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COUSIN ETHEL'S CHAMPIONS!

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



MANNERS INTERVENES!

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COUSIN ETHEL'S CHAMPIONS!

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

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Manners to the Rescue.

"GOOD-MORNIN', Miss Cleveland!"

It was Aubrey Racke, of the Shell, who addressed that greeting to Cousin Ethel, raising his hat politely as he spoke.

There was no note of doubt in his voice, though there might well have been. Racke was not at all the kind of fellow Cousin Ethel liked.

But she did not know very much of him. Lately she had been little at St. Jim's; the days when she was a more frequent visitor there had been before the coming of Racke.

And perhaps Racke knew that Cousin Ethel's chums in the Shell and Fourth were not in the habit of discussing with her the fellows they disliked and despised. They did not consider she needed warning against such fellows; her instincts were to be trusted, they knew.

She might be kinder to the wasters and the gay dogs than they deserved, for her nature was to be kind. But she was in no danger of making friends of them, even though nine-tenths of the iniquities that made their schoolfellows bar them were completely beyond the range of her knowledge.

"Good-morning!" she said now, quite civilly, but without any warmth.

Racke had flung away a cigarette the moment before he addressed her; and the fact that he was smoking would have told heavily against him in her eyes, even had she been disposed to like him.

She passed on along Rylcombe Lane. Racke looked after the slim, pretty girlish figure, and as he looked his eyes flashed angrily, and he bit his lip.

If Cousin Ethel's friendship could have been his for the asking he might not have cared for it. Really nice girls were not in Racke's line. But, as things were, he would have liked to be seen walking with her, if only because it would have made George Figgins frantic, and have annoyed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Miss Cleveland's cousin, and all her chums, who included the Terrible Three and Talbot, Blake and Digby and Herries, Fatty Wynn and Kerr. And all of these were fellows whom Racke counted enemies.

She would not stop and speak to him; he might have been snubbed severely if he had ventured to range up alongside her, as any of those fellows would have done, to receive a smile of welcome. She had all but cut him. Why, dash it, she might as well have cut him dead!

As Racke thought of it he grew more and more sullenly furious. Why should she treat him like this? He had more money than any of her precious chums, and he dressed better than almost any of them, though he might fall behind the noble Gussy in that respect—not that he admitted to himself even that possibility. Fellows like Herries and Digby and Figgins, who were apt to be careless about their clothes—though that hardly applied to Figgy when Cousin Ethel was at St. Jim's, for Figgy developed dressiness of

a sort then—looked shabby beside Racke. He was well-to-do—wealthy, even—and he dressed well. As for his character, what need a girl care, or what should a girl know about that?

Racke felt himself treated with undeserved scorn, and his heart was hot within him.

Cousin Ethel rounded a bend. But she was still in sight while Racke was on his feet, for the hedges between were low.

He had taken his cigarette-case out of his pocket, and was just going to light another expensive, gold-tipped cigarette, when something that he saw made him thrust the case back in his pocket.

A man had accosted the girl. He looked like a tramp, and he was plainly barring her passage along the lane.

A weedy, unsavoury-looking specimen was the tramp. Racke, though no hero, would not have shirked combat with him. He did not exactly shirk it now; but something made him postpone his dash to the rescue.

Here was a chance to win Cousin Ethel's favour! But there was no hurry about chipping in—none at all. Let her get a fright first; she would be paid in part for her coldness to him by that. And she would appreciate his intervention all the more if she were thoroughly alarmed before it came.

An unpleasant smile played about Racke's mouth as these thoughts passed through his mind. He did not realise that they were such thoughts as could only have come to a cad in grain. Perhaps even Aubrey Racke might have changed his ways if he could have seen himself as he really was.

The tramp raised his battered bowler hat in a way that had no real civility in it, and smirked as he said:

"Could you tell me the time, young lady?"

Ethel Cleveland glanced at her pretty gold wrist-watch.

"It is just half-past twelve," she said. "Arf arter twelve, an' I ain't 'ad a bite of grub since four o'clock yesterday! I say, miss, that's a rare nice watch as you've got on your'n little wrist. That would be worth a bit o' chunk, I shouldn't wonder, now!"

He glanced up and down the lane as he spoke. Racke, who had heard every word, and who anticipated the glance, dodged down, and the tramp failed to perceive him.

Cousin Ethel started back in alarm. She guessed at the fellow's intentions.

Racke saw her go pale. He was looking again now, partly screened by a tree-trunk, waiting his time to make in to the rescue. He meant to do that. The tramp really was not a very formidable opponent.

Now the fellow tried the whining dodge, possibly a trifle nervous about open robbery.

"It ain't a fair world, this world ain't!" he said. "Ere am I starvin'. 'Ere's you, gettin' as many meals a day as you've any use for, an' walkin' about covered with gold watches an' jew'ry!"

This was a gross exaggeration, of course. Cousin Ethel had far too good

taste to walk about covered with jewellery. But there was the watch, and the brooch she wore was valuable.

"But surely there is work for everybody who wants it now?" said the girl.

"Work," she says! Do you work, my pretty miss? If not you, why for should I?" snarled the tramp.

"You will kindly let me pass!" said Cousin Ethel pluckily, though her heart beat fast.

"Ho! Will I? Arter you've 'anded over that pretty little watch, I will! Net afore!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" flashed the girl.

The rascal shot out a grimy hand and clutched her wrist.

Racke buttoned his jacket. His time had nearly come. Not quite, though. He would wait until she screamed.

But she did not scream. There was brave blood in Ethel Cleveland; gentle as she was, she had plenty of courage.

She tried to wrench her hand from the ruffian's grasp. But she was not strong enough. A slight cry left her lips now. But it was an exclamation of pain, not a call for help. The tramp had wrenched her wrist cruelly.

Then came a shout, and Harry Manners of the Shell, his face aflame with anger, made in at the tramp. Racke, himself just about to go to the rescue, was forestalled, and he gritted his teeth savagely as he realised that Manners had seen him.

Yes, Manners had seen. He had no time to waste on Racke at that moment. He went for the tramp; and he would have gone for him as unhesitatingly had the ruffian been twice the weight he was.

He did not wait to parley. Right on the bristly chin of the tramp his fist smote, and the rascal rolled over in the mud.

Manners might not be able to punch like Tom Merry or Talbot or Grundy or Kangaroo; but he was no weakling, and rage lent strength to his arm then.

The tramp struggled up, and threw himself into a fighting attitude. He hit out once, and once only. Manners guarded the blow easily, and sent right and left crashing home on the ruffian's chest.

Down went the would-be highway-robber again, and now he had no stomach for more. He lay there groaning.

"Oh, I am afraid you have hurt him, Manners!" cried Cousin Ethel.

"Hope so, I'm sure!" flashed Manners.

"But—"

"He isn't hurt enough to matter," said Manners grimly. "I saw Crump down the road. Crump is a long way off being a really first-class policeman, but he's man enough to deal with a thing like this. I've a good mind to—"

"Oh, never mind about Mr. Crump, Manners! With the Head's birthday so near, I don't want the man arrested."

Manners grinned; he could not help it. For the life of him he could not see what the Head's birthday had to do with the grimy rascal he had twice knocked down.

But he knew that Dr. Holmes' sixtieth birthday, which was to be made a big occasion of celebration by St. Jim's generally, meant much to Ethel. In the Head's house she was counted almost as one of the family. She could never come too often for Dr. Holmes and his wife—never come at the wrong time, or stay too long. If they could have had their way she would have stayed altogether, and St. Jim's would have approved highly.

It was because of the special celebrations that Cousin Ethel was at St. Jim's now. Nearly everyone would have felt them incomplete without her.

"It's just as you say, Cousin Ethel, of course," said Manners.

She was like an uncrowned queen to these loyal boy chums of hers. They were not all over head and ears in love with her, as Figgy was, but they all regarded her lightest word as law.

The tramp picked himself up and slunk off.

"Thank you, Manners," said Cousin Ethel, "for letting him off, and for coming to my rescue, too!"

"That was nothing," said Manners, almost blushing. "Any fellow would have done the same thing—unless he was a cad like Racke!"

The name had slipped out before he had time to think. Racke, about to slink off, heard it, and into his eyes there came a lurid light.

But Cousin Ethel did not hear, as it chanced, for at that moment someone hailed her, and already she had caught the sound of young voices from farther away.

"Hallo, Ethel! Is anything wrong, old girl?"

It was D'Arcy minor—Wally of the Third—who asked that. He came hurrying up with Reggie Manners and Frank Levison as he spoke.

"Nothing now, Wally," replied the girl. "Manners has put it right. That tramp tried to rob me, but—"

"Oh, I say! Let's go after him, and roll the beast in the ditch!" cried Wally. "Yes, let's!" said Levison minor eagerly.

"What's my major after?" asked Manners minor; and they all turned to see.

CHAPTER 2.

Manners Talks Straight.

IT was Racke whom Manners was after; and he was in such haste to catch him up that he had left Cousin Ethel without a word of apology for leaving her. But he would not have gone like that but for the timely arrival of the three minors.

Those three cheerful young gentlemen were quite sufficient bodyguard for Miss Cleveland, he knew.

Racke turned, and saw Manners approaching. He slackened his steps. He was not going to have Manners saying that he funk'd him, but he did not like the notion of a row within sight of Miss Cleveland.

Manners did not want that, either. But as soon as they were out of Cousin Ethel's sight he quickened up.

His hand fell upon Racke's shoulder. The black sheep swung round in fury.

"Keep your hands off me, dash you!" he snarled.

"You funk! You cad!" said Manners, in tones of concentrated wrath.

"What have I done now?" asked Racke sneeringly.

But his face was pale, and he bit his lip. He knew what he had done, and, rotter as he was, he was sick with himself for it.

Nobody would ever believe that it was

anything but fear that had kept him from going to Cousin Ethel's rescue. Only to a fellow of his own kidney, such as Crooke, could he tell what had really held him back; and it was very doubtful whether even Crooke would believe.

"It's what you haven't done, not what you have!" snapped Manners. "You saw, and you stood still. Oh, you cad—you cur—you funk!"

And as he spoke Manners thrust his arm forward across Racke's chest.

It was not a blow—certainly far from a knock-down blow. But Racke, stepping backwards in haste, caught his heel against a fallen branch, and tumbled.

He went down all in a heap in the mud, and glared up at Manners.

Manners stood over him with clenched fists.

"I didn't mean to put you over," he said, "but I'm not going to say I'm sorry for it. I'm not! I'd do it again! You deserve that, and more!"

"Oh, you shall pay for this!" gritted Racke. "And for what you said to that girl, too! I heard you. You may call me a cad, but I call that a worse cad's trick than—"

"You'd better get up sharp if you don't want her to see you there!" snapped Manners.

He had heard the voices of Cousin Ethel and the three fags. In another moment they would have turned the corner. And Manners had no more wish that the girl should see Racke lying there than Racke could have.

He had spoken words in his heat that he would rather have had unspoken, and he was not sure that Cousin Ethel had not heard them, though he fancied it might be so. Even if she had, he could justify them. But he had not meant to let out the secret of Racke's failure to do the decent thing.

He swung round, and walked towards the four. Racke picked himself up in time to avoid being seen on his back; but he was not in time to escape.

There he stood, muddy from head to foot, and as they passed he raised his cap again to Cousin Ethel. There was a strange, evil look on his face as he did so; it was almost as if he intended the courtesy as an insult.

Even now Ethel Cleveland did not guess the truth. She was very slow to think evil of anyone.

But Wally did. At any rate, he guessed that Manners was responsible for Racke's condition. And Wally, who was Ethel's cousin by blood, and not merely by adoption, would say things before her that others would not.

"You must have been talking jolly straight to Racke, Manners, old top!" said Wally.

"Shurrup!" growled Manners.

"What was it for?" asked Reggie Manners, who was never much in the way of considering his brother's feelings.

"Nothing to do with you, kid!" replied his major, with a warning look.

Frank Levison nudged Reggie. Frank was far quicker than either of his chums to take a hint of this sort.

"What are you shoving your silly elbow into my ribs for, Levison, you young ass?" said Reggie crossly. "What was it, Harry? It's no good making a jolly mystery about it. We know you know—"

"Can't you behave yourself before a lady?"

"Well, I like that, blessed if I don't! Who wasn't behaving himself? If I called Levison a young ass, he is; and Miss Cleveland doesn't mind hearing the truth, if it comes to not behaving yourself, what—"

"Will you shut up?" roared Manners. He saw that a flush was mantling

Cousin Ethel's cheeks. It was nothing Reggie had said which caused it; but Harry Manners did not want his minor to go on until the truth about what had happened was made absolutely plain.

It would not have been exactly the truth, either. For, unless he explained, Cousin Ethel would be bound to suppose that he had knocked Racke down with intention; and no doubt she would think him rather a brute for doing that. It was not quite the same thing as knocking down a would-be highway robber.

But Manners had Wally to reckon with as well as his minor.

"Don't be an ass, Manners!" said Wally, with the way he often had of speaking to his seniors as though he stood on a footing of equality with them beyond all dispute. "Cousin Ethel isn't one of those soft, silly girls who think a chap should never knock another chap down. She knows jolly well that it has to be done sometimes. And Racke—"

"That's enough, D'Arcy minor!"

"I'm not taking orders from any of you old fogies, Manners, thanks! It's easy enough to guess how it was. Racke saw the tramp chap before Manners did, and funk'd going to the rescue. Just like Racke! He hasn't a scrap of pluck! But I don't see what old Manners should be ashamed—"

"If you don't mind, Wally, I'd much rather you said no more about it," said Cousin Ethel, her cheeks very red now.

She avoided looking at Manners. But it was not because she was angry with him. There was the true spirit of chivalry in his quick bringing to book of Racke, just as there had been in his eager rush to her rescue.

But Manners thought she was annoyed, and was furious with the two fags.

Manners minor had relapsed into sulky silence, but Wally had neither his capacity for sulkiness nor the restraint which the older fellows exercised in talking of others before Ethel Cleveland.

"If Ethel doesn't know that Racke's a cad and a funk it's about time she was told," he said judiciously.

"Don't, Wally!" whispered Frank Levison, who perceived how troubled both Manners and the girl were.

"What are you butting in for, young Levison?" growled Reggie. "Just you leave Wally alone!"

That speech had the contrary effect to what it was intended to have. Wally might not have heeded Frank's warning, but when he found Reggie agreeing with him, while Frank disagreed, he stopped to think whether Frank might not be right. Reggie was very apt to be wrong when those two differed, he knew.

And, having stopped to think, he said no more at that time. But it was firmly fixed in the minds of all three of the fags, as it was also in that of Cousin Ethel, that Manners had knocked Racke down for funking an encounter with the tramp.

And the fags thought all the better of Manners for it, while it was not at all likely that Cousin Ethel thought any the worse of him.

CHAPTER 3.

The Crown Prince at a Discount.

WATS, Blake—wats!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke very warmly. He was feeling that way.

Tom Merry banged on the table of Study No. 6 in the Fourth passage, which famous apartment was at that moment the scene of an important meeting, with his fist.

"Order, you chumps—order!" rapped

out Tom. "If you squeak again, Gussy!"

"I'm not squeaking, you wude ass!"

"Well, don't bark again; don't bray again; don't bleat again! Call it what you like, but understand that if you do it again you'll go out on your neck!"

"What, you wuffian? Out of my own studay? Weally—"

"This isn't your study at the moment, Gussy," explained Lowther. "It has been promoted. It is now a place of meeting for the committee empowered to settle the details of the revue to be produced on the auspicious occasion of our honoured Head's sixtieth birthday. And may he never grow a day older, for he doesn't deserve to be as old as that!"

"We know all about that, Lowther!" growled Herries.

"Yes, rather! Let's get on with the washing. We can hear Lowther spout any time," said George Figgins.

Figgins had stationed himself so as to be able to see out of the window. Figgy had a way of appreciating the beautiful scenery of the quad when Cousin Ethel was at St. Jim's that was not apparent at other times. He developed another habit—one of going downstairs about six stairs at a time, and it was whispered that when he did this Miss Cleveland was usually crossing the quad.

"Yes; let's get on with the washing," said Jack Blake. "Figgy's in a hurry, I know."

"Who says I'm in a hurry?" snapped Figgins.

"Well, aren't you? Don't get up. That was Mrs. Mimble!"

"You silly ass!" roared Figgins, springing to his feet. "As if I don't know the difference between Mrs. Mimble and— Besides, who says I was looking into the quad at all? And as a matter of fact it wasn't Mrs. Mimble. It wasn't anybody, unless you call Baggy Trimble anybody."

"He certainly is even more unlike—"

"If you say another word, Lowther!" roared Figgy, red with wrath.

Monty Lowther sighed.

"I didn't know I was expected to be dumb at this meeting," he remarked plaintively. "But if so, so be it. One only boon I crave; let—nay, force—Gussy also to be dumb! Then—"

"Then we really might have half a chance to get on!" struck in Manners. "A couple of muzzles wouldn't be a bad notion. We should want four if Cardev and Grundy were here. But, thanks be, they're not!"

"The question is," said Blake, who was chairman, as head of the study in which the meeting was held, "whether Gustavus is to be the Crown Prince in the war sketch or a dead body in the pageant?"

"That's the question," said Kerr. "It strikes me as quite a fair choice for Gussy."

"Wats!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, actually letting his monocle fall from his eye in the intensity of his resentment. "I utterly refuse to be a mouldy dead body!"

"Not mouldy, Gussy," said Lowther blandly. "We should not insult the nobility and gentry assembled with a mouldy corpse. We should do as Mark Twain wanted done—produce a nice, fresh mummy."

"Nobody said anything about a mummy, dummy!" growled Herries.

"Herries is an innocent at home, Lowther," said Digby, who happened to have read the book to which Lowther alluded—"The Innocents Abroad."

"Not so jolly inno—"

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"Then it's the Crown Prince part for you, Gussy," said Tom Merry, grinning. "I most uttally an' absolutely wufuse to be in the wah sketch as the Cwown Pwince of Germany—a wascal whom I hold in the most sinceah abhowwence. I am not at all suah that it is comme il faut—"

"Er—which?" asked Digby, who knew rather more French than any of the rest, having had better opportunities of acquiring it, but always pretended not to understand it at all.

"I said 'comme il faut,' but if you weally are so pwofoundly ignowant, Dig, I will say 'fittin'." It is seawcely fittin', I considah, to tweat anythin' done by the wascally Germans in a comic spiwit; an' I wufuse to entahtain for a moment the ideah of playin' the part of the Cwown Pwince waidin' a tuckshop."

"Well, we never heard that he did raid a tuckshop, did we, chump?" asked Blake sharply.

"That is not the point, deah boy."

"But it is the point, you dummy! The thing's imaginary, and there's no harm in getting fun out of even the rotten Huns that way, is there? Do you want to make out that your taste is better than Wharton's? We asked Wharton to do this sketch for us because he's so nailing good at such things, and we're not going to hack it about just to suit a silly fathead like you!"

"Hear, hear!" said most of the committee.

"There's another thing," put in Fatty Wynn. "Gussy said a rotten tuckshop. Now, that's a silly thing to say, I think. Some tuckshops are better than other tuckshops; I'm not denying that. But there couldn't be a rotten tuckshop, could there, now, you fellows?"

Fatty spoke almost pathetically. Even the depleted tuckshops of a war regime were sacred places to Fatty, so to speak.

No one argued that point, but all were ready to argue the other.

The sketch must be played as Wharton, of Greyfriars, had written it. That was agreed upon even by Lowther, who naturally felt that he could have written it much better himself, and had not yet quite forgiven Blake for giving the task to Wharton before even consulting the Terrible Three. Blake had rather forced their hands by doing that; but the scheme he had worked out was such a good one that no one but Lowther felt hurt much by his precipitancy.

"We must all do our level best to make the sketch go," said Tom Merry. "It's the best thing in the revue."

"Oh, is it?" growled Lowther, who had done most of the revue.

"Quite the best!" said Blake firmly. "Wharton is a don hand at that sort of thing. And we're not going to have it spoiled by the fatheaded obstinacy of our tame ass, that's—"

"But why should I play the Cwown Pwince?" howled Gussy. "Why not one of you fellows?"

"That was the difficulty. It was a singular thing, but no one seemed willing to play the Crown Prince."

"Because you know, Gustavus, you're the only chap who can do it!" said Dig wheedlingly.

"I have the histwionic ability, Dig; I am well awaah of that. But I considah it infwa dig, Dig."

"To dig he is not ashamed; doesn't considah it infwa dig, Dig!" murmured Lowther.

"Look here!" said Kerr. "It's not a bit of use suggesting Grundy or Trimble or Dig or—"

"You ain't putting me into very good company, Kerr," remarked Dig in a tone of injury.

"Oh, Grundy's respectable, at least! But it's no good talking about the part being played by a chap who hasn't the figure for it. And who has besides Gussy? Why, only Skimpole. And Skimmy's all wrong in the face, while you—"

"The shape of Gussy's noble head and the general cut of his jib—"

"Wats, Lowthah! I uttally wufuse even to be considahed in the vewy least like the Cwown Pwince!"

"Don't blame me, old bean! Blame Nature. Not I, but Nature, made you almost a facsimile of that German boulder!"

"Withdwa that wemark, Lowthah, or I shall be weluctantly compelled to administah to you a twightful thwashin'!"

"It's easy enough for me to withdraw the remark, Gussy, but it isn't so easy for you to withdraw the resemblance. Look at the shape of your head! Look at the length of your face! Look all round yourself!"

"Lowthah, you wottah—"

"Chuck it, Gussy! This isn't the time for scrapping!"

"Welease me, Tom Mewwy!"

"You can't brawl here, you know!" said Kerr.

"I am not in the habit of bwawlin', Kerr! Bwawlin' is low an' vulgah; an' I twust that I nevah do anythin' whatevah that is low an' vulgah. But I considah that my honah demands that Lowthah shall withdwa his howwibly insultin' wemark!"

"Right-ho, Gussy! I apologise for telling the truth about you!"

"As you apologise, Lowthah, let no more be said. Bai Jove, though, what do you mean by sayin' that it is the twuth? That is a fweah insult!"

"Hardly. Only rubbing in the old one!" said Kerr, with a grin.

"Oh, dry up, Gussy! You said that there was no more to be said, so what do you want to go on jawing for?" snapped Figgins. "We all know Lowther's an ass!"

"And we all know Figgy's in a hurry to get the meeting over," said Lowther blandly.

"Look here, Lowther—"

"New tie, Figgy? Very nice tie, too."

"I'll jolly well give you—"

"Peace, children, peace!" said Tom.

Gussy and Figgy were both glaring at Lowther, who smiled serenely, when the door burst open.

"Hallo, you old fogies!" spoke the cheery voice of Wally D'Arcy.

Wally was not alone. He was supported by Levison minor, Manners minor, Hobbs, Joe Frayne, Jameson, and Curly Gibson.

Arthur Augustus directed his glare upon Wally.

"Wally, this is a gwoss intwusion, an' I will not bwook it! Wetiah frowm this woom at once!" he said sharply.

"Rats, Gus! We're here on business! About the revue, you know. Cousin Ethel's here."

"That's hardly news," said Manners.

"Not to you, anyway!" replied Wally, with a wink that caused Figgins to transfer his glare from Lowther to Manners. "I say, do you chaps know that old Manners went for a tramp who was trying to rob Cousin Ethel—"

"Shut up!" howled Manners.

"And knocked the rotter over—"

"And then went for that cad Racke because—"

"If you don't dry up, Reggie, I'll—"

"Oh, rot! Why shouldn't the other chaps know that you're a giddy hero? It's jam to have a hero in the family, ain't it, Wally? You remember when your major—"

"I don't quite see what Cousin Ethel's being here has to do with you kids but—"

ting in like this," said Tom Merry, breaking in upon Manners minor.

"Don't you? Well, in an ordinary way we give you old fogies your heads, and don't interfere when you get up what you call an entertainment. Of course, this is for the Head's birthday, and it ought to be decent. But I don't suppose the Head really cares much what sort of a show it is; he can go to sleep while you're rotting about on the stage. But it's different with Cousin Ethel. And we think that it's up to you to give some of the principal parts to the Third, so that there's a chance of the giddy revue being a success."

Wally paused for breath. It was a long speech for him.

"Hear, hear!" cried those behind him.

"What are you grinning at, Gus?" snapped Wally.

Arthur Augustus had ceased to glare, and was actually beaming upon his minor.

"I have an idea!" he said.

"Hold me up, somebody! Gussy has an idea!" gasped Lowther.

"Sure to be a rotten one!" growled Herries.

"On the contrary, it is a most excellent one, as I am suah you will all agree. Wally, how would you like to play the leadin' part in a sketch w'ritten by Wharton of Gweyfwahs?"

"Now, that's really an idea!" said Wally heartily. "Blessed if I thought you had as much sense as that, Gus! What are you silly asses grinning at? I suppose I'm a better actor than any of you duds? I'll jolly well eat my hat if I can't wipe your eyes at the game!"

"What's the part?" asked Reggie Manners, with a hint of suspicion in his tone. Perhaps, like the wily Trojan of old, Reggie dreaded "the Greeks bearing gifts." What the Shell or the Fourth had to give away in the shape of parts to the Third was likely to be something that neither the Shell nor the Fourth wanted.

"It's weally quite a stwong part——"

"Then I'm on, Gus!"

"Better find out what it is, first," whispered Frank Levison, who shared Reggie's doubts. "We don't want a chap in the Third to——"

"Oh, rats! What is the part, you chaps? Anything wrong with it?"

"It might be considahed wathah unpleasant by an ovah-sensitive person," admitted Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, I ain't that sort! What is it? Charles Peace, the burglar? I shouldn't mind that! Or old Quilp in the 'Curiosity Shop'?—I could do Quilp a treat!"

"Not so bad as that, Wally. It is only the Crown Pwince of Pwussia."

"What? Me act that rotter? I never heard such beastly cheek in all my giddy life! I'd see you all hanged first, and so would any chap in the Third—unless it was that sweep Piggott! You'd better ask Piggy. Or play it yourself, Gus, you fathead! Now I come to think of it, you've got a mug just like that beast's!"

"You young wuffian!"

Arthur Augustus went for Wally. He hurled himself into the crowd of fags without hesitation.

A little hesitation might not have been at all a bad thing. There were seven of the fags, and any two of them would have been a match for the swell of the Fourth.

"Ow! Yow! Yawoooooh!" he howled, as the seven closed around him. "Oh, wescue, you chaps!"

"Rescue!" cried Lowther, first to his aid. The rest followed. In a couple of minutes the fags were routed. Then the door was shut, and the meeting resumed.



Baggy at the Usual Game.
(See Chapter 5.)

CHAPTER 4.

Racke in Fighting Mood.

BUT within two minutes there came another interruption.

Racke strode into the room without the formality of knocking at the door.

"Oh, you're here, Manners?" he said.

"Looks like it!" replied Manners.

Everyone stared at Racke. He was quite unlike his usual self. He still carried about him marks of the muddy lane, and his face was white and drawn with the rage that burned in him.

But that was not what seemed so strange and unfamiliar.

It was the way he spoke to Manners. There was defiance in it, and somehow the defiance rang true for once.

Racke was screwed up to fighting-pitch.

"You're a cad!" he snarled.

"You ought to be a judge of cads!" said Manners quietly. "But I hardly fancy you are. If you want to see the rottenest cad at St. Jim's you've only to look in the mirror!"

Manners was on his feet, facing Racke. His chums could see that, for all the coolness of his speech, he was really as hot with anger as the other fellow.

Tom Merry stepped between them.

"There seems to be something in the yarn we heard just now," said Tom.

"Did you doubt it, when Manners told you it?" sneered Racke.

"I never doubt what Manners tells me," said Tom at once.

"He's lyin' this time!"

"Stand aside, Tom! I'm not going to have that sweep call me a liar!" flashed Manners.

"Half a minute, old chap! What have you got against Manners, Racke?"

"That's it, bar Jove! What have you got against Mannahs, Wacke?"

"If it's only that he knocked you down, all I've got to say is that you jolly well deserved it!" growled Blake.

"And I've to say that if you don't get out of here within two seconds I'll knock you down!" roared Figgins.

"Wait a moment, please!" rapped out Tom Merry. "There's more in it than that, I fancy."

"There's a dashed deal more, by gad!" gritted Racke. "I don't care a hang about Manners tellin' his confounded lies to you fellows! You'll believe him, of course——"

"As a matter of fact," said Kerr quietly, "Manners has told us nothing at all. But go on, Racke. Better be more civil, though!"

For a moment the black sheep of the Shell was taken aback. He found it hard to doubt Kerr, though, like most liars, he was generally ready to doubt anyone.

But they had heard the story; that was evident. And who could have told them if not Manners?

"I say I don't care a hang what Manners has told you!" Racke repeated. "But when he told Miss Cleveland that I funk'd goin' to her rescue he lied!"

"I did not tell her that," said Manners. He still held his temper in, but his face was red, and his lips trembled. He wished now that he had not let Racke's name slip out in speaking to Cousin Ethel. But he did not believe she had heard, and, in any case, it was true that he had not told her Racke had funk'd.

"Will you deny that you mentioned my name to her?" snarled Racke.

"No, I won't," Manners answered frankly.

There was no more utterly honest fellow at St. Jim's than Harry Manners. He would not deny that; he would not even say that he fancied Cousin Ethel had not heard—that seemed to him too lame a plea. He knew that these fellows, whose good opinion he valued, would think that he had done the wrong thing in letting Racke's name pass his lips; and because he knew that he explained, for he preferred to face their disapproval.

There followed a moment's pause. Manners broke the silence.

"Racke did funk it," he said. "He was there before me, but he didn't chip in. I didn't tell Cousin Ethel that he funk'd it; but when—when—oh!—when she thanked me, you know, I said any fellow would have done it, unless he was a cad like Racke!"

"Quite right, too!" cried Figgy. "My hat, I wish I had been there!"

And there was no doubt about the fervour of that wish.

The others were not so absolutely sure as Figgy that Manners had done the right thing, however. Arthur Augustus voiced the general opinion when he said:

"Wathah! a pitay. Mannaahs, to mention a chap's name in that way before a lady, I considah!"

"Well, I didn't think," Manners said. "I was mad at the cad's behaviour. But that was all I said. I could have said a heap more!"

"Just as well you didn't, old man," said Tom Merry. "Mind, we're not blaming you. Anyone might have slipped like that. But we don't want to mix Cousin Ethel up in our squabbles, not even if she comes into them in the way she does into this one. You don't owe Racke an apology that I can see!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the rest. Except for Figgy, they all thought Manners a little in the wrong, but certainly not enough in the wrong to make an apology to Racke necessary.

"You'd better go, Racke!" said George Figgins sharply.

"I'm not goin' yet," replied Racke. "I say again that Manners is a liar, an' I can prove it! He said a lot more than that, an' I say that he behaved like a cad! Even you fellows, who think so, dashed much of him, see that!"

"If any fellow here says he sees that I'll punch that fellow's head!" roared Figgy.

"Yaas, wathah! An' if any othah fellow—"

"Dry up, you two!" said Tom. "Nobody here thinks Manners a cad; we all know Manners. We know Racke, too; and when Racke talks about proofs I can tell him that it will have to be something stronger than his bare word that we shall accept as proof. There's the door, Racke!"

"You think I'm goin' like that, dash you?"

"I know that you're going on your neck if you don't go of your own accord! Travel, will you?"

But Racke did not travel.

"You seem to be able to see who's funk'in' now!" he sneered.

For Tom was still standing between Racke and Manners. Nobody there wanted a fight in which Cousin Ethel's name might be mixed up—nobody, that is, except Racke.

The evident reluctance of the rest only made him keener. He had not the chivalry to understand how they felt; but if he did not understand their motives he saw their unwillingness.

"Better get out of the way, Tom," said Manners, in a strained voice. "I don't want to quarrel with you; but I tell you straight I'm not standing much more of this!"

Tom moved. It was the only thing to do with Manners taking that line.

"You called me a liar, Racke?" said Manners.

"An' you've called me a funk! You've backbitten me! I deny that I funk'd. You got there before me, that was all! I'm not potty about Miss Cleveland, as all you fellows are; but it isn't likely that I should stand by and see her robbed an' hurt, by gad!"

Racke spoke hotly, and his words rang

truer than their wont. In a sense they were true. It was not funk that held him back, though it was a feeling no less despicable.

"If it wasn't that I hate the notion of a row with Miss Cleveland's name dragged into it," said Manners, slowly and with difficulty, for he found it hard to choke down his resentment, "I should give you what you are asking for. As it is—"

"Oh, take that, dash you!" howled Racke. And he smote Manners full in the face with his fist.

There was an instant rush at Racke.

"No!" shouted Manners, blood running from his lips. "Nobody else has a right to touch him for that—the right's mine! I didn't want it; I stood a lot! But you can't expect me to stand this!"

They could not; all saw that. Racke had forced a fight upon Manners. It was quite unlike Racke's usual methods; but this time he evidently meant fighting.

"It was the only way," he said, breathing hard as he looked round upon the disgusted faces of the rest. "That cad says I funk'd a dashed weed of a tramp—a rotter that he settled with a couple of blows. I didn't, and I mean to prove it! Manners was a better man than the tramp; perhaps when I've shown that I'm a better man than Manners you'll admit that I didn't funk the other outsider!"

DOES YOUR SOLDIER PAL WRITE TO YOU?

Notepaper is "some" price these days, but none of us would grudge Tommy all the paper he needs on which to write those cheery letters of his if paper were treble the price it is to-day. Still, it's no use simply "gassing" about it; it's up to each one to do his bit to pay the piper.

It costs the Y.M.C.A., who supply Tommy with free stationery, no less than £60,000 a year. Sixpence will supply your own or somebody else's pal with enough notepaper to write one letter each week for a year. Going to let him have it? Of course you are!

So send sixpence along to-day to Y.M.C.A. (Stationery Fund), Tottenham Court Road, London, W.C., mentioning that it comes from a reader of this paper.

"I fancy, Racke, that it will be some time before you show us that!" said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

No one else spoke. Into Racke's mind as he retreated there flashed the thought that he was leaving them all thinking even worse of him than they had thought before.

He was right. His readiness to fight Manners surprised them; but not so much as it might have done. When Racke's savagery was aroused he always showed more pluck than the rest of the black sheep. He was never, at his worst, such a funk as Crooke or Clampe or Mellish.

CHAPTER 5.

Talks with Cousin Ethel.

"MELLISH, I want you to do somethin' for me!"

It was Racke who spoke. He had called Mellish into the study which he shared with Crooke.

"If there's anything hangin' to it," replied Mellish, "I'm on! But not if I've got to run a lot of risk. I sha'n't forget that rotten Moat House bizney in a hurry. You chaps let me in nicely there!"

"Oh, there's no risk in this, you hero!" sneered Racke. "It's only talkin' to a girl!"

"I'm on!" said Mellish, with a smirk.

"You're rather a favourite of Miss Cleveland's, aren't you?"

"She's always very nice to me," answered Mellish, smirking again.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"What are you guffawin' at, Crooke?" snapped Racke.

"Cousin Ethel loves Mellish just a little bit less than she does you an' me, Aubrey, dear old pal; that's what makes me laugh! She wouldn't wipe her feet on the worm!"

"It's a lie!" roared Percy Mellish, moved to some show of spirit for once.

In fact, there had been a time when Ethel Cleveland had fancied that Mellish might be decent if only someone took him in hand and sympathised with him. That had made her kinder to him than he had ever deserved.

But that time was past. Nevertheless, though the girl disliked Mellish, she did not dislike him in quite the same way as she did Crooke and Racke.

She saw him as one whom weakness, rather than actual wickedness, led astray. And Cousin Ethel never held any past transgressions she might know of against a fellow whom she saw running straight now. She counted Ernest Levison among her friends in these days, and was glad to count him so, though even yet Levison could hardly address her as "Cousin Ethel" without feeling inclined to blush.

Crooke did not get up from his chair to make Mellish answer for giving him the lie. It was seldom Percy Mellish plucked up so much courage, but among the black sheep accusations of lying carried no real sting. They were all liars, and they all knew it, and knew that the rest knew it.

"Dry up, Gerry!" said Racke. "Look here, Mellish, I want you to pump Miss Cleveland as to just exactly what Manners said to her after—oh, after my row with him, y'know."

"I think I can do that," said Mellish.

"She's so jolly conscientious she won't say a thing that she knows isn't true. He, he, he! And, of course, if she won't say anything, why, it will show that Manners said a jolly lot!"

"You're never goin' to fight Manners, Racke?" said Crooke, as Mellish departed.

"I dashed well am, though!"

"He'll lick you!"

"I'm not so sure of that. An' I sha'n't care much if he does as long as I can prove him a liar!"

"Well, that mayn't be so easy, by gad! I wouldn't give Manners or anyone an absolute certificate of truthfulness, but what that chap says is likely to be near enough to the truth, I fancy. Besides, you've got hold of a wrong idea altogether. You haven't seen as much of Ethel Cleveland with these bounders as I have. Amuses me, it does. They wouldn't for worlds tell her what nice boys you an' I are, frinstance. They think it would shock her almost to death. Keep her wrapped up in cotton-wool, by gad!"

"I'm not goin' to, though. If necessary, I'll drag her in to prove Manners a liar!" grated Racke.

Mellish popped his head in at the door again.

"How much, Racke?" he asked. "We didn't settle that. If you'll lend me a quid—"

"No! give you half."

"No; that's infra dig., old sport! A loan's best."

"Oh, all right!" snapped Racke.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Crooke. He knew that Mellish was ten shillings better

off on that deal. The sneak of the Fourth never repaid loans.

Mellish-laid wait for Cousin Ethel in the quad. Very few other fellows were about. Even Figgins had been half dragged off to footer, hoping that Cousin Ethel might appear on Little Side before practice was over.

He was in luck. She came within ten minutes.

Mellish raised his cap politely.

"It's a real pleasure to see you here again, Miss Cleveland," he said.

He could be very polite and pleasant when he tried, and if one could overlook the fact that his eyes were set much too close together, he was distinctly above the average of the St. Jim's juniors in looks.

Cousin Ethel smiled upon him. She did not like him, but perhaps she still had vague hopes that he might yet become a decent fellow, and he spoke as if he meant what he said.

"It is very nice of you to say so, Mellish," she answered.

"We all feel like that about it, you know," Mellish went on, ranging up alongside her. "Of course, you've come for the Head's birthday?"

"Yes. I couldn't miss that, could I?"

"Rather not! Rippin' old chap, the Head—the best sport I know! Are you going for a walk, Miss Cleveland?"

"Only a little way up the road, to take a message to an old friend of Mrs. Holmes."

"May I come with you?"

"If you like, Mellish."

The permission was given rather coolly. But a far more open snub would not have affected Mellish.

They were outside the gates before he worked round to his subject.

Then he did it in a way that was not wholly untactful.

"Manners is a jolly plucky chap!" he said warmly.

"Yes, I think so, too," said Cousin Ethel.

She did not mind discussing the courage of Manners, but Mellish's next words were less welcome to her.

"Pity he should have had a row with Racke about it," Mellish remarked.

The girl did not answer that.

"I must say that it doesn't seem much like Manners to be accusing another chap of funk without reason," went on Mellish, his cunning eyes fixed on the fair face of the girl in hopes to read something there.

"Does anyone say that Manners has done that, Mellish?"

Her tone had a touch of snap in it. She remembered how Manners had tried to shut up the fags. However bitter he might have felt against Racke, he had not accused him.

"Well, you know, Miss Cleveland, Racke seems to think so."

"I don't think Manners is likely to mind much what Racke thinks!"

There was scorn in the fresh young voice. Miss Cleveland despised Aubrey Racke most heartily.

"Other fellows besides Racke might think it wasn't quite the cheese," replied Mellish sulkily.

"I do not know that Manners would mind that!"

"Then he did——"

"I am not going to discuss the matter any further with you, Mellish! It is really not your affair, is it?"

"Then I suppose I can tell Ra—I mean, I suppose I can take it that he did tell you?"

The girl halted, drawing herself up proudly.

"Did you come from Racke?" she said hotly.

"Nunno! But——"

"That is quite enough! I should prefer to walk alone, Mellish!"

The sneak was beaten. Yet—was he beaten? At heart he believed that Manners had told Ethel Cleveland nothing at all about Racke. But her words would easily bear another construction. They could be so twisted in reporting them to Racke as to make him certain that Manners had given them away; and that, as Mellish reflected, would be far more likely to be worth a quid to him than the alternative.

He slunk off to report. He got his quid. His report pleased Racke. It would be a shrewd blow at them all if he could drag Cousin Ethel quite definitely into the affair. And surely he had a right to call upon her to say what was true?

Cousin Ethel, coming back a quarter of an hour or so later, fell in with Baggy Trimble.

She knew little of the Falstaff of the Fourth, and had no wish to know more. But he seemed anxious to cultivate her acquaintance.

"Nice morning—what?—Miss Cleveland!" he said. "I say, may I call you Cousin Ethel? Lots of the chaps do, you know and we're very good pals, aren't we?"

"I do not think we are quite on such friendly terms as would justify that, Trimble," answered the girl, smiling in spite of herself at the foolish, cunning, podgy face, wreathed as it was with what Baggy imagined a killing look.

"Oh, really! But, of course, your word is law. Cous—Miss Cleveland, I mean. I say, I suppose you've heard that Manners and Racke are going to fight?"

"I cannot talk to you about that, Trimble!" said the girl, with dignity.

Her heart beat fast at the news, but she would not discuss it with Baggy.

Baggy tried a fresh tack.

"Oh, as you like," he said. "I'm not interested, really. I say, there's going to be a fine kick-up for the Head's birthday, ain't there?"

"Yes, of course it is being made a special occasion," replied the girl. "And so it should be. I am sure that no school ever had a nicer or kinder headmaster than Dr. Holmes."

"Do you think so, Miss Ethel—Cousin Cleveland, I mean, of course. Now, I think he's rather an old be——"

"What?"

Baggy had hardly imagined that Miss Cleveland could snap like that.

"An old beauty, I was going to say, only you caught me up so," he said peevishly.

"If you do not admire and respect Dr. Holmes, Trimble——"

"But I do! Of course I do! I admire him like—like old boots! And as for respecting him, I don't suppose there's a single fellow here who has half as much respect for him as I have, you know."

There was no reply to that. Miss Cleveland was still suspicious that the epithet Baggy had been about to apply to the Head was not in the least like 'beauty,' though it might have a certain association with that word, which was probably the reason why Baggy had been so quick to correct himself.

"As a matter of fact, I'm worried almost to death about the present I'm going to give him," said Baggy confidentially.

"It seems a pity to let it trouble you so much, Trimble."

"Oh, don't be sarcastic with a fellow—don't, now, Cousin—er—Miss Ethel! It's like this. I usually have plenty of tin, but I lent Talbot a couple of quid a day or two ago, and——"

"Are you quite sure that what you say is true, Trimble? It does not sound at all like Talbot!"

"Well, if you're so certain about him, perhaps you'd like to pay it back for him!" grunted Baggy.

"I should not think of doing so. I know Reginald Talbot well enough to be aware that he would be annoyed at my doing so, even if he owed you the money."

"Well, he owes me it all right. I wouldn't think of telling you a— a crammer, Cousin—Miss Cleveland! But never mind about Talbot. The worst of it is that I'm short of a shilling in the price of the ripping paper-knife I want to buy for the Head—a mere bob, you know—me, a Trimble of Trimble Hall! Ain't it absurd?"

Cousin Ethel did not believe the story about Talbot, and she had her doubts about the existence of Trimble Hall. But she thought it likely enough that financial stringency might stand in the way of the buying of Baggy's present, and her heart was touched.

It was not exactly her heart Baggy wanted to touch, except as a step towards touching her money; but his piglike little eyes had a cunning gleam in them as she took out a small purse.

"Perhaps you would let me lend you a shilling, Trimble?" she said gently.

"Oh, well—it's a bit off borrowing from a girl, but as it's for the Head, and as we are such good pals——"

Trimble stopped suddenly, and thrust the shilling into his pocket in haste.

"Good mornin', Miss Cleveland!" said the drawing voice of Ralph Reckless Cardew, the dandy of the Fourth. "Don't stay if you want to go, Baggy! We'll excuse you—eh, Miss Cleveland?"

Cardew was another of the fellows whom Cousin Ethel knew less well than her older friends. But she was disposed to like him. She had seen nothing but the better side of him, and she was not likely to see the other.

"I—I think I'll go," faltered Baggy. And he went.

"Excuse me, but has that sweep been subbin' on you?" asked Cardew. "It sounds horribly like buttin' in, I know, even to ask; but——"

"I don't mind, Cardew. I think I understand why you asked, and it is nice of you. But it was only a shilling, and it was to help him to buy the present he wanted to get for the Head."

"Was it, indeed?" said Cardew thoughtfully. And he said no more on the subject. But at the gates he left Cousin Ethel, seeing Figgins approach; and he made straight for the tuckshop.

CHAPTER 6.

Figgy Takes His Orders.

THE rugged features of George Figgins looked almost handsome as he came forward, lifting his cap. He was in footer garb; but he had left practice early on the chance of seeing Cousin Ethel before dinner. The glow of joy on his face as he realised that the desired luck was his almost transfigured him.

Cousin Ethel cared more for Figgins than for any of her other chums at St. Jim's—they all knew that. But none of them knew how far that caring went, whereas it was an open secret that Figgy's affection for her bordered on idolatry. Nothing was too much for Figgy to do for Ethel Cleveland.

He was jealous at times, and had been known to show it. But it was not jealousy that prompted him to say now:

"Do you like that chap Cardew, Ethel?"

"Yes, I think I do. Of course, I don't know him very well. Why? Don't you?"

When they were alone Figgy sometimes dropped the "Cousin," and the

Cadet Notes.

During the past summer large numbers of Cadet Corps have rendered valuable assistance to the country in connection with the gathering in of the flax harvest. An account of the work and experience of the Clapham Volunteer Cadets has recently reached us, which shows that not only was the work interesting and useful, but also, incidentally, that the lads had a splendid time while engaged at it. The party—sixty strong—went to camp at Stowmarket, Suffolk, and carried out their duties on a strictly military system, setting up camp guards, arranging picket duties, etc.

The field work consisted of pulling, tying, and stooking the flax, which is needed to provide the fabric for our Air Fleets. The work was fairly laborious, but the boys stuck to it gamely, and managed to score a record acreage for that part of Suffolk. After the labours of the day they returned to camp, where a good dinner quickly put them into good spirits, and the evenings were spent in sports, concerts, and other amusements. Altogether, the period was a most instructive and enjoyable one, and our readers who are not already Cadets, but who might like to participate in the joys of camp life and field work next year, should make haste to join one of the Cadet Corps. Full information and particulars will be sent to all inquirers, as usual, on application to the Central Association Volunteer Regiments, Royal Courts of Justice, W.C.2.

girl, who called him "Figgins" when others were by, did not usually call him by any name then. It was a small thing; but perhaps it was significant.

"Yes, I think I do—I'm sure I do, really," replied honest Figgy. "I didn't at one time. But, for all his pretending to be so slack, there's lots in him."

"I think there is. He has queer ways that somehow one doesn't mind. He fairly dismissed Trimble when he caught us up on the road just now. But I believe he's gone after him again."

Figgy knitted his brows.

"If he caught you up at all it's a sign he meant something," he said. "It isn't Cardew's way to catch anyone up—he won't hurry, as a rule. Was that fat rotter annoying you?"

"Trimble? Oh, no! It was nothing of any importance. But Cardew did not seem to like it."

"Then we can leave Cardew to deal with Baggy. He'll do it," said Figgins, with entire conviction.

It might be curious that a fellow who slacked as much as Cardew did should have earned quite a reputation for putting things through when he chose to take them in hand; but so it was.

"There was something Trimble said that worried me rather," admitted the girl, after a minute or two of silence.

"I thought you looked as if there was something wrong, but I didn't like to say so," answered Figgins. "What is it, Ethel?"

"Is it true that Manners and Racke are going to fight?"

"Did Baggy tell you that? My hat, I'll—"

"No, you won't! I forbid you to say anything to Trimble about it!"

The tone was not so imperious as the words were. But it was enough for Figgy.

"That's all right," he said. "I reckon I know how to take my orders."

"They're not orders, you know. I shouldn't think of—"

"Yes, they are! And I like you to give me orders! It shows you know THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 559.

that there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you."

The girl's fair face flushed, and something in her beautiful eyes answered the loyal devotion in his. She did know that; and she valued the knowledge. It was quite a long time since she had seen Figgins last; but she found him unchanged, and somehow she believed that if years passed before their next meeting she would still find him so.

"It is true, I suppose?" she said softly.

"Yes. But don't you worry about it, dea—Ethel, I mean. Manners can lick Racke all right."

"But it's hateful that they should fight—especially just now!"

"Oh, really, I don't see that! Wish it had been me instead of Manners! Wish it had been me instead of Manners' to tackle that tramp! I—I don't like other fellows doing things for you, Ethel! I know it's—well, piggyish—because they all think a heap of you, and they'd be silly asses if they didn't—and, of course, they're my chums. But—but I rather it should be me than any of them—even old Kerr or Fatty!"

The words were blundering; but Ethel Cleveland did not think them so. For a moment her little hand rested on Figgy's hard paw.

"I know," she said. "But you say that I know, too, that there is nothing you would not do for me. Isn't that enough? I don't know as much as that of any of the rest, even Arthur or Wally."

The face of George Figgins was radiant with joy.

"But why do you mean it's so rotten they should fight just now?" he asked.

"Don't you see? The Head's birthday is so near at hand."

"Well, the Head won't know."

"But it would be so much nicer if you were all good friends at a time like this."

"I think I can see myself being friendly with Racke!" said Figgins, clenching his hands. "I didn't know how to keep my fists off him!"

"I forbid—no, I won't say that again—but you mustn't fight with him, George!"

"I don't mind your saying you forbid it, and what you say goes."

"Then stop this fight!"

"What, Racke and Manners?"

"Yes."

"It's an order. It's got to be done. But I'm blessed if I know how to do it!" murmured Figgy.

"I don't suppose it will be easy. But I should be so glad if you could do it!"

"I've got to do it, as you say so. But I can't think how—yet. Tom Merry might have a better chance—or Talbot. I don't know that Manners is going to take much notice of what I say; and you've cut me out of stopping Racke by taking him on myself."

"That would be worse—far worse!"

"Why?" asked Figgins simply.

But the girl did not answer, and in a moment Figgy saw. It would be worse because so many would be sure that Cousin Ethel was at the bottom of a quarrel between him and Racke. Too many knew, or suspected, that she was concerned in the trouble between Racke and Manners; but that was not quite the same thing.

He noticed that she did not suggest the handing over of the task he had undertaken to Tom Merry or Talbot. Much as she liked those two, she would not have asked either of them. She would not have asked anyone else; though she might have invoked the aid of Arthur Augustus had her confidence in the tact and judgment of Gussy been as great as was Gussy's own.

George Figgins was not exactly noted

for tact and judgment; but the girl never even thought of that. Her confidence in him, at least, was complete.

"I've got to manage it my own way," said Figgy.

"Oh, yes, of course!"

"It's going to be rough on Manners, you know!"

"I don't see—but I do, though! Yes, I suppose it will. But no one could possibly think Manners a coward!"

"I suppose it won't matter much if Manners and I have a row over it? We shouldn't fight till the birthday celebrations were past, anyway."

"Oh, but indeed it would matter very much! I should simply hate to have you and Manners quarrelling."

"Well, I don't want to row with him, Ethel—you know that! He's one of the very best. But he's sure to think I'm butting in. May I tell old Kerr about it?"

For a moment Ethel hesitated. But she knew how level-headed Kerr was, and how much Figgy thought of him.

"Yes," she said. "And Wynn, too, if you like. I know you three hate to have secrets from one another."

"It's wonderful how you understand things!" said Figgy, with adoring eyes.

But it was not really so very wonderful. George Figgins, open and honest and outspoken, was very easy to understand.

They had stood at the gates as they talked, and no one had come near. But now half a dozen fellows approached.

"I must be moving on," said Ethel.

"No; don't come with me! But thank you very, very much!"

"Thank you for trusting me—for giving me my orders!" blurted out Figgins.

She had gone, and Figgy rubbed his face as if he wanted to rub the red flush out of it.

Levison of the Fourth, Cardew, Clive, Durrance, Roylance, and Smith minor came up. None of them made any comment on the appearance of Figgy, though Smith grinned.

"Did Miss Cleveland tell you about Baggy, dear boy?" inquired Cardew lightly.

"Yes—no, I mean."



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"Which do you mean, by gad?"
 "Well, she did tell me you'd dismissed him, and that she thought you had gone after him again."

"Miss Cleveland is a lady of discernment, as well as bein' a thing of beauty and a joy for ever," in consequence," replied Cardew gravely. "I gave Baggy his conge because he had been guilty of the atrocity of spongin' on Miss Cleveland. I went after him because I had made up my mind—such as it is—that he shouldn't get outside the results of his spongin'. I knew the young lady would scorn to take the bob back; but—"

"That fat cad borrowed a bob of her?" gasped Figgins.

"Yaas—somethin' like sacrilege, wasn't it?" returned Cardew. "He didn't want to wear it on his watch-chain for ever after, as any fellow with proper feelin's would have done, either."

"He came into the tuckshop while we were there getting outside a ginger-beer each," said Clive. "And—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Smith minor.

"Wherefore this sudden mirth, Smithy?" inquired Cardew. "The whole thing strikes me as sad."

"Not all of it!" put in Levison, grinning.

"Not Baggy's face when Cardew clapped him on the shoulder," added Roylance. "It was worth a guinea a box!"

"He'd just ordered lemonade and buns, and had planked down his bob, when Cardew laid his hand on his shoulder," said Durrance.

"And he went jolly well pea-green!" Smith minor said.

"I assure you I didn't, Figgins. It isn't a habit of mine," said Cardew.

"Ass! I mean Baggy, of course!"

"You've been forgettin' things again, Trimble, dear boy!" Cardew said; and we all stared. (It was Levison who was going on with the story now.)

"You've forgotten that you contributed the large sum of sixpence to one of the collections bein' raised for buyin' presents for the Head." And Baggy said, "I—I—I—"

"Which wasn't specially illuminatin', was it?" drawled Cardew.

"It ain't precisely the thing to get Miss Cleveland to help to pay for your present to the Head," Cardew went on, and Baggy nearly choked.

"It's still further off the rails, y'know, to make a profit out of her, an' to spend that profit in pig-feedin'." He won't have that lemonade or those buns, Mrs. Taggles. He feels that he would rather put the shillin' in your Red Cross collectin'-box."

An' Baggy put it in. Mrs. Taggles was quite pleased, though she didn't quite catch on, I fancy."

"Wasn't Baggy pleased too, by gad?" asked Cardew.

"Ha, ha! He didn't look it!" said Clive.

"You're a bit serious, Figgy!" said Levison. "Anything wrong?"

"Oh, no! Nothing's wrong, thanks!" replied Figgy.

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins Speaks to Manners.

"THERE'S a good chap, Gussy!"

"We all know how jolly obliging and all that you are, Gustavus! There ain't another chap like you for that sort of thing!"

The words of Tom Merry and Jack Blake were honeyed. But Arthur Augustus was not to be come over thus easily.

He stuck his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the two with rather a frigid stare.

"I am apprehensive, Tom Mewwy and



The Work of Wally and Co. !
 (See Chapter 8.)

Blake," he said, "that you have in your minds somethin' outside the terms of the bargain we have stwuck."

"Oh, no, old chap!"

"Not at all, Gussy!"

Tom and Blake spoke together.

"Then you gwasp the fact that I agree to play the part of the Crown Prince at to-night's wehearsal because no one has come forward to take it, but that I uttably an' absolutely wufuse to be the Crown Prince in the pwopah wewue before the Head an' Mrs. Holmes an' Cousin Ethel an' othah persons who weally mattah?"

"Could anythin' be more absolutely perspicuous, Lowther?" drawled Cardew.

"Nothing in the wide, wide world, old top! It's specially pleasing to know that the present assembly doesn't matter in the least."

"Gussy will take a fancy to the part after he's played it once, and want to keep it," suggested Levison.

"I shall do nothin' of the kind, I assuah you!" said Arthur Augustus, elevating his noble nose. "Do you quite undahstand, Mewwy—an' you, Blake?"

"Oh, quite, Gussy!" said Tom; and Blake echoed him. But they winked at one another. Arthur Augustus had been known to change his great mind, obstinate as he could be on occasion; and they were in hopes that, after once having undertaken the part, he would stick to it.

Manners came in just then. He was looking rather pleased with himself.

"Where did you get to, chump?" asked Lowther.

"Met Mrs. Holmes and Cousin Ethel in Rylcombe, and was asked in to tea," replied Manners cheerily. "Had a ripping time. They did rather try to pump me about the wewue and all that, but I wasn't taking any, of course. I say, Tom, it's all right about the oak frame for my enlargement. It will be ready."

"Oh, good!" said Tom. "But let's get to business now!"

That oak frame was a matter of real importance. Manners, after much real hard work and many experimental shots, had secured a really first-class photograph of St. Jim's, from a point of view which brought out all that was most picturesque in the ancient school. From the negative he had made a big enlargement, and had spent much time and care in toning it to a beautiful sepia by a difficult and somewhat expensive process.

The photograph, handsomely framed, was to be the joint present of the Terrible Three to Dr. Holmes; and it was safe to say that among all the presents he would receive few were likely to give him greater pleasure. For the greater part of his life, as boy and man, had been bound up with the old school, and his love for it was intense.

Tom and Lowther had not been suffered to help Manners to any extent worth mentioning, of course. They had been ordered aside rather crossly on several occasions. But they had shared the cost, and were bearing the whole cost of the frame, which was to be ready next day.

"Blake can grin as much as he likes," said Manners sharply. "Let him wait till he sees the photo, that's all! It will make him sit up!"

"Blake's going to grin as much as he likes," returned the Yorkshire junior. "He never asks anyone's leave to grin. But I wasn't poking fun at your photo, old chap. I'm sure it's a ripper!"

"I say, Manners," said Figgins, as Manners turned, with a mollified look on his face.

"Oh, come along, you slackers!" said Tom Merry. "We shan't get anything like a decent rehearsal unless we hurry up."

Lowther, Blake, Levison, Kerr, Clive, Roylance, Noble, and a score more, followed him in haste from the Common-room. Even Cardew lounged after them. The wewue contained many separate features, and most of the fellows in the

Shell and Fourth had parts, larger or smaller, as the case might be.

"What is it, Figgy?" asked Manners. "I want a word or two with you in private," said the chief of the New House juniors.

"There's the rehearsal, you know."

"Well, our parts ain't exactly principal ones, and they come in rather late. They can get on without us for a bit, I fancy."

"Right-ho! Let's go to No. 10."

They went thither, Manners looking rather puzzled, and Figgins somewhat worried. Though he had sought counsel from Kerr and Fatty Wynn, Figgy was still just a little bit doubtful as to how to go to work with Manners. For, good fellow as he was, Harry Manners had an awkward temper, and few fellows were quicker to resent interference than he.

But the thing had to be done. That was the uppermost thought in the mind of loyal Figgy.

"See here, Manners, old scout, you can't fight Racke!"

It was scarcely a promising opening. It made Manners stare in a hostile fashion, and ejaculate:

"What?"

"Don't get your rag out, old chap! You can't, really."

"Who says I can't?" snapped Manners.

"Well, I do, for one."

"You can jolly well go and hang yourself! Think I can't see through it? You want to take it on yourself because it's for Cousin Ethel!"

"It isn't, you silly chump; and I don't want to take it on, you howling idiot! Do you suppose she wants fellows fighting about her?"

"No, of course I don't! She'd hate it, if she knew. That's why I tried to get out of it without fighting. But Racke wouldn't let me. She won't know, unless Racke hammers me a lot harder than I expect him to."

"She does know!"

"What?"

"That rotter Baggy told her. And she asked me to stop you!"

For the moment Manners was hurt, and he showed it.

"Asked you! Why couldn't she have spoken to me?"

"Because— Oh, don't you see, Manners? It's different. She knows you would do as she asked, of course; but—but she knows I'd—I'd do anything in the world for her, and—and she could speak to me about it when she couldn't to you!"

Manners understood now—understood more than Figgy had told him, perhaps—and the way he took it showed what a thoroughly good fellow he was.

"It's all right, Figgy," he said. "What Cousin Ethel says goes. I know it wasn't an easy job for you to take on; but I can see why she wanted you to speak to me."

Figgins breathed a deep sigh of relief. "You're a brick, Manners!" he said heartily. "It isn't going to be all violets for you, you know."

Manners' lip curled.

"I can stand it," he said.

"Racke will make out you farked him, I'm afraid."

"He's sure to do that."

"It will be rough on you, Manners."

"Think so? Who's going to believe that I farked Racke?"

"But you can't give your reason."

"Of course not! That would spoil it all. Don't worry, Figgy! I'd do a good deal for you at a pinch, old chap. I don't say I'd do this for just your asking; but it's got to be done, as Cousin Ethel wants it, and I'd rather you should have asked

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me than anyone, except her—even old Tommy!"

Figgy's feelings were too deep for words. He held out his hand, and Manners gripped it. If there was still a slight feeling, deep down in the heart of Manners, that he would rather have had the request straight from Cousin Ethel's own lips, it did not affect his admiration of Figgy.

CHAPTER 8.

Not a Successful Rehearsal.

THE two went off to the concert-room together. There they found Tom Merry addressing very seriously an unexpected audience.

Audiences are really not required at rehearsals, and the past records of the score or so of Third-Formers who had settled themselves in the chairs to look on and criticise were not such as to inspire confidence. The least that could be looked for was a flow of derisive remarks, which do not help much in such a case.

"Now, look here, you kids," said Tom, "there's to be no rotting! If you stay you're to behave yourselves."

"Don't we always?" said Frank Levison.

"Oh, rather!" said Reggie Manners. "We could teach you chaps a thing or two in the way of behaviour!"

"It's supposed to be funny, isn't it?" Wally D'Arcy said. "Well, if you old fogies are trying to be funny, it ain't a bit likely you're going to make us laugh—you needn't be afraid of that!"

"If you see me take out my handkerchief," added Jameson, "it doesn't follow that I'm going to cry, though I guess I shall want to. You can think it's to blow my nose with, if you like."

"Have you learned to do that all by yourself?" inquired Cardew sweetly.

"Yah!" was the only answer Jameson could manage on the spur of the moment.

There was something more than a little suspicious about the good behaviour of the fags. They sat there waiting for the rehearsal to begin with looks as bored as though they were middle-aged men, who had long since exhausted all the pleasure to be got out of such things as this.

But nobody noticed them particularly.

Tom Merry spoke to the actors in the sketch which Harry Wharton had written. It did not start the revue, as a matter of fact; but it was considered by everyone but Lowther quite the leading attraction.

"Got your parts with you?" Tom asked. "I don't suppose any of us can claim to be quite word-perfect yet."

"I wathah fancy I am, deah boy, although my part is weally not my part at all."

"But is only taken on to help us out of the hole," put in Monty Lowther.

"Lowther's made a joke!" came the voice of Wally D'Arcy, in tones of pretended awe.

"I didn't 'ear it," said Joe Frayne.

"You're lucky! Don't grumble about that, kid," Reggie Manners answered him.

Lowther frowned upon them.

"Will you write it down for us, Lowther? We'd like to understand it," said Frank Levison.

"Shut up, you kids!" snapped Levison major.

Gussy advanced to the centre of the stage, and struck an attitude.

"Yaas, I weally think I am word-perfect," he said. "Bai Jove, though, how does it begin, Tom Mewwy?"

"At the commencement," said Lowther solemnly.

"Lowther's made another joke!" announced Wally.

"He hasn't!" shouted Reggie Manners. "He didn't laugh. Lowther always laughs at his own jokes."

"That's because he wants someone to, and nobody else ever does," explained Hobbs.

"If you don't shut up—" roared Figgins.

"Pwaw don't be an ass, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus, moving forward a step or two in a stately manner. "Even the infants of the Third greet your asinine attempts at humour with the scorn they mewit. As for me, I— Oh, bai Jove! Ow-yow! Yawoooooh!"

Something had happened to Gussy.

As he moved forward, nobly contemptuous of Lowther's joking, one leg had suddenly shot out in one direction, the other in the opposite, and he looked like nothing so much as an ill-trained acrobat trying to do the difficult figure known as the splits.

His aristocratic face was a sight to see as he realised what was happening to him. He clutched wildly at his precious monocle, which had fallen from his eye. For one moment, by a desperate effort, he averted the impending catastrophe, and even brought his feet within a few inches of one another again.

But it was no go.

"Yawoooooh!" he howled again, as he tried to step out, and found his feet slipping up.

This time they kept each other company to a much greater extent. But it availed Gussy nothing, for they slid fast, and he sprawled backwards in his attempt to govern their erratic motion.

He smote the boards of the stage with a resounding thwack, and slid fairly over the front, to land with a thump below.

"Ha, ha, ha! Encore!" yelled the audience.

"That's great, Gus!" roared Wally. "Didn't think you'd got it in you, old sport! My hat, won't that scene go down when you fellows give the giddy play!"

"Oh, crumbs! Here come some more of them!" gasped Reggie Manners.

Wally and Reggie and the rest of the Third knew exactly why Arthur Augustus had done what he had done. Perhaps the fellows on the stage ought to have known at once. The fact remains that they didn't—or, at least, that some of them didn't.

Monty Lowther and Herries sprang forward together, as if to Gussy's rescue. They were not in time for that; but their attempt at it was not wasted.

Herries felt himself going, and clutched Lowther round the neck.

"Yoop!" he howled. "Oh, hold up, you silly ass!"

"Wharrer doing? Leggo, you idiot!" gasped Lowther, half choked.

Then his feet slid hopelessly, and the next moment he and Herries landed together on top of the luckless Gussy.

"Yow! I'm bein' c'wushed to death!" yelled the first victim.

"Yaroooooh!" yelled Digby.

"Howly mother av Moses!" exclaimed Reilly.

Then they two smote the stage with a thump—two thumps, to be precise, for they did not come down together. And they did not slide off, which was quite a piece of luck for Gussy, whose burden was already as much as he could bear.

"You silly chumps!" shouted Tom Merry, moving forward. "You idiots!"

Some of the others were following. But Cardew, gripping Levison's arm, said:

"Thomas isn't exactly givin' them soft soap, is he? Never mind; they don't need it. They've had some!"

Tom heard that, and pulled up in time. The rest heard, and behind Tom there

CHAPTER 9.

A Big Surprise.

was an instant halt of those who had been pressing forward.

Soft soap! That explained it all!

What need of more explanation had anyone? Why were the Third there?

Easy enough to answer that last question now!

"You young scoundrels!" yelled Tom.

"Oh, lemme get at them!" howled Herries, struggling to his feet.

"Let her rip, you chaps!" roared Wally.

The fags were awaiting that signal. The lights were rather dim, and none of those upon the stage had noticed the fact that quite a lot of strings had been run from above the stage to the auditorium.

Chinese lanterns were suspended above. They had not been lighted; in fact, they could not have been. An attempt to light one of them would have given away the fact that it was full of soot.

To each of these lanterns a string was attached, and at the end of each string was a fag. The fags pulled, with each a sudden jerk, and the lanterns thudded down. The jerk had been so delivered as to bring from its support the lantern that received it. Here and there a misfire occurred; a lantern still held because the string had not been rightly fixed, or because the jerk had not been strong enough.

But fully two-thirds of the lanterns thudded. Tom Merry got the first that fell. Right upon his devoted head it burst, and soot poured all over him.

Three fell upon Dig and Reilly as they scrambled up, and the shock of surprise was such that they promptly slipped again, and lay upon their stomachs, soot-sprinkled and howling.

Clive got one, and another halved itself between Kerruish and Noble. Two tumbled from the stage and burst over Gussy, Herries, and Lowther.

But Cardew and Levison, Manners and Figgins, Kerr, and Dane, and half a score others escaped, being too far to the rear. And Fatty Wynn might have escaped but that he ran forward with his mouth open and his face turned up to see whence this strange fruit was dropping.

The last of all that fell burst full and fairly upon Fatty's face.

"Grrrr! Gurrurr!" gasped the unfortunate New House junior.

"Is that how you like it done, old fogies?" sounded the exultant voice of Wally.

"Oh, chase them!" yelled Figgy.

His long legs made two strides off the stage. Heedless alike of the soaped boards and the sprawling juniors beneath he leaped, and landed on his feet beyond the heap of struggling humanity.

But the rest did not follow him. They preferred a safer, if slower, way.

By the time Cardew, Levison, Manners, and Redfern, who had got front places in the squeeze that occurred at the side of the stage, were in the auditorium, nearly all the fags were outside the door. Wally D'Arcy and Frank Levison, greatly daring, had halted there, however.

Figgins was almost upon them, wrath in his eyes as he came.

"Perhaps next time you old fogies will see the sense of offering us parts!" yelled Wally. "Bunk, Franky!"

Just in time they bunked. The door slammed within an inch of Figgy's furious face.

"I rather think the Third scored this time," remarked Cardew, with a grin that was more amiable than it might have been had he shared in the soft-soap slide or the soot bombshells.

"COME in!" yelled Racke. His eyebrows rose in surprise when he saw that it was Tom Merry who answered the yell by entering.

Crooke, as surprised as he, scowled. He regarded Tom's coming as an intrusion. If it were so, it was at least a most unusual one.

"I've come from Manners," said Tom quietly.

"Oh!" ejaculated Racke, in surprise. "No need, that I can see," said Crooke. "It's all fixed up for this afternoon, an' I don't see that there's any more to be said about it—unless Manners wants to back out!"

Tom flushed. He did not half like his errand. Manners was right, he felt that. He had not hesitated when his chum had explained, and asked him to go to Racke. But still, he did not relish it.

"Manners does not intend to fight Racke," he said.

"What?"

If there had been any doubt that for once Aubrey Racke was strung up to fighting pitch, the tone of that exclamation would have dispelled it.

Racke was furious.

"I think you heard me," said Tom.

"But— Oh, dash it, he can't back out like this!" roared Racke.

"It's at his choice whether he fights or not," Tom replied.

"But it's at my choice whether I brand him as a rotten funk all over the school, Merry!"

"That's so. I've no doubt you'll try it on. It's a matter for others whether they believe your accusation or not, though. I should say they won't."

"It's a dodge, Aubrey!" sneered Crooke. "They're not dead sure Manners can lick you, by gad! So they've found another champion. The noble Merry has looked in to goad you into takin' him on instead. Oh, they're a dashed downy lot!"

"You're mistaken, Crooke. It's the sort of mistake a cad of your kind would make. None of us has the slightest doubt that Manners does not mean to fight, and I don't, either."

"Who's your man, then? Talbot, I suppose?"

"You suppose wrong."

"It isn't Lowther, Aubrey. There's nothin' to choose between him an' Manners. I've got it! Figgins—he's the man!"

"You're wrong again, Crooke," said Tom patiently. "None of Manners' friends has the least intention of takin' his place."

A lurid light came into the shifty eyes of Racke.

"I've struck Manners in the face!" he said savagely. "He won't fight me after that! None of you will fight me, you say! Then I take it that you're all willin' to accept the coward's blow?"

"Wrong again!" flashed Tom.

"What will you do if I hit you?" snarled Racke.

"Better try it and see!"

But Racke did not try it. He dared not. He knew that he was a mere weed compared to Tom Merry. Tom could thrash Racke without a fight.

"This blessed place is gettin' more like a magnified Band of Hope every dashed day!" Crooke sneered. "I see it now. The Head's havin' a birthday in a day or two, an' what good little boy would think of scrapping at such a time?"

"You can take it that way if you choose," said Tom, rather hoping that the two black sheep would take it that way.

"It's not the Head they're thinkin' about, by gad!" said Racke. "It's Miss Cleveland!"

Tom's eyes blazed now, and his hands clenched themselves involuntarily. But he kept silence, since he could not deny the truth of that guess.

"What's she got to do with it?" asked Crooke.

"They don't want her dragged into a beastly vulgar scrap!" sneered Racke. "It would make talk, you know, an'—"

"That's enough!" said Tom sharply. "We don't want it, and we won't have it!"

"Can't see why she needs to be dragged in at all—what?" said Crooke. "Manners can fight Racke without havin' bills posted about that he's doin' it for the sake of Cousin Ethel, by gad!"

"I think you'd better say 'Miss Cleveland,' Crooke. Anyway, Manners isn't goin' to fight Racke."

"That won't save her!" snarled Racke. "I shall take the first dashed chance I get, before as many fellows as possible, of askin' her just precisely what Manners did say to her about me. I'm within my rights there, I think—what?"

And in a sense he was. Had Cousin Ethel been a boy, and a St. Jim's fellow, the course he proposed to take would have commended itself to Tom. When a fellow believed himself slandered, the best and most straightforward thing was to find out just what had been said about him, and to meet the charge made.

But Cousin Ethel was not a boy, and all her chums felt that she ought not to have her name mixed up in an affair of this sort. Moreover, when Racke did a straightforward thing, it was open to anyone to believe that he had some motive behind what happened. He was not exactly famous for being straightforward.

His motive was not hard to guess at. He wanted to hurt Cousin Ethel, for some reason or other; and he wanted to hurt all of them through her. To gain that end he was even willing to face a licking at the hands of Manners.

"I don't know whether you are within your rights or not," replied Tom warmly. "In a case like this it's impossible to say what a fellow's rights are. But I know this, if you do what you talk of doing, you'll be made very sick and sorry for it!"

"You hear that, Crooke?" said Racke. "My rights don't matter, by gad! But I'm not complainin'. I didn't expect fair play from the legion of Miss Cleveland's adorners. Will Manners meet me as soon as this dashed birthday affair is over, Merry?"

Tom paused. He would have liked to say "Yes" to that.

Once Cousin Ethel was out of the way, beyond reach of Racke's malice, no one would any longer want to postpone the fight.

But nobody knew the length of the girl's stay, probably not even she herself. Racke had guessed that.

"He didn't say so," said Tom.

"But surely you're empowered to make terms for him, dash it?"

"You're not the sort of chap I care to make terms with about anything, Racke!" snapped Tom.

And with that he went.

"By Jove, old chap, the cards are in your hands now!" said Crooke.

"I rather think they are, old sport! I'm goin' along to spread the news that the fight isn't comin' off. Will you toddle along with me?"

Crooke signified his willingness to toddle, and they passed out together.

The first fellows they met were Kangaroo and Clifton Dane of the Shell.

"Have you fellows heard?" asked Racke affably.

"Heard what?" growled Kangaroo, who disliked Racke intensely.

"The news."

"What news?"

"The fight's off, by gad!"

"What fight?" snorted Kangaroo.

"Between me an' Manners, of course! I don't know of any other."

"Well, I'm not surprised!" said Kangaroo, looking at him hard. "I fancied all along you'd funk it when it came to the pinch."

"But I'm not funk'n' it, you silly idiot!" hooted Racke. "It's Manners who's funk'n' it!"

"Rats!" replied Kangaroo.

"Manners won't fight, anyway!" said Crooke, shaking his head sadly.

"What's Racke been doin' now?" inquired Dane.

"I? What should I have been doin'?"

"Oh, I don't know! Come to that, your past record is black enough to give any decent chap excuse for not fightin' you if he doesn't choose. But I thought there might be something fresh."

Kangaroo and the Canadian junior passed on. Racke had certainly got no change out of them.

But they were wondering at the news they heard. It was queer enough that Racke should have screwed up his pluck to the pitch of being ready to fight Manners. It was still more queer, however, that Manners should refuse to meet him.

Noble and Dane did not know what the closer chums of the Terrible Three knew.

Julian and Kerruish were the next fellows met by the two black sheep.

"I say, you chaps!" said Crooke.

"Well?" was Julian's reply.

The Manx junior did not speak. These two also barred the precious pair.

"Manners has funk'd it!"

"Funked what?"

"Why, Racke, of course!"

"Oh, I'm glad you called Racke 'it'! Strikes me as quite the right way to speak of him. Come along, Eric!"

They passed on, leaving Racke and Crooke fuming.

"I say, though, Dick," said Kerruish doubtfully, "it can't be true, surely?"

"Does Crooke ever tell the truth?"

"Not often. But—"

"If it's true that Manners isn't going to fight him, there must be some good reason for it. Manners wouldn't funk anyone, I'm jolly sure. But—"

There it was. No one who did not know the circumstances could fail to be surprised. And it was impossible to tell everyone all about it.

Racke and Crooke had not met with much encouragement so far. But they went on their way.

In their next attempt they ran up against a bad snag, however.

Roylance, Contarini, and Smith minor came along together. These three shared a study, and the little Italian and Smith were close chums. Both liked Roylance, though he was scarcely to be reckoned as a third in their alliance.

"Your pal Manners is a funk, Roylance, by gad!" said Crooke.

"What?"

There was hot anger in the ejaculation. Dick Roylance and Harry Manners had been enemies at the outset, but they were fast friends now. Except for Tom Merry and Monty Lother, there was no fellow in the two forms whom Manners liked better than Roylance; and it is doubtful whether St. Jim's held another fellow whom Roylance cared half as much about as he cared about Manners.

"He's refused to fight me, y'know," added Racke.

"You say Manners is a funk, Crooke?" snapped Roylance.

"Yaas. What else can you call—"

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"That's enough! You say so, too, Racke?"

"I should say it went without sayin'!"

"But do you say it?"

"Of course I do!"

Roylance seized the two by their collars and brought their heads together with a powerful jerk.

"Ow-yow!" howled Crooke.

"Yoooop! Confound you!" roared Racke.

By another quick, deft movement the New Zealand junior twisted them both round, and planted a kick of the heartiest kind upon the person of each.

It was all done so speedily that Smith minor and Contarini, the only witnesses, could do nothing but stare in surprise.

But when Racke and Crooke turned in savage fashion upon Roylance, both Smith and the little Italian sprang forward to his aid.

"Leave them to me!" he snapped. "Come on, both of you, if you want any more!"

Racke might have come on; but Crooke really did not want any more.

And Racke knew himself useless alone against the fellow who had proved himself altogether too good for Manners, and had given Tom Merry one of the hardest tussles of his life.

Somehow, Racke and Crooke felt no keenness for further spreading of the news after that encounter.

But it went on spreading. Bernard Glyn heard it with surprise from his chums. Hammond and Reilly were as much puzzled by it as Julian and Kerruish had been. Grundy said that he should have to see Manners about it; and Wilkins and Gunn, though they hardly saw where Grundy came in, wondered.

Levison and Clive, Cardew and Durrance, did not know what to make of it. Even Blake & Co. were at a loss to understand.

Most of the fellows were of opinion that there must be something behind it; but only the Terrible Three, Talbot, and Figgins & Co., knew what was behind it.

CHAPTER 10.

Cousin Ethel's Champions.

"WARE hawks!" exclaimed Wally D'Arcy.

Wally and his little band made themselves scarce at once. They had not yet paid for their trick in the concert-room; but they were well aware that at least a score of the Shell and Fourth were only waiting a chance to get even with them.

D'Arcy minor had sighted the Terrible Three, with Blake, Herries, Digby, and his own major. Among the seven were no fewer than five of the chief victims of their plot, and it was eminently desirable to keep out of the way of those five for at least another day or so.

"Oh, bless it! There are some more of them!" said Reggie Manners, in disgust. "The bouncers seem all over the place this morning!"

Figgins, Kerr, Fatty Wynn, Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence had just come out of the New House together. Like the others sighted, they were off to footer practice.

"Well, you know, we did get a fair old crowd of them, and it ain't quite an unusual thing to find them going to footer about this time," remarked Frank Levison. "There's my major and Cardew and Clive now. But we needn't dodge them; they're not mad. Clive had a lantern on his napper; but he's got over that."

Levison major and Clive were off to footer. Cardew was not. He strolled towards the gates.

Racke and Crooke passed together, going in the same direction.

"It's jolly queer about that fight," said Hobbs thoughtfully.

"If you're going to make out that my major's funk'n' young Hobbs, I'll—"

"I wasn't, you fatheaded chump! Don't we know he wouldn't funk Racke—or anybody else, come to that! Look how he stood up to Roylance when you got him into that silly mess!"

"What beats me," said Curly Gibson, "is that a chap who knows jolly well he can lick Racke doesn't jump at the chance of doing it."

"I think as it's somethink to do with Cousin Ethel," remarked Joe Frayne.

"Oh, rats!" replied Wally.

"Well, I do, and I'll tell you chaps why. The row was really about 'er, and I know she'd jest 'ate to 'ave anyone fighting about 'er."

"Don't see why she should," said Reggie.

Wally had rather a way of thinking Reggie likely to be wrong, and he was somewhat struck by little Frayne's argument.

"I dunno," he said. "Girls are queer about that sort of thing."

"There she is!" said Jameson.

Ethel Cleveland gave them a bright smile to share among them as she crossed the quad. She was very fond of Wally, and all his chums were numbered among her friends.

"No, you don't, young Levison!" said Wally sharply. "We haven't the time to spare to go tailing round after girls."

"You can't call Cousin Ethel 'girls,' Wally," said Frank. "I like to talk to her."

"Well, you can't just now, that's all. If there was anything any of us could do for her, I'd jolly well lick the chap who wasn't willing to do it; but there ain't, so—"

"You're blessed free with your talk of lickings, young D'Arcy!" growled Hobbs. "I don't care about that; but you may as well know that we're all every bit as ready to do anything for her as you are. She's one of the best, that's what she is."

"Hear, hear!" chirped Reggie.

Even the wayward and rather sullen Reggie had yielded to the charm of Cousin Ethel.

The girl was going out of gates, it seemed. But as she neared the porter's lodge she hesitated.

Racke and Crooke stood together at the gates, and there was something in the unpleasant smiles both wore that made her reluctant to pass them.

She did not see Cardew a few yards farther away, and it did not strike her that the fags were likely to note her hesitation.

The two black sheep moved towards her. At the same moment, unnoticed by either, Cardew moved nearer to them.

"Now's your dashed chance, Racke!" said Crooke. "You'll never have the nerve to do it with a crowd about. Besides, even if you could get near her then, they wouldn't let you cross-examine her."

"She can't deny afterwards what she tells us now," replied Racke.

"Not so dashed sure of that. She's a girl, by gad, an' they'll deny-anything when it suits them. But I'm here to make a note of what she does say, an'—"

"Don't jaw so much, confound you!" snarled Racke.

Crooke forgot that Cousin Ethel's bare word would count for more with most people at St. Jim's than all the oaths that he and Racke could swear to bear out their story.

The girl would not turn back. But she evidently meant to walk past them.

Racke raised the silk hat he wore.

"Excuse me, Miss Cleveland—" he began.

"I am sorry, but I don't wish to talk to you, Racke," said Cousin Ethel, flushing.

"I say, you chaps, those cads are annoying her!" said Frank Levison hotly.

"Right-ho, Frank! We can all see that. We ain't exactly blind," replied Wally. "Just wait a minute, that's all!"

Cardew also seemed to be playing the waiting game. He had halted. Racke and Crooke had their backs to him, and Cousin Ethel did not see him, while the gates screened him from the vision of the fags.

"Is that quite fair?" asked Racke pathetically.

"I don't think that there is any question of fairness in it," answered the girl. "You have never been my friend, and I do not see why—"

"Oh, but that's too hard on me, my dear! Am I to be slandered to you an' have no remedy for it?"

The flush on Cousin Ethel's face deepened, and her brows knit. To be called "my dear" by Racke was really beyond the limit!

"No one has slandered you to me," she said.

"She means that you can't be slandered, old sport!" gibed Crooke. "The worst that anyone can say about you is only what you deserve. That's the idea—what?"

"Let's go for them!" panted little Joe Frayne.

"Half a jiff!" replied Wally. "We're going for the rotters all right, but just you wait till you get the word."

"It is not for you to say what I mean, Crooke," said Cousin Ethel, with dignity. "I repeat that no one has slandered Racke to me. I don't listen to slander, anyway, and my friends don't talk it."

"Not Manners?" snapped Racke.

"Certainly not Manners!"

"Didn't he tell you that—?"

"I refuse entirely and once for all to discuss with you anything that my friends have said to me. Be good enough to let me pass!"

The girl looked like a young queen in her anger. Cardew gave a low whistle expressive of admiration.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "I didn't guess she had so much in her!"

Racke and Crooke did not move. They were standing directly in front of the girl. She might have stepped aside and avoided them, but she had no desire for dodging. It was their place to move, since they had planted themselves in her path.

"Will you be good enough to stand aside?" she said again.

"Don't be in such a hurry, by gad! We—"

"Oh, look out, Racke, you silly idiot!" cried Crooke.

Wally had given the word, and his pack rushed like young wolfhounds upon the two cads.

Unobserved by anyone, Cardew stepped forward. Crooke turned, meaning to bolt out of gates, and ran right into his arms.

Almost in the same second the pack surrounded Racke, had him on his back in a twinkling, and really looked like pulling him to pieces.

Cardew had got a hand between Crooke's throat and his collar. He gave the black sheep one angry shake, and then, still holding him, turned to Cousin Ethel, and said politely:

"There is no one to bar your way now, Miss Cleveland. May I suggest that to walk on an' know no more would be quite a good idea?"

There were tears in the girl's eyes as she smiled at him, and walked on and

out through the gates without a backward glance.

Cardew was right. She could see that. Her best course was to vanish from the scene, and leave to those champions of hers the dealing with her enemies.

But as she went there was in her so much gratitude to, so much pride in them, as almost drowned her hot resentment against those others.

Cardew, cynical, drawling, slack, whom she had not known till lately, and these heedless youngsters, whom one would hardly have expected to have minds above japes—they were as ready to stand forth in her cause as George Figgins himself, or Harry Manners, or Tom Merry!

Cardew gave Crooke another vicious shake.

"Gurrrrr!" gasped Crooke, almost completely helpless.

For one wild moment he did think of kicking Cardew's shins. But he realised that that would not pay him.

"Cousin Wally," said Cardew, "I should advise against quite finishin' Racke off this time. The consequences to you an' the other gentlemen concerned might be unpleasant—though why there should be any fuss about such a trifle as makin' an end of a reptile like Racke in time of war puzzles me."

"Crumbs! How you do jaw!" puffed Wally. "Give us that other sweep, too! You needn't bother. We can deal with them both. Yank this rotter along to the fountain, you chaps!"

"Proceed!" said Cardew. "I will march my prisoner thither!"

"Here, I say, you know, you can't do that!" snarled Crooke, struggling hard.

"Think not?" was all Cardew condescended to say by way of answer. He had suddenly shifted his grip to the back of Crooke's collar, and, with the help of a gentle application or two of his knee, was forcing the Shell fellow along.

The fags left Crooke to Cardew. Cardew was plainly quite capable of dealing with him, and their anger was chiefly against Racke.

They gave that youth the fag's-march. Nobody was about to see; but in any case no one but a master or a prefect would have interfered with the rough justice meted out to those two.

"Heave-ho!" roared Wally. "In with him!"

"Heave-ho!" chorussed the rest. And Racke was heaved up.

Splash! Right into the fountain he floundered.

"Yaroooh! Oh, you young—"

"Duck his head under!" howled Reggie. And he and Hobbs thrust Racke's head under water, and held it there till Frank Levison reminded them that an inquest might be unpleasant.

"Gurrrr! Ow-yow!" spluttered Racke.

"That's one done!" said Wally, with great satisfaction. "You can bunk, Racke! Better not speak to my cousin again, though! She doesn't like cads!"

"Come on, Crooke!" yelled Jameson.

"Hallo, there! What are you doing, you kids?" demanded Tom Merry.

News of the trouble had reached Little Side with a speed that seemed magical, and the leaders of the Shell and Fourth had left footer at once.

They came crowding around. Wet as Racke was, no one made way for him. He was not to be allowed to go until they knew what was his crime.

Manners and Lowther, Blake & Co., Talbot, Figgins & Co., Roylance, Redfern & Co., Noble and Dane and Glyn, Clive and Levison, Durrance, Koumi Rao, Grundy and Gunn and Wilkins—all were there, and every moment added to the crowd.

"Let me get past, hang you!" snarled Racke.

"Leggo, Cardew, you rotter!" howled Crooke.

"You're not going past till we know what you've done!" snapped Tom Merry.

"There's some oversight here," said Monty Lowther. "Crooke's dry!"

"That's soon put right!" Cardew replied coolly. "The dear Crooke is polite. He gave his chief first turn. Will you get into the fountain, Crooke, or must you be put there?"

"Hang you, I won't—"

"Take him, my children!" said Cardew. And the fags clutched Crooke.

"Wait a moment!" said Tom. "What have—"

"It's quite all right, I assure you, Thomas!" Cardew said. "The execution has my full approval. Do you ask more than that?"

"Well, I think—"

"Heave-ho!" yelled Wally.

Splash!

"Shove his head under!" ordered the leader of the Third.

Then he turned to Tom Merry. "You talk too much, Tommy—that's what's the matter with you!" he said severely. "My motto's do it first and talk about it afterwards."

"But what have those two done?"

"They were cheeky to Cousin Ethel!" replied Frank Levison. And his tone left no doubt as to his opinion of the enormity of the crime.

"Stood in her way, and wouldn't let her go past," added Curly Gibson.

"That's right!" said Wally, and Cardew nodded.

"They're not jolly well going to get off as easily as this, then!" roared Figgins. "Clear out of the way, you fellows! Racke, you sweep—"

"Don't, old man!" breathed Kerr in the ear of his chum. "The kids and Cardew have done the needful!"

"Let go of me, idiot! I—"

"Well, she won't thank you for it!" said Kerr.

And Figgy subsided.

"You two had better go!" said Tom scornfully. "It isn't necessary for us to say what we think of you! I'm glad it was the Third that handled you, but it isn't the Third you'll be up against if you try any more games of this sort, I can tell you!"

"It's all a dashed lie!" hooted Racke.

"We only—"

"Shut up!" commanded Grundy. "If you say another word, Racke, you'll have me to reckon with—me! I ain't exactly a ladies' man as a rule—tain't in my line; in fact, I think it very silly. But I don't mind saying that I respect Miss Cleveland very highly indeed, and—and you'd better look out for yourselves if—"

Oh, hang you! Get out of my sight!"

Another champion for Cousin Ethel! She would never lack them at St. Jim's; but it was a bit of a surprise to those who heard to find Grundy among them, by his own showing.

The two slunk off.

"You kids—"

"Not so much of the kids, Tommy,

please!" broke in Wally.

"You young gentlemen of the Third," Tom amended his address, with a smile, "have done well—jolly well!"

"Yaas, wathah! For once, Wally, I am pwoud of you!"

There was no need for Ernest Levison to say that he felt the same about his minor. And Reggie Manners, though usually inclined to resent the slightest show of feeling from Harry, did not try to shake off his brother's hand when it rested for a moment on his shoulder.

"Rats, Gus! We know what to do as well as you old fogies! But we know that you'd have done the same if you'd

(Continued on page 16.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 559.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 21.—George Herries.

YOU will not find many St. Jim's stories in which Herries does not appear at all; but you will find very few in which he plays a big part.

Some of the readers of the GEM think that every character should have his turn in the limelight. But this would not be according to the ways of life as it is really lived. Some people—the majority, indeed—never get any of the limelight. All of you must have known at school fellows who were never exactly prominent, although they were in everything. They did not lead, because that instinct for leadership was not in them; and it chanced that luck never made them the central figures on any stage, as luck does sometimes make those not naturally fitted to be in the front rank. They usually wish luck had not, by the way!

George Herries is such a fellow as this. A very good fellow, a loyal chum, not a duffer, though one would say that he is, on the whole, the slowest and least clever of the four in Study No. 6; but certainly not a fellow likely to attract all eyes to him by his shining qualities or his doughty deeds.

I cannot recall any reader ever saying that Herries was his favourite character in the stories. Tom Merry, Talbot, Blake, Figgins, Kerr, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Wally D'Arcy, Ernest Levison, Frank Levison, Cardew—all of these have many adherents. There are some who value Redfern, Fatty Wynn, Julian, Kildare, Clive, or Kangaroo above all others. And this does not exhaust the list. But I don't think Herries really comes into it, though I am sure few would say what a very young correspondent said a little while back—that he did not like Herries because he shoved himself forward too much and thought he knew such a lot. That seems to me a total misreading of the character of Herries.

Herries is not specially notable for shoving himself forward. He does stick to his own notions, even when they have been proven wrong—to the satisfaction of others. But that is only the natural obstinacy of a mind not over quick.

In some ways Herries is rather like Johnny Bull, of Greyfriars. They both have a habit of growling remarks—not usually particularly silly remarks, but not usually distinguished by any very deep thinking. But Johnny Bull is quicker than George Herries, and has more real shrewdness. Johnny is a very typical English boy. I shall probably incur the wrath of a Scots reader or two of the sort answered in last week's Chat when I say that Herries, from his name, should be at least of Scots extraction. There I will stop, however. I am not going to say that I consider Herries a typical Scots boy. If I had been going to do that I should have had to ascribe to him first place in Study No. 6, and at worst second place in the Fourth—Kerr being accorded first—in order to put myself right!

Bull and Herries are alike in a certain vein of obstinacy, too. So they are in their outspokenness. They are apt to growl what they think without the regard which a more sensitive fellow might show to the feelings of others. Herries is as emphatic as anyone about the foolishness of Gussy. He is very fond of Gussy; but he does most certainly regard him as his own inferior in intelligence. I doubt whether he is right. Gussy will do more foolish things than Herries; but he has a decidedly quicker brain, and it is not always at his most foolish actions that Herries girds most.

I fancy it is lucky for Herries that Gussy is in No. 6. If he were not, Herries might more often be the butt of the wit of Blake and Digby—which is not wit of any very superior quality, by the way, and he would not stand it as well as Gussy does. For the noble Arthur Augustus can only sulk with an effort, whereas Herries could do a fair amount of sulking without trying at all hard.

Herries is a big, burly fellow for his age—probably the heaviest fellow in the Fourth, and possibly also the strongest. But his weight and strength do not avail to give him first place in any sport. There are several fellows who are easily his superiors with the gloves. He is only a moderate cricketer, and in the footer field is conspicuous rather as a good, honest worker than as a really clever player. He showed up well in the wrestling line during the sports tournament; but even at that game there are others ahead of him.



The things which chiefly distinguish Herries from the rest of the rank and file at St. Jim's are his devotion to Towser and his keen love of music.

It is easier to understand the first trait than the second. Herries is just the sort of fellow who might be expected to love a bulldog. I am not blaming him. I love bulldogs myself. They are not the churlish desperadoes they look. There is any amount of affection in a bulldog. But I don't think he is quite the kind of dog for a quick-brained, sensitive fellow, as a rule.

Little will be said about good old Towser here, for a reason which will appear later. But of Herries in relation to Towser something must be said. Herries overrates Towser's intelligence, there is no doubt as to that. He imagines him capable of doing more than a bloodhound could do in the sleuth line, which is absurd; and he fancies

that Towser understands every word his master says to him, which is unlikely.

But that does not matter. The best side of Herries is shown in his love for the grinning beast. He would cheerfully cut himself short of food that Towser might not want. He regards the dog as one of his chums, which is quite a reasonable way of regarding a good dog. I am not sure that he does not regard him as the chief of them—that would be a mistake; but, after all, if he is ready to do as much for Blake or D'Arcy or Digby as he is for Towser—and I should say he is ready, though it might be done with a worse grace—he is ready to do more than a great many people will do for those they call their friends.

As to Herries' and his musical abilities, I am rather more in doubt—possibly because I know a lot more about dogs than I do about music. One must not accept the opinions of the Shell and Fourth generally as counting for much. When Herries practises on his clarinet, or trombone—which is it?—they say he is making a hideous din. That proves nothing; they are not judges, it may be. He can play the piano. So can Monty Lowther; so, no doubt, can a couple of dozen other fellows in the two Forms. How well or how badly most of them play I cannot tell you. Herries cannot be a duffer, or Mr. Curll would not have been so pleased with him. On the other hand, even if Mr. Curll had said he was a genius, I should not have felt sure of it. For, though Horatio has his good points, I am not convinced that a strict adherence to the frigid truth, or a superiority to flattery when flattery may serve his turn, is among them.

Anyway, Herries scored for the Fourth in the concert competition in connection with the sports tournament. In his special turn he played four instruments at once; and who are we, who cannot play even one—I speak only for those who are like unto myself in this—to belittle him? Most of us could at a pinch beat a drum. If I had ever taken to a musical instrument it should have been a drum. But there is a difference between beating a drum and playing one, I apprehend. Herries played the drum, the piano, and two other instruments, all at once. Honour to Herries—we couldn't have done that, you know!

Seriously, I suppose we must take it that he has some real musical talent, though one might not think it to look at him. For that matter, doubtless there have been other musical fellows who have had big feet and, shall we say, fairly thick heads? As for size, like other men, they have been of all sizes.

Herries displayed the obstinacy which is one of his traits in that affair of the special turn. At all costs he was keen to keep it a secret from everybody—even from the chums of his bosom—until the night of the concert. Now, that might have been worth while at some cost, but hardly at all costs; and Herries' doggedness about it gave his chums a good deal of trouble, through the machinations of Racke and Crooke, before the time for disclosure came.

But they might have given Herries credit for more sense, I think. He is a steady-going chap, on the whole; few are more so. You do not often find George Herries kicking over the traces badly. He follows others into folly sometimes, but he seldom walks into it alone.

Do you remember when Levison, Crooke, Gore, and Mellish plotted to make bad blood between the Grammarians and Tom Merry & Co.? They had a certain measure of success, and there were several fights, in which St. Jim's fellows, caught singly, met Grammarians with a crowd to cheer them on. Herries had a licking in one of these encounters; he went out to sneer, and was shorn. He took it rather hard. Gussy found him battered and solitary in No. 6 when the rest were at tea elsewhere, and, of course,

tender-hearted Gussy did his best to comfort him. Herries showed more pride and more sensitiveness than he usually shows; but that is because he does not usually show his feelings much, one fancies.

There was a time when Herries was inclined to fancy himself as a poet. He may be a musician; a poet he certainly is not. His verses were very bad indeed. But in those days everyone was keen to write for "Tom Merry's Weekly." Now that the novelty of it has worn off there is less keenness.

If we go back very far we find Herries a person of much more weight and importance in the Fourth than he now is. There was a brief time when he was looked upon as captain of the Fourth, though it may be

doubted whether the New House contingent ever acknowledged him as such. But Blake came along, and it was no long time before Blake passed above the head of Herries. There was a fight first, though; and there was an argument as to the King under whom the monasteries were dissolved, an argument in which Herries was completely in the wrong, it may be added. He got Digby and other fellows who admitted his rule to hold Blake while he pulled his ears; but even if Blake was thus forced to admit that what wasn't so was so, nothing was really proved by that.

Since then many fellows have joined the Fourth, and when one thinks of them all one is not surprised that Herries is no longer cock of the Form in the School House. Blake

is a better all-round man than he; and there are others—Julian, Clive, Cardew, and Roy-lance among them. But that is not by any means to say that Herries is not a good fellow. Mr. Lathom would hardly rank him among his brightest pupils. Tom Merry does not think of him among the first when he is making up cricket or football team lists. He cannot joke like Lowther—perhaps he does not want to—or sling sarcasm like Cardew, though I fancy he regards himself at times as rather a sarcastic person, or rival Kerr as a detective, or Glyn as an inventor. But he has his place, and it is not a place that he needs to be ashamed of, for, when one comes to think of it, there is about as little that really matters against George Herries as against any fellow at St. John's.

With the Guns.

By an Old "Gem" Reader in Khaki.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

This not not the sort of thing we usually publish, and I am not sure that it will suit every taste. But I think many readers who are nearing the age of joining up will be glad to see it. It is a simple narrative, very well told, which gives some idea of the golden chain of comradeship that links men over there, and has real life in it.

I.

"O H, blimey, what luck!" The exclamation from our Cockney chum was really quite mild when one reflects that he had just lost deux francs—we get the lingo, you know!—on what looked a moral cert at banker. His pontoon had gone down to the ace and king of clubs, turned up by the banker.

"It's Smudger Smith's luck!" he muttered. "Wasn't he born like it?"

You folks at home must not think it too dreadful of us to play banker. We are not habitual gamblers, you know. But one must do something to take one's mind off the horrible monotony of the surroundings in which we find ourselves out here. Yes, there are other horrible things besides the monotony; but on the whole that is the hardest to bear.

Just imagine yourselves poked away in some forsaken place on the Somme—or anywhere else—the Somme isn't the only district of the sort—surrounded by thick, slimy, smelly mud. Nearest canteen two miles away, and only to be got at by expert swimmers. You might turn to cards; of course, you might not. But you might!

The game was going on in the gun-pit. Things were what we call quiet; a few trench lights, and the rattle of machine-guns coming over the crest, sounding nearer than they really were in the stillness of the night. But we knew the quiet would not last long. What did I say about monotony? Well, there's a kind of monotony in constant interruptions, isn't there? Anyway, we didn't often get a night's "kip," and now that we had got it out came the cards, and the whole six of us were at it, in spite of the fact that we were all wet, and knew that we had a dreary twelve hours' shift ahead of us. And we were, on the whole, as happy as you would expect from fellows who had had eighteen months' active service without a blessed day of leave.

"No. 2 gun, action!" Through the night came the order, and the game of banker was cut off short. All were ready, the sergeant alert for orders, Jimmy on the laying-step, his eyes glued to the sights, our old Cockney chum fondly nursing his lanyard, filling his pouch with tubes, still grousing about the luck he was born with.

"Range, 7500, 3.4 degrees sight, 5 degrees elevation; report when ready!"

"All correct, sir!" replied the sergeant cheerily. Then he turned.

"Got it, Jimmy?"

"Yes, skipper."

"Old Patience"—as we called our gun—was loaded and ready. Without swank, I may say that ours was reckoned the smartest detachment in the battery.

"No. 2 gun ready, sir!"

Back comes the answer.

"Fire, No. 2!"

Away she blazed. A second or two later down came a correction from the B.C., with an order for thirty rounds of gunfire.

At the word "gunfire" everybody moved as though on springs, fusing shells, getting cartridges ready. The order meant that we had to get off thirty rounds as quickly as possible without further orders.

"Let her go, Bill!" cried the layer, hopping nimbly off the step.

A swift tug of the lanyard, and another iron pill had been sent over to old Fritz.

A cry came from Jimmy:

"She's off the line, sir! Trail-jumping like anything—these last three rounds! Trail right!"

Quickly the handspikes were brought into play, and the old beauty was levered back.

Then things were lively enough for a time. And that's one picture!

II.

DAWN at last! We had had a rough passage that night, and our coming eight hours' rest had been well earned.

Fritz had commenced to baggage over the track that led to the village where our billets were. But we had got used to that kind of thing, and took it as all in the day's—or the night's—work.

"Good-bye, you chaps!"

That was to the relieving detachment. Then we sauntered up the track. A shrapnel burst overhead, and we got a move on us. Bullets flew all about us as we hurried at the double. We never looked round till Jimmy called:

"I say, where's Bill?"

Bill was not with us. Was that poor old Bill lying across the track back there? The question formed itself in the mind of each of us; but no man spoke it. We said nothing at all; we just hurried back.

Yes, it was Bill; not dead, as we saw with relief, but wounded in both legs. In a few seconds we had bandaged him up as well as we knew how—and one learns a bit of that kind of thing—and soon the stretcher was on the spot, and was off again with Bill to the dressing-station.

We went with him, and he talked.

"You can tell Smudger 'e can keep that there deux francs to drink my bloomin' 'ealth, an' think of me when I'm drivin' about in a motor-car with a bloomin' swell lidy in good old Blighty."

That was one of the things Bill said. Somehow it made us feel down in the month—not with envy, but because poor old Bill had caught it pretty badly, and we didn't feel so sure that he would ever see Blighty again.

And when we came away from the dressing-station we were still less cheerful. Bill did not know yet; but it had not been kept from us, and we felt already that we had lost Bill for ever. Dear old Bill! His Cockney accent was of the thickest, and some of his ways were uncouth; but he was a true pal. We should miss him. I don't think any of us will ever again hear anyone sing "If I could only make you care" without being troubled by a lump in the throat.

III.

THE next shift had come round. And old Bill had gone. No Blighty for Bill. Let's hope he was bound for some place that would make up to him for losing that!

We took out a new lanyard, and put Bill's old greasy, knotted one back into the box, to wait there until the morrow, when it should be buried with a true soldier and a dear pal, a man who had done his bit and made the big sacrifice. Both legs off first—poor old Bill! Was it better to die or to live, I wonder?

The happy sing-songs would never be the same. Bill was always the leader in them. We should hear no more tales of Pickford's. Bill had been a Pickford's vanman before he joined up, and had endless stories to tell.

I saw old Smudger put a dirty two-franc bill in his pocket-book, next to the cherished photo of his girl; and I heard him sigh. But he didn't know that I saw or heard. We did not say very much—you can't say very much about these things, you know.

It was a real relief to get the order for action again. One wanted to forget for a while. But even old Patience seemed to know that something was wrong, for after five rounds something went wrong with the works, and she was out of action.

Five hours later we were sitting together round the brazier, trying to get a joint letter to old Bill's missus written. A faint report came over the crest; then the whine of a shell. Crash! It burst not twenty yards from us.

"Funk-hole, boys!" cried the sergeant.

We dived into the little dug-out only just before the next shell burst.

"Seems like Fritzzy has got us fairly taped this time, kids," said the sergeant coolly.

And it did seem like that.

Our little dug-out was shrapnel-proof all right. But it would not stop a pip-squeak, and all of us felt the breeze getting stronger. "My conscience! That's right in the pit!"

It was. Poor old Patience had got it—hit right between the buffers.

She lay there a wreck. We scrambled out of the dug-out and into the pit, with shells flying around us. I don't think there was a man among us in that minute who remembered that, after all, old Patience was only a thing of wood and metal—not a live creature.

The sergeant gasped, and fell forward. One glance was enough. A piece of H.E. had hit him on the right temple, and he was gone.

"The pit's all right!" yelled Smudger.

He rushed at once for the cartridge recess, with intent to throw its dangerous contents out into the open.

But he never reached it. His head dropped one way, his body another. He had gone the long road after the sergeant. And how could a man have died better? Another rough diamond, old Smudger, but he died for his pals!

"My word, there's no standing this! Let's get into the dug-out again!" cried Jimmy. And we went.

The gun-pit was burning furiously now, and

our own cartridges and shells were exploding, while we were slowly roasting alive.

There seemed no hope for us. Not one of us saw a chance of coming alive out of that hell.

"What's that? I can hear 'em coming!" gasped someone.

And they were coming—to our rescue! Our danger had been perceived, and the boys were here.

How they worked! How good it was to hear their cheery words of hope and encouragement, as they went at it, sweating, straining, each man labouring like a den. We had to be dug out, for we were practically buried.

The stink of the burning cordite almost choked us; but we cheered on their efforts, and they shouted back.

At last! They had only taken minutes over the job; but it seemed like many hours. We were carried out utterly exhausted, with all the hair singed from our faces, but otherwise quite unharmed.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust!" The padre spoke the solemn words over the sergeant and old Bill and Smudge—three of the best! And three of the six who had played that game of banker so little a time before lent ear, with hearts sad, but thankful.

In France many tens of thousands of wooden crosses mark the last resting-places

of men who were men for all their faults, because they had at least the courage to fight and die like men. Courage may not be everything; but can you have a real man without it?

The years will go on, and it will be easy enough for most of those for whom they fought and died to forget. Wood decays, and the plain crosses may cease to mark the graves of heroes.

But we shall never forget them. In the hearts of their comrades there will still be a living memory. Nothing can destroy that. With them we shared dangers, hardships, pleasures, troubles; we lived with them.

We shall not forget!

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE SHELL!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's story is a sequel to that which appears this week, and tells more about the great preparations being made for the Head's birthday celebrations, and the trouble with Rakke. Crooke stands in with Rakke, not out of any real friendliness, but because their enemies are the same. Cousin Ethel appears again, and Grundy and Skimpole are among others who play parts in the story, which I am certain will be to your taste.

ABOUT SERIALS.

I have had a good many letters on this subject. "The Twins from Tasmania," which ran so long in this paper, seems to have been exactly to the taste of a great majority of my readers. There have been two or three letters from people who did not like it, but there have been hundreds of letters from those who did, and lately, since it was plain that it must soon end, from many who want another yarn of just the same kind.

But one can have too much of a good thing, and variety counts for a great deal. Moreover, there are still many readers who like an adventure serial, as a change from the complete school story. I have not yet quite made up my mind what I shall do in the matter. The "Extracts from the Greyfriars Herald" and "Tom Merry's Weekly" are very popular, but I think they would pall if they were run for very long in both papers. I have in mind a serial of the Rylcombe fellows, in which Tom Merry & Co. would naturally play many parts from time to time. This would suit most readers; I fancy. But not a line of it is written yet, so I can only tell you that I am considering the idea.

Then ever so many years for another story with Goggs in it. I rather thought that there would be a slump in Goggs when once his novelty had worn off. But there seems to be nothing of the sort. Some of my girl readers say they fairly love Goggs, which is a very high compliment, indeed.

But I don't think it is a Frankingham yarn that most want. Frankingham does not mean to the fervent lover of our papers what St. Jim's and Greyfriars mean. It might be possible to bring Goggs to Rylcombe, with his chums or without them. What do you think of this idea?

Whatever I do, I don't think I shall run two school serials at once. That would hardly be fair to the lovers of adventure yarns. And I shall not drop the "Extracts" for good. If they disappear for a time, you may sely upon seeing them again.

That's all just now, I think. I await further expressions of opinion.

BACK NUMBERS WANTED BY—

S. Waterman, 32, Albert Square, Commercial Road, Steney, E. 1.—"Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves"; clean, with covers. 2d. offered. Write first.

W. G. Bennett, 63, Enfield Street, Keighley, Yorks.—"Magnet" No. 1. 4d. for clean copy, postage extra.

Cecil H. Watson, 23, Medina Road, Holloway, N. 7.—GEMS and "Magnets" before 1915.

Horace Relfell, 12, Sunnyhill Road, Streatham.—"Bunter the Blade," "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," "Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves," "Fifty Pounds Reward," "Sportmen

All "Bunter's And Buck Campaign." 9d. each offered.

FOOTBALL.

MATCHES, ETC., WANTED BY—

WALLWOOD UNITED—16.—W. Cavender, 26, Broomfield Street, Poplar, E. 14.

REGENT'S UNITED F.C.—15.—S. Davis, 7, Green's Court, Little Pulteney Street, W. 1.

PECKHAM ATHLETIC F.C.—away only.—George H. Elam, 100, St. George's Road, Peckham, S.E. 15.

ENNISMORE F.C.—15—3 miles of Kensington. J. Hull, 13, Ennismore Mews, Kensington, London, S.W. 7.

REDDISH NORTH END—15—Manchester and Stockport districts.—F. Thompson, 114, Reddish Lane, Gorton, Manchester.

SCHOOL GREEN A.F.C.—15—8 miles—also four green-and-white striped jerseys wanted.—L. Bentley, 6, Green Lane, Thornton, Bradford, Yorks.

ST. SILAS' CADETS F.C.—14 weak—all dates.—L. Dixie, 2, Henry Place, Copenhagen Street, N. 1.

CARLSBAD UNITED F.C.—14-15—4 miles.—H. King, 22, Canal Terrace, York Road, King's Cross, N. 1.

SOUTHFIELDS UNITED F.C.—A. Holloway, 127, Lavenham Road, Southfields, S.W. 15.

ST. PAUL'S F.C.—17.—H. Humphrey, 82, Canal Road, Mile End, E. 3.

ALBION ATHLETIC—15-16.—A. E. Lynes, 52, Hambalt Road, Clapham, S.W. 4.

WOOL Rovers—16-17—5 miles—all open dates at the earliest; also players.—C. R. Chester, 2, Sandwich Buildings, Rotherhithe, S.E. 16.

PARK WANDERERS F.C.—13-14—players wanted; must be willing to pay subscription towards equipment.—C. H. c/o M. T. E. F., 89, Pall Mall, S.W. 1.

CLAREDALE ATHLETIC F.C.—15—5 miles.—H. W. Carrington, 4, North Street, Barking.

EDMONTON F.C.—10 miles.—A. W. Parsons, 8, Chedington Road, Silver Street, Edmonton, N. 15.

BELMONT F.C.—15-5 miles—all dates.—Flynn, 15, Kenwyn Road, Clapham, S.W. 4.

LEYSLAN ATHLETIC F.C.—16.—W. Sewell, c/o Leyslan Mission, City Road, E.C. 1.

QUARRY ROAD OLD BOYS—15-7 miles.—Joe Riley, 17, Muriel Street, Bulwell, Notts.

NEWSHAM JUNIORS F.C.—15.—Eric Lanceley, 107, Gregson Street, Everton, Liverpool.

CHADWELL HEATH ALBION F.C.—15-16.—Hon. Sec., Fonthill Cottage, Mörley Road, Chadwell Heath, Essex.

57TH S.E. B.P. SCOUTS F.C.—14.—L. Harrington, 171, Newington Butts, London, S.E. 11.

BECK'S UNITED F.C.—16-16—4 miles.—A. Timson, 18, Crogsland Road, Chalk Farm, N.W. 5.

NUNHEAD JUNIORS—15-16—5 miles.—E. A. Child, 143, Kirkwood Road, Peckham, S.E. 15.

EAVENTHURST F.C.—15-17.—A. Liley, School House, Westville Road, Shepherd's Bush, W. 12.

PARK JUNIORS F.C.—15-16.—T. Mahoney, 31, Percy Road, Shepherd's Bush, W. 12.

PARK UNITED F.C.—15.—F. H. Eldon, 41, Longfellow Road, London, E. 17.

DEWRANCE'S UNITED F.C.—E. Highsted, 12, Gurney Street, New Kent Road, S.E. 17.

ANERLEY EXCELSIOR F.C.—16—5 miles.—L. R. Woodfield, 34, Anerley Vale, Upper Norwood, S.E. 19.

WESTBOURNE PARK F.C.—17—matches Sunday mornings; away preferred.—G. Page, 37, Southam Street, North Kensington, W.

HARLEY F.C.—E. Wilder, 7, Stanley Road, West Green Road, South Tottenham, N. 15.

BLACKPOOL JUNIOR CYCLING CLUB—12-14.—J. Roberts, Empire Hotel, Landsdowne Crescent, Blackpool.

ALFRETON ATHLETIC F.C.—16-17—5 miles.—A. E. Titterton, 6, Beckway Street, Waiworth, S.E. 17.

BOWES ROAD OLD BOYS F.C.—16.—Fred W. Tell, 44, Lavingstone Road, Palmer's Green, N. 13.

AVONDALE J.F.C.—15-16—players wanted, any position.—R. H. Smith, 240, Sherrington Avenue, Manor Park, E. 12.

ALBANY F.C.—8 miles Enfield Lock.—G. Dr. v. 76, Uckfield Road, Enfield Wash, N.

Your Editor

COUSIN ETHEL'S CHAMPIONS.

(Continued from page 13.)

been here—we'll say that much for you," admitted Wally handsomely.

"Don't you think an amnesty might be declared, Thomas?" asked Cardew.

"What? Oh, about the corner room truck, you mean? Right ho! We'll let you kids off punishment for that!" said Tom.

"Thank you for nothing!" snapped Wally. "We don't want letting off—you've got to catch your bear before you can skin it, you know. Tell you what you might do, though—"

"Give them all parts in the revue," put in Blake, guessing quickly.

"That's quite an idea!" cried Arthur Augustus.

"You ain't such an ass as you look, Blake!" said Wally. "Is it a go, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, it's a go, kid!" said Tom. "I dare say we can find seven parts for you—there's a whole lot to share round."

"There's the Crown Prince going begging," said Dig. "Just about Wally's—"

"Not jolly well likely—not for me, or any of this crowd!" shouted Wally indignantly. "Gus can stick to that!"

As the Shell and Fourth fellows went back to footer Figgins ranged up alongside Manners.

"We haven't done with those rotters yet, Manners!" he said.

"Think not?"

"I know we haven't. But just wait till Cousin Ethel's gone, that's all!"

"I shouldn't have thought you'd have been in a hurry for that, Figgys!"

"I'm not, ass! But— Oh, I'll see to them then!"

But there was to be more trouble before Ethel Cleveland went, even as Figgins had foreseen.

THE END.

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