

AFTER LIGHTS OUT

or
Expelled from St. Jim's.

A MAGNIFICENT STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE.

by *MARTIN CLIFFORD.*



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TWO
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LONG
COMPLETE
TALES

dealing with the

ADVENTURES

of

TOM SAYERS

and

JACK, SAM & PETE.

THE MARVEL

One Penny Everywhere — Every Tuesday

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A Magnificent Story of School Life.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I,

A Ragging for Three!

"LEGGO!"

Tom Merry paused.

"Hullo, that sounds like trouble," he remarked.

Tom Merry was crossing the quadrangle at St. Jim's, towards the School House, with Manners and Lowther, when that sudden yell came from under the old elms.

"Yah! Leggo!"

"Only Trimble of the Fourth!" said Monty Lowther. "I daresay he's been asking for what he's getting. Let him rip!"

"Come on," said Manners. "Tea's ready in No. 6, you know."

But Tom Merry hesitated.

"Yaroo! Leggo, Scrope, you rotter! Leggo, Racke, you beast! You cad, Crooke—yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth, was evidently in trouble.

"They're ragging the fat boulder," said Tom Merry.

"Well, he wants ragging."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I daresay he does, but one may have too much of a good thing. Let's give them a look-in, anyway."

Tom ran towards the elms, without waiting for his chums to reply. Lowther and Manners gave a simultaneous expressive grunt.

They had come in from a long walk and were ready for tea. And tea was waiting for them in Study No. 6—and Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy were probably waiting for them too, in that celebrated apartment.

And they had no doubt that Baggy Trimble had "asked for it." Trimble was the Peeping Tom of the School House, always minding anybody's business but his own, which naturally led to frequent trouble.

Manners and Lowther grunted, but they followed Tom Merry under the trees.

There was Baggy Trimble. He was wriggling in the grasp of Racke, Crooke,

and Scrope, three Shell fellows. And the three were industriously bumping Baggy's head against the trunk of a tree. Baggy did not seem to be enjoying the process.

"Give the fat cad another," growled Racke.

Bump!

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Rescue! Yah!" roared Trimble. "Yaroo! I wasn't listening—yow-ow—I never heard you say anything about breaking bounds to-night—leggo!—if you don't leggo I'll tell Kildare—yah!"

Bump! bump!

Then the Terrible Three arrived on the scene. They did not waste words on Racke and Co. Each of them grasped one of the raggars, and dragged him off Trimble.

"Nuff's as good as a feast!" remarked Tom Merry.

Baggy Trimble staggered against the tree, gasping.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! yow!"

"Let me go, Merry," shouted Racke struggling furiously in Tom's sturdy grasp. "I'm going to smash the spying cad!"

"You've done enough smashing!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "If you want to do any more, begin on me!"

"And you can begin on me, Crooke," said Monty Lowther genially. "I can see you're spoiling for a fight."

"Let go my collar, you fool!" snarled Crooke. Crooke was not spoiling for a fight by any means. That was not in his line at all.

"Ow! The rotters!" groaned Baggy Trimble. "I wasn't listening, you know. I just happened to be behind the tree—"

"You fat toad!" said Tom Merry, in disgust. "You're always playing rotten tricks. Still, there's a limit."

"I—I wasn't, you know—I simply happened to hear Scrope say he was going to break bounds to-night with Levison of the Fourth!"

"What? What's that about Levison?" exclaimed Tom Merry sharply. A

"They're going out to-night, after lights out," gasped Trimble. "I've a jolly good

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mind to tell Kildare! In fact, it's my duty."

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Tom Merry. "Racke, is that true? Is Levison going out with you?"

"Find out!" said Racke sullenly.

"Yes, he is!" said Scrope viciously. "He is, and Cardew as well, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"I don't believe it," he said quietly. "Ever since Levison chucked up sharing in your rotten games, you've been trying to make out that he's still one of your set. It's a rotten lie, in my opinion. I shall speak to Levison about it."

"Speak to him and be hanged!" replied Racke savagely. "Let go my collar, or I shall hit out, I tell you!"

"Hit out as soon as you like!" said Tom Merry in disdain.

Racke ground his teeth, but he did not hit out. The consequences would have been too painful for the blackguard of the Shell.

"Trimble, you fat rotter, you deserve what you've got!" said the captain of the Shell severely. "I'd give you a booting myself, if these rotters hadn't given you enough. Cut off!"

"Look here, you know——" mumbled Trimble.

"Cut off!" rapped out Tom Merry.

And Baggy Trimble cut off. He was glad enough to get away from the neighbourhood of Racke and Co. while the Terrible Three were holding them.

Aubrey Racke gave Tom a look of concentrated rage.

"Will you let me go?" he hissed.

"All in good time," said Tom. "Listen to me, Racke! I've got nothing to do with your breaking bounds, and smoking, and gambling with that scoundrel Lodgey, at the Green Man. I'm not prefect. If you choose to disgrace yourself and your school, I suppose you can keep on till you're found out and sacked from St. Jim's. But I have something to do with your rotten trickery against Levison. Whatever Levison used to be he's a decent chap now and he only wants to keep your shady crew at a distance."

Racke sneered savagely.

"That's all you know!" he said.

"I do know it," said Tom Merry quietly.

"You've tried every way to get Levison back into the fold, and when you found he wasn't taking any, you tried to blacken him. I daresay you've got some dirty scheme of that kind in your mind now,

from what Trimble heard you say. Well, it's not good enough. See?"

"Mind your own business, hang you!"

"This is my business, as I said. Levison's a member of my cricket eleven, and you're going to let him alone. As a warning, you're going to have a jolly good bumping!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther heartily.

"Let me go!" roared Racke furiously.

Tom Merry did not reply. He had explained his views; and he now proceeded to carry them out. Racke struggled fiercely as he was twisted over; but the weedy, unfit blade of the School House was not much use in the junior captain's sturdy grasp.

He smote the quadrangle with a heavy bump.

"Oh, crikey! Yow-ow!" gasped Racke. "You rotter, leggo!"

Bump! Bump!

Manners and Lowther always followed their leader. They followed his example now.

Crooke and Scrope bumped down after Racke.

"Three!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaroo! Stop it!" shrieked Crooke.

"Oh, my hat! I'll smash you! Ow!"

"Smash away!" said Monty Lowther.

"Here goes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The struggles of the three merry blades of St. Jim's did not avail them. They were sentenced to a bumping, and a bumping they got.

Then the Terrible Three strolled on to the School House, leaving Racke & Co. sitting under the elms, gasping for breath. There was a chorus of gasps and groans and gurgles from the three merry youths—not very merry now. And the Terrible Three walked into the School House feeling the satisfaction which naturally follows duty well done!

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Speaks Out.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, of the Fourth Form, greeted the chums of the Shell cheerily at the door of Study No. 6.

"Twot in, deah boys," he said. "Tea's weady."

"And waiting!" came Jack Blake's voice from the interior of the study.

"Sorry we're a bit late," said Monty Lowther politely. "Racke & Co. rather delayed us in the quad."

"Bai Jove! I was not awaah that you fellows had anythin' to do with Wacke," said Arthur Augustus in surprise.

"Wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole, if I could help it," said Mannors. "But he fairly asked to be bumped, so we obliged."

"Oh, I see!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Well, twot in. I twust you do not object to a war tea. Food restrictions, you know—"

"Lots of some things, and precious little of others," said Herries.

"My dear chaps, I could eat a Hun, if he was only a tender one," said Monty Lowther. "Come in, Tom."

Tom Merry paused outside the study doorway.

"I'll join you in a minute," he said.

"I want to speak to Levison."

"Rats! Let Levison wait."

"Levison is coaching his minah," said D'Arcy. "I went along to ask him to tea, and he is busy."

"Sha'n't be a minute!" said Tom.

"Well, if you're long, you won't find anything left," said Monty Lowther warningly.

Tom Merry laughed, and went up the passage to No. 9, the study tenanted by Levison, Cardew, and Cive of the Fourth.

He tapped at the door and opened it.

Ernest Levison was there, but his study mates were not present. His minor, Frank Levison of the Third Form, was at the table with him, and they were working together. Levison of the Third often brought his books to his major's study for assistance, which Levison major was always willing to render. Little as they said of it, there was a deep bond of affection between the two brothers. Indeed, Tom Merry knew that it was Frank's coming to St Jim's which had, in the first place, turned Levison of the Fourth from his old reckless ways.

Levison minor gave Tom Merry a cheery smile, and Tom nodded to him. He liked the frank, cheery little fag, as most of the juniors did.

"Sorry to interrupt," said Tom. "I won't keep you waiting a minute, Levison."

"All serene!" said the Fourth Former.

"Is it about the match to-morrow? I suppose you want me?"

"Yes; I've got your name down in the list for the House match—you've seen it up on the board?" said Tom.

"Yes, and I was glad to see it there," said Levison, with a smile. "I'm in jolly good form, too—fit as a fiddle!"

"Glad to hear it."

"But what's the raw?" asked Levison.

"You came here to speak about some thing?"

Tom Merry glanced at the fag.

"Out with it!" said Levison. "I don't keep any secrets from Franky."

"I'll get out, if you like," said Frank, rising.

"Oh, no!" said Tom. "I suppose it doesn't matter if your minor hears, Levison, as I'm quite certain there's nothing in it."

"In what?" asked Levison in wonder.

"I thought I'd better speak to you about it. Trimble's been spying on Racke & Co., and he's heard them saying they're going to break bounds to-night."

"Silly chumps!" said Levison, shrugging his shoulders. "It's a mug's game. Bound to mean the chopper sooner or later."

"They said you were going with them."

Levison laughed, then his face clouded.

"Did you believe it?" he asked quietly.

"Not a word of it!"

"Good! Of course, it isn't true."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I was sure it wasn't true, of course," he said. "But they were speaking about you and Cardew going with them, and I thought I'd mention it. I knew you'd done with that kind of rot, and as you're down to play in the match to-morrow, you couldn't be ass enough to crock yourself with a night out just before it. Still, I'm glad you've told me there's nothing in it. Figgins & Co. are in topping form, and we don't want to be licked."

"I suppose you can take my word."

"Of course I can," said Tom Merry at once. "Don't get your back up about nothing, Levison. I thought it better to have the matter out, that's all."

"All serene," said Levison. "Then, as Tom Merry turned to the door, he added quickly: "Of course it's not true about Cardew, either."

"I hope not," said Tom. "Cardew's a reckless sort of ass, but he's got plenty of good qualities, and I should be sorry to see him going that way. Of course, that's no business of mine, and he's not in the eleven."

And the captain of the Shell nodded, and quitted the study.

Levison remained with a very thoughtful brow and did not speak for some minutes. Frank did not interrupt him.

"Let's get on," said Levison at last.

"I—I say—Ernie——" said Levison minor, hesitating.

"Hallo! Anything the matter?"

"I—I suppose that isn't true about Cardew?"

"I'm not sure," said Levison, frowning. "He's friendly with Racke sometimes," said Frank. "I've heard the fellows say he goes to Racke's study sometimes, and they play cards there. Reggie Manners said they were nearly caught by a prefect once."

Levison knitted his brows.

"I daresay Cardew's got his faults," he said; "but I'm not going to preach to him, Frank."

"I—I know. But——"

"I haven't the cheek, for one thing," said Levison moodily. "You know the sort of chap I was when you came to St. Jim's, Frank—you found it out soon enough, though I tried to keep it from you. I was the hardest case in the school, and like a silly duffer, I took a pride in it. Cardew's a bit of the same sort. He gets bored and fed up with things, and plays the goat out of sheer recklessness. But there's no harm in him—not really. And it isn't for me to preach to anybody."

Frank nodded, and they bent over their books again.

But the fag's face was a little clouded. He knew what an uphill fight it had been for Ernest Levison to leave the old ways behind him; and though he had faith in his brother, he feared the influence of the reckless scapegrace over him. But he did not utter his thoughts. The brothers were soon deep in the Gallic War again.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry returned to Study No. 6. He found tea going on there—a frugal war-tea. But of such articles of provender as were not restricted by the Controller, there was plenty. Clive of the Fourth was there to tea, and Talbot of the Shell. Sidney Clive gave Tom Merry a cheery look.

"I've seen the cricket list," he remarked.

"You're name's in it," said Tom.

"Yes. I never realised before what a jolly good cricket captain we've got," grinned the South African junior.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard the selection as quite first-wate," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust I shall get at least a century against the New House."

"How many centuries will it take you to get it?" inquired Monty Lowther affably.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Grundy was reading down the list, and snorting over it," said Talbot, with a smile. "I fancy Grundy's got something to say about it, Tom."

There was a chuckle in the study. Grundy of the Shell, and the fearful and wonderful way he played games, was a standing joke in the lower school at St.

Jim's. George Alfred Grundy could never understand why Kildare didn't pick him for the first eleven—and being left out of the junior eleven made him snort with indignation and contempt.

"Hallo, talk of angels!" said Digby. "Here's Grundy!"

A heavy tread sounded in the passage.

The juniors knew that tread. Nobody else at St. Jim's had feet the size of Grundy's. A voice was heard outside—the voice of Wilkins of the Shell.

"Come on, Grundy, old chap!"

"Yes, do come on, Grundy," said the voice of Gunn. "No good talking to Tom Merry about it—he's awfully obstinate, you know."

Tom Merry & Co. grinned. Wilkins and Gunn were evidently seeking to persuade their chum not to push his claims. But George Alfred Grundy was not to be persuaded.

The door of study No. 6 was shoved open, and Grundy's wrathful face looked in. Smiling countenances were turned upon him.

"Have you come to tea?" asked Jack Blake affably. "I hope you've brought your own bread and sugar—you know the Merry regulations."

"Tom Merry's here, I think," said Grundy. "Oh, yes; here you are! Now, what about the cricket, Merry?"

"What about it?" repeated Tom. "Why, it's a game played with a bat and ball, in the summer time, the winter game being called footer. Wickets are set up at each end of the pitch, which shall not exceed twenty-two yards in length——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Study No. 6 roared, and Wilkins and Gunn grinned—behind Grundy. Grundy did not grin. He snorted.

"You silly ass!" he roared. "I didn't come here for your rotten jokes! I want to know whether I'm going to have a show in the cricket? I've been kept out of the footer by jealousy of my form. Now, my idea is that I ought to play in the House match to-morrow."

"What an idea!" said Tom Merry blandly.

"I hear you're playing Levison—that bouncer!" said Grundy. "You can leave Levison out and play me. That's a suggestion."

"Thanks."

"Or you can leave D'Arcy out—he's not much good."

"Bai jove! You uttah ass——"

"Or Blake—Blake can't bat for toffee."

"You cheeky idiot!" roared Blake.

"Well, what do you say, Tom Merry?"

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That won't do for me," announced Grundy. "Now I want a plain answer. Am I or am I not going to have what you know to be my deserts?"

"Certainly," said Tom, winking at the study generally. "Every fellow here is agreeable to that."

"Yes, rather," said Blake. "Give Grundy his deserts, you chaps!"

"Here, I say—let go—stop it—yah!" roared Grundy, in surprise and rage, as the whole tea-party rushed on him.

What happened next Grundy hardly knew. But a minute or two later the study door was closed on him, and Wilkins and Gunn were picking him up, and trying to look sympathetic. And while they helped him away to his study, Grundy was making desperate efforts to get his second wind.

CHAPTER 3.

The Chums of No. 9.

RALPH RECKNESS CARDREW came into No. 9 study in the Fourth Form passage, just as Levison minor was leaving with his books. He gave the fag a cheery nod as he passed.

The door closed on Frank, and Cardew crossed to the hearthrug, drove his hands deep into his pockets, and yawned.

Levison was still sitting on the table, with a cloud upon his brow.

"Been teachin' the young idea how to shoot?" yawned Cardew.

"I've been helping Frank with his Caesar."

"Oh, my hat! All Gaul was divided into three parts, wasn't it?" said Cardew, with another yawn. "Ain't you fed up on old Julius yet?"

"Well, it helps Frank through, and it's easy enough to me."

"Prep., now, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You're a queer beggar, Levison!"

"Thanks," said Levison.

"I expected to find you quite a different sort of chap. Accordin' to what the fellows say, you used to be a wild beggar, always kickin' over the traces, and generally in hot water with masters and perfects. You seem to have chucked it all up just before I came to St. Jim's."

"It was a mug's game," said Levison quietly. "Look at Racke and Crooke—does it do them much good?"

"Well, it livens things up," said Cardew. "Things are a bit slow—don't you find them so?"

"Not at all— I'm playing in the House Match to-morrow," said Levison. "I don't have any too much time for cricket."

"Cricket's all very well in its way, but a chap wants somethin' a bit more excitin' sometimes."

"It's exciting enough for me."

"What about a little break for once in a way?" suggested Cardew, watching Levison's face out of the corners of his eyes. "A real break, you know—a little razzle?"

"With Racke & Co.?" asked Levison, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, they're a shady set, I admit. But a fellow must know all kinds, if he wants to see anythin' of life. Are you game for a run out of bounds to-night?"

"I'm game enough; but I'm not going to do anything of the kind," said Levison.

"And you're not, Cardew."

"I've as good as promised Racke."

Levison rose to his feet.

"Then there's something in it," he said. "Racke's been talking, and Baggy Trimble's heard him, and spread it about. You're not really going to play the giddy goat with that set, Cardew?"

"A fellow must have a change," said Cardew. "Dash it all, you used to think so yourself."

"I don't think so now."

"Ennoblin' influence of your minor, what?" smiled Cardew. "Perhaps I shall come under Frank's ennoblin' influence some day. Look here, Levison, give up the goody-goody bizney for once, and come out and see life!"

Levison's lips curled.

"See life?" he repeated. "A set of dingy rotters playing cards in the back-room of a pub!"

"Well, it's a change."

"It would be a change, too, if the Head or the House-master heard of it, and gave a fellow the order of the boot!"

"The risk makes it a bit exciting. You used to think so yourself."

"Then you're going, Cardew?"

Cardew nodded.

"I wish you wouldn't!" said Levison very gravely. "I know it's not for me to preach, all things considered. But I've seen how rotten it is."

"Well, I'm goin' to see how rotten it is," smiled Cardew. "Look here, Levison, I've as good as promised for you as well."

"Well, I'm not coming!"

"It would do you good."

"Oh, rot!"

Cardew laughed.

"Righto!" he said. "I'll go my way—"

you go yours. No need to quarrel about it, old scout; we're pals just the same, though tastes differ."

And Cardew sat down to his preparation. Levison worked with a clouded brow.

He had palled with Cardew, and there was a sincere friendship between them.

In his old days, Ernest Levison would have entered heart and soul into Ralph Cardew's wild schemes. It was not so very long since Levison of the Fourth had been called the black sheep of the school, and he well deserved the title. Now he had taken up a healthier and manlier way of life, and he would have given a good deal to take his chum his own way.

But the remembrance of what he had himself been made it hard for him to preach to Cardew on the subject. Whatever act of reckless folly Cardew might be guilty of could be more than matched in Levison's old record.

Clive came into the study, and joined the workers at the table. The South African junior was on chummy terms with both his study-mates, but Cardew did not venture to propose to him what he had proposed to Levison. It was not the kind of proposition that could have been made to Sidney Clive.

Ernest Levison was still looking clouded when the Fourth Form went up to their dormitory.

Cardew's reckless expedition for the night weighed on his mind.

It was not only the rottenness of such proceedings, but moreover the risk involved was no light one.

Discovery meant a flogging at the least, and in all probability expulsion.

But it was useless to point that out to Cardew. The risk appealed to his reckless nature; and the fact that Racke & Co. would have sneered at his want of nerve was more than enough to keep him from drawing back.

Kildare of the Sixth saw lights-out for the Fourth Form. After the Prefect was gone, a giggle sounded from Baggy Trimble's bed.

"I say, Cardew, when are you off?"

"Shut up, you fat fool!" snapped Cardew.

"Mind Kildare doesn't spot you, you know!" chuckled Trimble. "He's got an eye on Racke, I know that."

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed. "Surely, Cardew, it is not poss. that you are goin' to bweak bounds to-night?"

Cardew did not speak.

"I should wegard such a pnyceeding as wotten bad form, Cardew!"

"Go hon!" yawned Cardew.

"Levison's going, too," chuckled Baggy Trimble. "Levison and Cardew and Racke and Crooke. Scrope said he wouldn't go—hadn't the nerve."

"Gweat Scott!"

"You're playing in the House match tomorrow, Levison," said Blake.

"It's all rot," said Levison. "I'm not going out."

"Racke said you were," said Trimble.

"Oh, hang, Racke!"

"Wacke is an uttah wottah," said Arthur Augustus. "I am suah Levison would do nothin' of the sort, especially just befoah a House match. I wequest you to dwy up, Twimble."

Trimble dried up at last, and the Fourth Form settled down to sleep. But Levison did not close his eyes.

CHAPTER 4.

Out of Bounds!

S T. JIM'S was wrapped in darkness and silence.

A light still glimmered in the Head's house, though shut off from outside by the dark, heavy blinds.

Half-past ten had sounded from the clock-tower. All the St. Jim's fellows were in bed, and most of the masters.

All the fellows, at least, were supposed to be in bed. But in the lower box-room near the end of the Shell passage in the School House there was a whisper of voices.

"They're not here," muttered Crooke. "Are they coming?"

"They'll come right enough—at least, Cardew will," said Racke. "I don't know about Levison."

There was a faint footfall in the darkness.

"Is that you, Cardew?" breathed Racke.

"Yes, here I am," said Cardew cheerfully. He came into the box-room fully dressed, with overcoat and cap on.

"Don't speak so loud," said Crooke savagely.

"Rats! There's nobody to hear."

"Quiet, you ass!"

Cardew laughed softly. He was not troubled by nerves, like the two bold blades of the Shell.

"Well, let's get out," he said.

Racke opened the window softly. The three juniors dropped from the sill upon the leads below, Racke carefully closing the window after him.

From the outhouse they dropped to the ground.

There they paused to listen.

"Hark!" muttered Crooke suddenly, his face blanching in the darkness.

A faint sound came from above.

It was the sound of the box-room window opening—the window Aubrey Racke had closed so carefully a minute before.

A curious ironical smile came over Cardew's face. He wondered whether this meant discovery. He was prepared to face the music with cool hardihood, if the worst came.

Racke and Crooke shivered in the dark shadows.

"My hat!" muttered Racke. "It's the window. Somebody's on our track!"

"A—a—a prefect!" stammered Crooke through his chattering teeth.

"It—it might be Scrope coming after all."

The three juniors listened intently.

They heard the soft sound of someone dropping from the sill to the leads. A head looked over the edge of the roof above them.

Was it a prefect?

They could not be seen in the darkness, and they crouched against the wall of the outhouse, their hearts thumping.

For a moment there was a tense silence, and in that moment Racke and Crooke could hear their hearts throbbing. Then a whispering voice came from over their heads.

"Are you still there?"

Racke panted with relief. It was the voice of Levison of the Fourth.

"Levison!" muttered Cardew, in wonder.

"Hang him!" said Crooke, between his teeth. "He gave me a beastly start! Hang him!"

Cardew peered upward at the dark head looking down.

"Are you coming after all, Levison? Come on!"

"No! I want you to come back, Cardew. I meant to keep awake, but I dropped off, but you woke me going out." Levison's voice was low and earnest. "Cardew, don't be a fool! Come back!"

"Oh, rats!"

Cardew turned and hurried away across the quadrangle, and Crooke and Racke followed him.

Levison whispered again, but there was no answer.

The Fourth Former hesitated a moment or two, and then dropped to the ground.

He was only half dressed, and the night was cold. But Levison did not seem to notice it.

He scudded away in the darkness, in the direction taken by the three. He knew where they were making for—the slanting oak by the school wall, where it was easy to climb.

Three shadowy figures loomed up as he arrived panting, at the wall. Cardew was climbing, and he dragged himself to the top of the wall just as the breathless Levison came up.

"You here again!" muttered Racke between his teeth. "Can't you mind your own business, Levison, you cad?"

"Come with us," said Crooke, "or go back, just as you choose. What are you interfering for?"

"Cardew!"

"Hallo!" came a whisper from the top of the wall.

"You don't understand, Cardew. It's risky—more risky than ever to-night. The House-master's up."

"How do you know?" muttered Racke..

"I saw him from the top of the stairs. He went out into the quad."

"Oh, thunder!"

"Most likely he suspects something," said Levison hurriedly. "You never know. Cardew, don't be a fool!"

"Oh, rot! Why should he suspect anything?"

"Well, he's out in the quad, and it's nearly eleven—"

"I know he sometimes goes for a stroll on a fine night," said Cardew. "His old wound keeps him awake sometimes. I've seen him before."

"Yes, but—"

"Anyway, I'm going!"

Cardew dropped from the wall into the road. Racke and Crooke stood hesitating. A red glimmer showed up through the darkness, coming from the direction of the School House. The juniors knew what it was. It was the lighted end of a cigar.

"That's Railton!" breathed Crooke.

Racke gritted his teeth.

"We must go now. He's coming this way. He'll spot us if we stay. We can't dodge him from here. Come on—quick!"

"You'd better come on, Levison," whispered Crooke. "You can't get in again while Railton's out."

"I won't come!"

"Go and eat coke, then!"

Racke and Crooke hurriedly climbed, and dropped on the outer side of the wall. It was really safer now to go than to stay, with the House-master so near at hand.

Levison stood still.

His heart was beating hard. If the House-master discovered him—

He crouched in the shadow of the slanting tree-trunk.

If he were found, he could not say why he was there. He could not betray Cardew; even Racke and Crooke he could not betray. If he were found, he had to take the consequences of breaking dormitory bounds at night—consequences more severe in his case than another's, for his old reputation would not fail to tell heavily against him.

His heart throbbed as the red glow in the darkness came nearer and nearer.

Did the School House-master suspect that anyone was out of bounds? So Levison wondered, with sickening uneasiness.

Mr. Railton came steadily on, straight for the spot where Levison crouched behind the tree-trunk. But for the darkness, he must have seen him. And if he suspected his presence, discovery was certain. It was too late now to take the chance of climbing the wall.

The steady tread of the House-master came right on. Levison saw his stalwart figure looming up dimly in the gloom. He scarcely breathed.

But the footsteps turned, within six paces of the tree.

Levison almost panted with relief.

The House-master did not suspect. Was it the sleeplessness induced by his old wound that brought him out into the quiet quadrangle at that hour? The master of the School House had fought for his country in the trenches of Flanders, and had come home with a shattered arm, and no one ever knew, from any word that passed his lips, of the trouble that wound gave him still.

Upon the gravel path that ran within the school wall, only six feet from the trees, the House-master paced to and fro.

Levison, hidden in the darkness, listened to the steady tread, holding his breath when Mr. Railton passed near him.

He was a prisoner in the shadow of the wall—one movement would be enough to draw the House-master's attention to him. He did not move.

Midnight sounded dully from the clock tower of St. Jim's. For over an hour the House-master had paced there, breathing the cool, pure air of the spring night, and Levison shivered behind the tree-trunk.

He was half clad; he had no boots, and the necessity of keeping still exposed him to the keenness of the wind. His hands and feet were chilled to the bone, and he shivered as he crouched.

But there was no help for it. He dared

not risk discovery. Several times he thought of making a bolt for it and trusting to the darkness; but he knew that the House-master must hear him, if he did not see him. Possibly he might get back to his bed in time—there was a chance. But certainly the dormitory search that would follow must reveal the absence of Cardew.

Levison had come out that night to save his chum, not to betray him. He remained still, shivering.

The House-master, unconscious of the junior, racked by anxiety, hidden so near him, paced to and fro till the strokes of twelve had died away.

Then the steady footsteps turned away in the direction of the School House. Levison almost sobbed with relief.

In the distance he heard a door close softly.

The House-master had gone in. The half-frozen junior crept away across the quadrangle, his numbed limbs aching.

He climbed the outhouse, got into the box-room, and left the window unfastened for the roysterers. A few minutes later he was in his bed in the Fourth Form dormitory.

The other fellows were fast asleep. But it was long ere sleep came to Ernest Levison. It was long ere his chilled limbs were warm. He slept at last, an uneasy slumber. What he had gone through had told upon him—told upon him more than he realised.

CHAPTER 5.

A Dangerous Encounter.

WHILE Levison major was watching and waiting in the shadow of the slanting oak within the school walls, Racke & Co. were hurrying down the lane towards Rylcombe.

Racke and Crooke were in a somewhat uneasy frame of mind, but Cardew was quite cool and nonchalant.

The possibility that the secret expedition was suspected, and that the House-master was on his guard, haunted the two rascals of the Shell. Yet they knew the chance was slight. Owing to their peculiar habits, Racke and Crooke knew more of Mr. Railton's customs than the other fellows. More than once they had seen the School House-master pacing the quadrangle at a late hour, when the throbbing of his old wound kept him from sleep. But the bare possibility of suspicion and discovery dashed the pleasure of the escapade for them. They did not possess Cardew's cool nerve and reckless audacity.

"Come on!" said Cardew, as his companions lagged. "We are late already for the merry party."

"I'm dashed if I feel more than half inclined to go now," grunted Crooke. "A fellow doesn't exactly ask for the sack."

Cardew laughed mockingly.

"It's a bit too late to think of that," he said. "If Railton's out for a trot, he may stick in the quad for an hour or more. You can't go back."

"That's true enough, I suppose."

"Better go the whole hog," grinned Cardew. "May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. If we're bowled out and sacked, we'll keep one another company in standin' up before the Head. What a cheery prospect!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Racke.

The prospect of standing up before the Head to receive a sentence of expulsion did not appeal to him in the least. The heir of Messrs. Racke & Hacke, the war-profiteers, had been sent to St. Jim's to get a footing "among the nobbs," as Mr. Racke expressed it. Certainly that desirable object could not be accomplished by getting sacked.

Cardew laughed again. He had been half persuaded, half bantered into that reckless expedition by Aubrey Racke; and now that they were committed to it, it was Racke who was showing signs of the white feather.

Truth to tell, it was only the thought that the House-master might be still out of doors which kept the two Shell fellows from returning and abandoning the expedition.

As it was, they tramped on, with laggard steps and clouded faces. Cardew glanced at them mockingly from time to time.

"Hallo! What's that?" muttered Crooke suddenly.

The juniors had reached the darkest part of Rylcombe Lane, where the road ran under heavy, overhanging trees, the branches of which almost met.

A moving shadow in the darkness caught Crooke's eye.

"Nothing there!" snapped Cardew contemptuously. "Only a rabbit, anyway."

"It—it wasn't a rabbit!"

"Oh, come on! You're as nervous as a rabbit yourself."

They passed on, Racke and Crooke casting uneasy glances into the shadows. At that hour they were not likely to meet ordinary pedestrians in the lonely lane, but it was quite possible to meet a tramp or a late roysterer.

There was a step in the shadows, quite audible now, and a dark form loomed up before the three, who halted at once.

"My hat!" muttered Cardew.

Racke and Crooke uttered a simultaneous scared exclamation.

In the gloom they made out dimly a short, thick-set form.

"Who—who is it?" panted Crooke.

"Old on!" said a husky voice, evidently the voice of a tramp.

"Only a merry tramp," said Cardew coolly. "Let us pass, my beery friend."

"Can't you 'elp a pore cove on his way, gov'nor?"

"Yes, I'll help you with my boot, if you don't clear off!" said Cardew.

"Shut up, Cardew!" muttered Crooke.

"I—I'll give you sixpence, my man."

There was a hoarse laugh.

"A tanner ain't much good to me, young gent. Make it a quid."

"I—I can't."

"You'd better!" The husky voice was threatening. "You'd better 'and me that little sum, my boy. Look at this 'ere."

A knobby stick came dimly into view, and Racke and Crooke jumped back. Cardew did not move.

The two Shell fellows would have given a great deal more than a sovereign to have been safe in their beds in the dormitory at that moment.

"Run for it!" muttered Crooke.

"Don't be funky idiots!" snapped Cardew. "Tackle the man if he meddles with us. Will you clear off, you bosky brute?"

There was a muttered oath in the gloom, and the stick slashed at Cardew.

The Fourth Former leaped aside, and avoided the angry blow. Then he rushed in with lightning quickness. Before the ruffian could recover and strike again, Cardew was upon him.

His fist landed fairly between the eyes of the ruffian, and there was a crash in the road as the man went down.

"Pile on him!" muttered Cardew.

His knee was on the man's chest the next moment, pinning him down.

Racke and Crooke came forward reluctantly. But now that the man was down they were willing to chip in.

The tramp struggled savagely under Cardew's weight.

"Back me up!" panted Cardew. "I can't handle the rotter alone! Back me up, I tell you!"

Racke had heard the stick fall as the tramp went down. He groped for it, and caught it up. With a savage gleam in his

eyes he struck the fallen man a fierce blow, and the tramp howled with pain and sank back on the road.

Racke raised the stick again.

"That's enough!" said Cardew, pushing him back. "Do you want to brain the man, you idiot?"

Racke ground his teeth. He had the upper hand now, and his earlier cowardice only made him the more savage now that the danger was past.

"I'll crack his skull for him!" he muttered. "Let go my arm, Cardew!"

"You won't, you fool!"

"Old on, young gents!" groaned the fallen man. "I gives in. 'Old on! Don't 'it me again! Oh!"

"Stop it, Racke!" shouted Cardew.

But Racke tore his arm loose, and struck again. The tramp groaned, and lay still in the road.

"My hat! You've stunned him!" said Crooke.

Cardew jumped up.

"You rotten funk!" he said, between his teeth. "If you touch him again, I'll knock you into the ditch!"

Racke's eyes glittered.

"I'll give him a lesson while I'm about it!" he said savagely. "I'm not going to brain him, you fool; I'm going to thrash him! He's given us a scare, and he's going to pay for it!"

"He hasn't scared me!" said Cardew contemptuously.

The tramp groaned again, and sat up dazedly.

"Old on!" he said. "I give in! Don't 'it a man when he's down, guv'nor! Don't let 'im, sir!"

"Keep off, Racke, I tell you!"

"And I tell you I won't!" growled Racke.

Cardew put up his hands.

"Then you can tackle me!" he said.

"Look here, you fool——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Let's get on," said Crooke uneasily. "We're wasting time."

"Strike a match," said Cardew.

"What on earth for? Someone may see——"

"I'm going to see if that man's injured, that's all," said Cardew quietly.

"What the dickens does it matter if he is?"

Cardew laughed.

"Well, I suppose it doesn't matter much; but I'm going to see, all the same."

"Oh, come on, and don't play the goat!"

"Rats!"

The tramp was moaning and holding his

head. Cardew fumbled for a match-box, and struck a match. The light glimmered on the ragged, beery-looking rough sitting in the dust, with a trickle of blood running down his forehead. His eyes, gleaming under shaggy brows, were fixed on the juniors like those of a scared, savage animal. They rested on Racke's hard face, and glittered. Cardew bent over him.

"Keep still!" he said.

In the light of the match he looked at the man's injury. Racke and Crooke watched him with sneering faces.

"Only a bump and a cut, my man," said Cardew. "You've got off cheaply. I'd advise you to take up some other business instead of highway robbery."

"Ow! Ow!"

"Will you come on?" said Racke, between his teeth.

The match went out.

"Yes, I'm ready," Cardew hesitated. "Look here, you boozy rotter, are you really hard up?"

"Starvin', guv'nor!" muttered the tramp. "These are 'ard times for a poor man."

"What's your name?"

"Bill Jenner."

"Well, Bill Jenner, if you're hard up, you can get a job at munitions, if you apply for it," said Cardew. "And here's five bob to help you along."

"My heve!"

"You silly idiot!" said Racke.

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

Cardew clinked the shillings into the hand of the astonished footpad, and walked on. Racke and Crooke followed him. In Racke's hand was the stick he had taken from the ruffian. Racke's eyes were glittering with rage. His cruel nature had prompted him to inflict the severest punishment upon the wretched tramp, as soon as he held the upper hand. He would have enjoyed inflicting it, and Cardew's interference infuriated him.

He lagged behind his companions turned suddenly and ran back. The tramp was dragging himself to his feet, with his head still swimming from the blows Racke had given him.

The Shell fellow ran into him, and sent him crashing to the ground again, then the stick rose and fell savagely. The yells of Bill Jenner rang through the dark night.

Cardew spun round.

"Racke, you rotter!"

He ran back. Racke was thrashing the tramp mercilessly as he lay sprawled in the dust, careless where his blows fell.

Cardew grasped him by the collar, and dragged him back with such force that

Racke went spinning, and crashed to the ground. Cardew stood over him with blazing eyes.

"Now do you want any more, you cad!"
"Oh!" gasped Racke. "You rotter—oh!"

"Do you want any more?"
"Hang you!"

There was a rustle among the trees as Bill Jenner scrambled away into safety. Racke picked himself up, his eyes burning. He seemed inclined, for a moment, to hurl himself upon Cardew, but he restrained his fury.

"Come on!" said Crooke anxiously. "That brute's yelling may have been heard. For goodness' sake come on!"

"I'm comin'," said Racke sullenly.
"And I'm not," said Cardew with quiet determination. "I'm fed up with you, Racke! I was a fool to have anythin' to do with you, you rotten blackguard! Go an' eat coke, the pair of you!"

Without another word, Cardew turned back in the direction of St. Jim's, and disappeared in the darkness.

Racke muttered an oath worthy of Mr. Jenner himself.

"Come on!" said Crooke hurriedly. "That rotter may be hanging about—we shall have to get home a different way."

They hurried on down the lane.

Racke was in a savage temper. He had taken a great deal of trouble to induce Cardew to join the party, realising very well that it would be a blow to Levison, whom he hated. His own savage temper had frustrated his plans. His scheming had failed after all. His brow was black as he tramped on with Gerald Crooke.

But it cleared when he was once in the back parlour of the Green Man, in an atmosphere of smoke and spirits, with cards and money on the table, and sharp, greedy faces round him. There Aubrey Racke was in his element. Two o'clock had tolled out before the merry party broke up, and the two juniors took their homeward way—taking care to follow a round-about route to the school, in case the tramp might be still hanging about.

CHAPTER 6.

Friends Fall Out.

"**B**AI jove! There's the wisin'-bell!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory, and yawned.

The early spring sunshine was glimmering

in at the high windows, and the clang of the rising-bell sounded over St. Jim's.

The Fourth Formers turned out of bed. Cardew turned out as promptly as the rest. His loss of sleep on the previous night did not seem to have affected him much. And he was glad just then that he had thrown up the midnight expedition. He knew that Racke and Crooke must be feeling very different that morning.

"Hullo! Wake up, Levison!" called out Blake.

Levison had not turned out with the rest. He seemed to be still asleep.

Blake shook him, and Levison's eyes opened.

"Rising-bell," said Blake, with a rather sharp glance at Levison's face.

"Oh! Thanks."

Levison jumped out.

He was feeling seedy that morning, and his movements were unusually slow. Cardew had been up later than Levison, and was showing scarcely a sign of it. But he had not gone through Levison's experiences. That hour of crouching, half-dressed and shivering in the chilly quad, had told upon Levison. He was feeling seedy, sleepy, and out of sorts, and it showed plainly enough in his face. Blake & Co. noted it, though they did not remark on it.

If ever a fellow looked as if he had been on the tiles, it was Levison major that morning.

Levison felt the curious glances that were turned towards him, and his cheeks burned as he realised what the juniors were thinking.

But he said nothing, and left the dormitory as soon as possible.

He hurried out into the quadrangle, hoping that the fresh morning air would set him up a little.

Some of the juniors were already down, and a crowd of the Third were punting an old footer about under the trees. There were Levison minor, Reggie Manners, Wally D'Arcy, Joe Frayne, and three or more of the fags, in merry mood, shouting at the tops of their voices. Wally kicked the ball towards Levison.

"Save!" he shouted.

Levison saved a little too late, and the muddy footer clumped on his chest. It slid to the ground, leaving muddy stains on his clothes, and Levison frowned angrily.

"You clumsy young ass!" he shouted.

Wally grinned.

"Well, why didn't you save?" he demanded. "Are you walking in your sleep, Levison major?"

Frank Levison ran for the ball, and kicked it back to the fags. They rushed it away under the trees, but Levison minor lingered, his eye anxiously on his major's face.

"I'm sorry for that, Ernie," he said. "Wally didn't mean the ball to bump you. Shall I brush you down?"

"No, it's all right, Frank," said Levison, his face clearing.

"You don't feel well this morning, Ernie?"

"What rot!" said Levison, sharply. "Why shouldn't I be well?"

Frank's face clouded.

"Didn't you sleep well?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh, yes. Don't bother!"

Levison's tone was sharp and irritable, and Frank did not pursue the subject. He ran off and joined the fags with the ball.

Levison strode angrily away. He knew what had passed through Frank's mind; he knew he looked as if he had not slept—as if he had been out with the merry blades the previous night. It had been noticed in the Fourth Form Dormitory, and now Frank had noticed it too. But he could not help it. He tried to shake off the lassitude that was upon him, but in vain. He was utterly out of sorts, and there was no help for it.

He went in to breakfast with a sullen brow.

That afternoon was a half-holiday, and the House match was to be played. Levison was playing for the school house. He could not help wondering whether he would play a good game. But he would not resign—he resolved savagely that he would play a good game, by sheer force of will. Suspicion was already abroad that he had resumed his old ways—he could see that. He would knock that on the head by playing the game of his life that afternoon—if he could.

Morning lessons were not pleasant to Levison. As a rule, he was well up to the Form work, and Mr. Latham seldom had fault to find with him.

But this morning he could not put his mind to his work. The Fourth Form-master glanced at him very sharply several times, and Levison earned a hundred lines during the morning.

Cardew joined him as the Fourth Form came out of the form-room. Levison eyed him sourly.

It was Cardew's folly that had caused his trouble, and looked like causing more. He was not feeling very cordial towards Cardew just then.

"You seem jolly seedy," said Cardew, eyeing him curiously.

"Oh, rot!"

"You went back to bed when I left you, I suppose?"

"I couldn't," said Levison savagely, "Railton was out there. I had to keep in cover for over an hour."

Cardew looked concerned.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Lot of good being sorry now!" said Levison angrily. "I'm fairly knocked up, and the House match is coming off this afternoon. If I don't play, it's as good as admitting what most of the fellows are thinking already."

"I'll tell them the facts fast enough."

"I don't suppose they'd believe you if you did," said Levison. "It would look like a yarn."

Cardew set his lips.

"If they doubted my word——"

"Why shouldn't they doubt your word?" sneered Levison. "Is any fellow going to put a lot of trust in the word of a fellow who goes out blagging of a night when decent chaps are in bed?"

Cardew's face flushed.

"Well, I'm sorry it happened," he said. "But you've only got yourself to blame. Why couldn't you let me alone?"

"I'll let you alone fast enough after this!" growled Levison. "I was a fool for my pains, I know that."

"You were," agreed Cardew.

Levison gave him a bitter look.

"Well, I sha'n't be such a fool again," he said. "Go to the dogs your own way, and be hanged to you!"

And Levison strode away, leaving Cardew standing alone, his handsome face somewhat pale now.

He was brought up suddenly in the quadrangle by Grundy of the Shell. Grundy planted himself in Levison's path, stopping him with a magisterial gesture.

"What do you want?" snapped Levison. He was in no mood to be bothered by the egregious Grundy.

"A word with you," said Grundy loftily. "I suppose you know what your face looks like?"

"I know what yours looks like," grunted Levison. "A gargoyle, or a Guy Fawkes mask!"

Grundy frowned.

"I heard the talk about you yesterday," he said. "It's pretty clear now. You were out last night—out on the tiles, you young blackguard! Do you think you're fit to play in a House match to-day?"

"Mind your own business!"

"This is my business. I think you'd better resign from the team, and then Tom Merry may have sense enough to play me."

Levison laughed angrily.

"Tom Merry wouldn't play you so long as there was a fag left to play," he said. "You can't play cricket for toffee, Grundy! Shut up, for goodness' sake!" "You cheeky young rotter!" roared Grundy.

"Oh, go and eat coke, you ass!"

"Then you're going to play after all?"

"Yes, idiot!"

"What?"

"Idiot!" said Levison.

"By Jove!" Grundy made a rush at the Fourth Former. "I'll jolly well teach you—yaroo! Leggo!"

George Alfred Grundy struggled in the grasp of the Terrible Three, who had rushed up and collared him just in time.

CHAPTER 7.

The House Match.

TOM MERRY smiled into Grundy's crimson face.

"Easy does it," he remarked.

"I can't have you crocking one of my team, you know."

"Leggo!" growled Grundy, wrenching himself away. "Look here—"

"Can't be done," said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "Put on a mask, dear boy, and then we'll see into it."

"Why not a fire-screen?" suggested Manners thoughtfully.

Grundy snorted.

"Look here, Tom Merry! You know I'm not the sort of fellow to shove myself forward in any way—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry in astonishment.

"You know I'm not!" roared Grundy.

"But a chap has his rights. Not that I'm thinking about myself, either, but about the House. I suppose you want to beat the New House this afternoon?"

"We're going to," said Tom with a nod.

"Well, I've offered my services."

"But we want to beat them," explained Tom Merry patiently. "When we want to be licked we'll jump at your offer of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, I'm fit," said Grundy.

"You prefer to leave me out, and play that smoky rotter, when he's knocked himself up by going out of bounds last night before the match."

Tom Merry glanced at Levison.

"Rubbish!" he said. "Levison's done nothing of the sort."

"Look at him, then!" snorted Grundy.

"My hat! You do look seedy, Levison," said the captain of the Shell.

Levison set his teeth.

"Are you going to begin cross-examining me again?" he asked.

"Not at all. You gave me your word yesterday, and I took it. That settles the matter."

"Oh, good, then!"

"Let him answer the question—was he out of bounds last night?" snorted Grundy.

Levison turned his back on the Shell fellow, and walked away.

"You're off-side, dear boy," said Monty Lowther soothingly. "Levison had given up all those naughty little ways ages ago. Don't be uncharitable, my young friend."

"You silly ass—"

"Let not your angry passions rise," said Lowther chidingly. "Let Huns delight to bark and bite, it is their nature to—"

"Look here—"

"Let Turks and Bulgars growl and fight, they've nothing else to do," continued Lowther.

Grundy gave a snort and stalked away. It was evident that there was no chance that afternoon for the great George Alfred to show what he could do in the cricket field.

"Jolly queer, all the same, about Levison!" Manners remarked. "He looks jolly seedy and hollow about the eyes."

"He was fit enough yesterday," said Tom, frowning. "He was in ripping form at practice. He can't have been playing the fool. He gave me his word about it. I can't keep on suspecting the chap, and questioning him. But if he lets the side down in the House match, there will be a row."

But after dinner, when the juniors were preparing for the match, Tom Merry sought out Levison. He found him in his flannels.

"Now, I'm not going to jaw you or ask you questions," said Tom, as Levison's brows knitted. "But you don't look very fit to-day, and if you want to stand out for the match, I'll play another man."

"I don't want to stand out."

"You feel fit to play?"

"Why shouldn't I be fit?" said Levison irritably. "I was fit enough yesterday, wasn't I? You told me my bowling was nearly as good as Talbot's."

"Quite so. We should miss you if you stood out," said Tom frankly. "But you're the best judge whether you're up to playing or not."

"I feel all right."

"Righto, then; come on!"

Levison walked down to the cricket field with the junior cricket captain. The players of both Houses were gathering there.

It was a fine, sunny afternoon, ideal weather for cricket. A good crowd of School House and New House fellows were assembling to see the match.

Frank Levison, who seldom missed a match in which his major was playing, was already there, with three or four of the Third. Levison gave him a nod and a smile as he passed on his way to the pavilion.

"Your major doesn't look in much form, young Levison," remarked Manners minor, with a shake of his head.

"What rot!" said Frank; though in his heart he agreed with Reggie.

What was the matter with his major that afternoon?

"I think so too!" said D'Arcy minor.

"Looks seedy, if you ask me."

"Nobody asked you!" returned Frank.

"Don't be cheeky, young Levison! Hello, there's my major! Go it, Gussy—ducks' eggs cheap to-day!" shouted Wally.

A remark to which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not deign to reply.

Figgins and Co., of the New House, were on the ground, all of them looking very fit. Figgins had mustered a first-rate junior team: Fatty Wynn, the demon bowler; Figgy himself, the mighty batsman; Kerr, Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, Koumi Rao, the Indian; Pratt, Thompson, Jimson, and Dibbs. At least half-a-dozen of them were of the very best.

But the School House team was a good one, consisting of Tom Merry, Talbot, Kangaroo, Blake, D'Arcy, Levison, Julian, Herries, Manners, Lowther, and Clive.

If there was a member of the School House eleven who did not look as fit as a fiddle, it was Levison.

Levison had pulled himself together, determined to drive away the seedy lassitude that lay heavy upon him. For the time he thought he had succeeded, by sheer effort of will. Levison would not willingly have risked a defeat for his House by keeping his place in the eleven if he had felt unfit for it. But, if other considerations had been absent, probably he would have acknowledged to himself that he was unfit. He knew, however, that if he stood out of the match, it would give colour to the stories that were already spreading in the School House. He could not more effectually quash them than by playing a first-class game for his House,

and that he was determined to do. And it really seemed to him, just then, that he was able to do it—the wish being father to the thought to some extent.

But he admitted to himself that he was not looking forward to the game with his usual keenness. Instead of a pleasure, it was going to be a task, which he would be glad to be finished with. He owed that to Cardew, and his attempt to save the scapegrace of the school from himself. He had not exchanged a word with Cardew since the quarrel in the morning, and he did not feel inclined to—at present, at least.

Tom Merry won the toss, and elected to bat. It was a single innings match. Figgins and Co. went into the field, and Tom Merry sent Talbot and Blake in first.

Talbot of the Shell was a mighty man of his hands, and great things were expected of him. But Talbot's luck was out that afternoon. He found Fatty Wynn in terrific form; and in the third over Talbot's wicket was down, with only six runs to his credit.

The Shell fellow gave Tom Merry an apologetic smile as he came off.

"Bad luck!" said Tom cheerily.

"Fatty's in great form."

"He caught me napping," admitted Talbot.

"All in the day's work. Man in!"

Kangaroo of the Shell went in next. The runs piled up now somewhat, but the wickets went down at a good rate. Tom Merry was sixth man in, and he had told Levison he was to be last. Had Levison been looking as fit as usual, Tom would not have left him to the tail-end of the innings; but as it was he did. Levison stood waiting for his turn, looking as cheerful as he could.

Tom Merry played a fine innings. He stayed at the wickets while man after man went out, and he was still there when last man in was called. Levison did not seem to hear, his thoughts had wandered, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped him on the shoulder. D'Arcy had not made the century he had hoped for—far from it—having been dismissed for two by Redfern. The School House score stood at only fifty when last man in was called—not at all the score they had hoped to make. But Tom Merry was in magnificent form, and had proved impervious to the best New House bowling; and if his partner succeeded in keeping the innings open there was good hope for the School House yet.

"Man in, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus quietly. "You're wanted, Levison."

Levison started and coloured.

"Righto!" he said.

And he hurried into the field.

Grundy, who was lounging outside the pavilion with Wilkins and Gunn, gave a sniff.

"Looks like a bat, don't he?" said Grundy.

"Looks off his feed," remarked Wilkins.

"I don't fancy he will keep his sticks up long."

"I know he won't," growled Grundy.

"And just think of it, Wilkins, Tom Merry might have had a first-class man——"

"My wrist's crooked," said Wilkins calmly. "I couldn't play."

"I don't mean you, fathead! I mean——"

"Oh, you mean Gunn?" said Wilkins.

"Yes, I really think Gunn is up to House eleven form; but Tom Merry doesn't seem to think so."

"I don't mean Gunn!" roared Grundy.

"I mean me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wilkins.

Grundy gave him a ferocious look.

"What are you cackling at, Wilkins?"

"Ahem! The way Levison's shaping at the wicket," said Wilkins hastily.

He did not want a fight with Grundy outside the pavilion.

"Yes, isn't he a picture?" said Grundy, with a nod. "My hat! He won't live through this over."

The things George Alfred Grundy did not know about cricket would have filled large volumes. But, for once in a way, he was right.

Levison was standing up to Kerr's bo ling. He was glad that he had not to face Fatty Wynn. But the moment he took guard he realised that he was not in form for the match, in spite of his iron determination to play up. He stopped ball after ball without venturing to hit out.

That, however, was what was wanted. So long as Tom Merry had a steady stonewaller at the other end, he could be relied upon to make the running. If Levison had been stonewalling from choice he could not have played a more useful game. But, as a matter of fact, he was stopping the leather because he knew that it would be fatal to attempt anything else. And the fatality came along, all the same. The last ball of the over eluded the bat and knocked the off-stump fairly out of the ground.

Levison went with burning cheeks. As he walked back to the pavilion, voices from various parts of the ground were raised in a kind of chorus, demanding the price of ducks' eggs.

CHAPTER 8.

Bad Luck for the School House.

TOM MERRY came off the pitch, with a slight frown on his brow.

The School House innings was over for fifty. Tom himself not out with 24. Had Levison played a reliable game, there was no reason why the captain of the Shell should not have added another twenty or thirty runs at least, and perhaps pulled the game out of the fire. Several of the School House bats had had bad luck; but Levison's display had been the weakest.

Tom gave him a glance as he came off, but did not speak.

Levison could read his thoughts easily enough without words. He had failed his side miserably, and it probably meant defeat in the match. Figgins and Co. could be relied upon to knock off fifty runs easily enough. And there was no second innings in which misfortune might be retrieved.

When the New House innings was about to commence, however, the captain of the Shell spoke to Levison.

"You know we want you to bowl, Levison," he said. "But if you're going to bowl as you've batted, it won't be much use. And if you're only going to field, I may as well play a substitute, if you feel off colour. What do you say?"

Levison drew a deep breath.

"I'm sorry I showed such rotten form," he said. "I'll do my best, I can't say more than that. Turn me out if you like."

"It's not a question of turning you out," said Tom. "Next to Talbot and Blake, you're our best bowler, and we want you, if you can bowl."

"Well, I can bowl."

"If it was only bad luck at the wicket, that was all right, but you looked to me to be fumbling like a fag."

"It was bad luck," said Levison, in a low voice.

"Well, for goodness' sake bowl your level best! We want wickets as quickly as we can get them. Fifty isn't much of a total to beat!"

The School House eleven went into the field.

Talbot bowled the first over, and there were loud cheers from the School House

crowd as Owen's wicket went down, followed by Koumi Rao's. The School House were beginning well, at all events.

Blake was put on at the other end, and he took Lawrence's wicket. After that, Talbot bowled again, without result; and then Levison was given a show. Levison was generally an excellent bowler, and could send down a very dangerous fast ball. He was facing Figgins now, and he did his best.

The first ball down very nearly had Figgy; but he just stopped it. Tom Merry, watching from the field, drew a breath of relief. That was like Levison at his best.

But it was only a flash in the pan! Try as he might, Levison could not feel his old self—his hand had lost its cunning. The feeling that he was out of sorts, that he was in a state of nerves, naturally affected him, too, and made him worse than ever. Ball followed ball, and Figgins swiped away right and left, grinning as he swiped.

"My only Aunt Jane!" remarked D'Arcy minor. "Is your major making the New House a present of this match, young Levison?"

Frank did not reply.

Figgins having run a three, Pratt was brought to the batting end. Pratt was a very second-rate bat, and Levison, in his usual form, would not have had much trouble with him. But the ball that went down to Pratt was hit for three, and Pratt grinned as he made his end good before the leather came in.

The over finished, the field crossed, and Levison went to slip. Tom Merry did not look at him.

It was more than clear now that Levison was not in form, and that his bowling was going to be as rotten as his batting.

He was not put on to bowl again. An over which had resulted in fourteen runs for the New House was not quite good enough!

But the wickets were going down to Blake and Talbot, with a catch or two in the field.

In spite of Levison's failure, and Figgy's good display, the New House were nine down for forty-nine. Figgins was still at the wicket, and he had the batting. Last man in was not likely to be required, excepting to lounge round his wicket while Figgins knocked away the ball for the winning runs.

Figgins, of course, had noted Levison's failures, and noted, too, that he was slow and clumsy in the field. When the ball came down from Talbot, Figgins put it up—a chance in the slips.

"Levison!" shouted half-a-dozen voices. It was an easy catch of the season—Figgy could have kicked himself. The ball seemed fairly to float into Levison's hands—and out of them! From the whole School House crowd came a gasp, as that easy catch dropped to the turf.

Then there was a roar of wrath and contempt. The batsmen were running—once, twice!

"Butter-fingers!"

"Fathead!"

"Call that cricket!"

"Yah! Go home!"

"Butter-fingers!"

Levison's face was crimson. He had missed that catch—an easy catch that a fag would hardly have missed. He deserved that yell of wrath and derision.

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

Tom was far from being that variety of cricket skipper who heckles his men and picks faults. But his patience was sorely tried now. The easy catch would have won the match for the School House, and Levison had fumbled and missed it in a way that was simply disgraceful.

Levison, with a burning face, joined the captain of the Shell as the field went off.

"I—I'm sorry——!" he stammered.

"No good talking," said Tom Merry shortly. "Why couldn't you tell me you were off colour? I asked you."

"I—I thought—I hoped——"

"You've played like a clumsy fag," said Tom savagely. "And what's the reason? You were in topping form yesterday. Now you're half-asleep, and as clumsy as a Prussian Hun. What's the reason? If you're not well, you could say so, I suppose. And what's made you seedy all of a sudden? I tell you plainly, Levison, it looks to me as if you've been playing the fool overnight, and if that turns out to be the case, you've played your last match for St. Jim's while I'm cricket captain!"

And Tom Merry strode away without giving Levison time to reply.

CHAPTER 9.

Called Over the Coals.

LEVISON of the Fourth left the cricket ground by himself.

No one else in the eleven spoke to him, not even Talbot. It was too bad, and there was angry resentment from all the team. The School House fellows could take a defeat cheerily enough; upon the whole, the New House won as many matches as they lost, and honours were easy. It was not defeat that rankled

at all; it was the crass failure of the fellow who had brought the defeat about. After an uphill game, victory had been in their hands, if Levison had not clumsily muffed a simple catch. There was only one explanation of his being off colour to such an extent—the explanation that he had taken up again his old shady ways, and was suffering from the effects of a night out.

That such rot as this should be allowed to cost them a win in a cricket match exasperated the juniors. If Levison wanted to be a shady blackguard, on the model of Racke of the Shell or Cutts of the Fifth, let him keep clear of the cricket, and go to the dogs his own way without bothering other fellows! But to lead the cricket captain to rely upon him, and to crack up and let the side down in this way, was the limit.

There were grouching remarks among the cricketers after the match. Even Figgins and Co. were not wholly satisfied with their win. They knew that they ought not to have won that match.

Even George Alfred Grundy was listened to with more respect than usual when he held forth on the subject. Duffer as Grundy was, certainly he couldn't have put up a rottener game than Levison that day; and Grundy, at least, was a clean-living and decent fellow. Tom Merry would have done much better to play even Grundy in the House match.

Not that the cricketers blamed Tom. Levison had showed up so well as a cricketer of late, that Tom really had been bound to play him. He could not have foreseen that the fellow would fail him like this.

But if Tom Merry played Levison in the next match, there would be trouble; there was no doubt about that.

The next important match was with Rookwood, and Tom had intended that Levison should play. It was up to him to fill the place again.

"It's too utterly rotten," Tom said to his chums, at tea in the study. "To crack up like that during the match. I gave him every chance of owning up if he was out of condition."

"He was out of condition, right enough," said Lowther.

"And why?" Manners gave a sniff. "It's pretty plain what was the matter with him. There was talk up and down the House yesterday about what he was going to do last night. You heard it from Trimble yourself, Tom."

The captain of the Shell knitted his brows

"Levison gave me his word there was nothing in it," he said.

"You can judge for yourself now."

"Well, it looks bad enough. Levison was in great form yesterday, and to-day he cracked up in the rottenest way. He's got to give an explanation, anyway, before I put him down for the Rookwood match."

"If you put him down for the Rookwood match now, Tom, the fellows will scalp you," said Manners.

"You can't!" said Lowther. "You've got both Houses to choose from for a School team, and you can't play him."

"He may simply have been queer—fellows are sometimes," said Tom. "If he gives me his word that he didn't leave his dormitory last night, I'm bound to take it."

Manners and Lowther grunted. They were not so much inclined to take Levison's word, after he had thrown away the House match that afternoon.

But Tom, angry as he was, wanted to be just. If some indisposition had come over Levison, it was a thing that might happen to anybody, and he might have failed to realise just how much off colour he was. Tom knew what the whole House believed, but he would give the disgraced junior fair play. And after tea he went along to Levison's study for a plain talk.

He found Levison and Clive there.

Levison was in the armchair, his face moody. He had not shown himself in public since the House match.

Clive was chatting with him, but with a somewhat shadowed brow. Clive had done fairly well in the game, and justified his selection, at all events. He knew what was being said, and he did not know how to defend his study mate. For he could not doubt that there was something, at all events, in it; it was quite clear to him that Levison had not spent the previous night in healthy slumber.

Cardow was not in the study. He had not spoken to Levison since their quarrel, and was keeping away.

Levison looked up with a bitter expression as the captain of the Shell came in. He knew what was coming.

"Well?" he said laconically.

Tom Merry came straight to the point.

"You crooked up in the match, Levison, and let the game go to pot. I suppose you are aware of that?"

Levison nodded.

"The fellows think—but you know what they think."

"Yes."

"Is it true?"

"I gave you my word yesterday," said Levison

Tom made an impatient gesture. "That's all very well," he said. "But if you weren't out last night, playing your old rotten game, what's the matter with you?"

Levison was silent.

"Mind, you're going to have fair play," said Tom. "I can't deal with a fellow I distrust, and I'm quite ready to trust you, though it beats me how you came to crook up like that to-day, when you were as fit as a fiddle yesterday. If you give me your word, honour bright, that you didn't leave your dormitory last night, I'm bound to believe you."

A bitter smile crossed Levison's lips.

There had been a time when a falsehood came easily enough to Ernest Levison, but that time was past.

Neither would a falsehood have been of much use. Racke and Crooke knew that he had broken dormitory bounds, and they were not likely to shield him.

"Well?" said Tom. "I'm waiting, Levison."

Clive gave his study mate an anxious look, but did not speak. He had no hope that Levison could give the required assurance.

Levison answered at last.

"I've got nothing to say, Tom Merry." Tom's brow darkened.

"That means that you did leave the dormitory?"

"Well, yes."

"That will do!"

Tom Merry turned to the door.

"Hold on!" said Levison. "I did not break school bounds last night. I kept my word to you. I was out for an hour, and I think I caught a chill—it knocked me up more than I knew."

"You were out for an hour in the night, and you didn't break school bounds?" said Tom scornfully.

"I did not."

"Where were you, then?"

"Only in the quadrangle."

"Levison!" muttered Clive.

Levison gave a hard laugh.

"Oh, it's true!" he said. "I suppose you won't believe it, Merry? I was a fool to get up at all, I know that. But I did."

"Then why did you go out?" asked Tom.

"To stop another fellow who was going to break bounds."

"Oh!" said Clive.

"Railton was in the quad, and I couldn't get back without being spotted," said Levison. "That's all, and you can believe me or not, as you like."

"Who was the fellow?"

Levison did not reply.

"Was it Cardew?"

"I've told you all I mean to tell you," said Levison. "If you can't take my word, you can do the other thing!"

Tom Merry looked at him hard. He wanted to be fair; but he could not help remembering what a slippery customer Levison had always been.

"There were some Shell fellows out last night," he said. "Gore woke up and heard them coming in—Racke and Crooke, I believe. Were you so concerned about those two cads that you had to go after them and try to get them back?"

Levison shook his head.

"Then it was Cardew?" said Tom.

No reply.

"Very well; I'll speak to the lot of them," said Tom. "I'm sorry I can't take your word, Levison; you've broken it often enough, and you know it."

"I know it," said Levison, in a low voice.

Tom Merry quitted the study. Baggy Trimble and Mellish were in the passage, talking and chuckling. They grinned at Tom Merry, who passed them without a glance. He went back to the Shell passage, knocked at Racke's door, and turned the handle. The door was locked.

He rapped sharply.

"Hallo! Who's there?" came Racke's voice.

"It's I—Merry."

"Well, buzz off!"

"I want to speak to you."

"The want's all on your side, then. Run away!"

"I'll speak from here, if you like," said Tom Merry fiercely. "It's about your going out of bounds last night."

There was a hurried movement in the study.

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Racke.

The door was opened at once, and Tom Merry strode into the study.

CHAPTER 10.

Expelled from St. Jim's.

THERE was a haze of cigarette smoke in the room, and Crooke was hastily shoving cards out of sight into a drawer of the table. Tom Merry saw it, but he did not look at Crooke. He had not come there to interfere with the shady amusements of the two blackguards of the School House.

Racke, with a cigarette between his lips, regarded him with a sneering look.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. "Have they made you a prefect by any chance?"

"You went out of bounds last night," said Tom, unheeding.

"Suppose I did?"

"Was Levison with you?"

Racke's eyes glimmered. He understood now why the captain of the Shell had come; and he understood, too, the opportunity that was offering itself to pay off his long and bitter grudge against Levison of the Fourth. But his tone was very guarded as he replied.

"What are you asking me for? I suppose you don't expect me to give a pal away, do you?"

"It's not a question of that. I'm not a prefect, as you just pointed out. I want to know whether Levison was with you last night."

"Well, of course he was," said Racke. "Trimble told you so yesterday, didn't he?"

"I thought Trimble was mistaken."

"Well, he wasn't."

"Then Levison was with you?"

"Yes."

"Where did he go with you?"

Racke gave Crooke a quick look. Crooke smiled. He understood that he was to back up the falsehoods that were evolved so easily in the cunning brain of Racke of the Shell.

"You can guess where we went," drawled Racke, blowing out a little cloud of smoke. "There's only one place near here where a sportin' fellow can have a good time."

"The Green Man at Rylcombe, I suppose you mean?"

"Yes."

"And Levison went with you there?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"Yes or no?" said Tom fiercely.

"Yes," said Racke.

"Was anybody else in the party?"

"I don't see why I should answer your dashed questions!" said Racke, sulkily.

"Who are you, anyway?"

It did not suit Racke's book to appear to be too willing to be questioned. Tom Merry made a step towards him, his hands clenched.

"I don't want to touch you," he said.

"You're not fit for a decent chap to touch. But I've got to know the truth about Levison. If there's another witness I want to see him—you're such a liar, Racke."

"Thanks," said Racke, with a sneer.

"Was anyone else present?"

"Cardew was," said Racke.

"And you all went to the Green Man?" asked Tom scornfully.

"Not all," said Racke calmly. "There was an alarm as we were getting out. Railton came out for some reason. Levison was spotted before he could get over the wall—I mean, he would have been spotted if he'd climbed after us. He stayed behind for a bit."

"Not for good?"

"Oh, no. Cardew cut up rusty in the lane, and we had a row, and he cleared off. Levison joined us after that. Only three of us went to the Green Man. Cardew wasn't with us."

"Is that the truth, Crooke?"

"Certainly," said Crooke, with cheerful calmness. "Cardew's dear little conscience smote him, and he came back. Levison was quite goey. He won over a pound from Lodgey, at the Green Man."

"Nearer two, I think," said Racke.

Tom Merry looked searchingly at the two rascals.

He knew of their old grudge against Levison for deserting their society. They had tried more than once to blacken him in the eyes of his new friends. He knew that Racke was as false at heart as any Prussian. Yet the story sounded true enough, and Levison had admitted being out of the dormitory, and being cornered in the quad by the House-master.

"Well, have you finished?" yawned Racke. "If you have, we'll get on with the little game. I've got to go down to Rylcombe soon."

Tom Merry strode out of the study. How much of Racke's story was true, how much false, he could not tell. But it was possible that Cardew could tell him.

Racke grinned to his study mate when the door had closed on the captain of the Shell.

"I fancy that put a spoke in Levison's wheel," he said venomously.

Crooke chuckled.

"Cardew won't back it up."

"That doesn't matter. He can't say what happened after he left us last night," grinned Racke. "All he can tell that meddlin' fool will bear out what I've told him."

"By gad!" said Crooke admiringly.

"You're a deep card! Your deal."

Tom Merry was looking for Cardew. He found the dandy of the Fourth in the common-room.

Cardew was looking as nonchalant as usual, but there was a shade of dissatisfaction on his face. The quarrel with Levison troubled him a little. He had not the slightest intention of making the first advances towards a reconciliation, however. If Levison wanted matters on

their old footing, he could say so. But he was feeling discontented and morose, and he was in a humour for a quarrel with anybody.

"I've been looking for you, Cardew."

Several fellows looked round as Tom Merry spoke. Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, here I am," he said.

"I want to know what happened last night, when you were out of bounds."

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"About Levison, I mean," said Tom.

"I'm not concerned with your own blackguardism, Cardew, and it's no business of mine to call you to account—"

"I was about to point out that very obvious fact," said Cardew blandly.

Some of the fellows chuckled.

"Never mind that," said Tom. "You started out, I understand, with Racke and Croke to go to the Green Man."

"Perhaps."

"Will you answer me?"

"I'm not in the habit of answerin' questions about my private affairs," yawned Cardew.

"You'll answer me," said Tom, between his teeth. "But I won't threaten you, Cardew—I'll tell you this, if Levison was out blagging last night, he's going to be kicked out of the cricket team."

"Yaas, wathah," chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great emphasis.

"I understand that you're his pal," said Tom. "If you can tell me anything to help him, you'd better do so."

"That alters the case," smiled Cardew. "I shall have great pleasure in answerin' your questions, dear boy. It's rather rotten to show up my shocking conduct before all these innocent youths, but I'll try to bear it. Go ahead, by all means."

"Tell us what happened, then."

Cardew appeared to reflect.

"Like a naughty bad boy, I rose in the dark hours, and went out on the merry ran-dan," he said gravely. "My companions in crime were Racke and Croke, as you know probably—"

"I know the other rotters were Racke and Croke. What about Levison?"

"Levison was the guardian angel," smiled Cardew. "He came after us, and tried to turn me from my wicked ways. I regret to say that I told him to go and eat coke."

There was a chuckle again. Cardew of the Fourth might be a scapegrace and a blackguard but certainly he was a very cool blackguard.

"Then he did not go with you?"

"Not at all. Levison is miles above

such shockin' practices. I left him in the quad, shivering behind a tree I believe, with a ferocious House-master prowling round near at hand."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you went out with Racke?"

"Exactly!"

"And left him in the lane?" asked Tom.

"I see you know the whole story? Yaas; Racke's manners and customs had got terribly on my nerves by that time, an' I felt that I couldn't stand him at any price. So I said good-bye, and came home to bed, and missed the merry razzle after all," said Cardew regretfully.

"Do you know whether Levison joined Racke after you had left him?"

"Of course he didn't."

"Do you know whether he did or not?"

"Well, I suppose he didn't," said Cardew. "Of course, he didn't. He only came out at all to reason me from naughty companions."

"Did you see him in the Fourth Form dorm when you got in?"

"Not bein' a cat, I can't see in the dark," said Cardew. "But I presume he was in bed."

"You didn't see him in bed?"

"Of course I didn't, in the dark. But he was there."

Racke says he joined them after you had left them in the lane, and went on to the Green Man with them."

"That's a lie, then!" said Cardew. "Levison came in as soon as the House-master was off the scene, I feel sure of that."

"But you don't know?"

"I don't know anythin' about it, of course, but I'm sure of it. You can ask Levison, can't you?"

"I've asked him, and he says he came in. I've asked Racke and Croke, and they both say he went to the Green Man with them."

"Oh, my hat!" Cardew stared blankly at Tom Merry. "Was the boulder spoofin' me, then, and pullin' my innocent leg? Kick me, somebody!"

"I'll do that with pleasure," said Manners.

"Hold on! I withdraw the request. Perhaps Racke is lyin'," suggested Cardew. "He's an awful liar, I believe."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"Racke may be lying, or you may be lying, or Levison may be lying," he said. "I can't pick and choose among a whole crowd of liars! I know that Levison owns up to havin' been out of the dormitory

last night, and he cracked up in the cricket match to-day, and I know that I'm not going to risk the same thing happening in the Rookwood match. You can tell Levison that his name's scratched from the list for Rookwood."

And Tom Merry returned to his study with that matter settled. How to disentangle truth from falsehood in the varying yarns he had heard was a puzzle Tom Merry was not equal to. Levison certainly should not have given up his night's rest on any account, just before the House match. On the other hand, there were excuses for him, if he had acted thus to make an attempt to induce a reckless young rascal to give up a risky escapade. But was that true? Tom Merry was a believer in Levison's reform, but Levison in the role of good angel to reckless youth was a trifle steep. As to whether Racke's story was true, Cardew could give no evidence, neither did Tom Merry wholly trust Cardew. One thing stood out clearly—he could not afford to risk letting what had happened in the House match happen over again in the Rookwood match, a much more important fixture. Tom Merry had his duty to the team to consider, and he could not afford to give Levison of the Fourth the benefit of the doubt.

CHAPTER 11.

A Shock for Levison.

"FRANKY! Come in, kid!" Levison major's face brightened up as his minor came into the study. Tea was over, and Frank had come in, as he often did, for assistance with his books. Clive gave the fag a cheery smile, and went out. The Third Former put his books down on the table.

"Not tired, Ernie?" he asked.

"Well, a bit," said Levison. "That's all right, though."

"I won't bother you if you're tired. You told me to come, you know. But after a cricket match—"

"I didn't have much to do," said Levison, with a satirical smile. "You saw how many runs I took, young'un."

"You were off your form."

"I was, and no mistake. I oughtn't to have played," said Levison moodily. "But I thought I should pull round. I never realised I was so much off colour. I caught a chill last night, I think." He paused.

Frank looked at him quickly.

"A chill—in the dormitory?" he said. "Never mind," said Levison hastily. "What is it now—old Eutropius again?" "Ernie!"

Levison burst into a laugh.

"It's all right, kid! I haven't been playing the giddy ox again. Haven't I told you that's all over? I suppose you've heard the fellows talking?"

"Yes," said the fag, with a troubled look. "Piggott of the Third says you were out with Racke and Crooke and Cardew."

"It isn't true, Frank—not as that young cad means it, anyway."

"I punched his head," said Frank.

"Ha, ha! Well, let's get to work."

The brothers were hard at work when Cardew came into the study. Levison was not feeling fit for work, but he forced himself to it so successfully that Frank did not observe that anything was wrong with him. But he was glad to pause when Cardew came in. He gave his study-mate a somewhat grim look.

"Goin' strong?" smiled Cardew.

"We're working," said Levison shortly.

"Go on with it, don't mind me." Cardew stood with his hands in his pockets, looking on. "I admire you in the role of the kind elder brother, dear boy."

"Oh, dry up!"

"When the dear boy's gone, I want to speak to you," grinned Cardew. "You spoofin' bouncer, I've got a bine to pick with you!"

"What do you mean? If you've anything to say, you can say it before Frank!" growled Levison.

"Well, you were spoofin' me last night," said Cardew coolly. "Why didn't you put me up to it, and I'd have stood by you, and sworn black was white, and Huns were human, if necessary, to see you through. But when Tom Merry asked me questions, I thought it would help you best if I told the facts—as I knew them."

"That's all right," said Levison. "I told him I went out to get a silly fool to come back. If you've told him the facts, all serene!"

Cardew laughed.

"After your little sermon to me, I understood that you came in, as soon as you could dodge Railton," he said.

"So I did."

"You didn't join Racke afterwards?" grinned Cardew.

Levison stared at him.

"Of course I didn't! You know whether I did or not, as you were with Racke all the time."

"Not all the time," said Cardew. "I should have told you about it, only you cut up so rusty to-day. I had a row with Racke and came back, and the two merry blades went on alone."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that, at all events. What's put it in your head that I joined Racke afterwards?"

"Didn't you?" asked Cardew banteringly.

"No, I didn't!" shouted Levison. "What do you mean?"

Cardew looked serious at last.

"Well, Racke's told Tom Merry that you did, and that you had a high old time at the Green Man," he said. "Is it one of Racke's lovely yarns, after all? Tom Merry takes it seriously enough. He's scratched your name out of the list for the Rookwood match, an' told me to tell you so."

Frank uttered an exclamation of dismay.

Levison major sat quite still. He seemed to be overwhelmed for the moment by what Cardew had told him.

"Racke said so?" he ejaculated at last, his eyes beginning to burn.

"He did. It seems that Crooke backs up the yarn, too. Isn't it true?"

"It's not true!" exclaimed Frank indignantly. "How dare you ask whether it's true, Cardew?"

Cardew laughed. Levison did not heed his minor.

He rose to his feet, his face strangely pale, and his eyes burning as if lighted by an inward flame.

"Where are you going?" asked Cardew, a little uneasily.

"I'm going to see Tom Merry—to see whether he believes that yarn. If he does—"

"No good fightin' Merry," said Cardew uneasily. "Take it calmly, old chap. That won't do any good."

Levison gave a harsh laugh.

"I know it wouldn't do any good. If Tom Merry believes it, I'm going to see Racke."

He strode out of the study. Frank half rose, then sank back into his seat again. He knew it was no use to speak to his major in that mood. The fag's usually cheery face was pale with dismay.

"Cheero, kid!" said Cardew. "It's all serene. It will do Racke good to get a hiding, and Levison can give him one."

Frank nodded without speaking. There was a weight on his heart, he hardly knew why.

Levison major strode along the passage with burning eyes.

It was not the first time Racke had sought to injure him, to blacken his character, in revenge for Levison's desertion of his precious set. It had always been Racke's aim to hint and insinuate that Levison was the same Levison as of old—that his pretended reform was but a cover, a mask, for his way of life, in order that his secret blackguardism might be carried on in greater security. Racke had always failed—till now. He seemed to have succeeded at last.

It was not only righteous wrath that flamed up in Levison's breast. The events of that day had tried him sorely, and all the savagery in his nature seemed to have been aroused.

Two or three fellows who passed him in the passage stared at him curiously. His face startled them.

Talbot of the Shell was going into his study, next to Tom Merry's, as Levison came up. He started, and stepped quickly towards Levison.

"What is it?" he asked quickly.

Levison did not answer. He turned to Tom Merry's door. Talbot caught his arm anxiously.

"What's the matter, Levison?"

Levison gave him a dark look.

"The matter? The matter is that I'm done playing the silly fool. The fellows have always been looking for a chance to be down on me, and I'm going to give them a chance in future. Racke has lied about me, and I'm kicked out of the cricket team, you know it!"

Talbot nodded. He had been present in the common-room during Tom Merry's interview with Cardew.

"You needn't blame Tom," he said quietly. "You can't deny that you threw away the match to-day, Levison, and a cricket captain can't take risks with matches."

Levison sneered.

"You needn't be alarmed—I'm not going to fight Tom Merry," he said. "Let me go. I'm only going to ask him whether it's true that I'm turned out on that rotter's word."

Talbot looked at him hard.

"A scrap won't do any good," he said. "That's all, Levison."

"That's all, as far as Merry's concerned."

Talbot released his arm, and went into his own study, his brows knitted. Levison knocked at Tom Merry's door, threw it open, and strode in.

CHAPTER 12.

Seeking Vengeance.

TOM MERRY rose to his feet as Levison came in. He was quite prepared for trouble. Manners went on with his work, and Monty Lowther winked at the ceiling.

Levison stood for a moment, silent, breathing hard.

"I've got your message from Cardew," he said at last.

"Good!" said Tom.

"You've turned me out of the team?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"For the present, yes. I suppose you don't expect me to let you repeat your exhibition to-day when we meet Rookwood?"

"There's no question of that," said Levison. "I was off colour to-day; but the same thing wouldn't happen again."

"I should want to be sure of that," said the captain of the Shell drily.

"You mean that Racke lied about me, and you believe him?"

"I don't quite know what to believe," said Tom frankly. "What I know is that you threw away the House match to-day by rotten play, and it was because you broke bounds last night. Whether your version or Racke's is the true one, I can't say. But it's my business to win matches, not to lose them, and I don't intend to take chances."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Levison, turning to the door.

"You're not going to exterminate the whole study?" asked Monty Lowther, with an air of mild surprise. "I really thought you were, dear boy!"

Levison did not reply. The door slammed after him.

"Quite a storm in a teacup!" yawned Lowther. "Now let's get on with the prep. What are you wrinkling your cheery chivvy about, Tom?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"I'd like to think the best I could of Levison," he said. "But I don't see what else I could do—I can't play him against Rookwood. He couldn't expect that. I suppose he's gone now to row with Racke. Well, if Racke was lying, a licking will do him good."

"And if he wasn't, a licking will do him good," said Lowther. "The more lickings dear Aubrey gets, the better for him. Blow him!"

The Terrible Three went on with their prep.

Levison hurried along the passage to Racke's study, his eyes burning. It was

but seldom that the cool, self-contained Levison allowed his anger to run away with him, but it had the upper hand now. After the long, uphill struggle of his reform, everything seemed to be lost again, and he owed it to his old associate, the fellow who had striven by every means to keep him to the old rotten ways, and, disappointed in that, had taken this treacherous vengeance. It was no wonder that Levison was furious and that his usual coolness had deserted him.

He hurried open the door of Racke's study.

Crooke, who was there, started to his feet, and backed away round the table as he saw the look on Levison's face.

"I—I say—" he stammered.

"Where's Racke?"

"Oh, Racke!" said Crooke, relieved.

"He's gone out."

"Where has he gone?"

"To Rylcombe."

Levison made a furious gesture.

"Where has he gone, in Rylcombe, then?"

"Only to a shop" said Crooke. "He'll be back before locking-up, if you want to see him."

Levison set his teeth.

"Racke's lied about me!" he said.

"He's got me kicked out of the cricket eleven. You backed up his lies!"

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

But he dodged round the table as Levison came towards him, following him round.

"Hands off!" panted Crooke. "You rotter, hands off! My hat, I'll brain you with this ruler if—oh!"

The ruler went to the floor with a clatter, and Crooke dropped on the carpet as Levison's fist smote him full in the face.

He rolled on the floor, yelling, and Levison strode out of the study. He had done with Crooke. Crooke was glad enough to have done with him.

It was Racke who had schemed against him; Levison knew that. Crooke had only followed Racke's lead. It was with Racke that he had to settle his accounts.

Crooke sat up on the carpet, pressing his hand to his streaming nose.

"By gad!" he muttered. "The—the wild beast! Oh, gad! I—I shouldn't like to be Racke, and meet that beast now. Ow!"

Crooke scrambled to his feet, and dabbed his nose savagely with his handkerchief.

Frank Levison looked in at the door a few minutes later. His face was anxious.

"Isn't my major here?" he asked.

"Hang your major!" snarled Crooke. Frank glanced round the study and hurried on. On the landing he found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a very astonished expression on his face.

"Have you seen my brother?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yaas, wathah! He wushed past me like a wild Hun," said Arthur Augustus. "Weally, he thwew me into quite a flut-tah!"

"Where is he?"

"He wushed downstairs, deah boy!" Frank Levison ran down the stairs.

"Seen my major?" he exclaimed, catching Julian's arm in the doorway.

"Yes, he's gone out. What's the matter with him?"

"Gone out of gates?"

"Yes; sprinted across the quad as if he were on the cinder-path," said Julian.

"Anything up?"

Frank did not reply. He hurried out into the quadrangle. He was vaguely uneasy as to what might happen with Levison in his present mood. But in the quadrangle, Wally and Joe Frayne bore down on him.

"Where are you off to, young Levison?" demanded Wally. "Prep, my son?"

"Hang prep! I——"

D'Arcy minor chuckled.

"But you can't hang prep., old scout. You can't keep Selby waiting. Come on, my infant."

"Look here, I——" panted Frank.

"Oh, come on, and don't be an ass!" said Wally, as he linked his arm in Frank's, and marched him off to the Third Form-room. Levison minor went quietly; it was, after all, impossible to cut prep which Mr. Selby took personally with his form in the Third room.

But during prep, that evening Levison minor's thoughts wandered, and more than once the master of the Third was down upon him very severely. But Frank could not help it. He was thinking of his brother, and wondering what might be happening while he was sitting there, grinding through the Form work in which he could not put his thoughts.

CHAPTER 13.

Blow for Blow!

AUBREY RACKE sauntered along the lane with a smiling face.

He was returning to the school after his visit to Rylcombe, and feeling very satisfied with himself.

He had, as he expressed it, put a spoke in Levison's wheel. Levison's desertion of his old associates, his disdainful refusal to re-enter the select circle of Racke and Co. had been avenged now. It had cost Racke nothing but a lie; and lies came very easily to Aubrey Racke. Levison had been a dog with a bad name—and the bad name was not to be got rid of, so long as Racke could help it. His new friends would give him the cold shoulder now; and Racke had little doubt that Levison would seek to return to his old friends—to get the cold shoulder from them as well.

It was a very pleasant prospect to Racke, and he found a malicious satisfaction in it.

And it had been so easy, too! Circumstances had played into his hands. His most cunning schemes to the same end had failed, and almost by chance at last he had succeeded.

So Racke smiled as he sauntered along the leafy lane, with his bag in his hand. Racke had been to a shop in the village to purchase tuck. Since the food restrictions had been put into force at St. Jim's, all shops outside the school had been put out of bounds, and the quantity of tuck to be purchased at the school shop was limited. That did not suit the hoir of Messrs. Racke and Hacke, who was accustomed to indulge himself in every way. With his pocket-book bulging with currency notes, Racke did not see why he should not have the best, and plenty of it—and he was accustomed to getting supplies in from any quarter he could, careless of what he paid for them. If his selfish greed rendered food dearer and scarcer for others, that did not matter to the hoir of the war-profitere, who was following so dutifully in his father's footsteps.

But Racke paused, and the smile died off his face, as he caught sight of Levison in the lane, hurrying towards him from the direction of the school.

The look on Levison's face was enough to tell Racke whom he was looking for, and why.

Racke was not a fighting man, when he could help it; but he had not expected his scheme to pass off without trouble. He was bigger than Levison, and though he would have avoided a fight if he could, he did not believe that he would get the worst of it.

He stopped, dropped his bag into the grass by the road, and waited for Levison to come up.

From the dark shades of the wood beside the road a pair of sharp, glittering eyes looked out from the leaves.

Racke did not see them.

He was standing almost upon the spot where the encounter with the tramp had taken place the previous night, but he was not thinking of Bill Jenner. He had no fear of footpads in the daylight.

The coarse, stubbly face in the wood glowed with revengeful passion as the scintillating eyes glared upon Racke.

The ruffian recognised his assailant of the previous night; he knew the hard, cynical face he had seen in the light of the match.

He made a movement to leap out into the road, but just then Levison's hurried footsteps came to his ears, and he crouched back.

In silence, like one of the wild animals that had tenanted the deep wood in ancient days, the ruffian watched through the foliage. Levison came panting up.

"So I've found you, Racke!"

"Have you been lookin' for me?" yawned Racke.

"Yes, you hound!"

"Well, here I am."

Levison's hands clenched convulsively.

"You told Tom Merry I was with you last night—you lied to him. You've got me kicked out of the cricket eleven!"

Racke nodded coolly.

"I've settled your old account," he said, his eyes gleaming. "Luck's been my way at last, Levison! You've had all the luck so far. Now I've downed you, you cad! Your precious new friends won't put much faith in you after this. You turned your back on your old pals—you've tried to keep Cardew away from us—you've put on sanctimonious airs—you and your precious minor! Now I've paid you out. You made a mistake in making an enemy of me, my boy. I told you you'd be sorry for it."

"I'm not sorry for it!" said Levison. "But you are going to be sorry for what you've done. I'm going to thrash you till you can't crawl!"

"Perhaps I shall have somethin' to say about that," sneered Racke.

"Come into the wood," said Levison.

"Anybody might come by here."

"Thanks, but I'll stay where I am."

Levison gritted his teeth.

"You know Linton's in Rylcombe, and you want him to come by and stop us," he said. "Well, that's not going to happen. Come into the wood."

"I won't!"

"Then I'll make you!"

Racke sprang back.

"Hands off! Or—ah, would you?"

Levison was upon him with the spring of a tiger.

Racke struck out savagely, and Levison received, without heeding, a furious blow full in the face. Then Racke was down. Levison grasped his collar, and by main strength, dragged him across the belt of grass and under the trees.

Racke struggled in vain to resist. Levison seemed to have the strength of a giant at that moment.

The pale fury in his face daunted the cad of the Shell.

"Let me go!" he panted. "Levison, are you mad? Let me go!"

Levison did not reply.

He stopped, a dozen yards from the road, and flung the Shell fellow scornfully into the grass.

"Get up!" he said. "It's between you and me now, and you're going to pay for your lies!"

There was a rustle in the thicket, but neither of the juniors heeded it. Racke slowly scrambled to his feet. He would have given half the year's war profits of Messrs. Racke and Hacke to have been safe from Levison's hands just then. He was terrified by the blaze in the Fourth Former's eyes. Levison did not seem to be quite himself at that moment.

But there was no escape for Aubrey Racke.

The hour of reckoning had come, and he had to face the junior he had wronged.

"Are you ready?" muttered Levison.

"Look here, Levison——"

"Are you ready; you coward?"

"Yes, hang you!"

The next moment they were fighting savagely.

Racke was the bigger of the two, and should have had the advantage, but he was wretchedly unfit and out of condition. But even had he been at his best, he could hardly have withstood Levison's furious attack. Even Tom Merry or Figgins would have had difficulty in standing up to Levison at that moment.

The Fourth Former received unheeding blow after blow. He did not even appear to feel them. His only thought seemed to be to rain blows upon his enemy, careless of the injuries he took.

Racke went down in the grass at last, and lay panting. Levison's eyes blazed down at him.

"Get up!" he shouted.

Racke panted.

"I—I can't! Let me alone! I'm done."

"You're not done," said Levison, between his teeth. "You won't get off so cheaply as that, Racke. Get up!"

"I won't!" screamed Racke.

"Then I'll kick you till you do!"

CHAPTER 14.

Missing.

Racke scrambled at that. There was no escape for him, and he threw himself into the fight with a savage animosity, in a bitter mood akin to Levison's own.

But it did not avail him.

The fighting was furious for a few minutes, and then Racke went down on the grass again, groaning.

Levison looked at him.

This time Racke was not shamming—he could not rise, he lay in the grass utterly exhausted, panting for breath.

"That's enough!" panted Levison.

He threw on his jacket and cap, and turned away. His footsteps died away in the dark glades of the wood.

Racke lay where he had fallen, groaning.

The minutes passed, and he did not rise. He sat up at last, passing his hand dizzily over his bruised face. Then he started, and fear came into his eyes, and he saw a rough, stubbly face that looked at him from the thicket. Racke's look became fixed with terror as the ruffian came into view. It was Bill Jenner, the tramp—the man he had cruelly beaten as he lay helpless, and whose chance had come!

Racke did not speak. He could not. Only too clearly he read the ruffian's savage, revengeful purpose in his stubbly face. Levison was gone—he had been gone five minutes or more. Instinctively Racke knew that the ruffian had been watching the conflict, and had waited for Levison to get to a distance.

The hard, brutal face bent over him.

"My turn now, Master Racke!"

Racke did not move his lips. He could only gaze at the revengeful face, as if fascinated by a serpent.

The rough hands glided over him, through his pockets. The fat pocket-book, crammed with currency notes and bank-notes, was taken, the big gold watch, the massive chain. The plunder disappeared into the ruffian's rags. Was that all? Racke knew that it was not all.

"Don't!" he panted, at last, as the cudgel in the ruffian's hands whirled in the air. Bill Jenner grinned.

"Wot did you do to a bloke when he was down?" he asked.

"Don't!" moaned Racke.

The cudgel descended—blow on blow, as savagely as Racke had struck the night before.

There was a rustle in the woods as the footpad slunk away. In the grass, dim in the thickening dusk, lay a motionless figure. The dusk deepened, the blackness of the night blotted out the trees, and still Aubrey Racke did not stir.

"RACKE!"

Mr. Railton was taking the roll-call.

There was no reply.

"Racke!"

The School House-master glanced at the ranks of the Shell. Aubrey Racke was not there.

Mr. Railton marked "absent" to the name, and went on with the roll. When it was finished, and the St. Jim's fellows were filing out of the Hall, the House-master called out sharply:

"Levison!"

Levison was there with the rest of the Fourth. Half the fellows in the hall had noticed Levison's face—dark with bruises. He had been severely damaged in the fight in the wood, and it was not likely to escape the House-master's notice. A mark or two of conflict was generally passed over judiciously. But this was a little too conspicuous to be passed over.

Levison came sullenly up the hall. The House-master's eyes scanned his face.

"You have been fighting, Levison?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not use gloves?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Railton knitted his brows.

"I do not generally take notice of disputes among juniors when only a few rounds with gloves may be in question," he said. "A brutal fight with bare knuckles is quite a different matter. To judge by your appearance, Levison, you have been fighting like a prize-fighter."

Levison's face set sullenly, but he did not answer.

"With whom have you fought, Levison?"

Levison hesitated a moment, and then replied. It was not much use to attempt concealment, if he had wished to do so. He knew that Racke's face must be worse than his own.

"Racke, sir."

"Racke?" said Mr. Railton. "Very well. I shall leave the matter till Racke reports himself, and then you will both come to my study, Levison."

"Very well, sir."

Levison walked out of the hall.

Cardew joined him in the passage, looking very curiously at his face.

"You've been through it," he remarked.

"Yes," said Levison shortly.

"Racke, of course?"

"Yes."

"Did you get the licking?"

Levison smiled sourly.

"Wait till you see Racke," he replied.

"By gad, he must be in a merry state if he's worse than you are," said Cardew, with a grin. "There'll be a row about this."

"I don't care."

"Dash it all, prize-fightin' isn't quite the thing, you know," said Cardew. "It may mean a floggin' for the pair of you."

"Let it!"

Crooke met Levison on the stairs. His face was dark and anxious.

"What have you done with Racke?" he muttered.

"Licked him."

"You fool! There'll be an enquiry about this."

"Very likely." Levison shrugged his shoulders. "What do I care?"

"You—you fool! It may all come out," said Crooke shrilly. "They may get on to what you were fighting about, and then—"

Levison laughed.

"Well, let them!"

"What about your precious friend Cardew?" hissed Crooke. "If it all comes out, it's as bad for him as for us! He was with us last night."

Levison started.

"Oh, don't mind me," smiled Cardew. "I can face the music. We'll all go in to the Head together, Crooke, dear boy. What a merry meetin'!"

"Hang you!" snarled Crooke. "I don't want to be sacked, if you do! Remember that, Levison—Cardew's as deep in the mud as we are in the mire."

"I sha'n't say anything," said Levison quietly. "I quarrelled with Racke, and we fought—that's all. If Racke keeps his mouth shut, there's nothing to come out."

He went on to his own study. Cardew followed him, and Clive came in a few minutes later. Levison had thrown himself into the armchair. He had no heart for work that evening. The reaction after the first excitement of the fight with Racke had left him feeling exhausted, almost sick.

Cardew and Clive worked in silence. Their sympathy was with Levison, but they felt that there was trouble in store for him. The way he had taken Racke's accusation was enough to clear him of it in the eyes of his study-mates, at least. It was probable that many of the fellows would think that Levison had cut up rough with Racke for giving him away. In any case, he had to answer to the House-master for the savage fight.

It was later in the evening when Frank Levison looked in. His brother made an impatient gesture.

"Cut off, Franky! Can't help you to-night—I'm seedy."

But Levison minor came into the study.

"It isn't that," he said, with a catch in his voice. "Ernie, it's—its nearly nine o'clock, and Racke hasn't come in!"

"Well?"

"All the fellows seem to know that you went out after him," said Frank.

"Yes, I did."

"Why—why hasn't he come in, Ernie?"

"How should I know?" said Levison roughly. "He could have come in if he'd liked, I suppose?"

Then, as he noted the pallor in the fag's face, and the fear in his eyes, he started.

"You young fool! Do you think I've hurt him so that he can't come in? Don't be a silly young idiot!"

Frank drew a deep, sobbing breath.

"What did you do, Ernie?"

"I licked him," growled Levison. "We fought it out in the wood, and Racke got the worst of it."

"And—that's all?"

"Of course it is, you young duffer! What do you think I've done?" exclaimed Levison angrily.

"N-n-nothing, Ernie. You—you—looked so excited when you went—and—and Racke hasn't come in. It's nearly bedtime, too. The prefects have been asking questions about him. It's queer he doesn't come in. Was he much hurt?"

"Yes, he was—worse than I was. I left him lying in the grass," said Levison savagely. "He will have a face that mine will be a joke to. Serve the cad right! I'd do the same again."

"I wish he'd come in," muttered Frank.

"Oh, hang him! Give us a rest."

The fag left the study with quivering lips. Levison sat down again moodily. He, too, was wondering why Racke had not come in. Why didn't he come? He was knocked out by that fight to a finish, certainly; but he had had plenty of time to get home. Dash it all, he could have got in by this time if he had had to crawl home on his hands and knees. Why didn't he come?"

"It's beastly queer," said Cardew, breaking the silence, with a very odd look at Levison.

Levison did not reply. There was a footstep in the passage at last, and Tom Merry, with a very grave face, looked in.

"You're wanted, Levison."

"Oh, rats! What's the matter now?" snarled Levison.

"Racke hasn't come in."

"Confound Racke!"

"Well, Mr. Railton wants you in his study, and you'd better go," said Tom Merry quietly.

He turned away. Levison hesitated a moment, and then left the study, without a word or a glance to his study-mates. Cardew and Clive looked at one another, in grim silence for a moment, and then resumed their work. But they were not thinking of their work now.

CHAPTER 15.

Where is Racke?

MR. RAILTON'S brow was very severe as Levison of the Fourth quietly entered his study.

The junior stood before the House-master, his eyes sinking a little under Mr. Railton's stern gaze.

"You know why I have sent for you, Levison?" the House-master said at last.

"No, sir," said Levison quietly.

"Racke has not returned to the school."

"Tom Merry told me so, sir. I don't see why that should make you send for me."

"It is now bedtime for the juniors, Levison. It is very strange that Racke should not have returned to the school."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any idea what is keeping him away?"

"None whatever, sir."

"You are sure, Levison?"

"Quite sure, sir. Racke is not a friend of mine, and I don't know anything at all about his affairs."

"You have told me, Levison, that you fought with Racke?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did this fight take place?"

"In Rylcombe Wood, sir."

"I hear from Crooke that Racke went down to the village on some business of his own. Did you meet him out of gates by chance, or did you follow him for the purpose of picking this quarrel with him?"

Levison hesitated a moment.

"I followed him, sir."

"In order to fight with him?" asked Mr. Railton, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly tell me what happened, Levison."

Again Levison hesitated, but he replied quietly, after a moment or two.

"I met him in Rylcombe Lane, sir, coming back from the village. I asked him to step into the wood, where we should

be undisturbed. There we fought, and I beat him. I left him there."

"Is that all, Levison?"

"That is all, sir."

"How did you leave him? What was he doing?"

"Lying in the grass, sir."

"You bear very noticeable injuries from this encounter, Levison. Was Racke in a similar state?"

"A bit worse, sir."

"You have not seen him since you left him in the wood?"

"I have not, sir."

"Did you come directly back to the school?"

"I stayed to bathe my face in the brook in the wood—only a few minutes," said Levison. "Then I came home."

"What was the reason of your quarrel with Racke?"

"He had injured me, sir," said Levison steadily.

"In what way?"

Levison was silent.

"Very well. I will not inquire more deeply at present," said the House-master.

"I will wait till Racke is here. But there is one most important point, Levison—were Racke's injuries of a nature to render him unable to return to the school?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"You are quite sure of that?" asked the House-master, searching the Fourth Former's face with his keen eyes.

"Of course, sir. It was simply a fight, and Racke had the worst of it," said Levison.

"Then it is exceedingly strange that he does not return! Kindly tell me exactly where you left him. He must be searched for, you understand."

"It was about a dozen yards in the wood from the lane—just where the road dips under the trees."

"Very good! I know the spot well. You may go for the present, Levison."

"Yes, sir."

Levison left the study, his face quite calm. He went into the common-room, where most of the School House juniors were gathered. Mr. Railton sent a fag to call Kidlare, Darrel, and Langton to his study.

Many curious glances were cast upon Levison major as he came into the common-room. His face was striking enough. There was a dark circle round his left eye, and his nose was swollen, his lip cut. But it was not those signs of conflict that drew glances upon him. The juniors were wondering where Aubrey Racke was, and

what had happened to him. What had Levison done to him?

The fellows who remembered what Levison had looked like when he started out in pursuit of Racke were quite prepared for serious news when Racke should be found.

Levison understood what the glances meant, and his lip curled.

"So Racke hasn't turned up yet?" he said, with a sneering smile.

"Not yet," said Tom Merry curtly. "What did you do to him, Levison?" sniggered Baggy Trimble.

"I licked him," said Levison. "Is that all?" grinned Mellish. "Why hasn't he come back, then? You must have hit him pretty hard, if he couldn't get home afterwards."

"He could if he liked," said Levison. "I don't know why he's keeping away; very likely to make out that he's badly hurt, and to get me into a row. It would be like one of his tricks."

"Well, that's possible," said Talbot. "Yaas, wathah!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "All the same, it's vewy queeah. Now the House-mastah has got on to it, it may vewy likely come out about Wacke bweakin' bounds last night."

"Racke isn't staying away of his own accord," said Crooke. "I jolly well know that!"

"How do you know it?" asked Blake. "Because he went out to bring in grub for supper. If he's found by the prefects they'll find his bag of tuck with him, and he will get into a row."

"Bweakin' the food regulations, bai Jove! What a frightfully caddish thing to do!" exclaimed D'Arcy in disgust.

"Well, it shows Racke isn't staying out of his own accord. If he don't come in it's because he can't come in; and Levison can explain why," said Crooke, with a venomous look at Levison.

"How should I know?" demanded Levison, his eyes gleaming.

"What have you done to him, that's the question?" sneered Crooke.

Levison drew a deep breath. "What had he done? Certainly he had given Racke a terrific thrashing. Had he struck rather harder than he had realised at the time—so hard that Racke, in truth, was too badly hurt to get home? It was impossible—absurd! He knew that it could not be possible, that he had nothing to fear. When Racke came in, the vague suspicions fixed upon him would be dissipated at once.

"Kildare's going out, and Darrel and

Langton," said Kerruish, who was looking out into the passage. "I suppose they're going to look for Racke."

"They'll find him malingering somewhere," said Levison, with a sneer.

Knox of the Sixth looked into the common-room.

"Bed!" he snapped. "Bai Jove, can't we stay up till Wacke comes in, Knox?"

"No, you can't."

"We are wathah anxious about him, you know."

"You can be anxious in the dormitory, then," said Knox. "Cut off with you!"

The juniors went to their dormitories. In the Shell Dormitory Aubrey Racke's bed remained empty.

CHAPTER 16.

By Whose Hand?

"HARK!" Kildare uttered that exclamation in suppressed tones.

The three prefects of the Sixth had reached the dip in the lane, the spot indicated by Levison. They had undertaken the search for the missing junior at Mr. Railton's request, and proceeded straight to the spot. Kildare had an electric torch for light.

As the three seniors halted in the deep shadow of the overhanging trees, a faint sound came from the black woods.

They listened intently.

The sound was repeated. It was a moan of pain, faint in the distance. Kildare and his companions exchanged startled glances.

"By gad!" muttered Langton. "Come on!" said Kildare abruptly.

They crossed the belt of grass to the wood. Darrel uttered an exclamation as he stumbled over something lying in the grass.

"Hold on! There's something here. Show a light, Kildare!"

Kildare flashed the light down. A bag lay in the grass—an expensive leather bag. As Darrel picked it up, they saw the initials on the leather: "A.R."

"Racke's bag," said Langton. "It's full of something," said Darrel. "Queer that he should have left it lying here."

"Come on!"

Another faint moan came from the darkness of the wood. Kildare led the way under the murmuring trees.

There was silence now; but Kildare knew the direction from which the moan

had proceeded. He hurried on, flashing the light among the bushes and ferns. Then he halted suddenly.

"Good Heavens!"

A figure lay at his feet, moving slightly, and moaning.

Kildare bent down, and turned the light upon the face. It was the face of Aubrey Racker, but so bruised that the prefect hardly knew it.

The junior was not conscious yet.

Consciousness was slowly returning, and he was moving and moaning faintly. Kildare's face went pale as he looked at him.

"Good Heavens!" he repeated.

"He had a fight with Levison, of the Fourth, I understand," said Darrel, in low tones.

"Those injuries were not caused by a fist fight," said Kildare quietly. "He had been beaten with a cudgel, I should say. Look at him."

"No doubt about that! But Levison—the utter young brute."

"He will have to answer for it" said Kildare.

He raised the moaning junior in his strong arms.

"Racker!"

There was no reply. The closed eyes did not open. Blood showed on Racker's face, oozing from under his hair. It was only too clear that his injuries had not been caused by human knuckles.

"Langton, you cut off to the doctor's!" said Kildare quickly. "Tell him to come up to the school as fast as he can. You give me a hand home with this poor kid, Darrel."

"Right you are!"

Langton ran back to the lane, and started for the village at a swift run. Kildare and Darrel carried Racker tenderly enough back to the road, and bore him away towards the school.

They walked in silence.

The horror of the situation had made their faces pale. How serious Racker's condition was, they could not tell; but they knew that it must be very serious. There was black disgrace for the school to come; not only the expulsion of the wretched junior who had been guilty of this, but perhaps worse, for if Racker was seriously injured, it must be a matter for the police. The thought of it made them shiver. The police—at St. Jim's! A St. Jim's fellow taken away from the school, like Eugene Aram of old, with gyves upon his wrists. It was horrible; but it was only too possible.

They reached the school gates at last.

Taggles opened them at once. The old porter gazed in horror at the insensible junior as he was carried in. Kildare and Darrel went on to the School House with their burden.

Mr. Railton was in the hall, awaiting them. He came forward quickly.

"You have found him! Good Heavens, Kildare! what has happened to the boy?" exclaimed the House-master, in agitated tones.

"We found him like this, sir."

"Where?"

"In the wood close by the lane—the place that Levison told you."

"Levison!" said Mr. Railton, compressing his lips hard. "Racker, my boy—he is quite unconscious!"

"He was so when we found him, sir."

"Take him to the sanatorium at once, Kildare. I will telephone to Dr. Short."

"Langton has gone to the doctor already, sir—he will be on his way here now. I thought it better—"

"Quite so—it was thoughtful of you. Take him to the sanatorium, then. I will come with you."

The insensible junior was carried away.

A few minutes later Racker was in bed in the school hospital, and Miss Pinch, the head nurse, was taking care of him. Mr. Railton, with a grim brow, went to the head's house, to acquaint Dr. Holmes with what had happened.

When the medical gentleman, with Langton, arrived from Rylcombe, dashing up in his trap, he found Dr. Holmes and the House-master both in the ward with the unfortunate junior.

The two masters remained silent and apart while the doctor examined his patient, and gave instructions to the nurse.

Then Dr. Short joined them. His face was very grave.

"Tell us what has happened to the boy, doctor," said the Head, in low, strained tones.

"He has been beaten with some heavy weapon—a cudgel of some sort," said the doctor. "The ruffian who did it must have been a thorough brute—some drunken hooligan, I should say."

"And his condition?"

"Fortunately, there is no injury of a grave kind. He will certainly be very ill, but no bones are injured—and that is very odd," said the medical gentleman thoughtfully. "Not a drunken hooligan, I think, on second thoughts. The boy has been cruelly thrashed with a heavy stick, but his assailant must have been careful not to strike where the injury would have been

serious. Whoever assaulted him knew what he was about, and was careful. He appears to have wished to inflict the maximum of punishment with the minimum of danger of severe penalties to himself afterwards, if brought to account. Some tramp—

"The injuries could not have been inflicted in a fist fight?"

"Quite impossible!"

"When will the boy recover consciousness?"

"He is on the way to recovering it now. But he must not be disturbed. I have given Miss Pinch a soothing draught for him. It will be impossible to question him till to-morrow afternoon at the earliest."

The Head bowed.

"If you would like me to call in at the police station on my way home, I am quite at your service, Dr. Holmes."

Dr. Holmes started.

"I—I think not, at present," he stammered.

The medical gentleman glanced at him.

"The sooner the police are on the track of the brutal ruffian the better, surely?" he remarked.

Dr. Holmes's face was crimson.

"I put myself in your hands, doctor," he said, in low tones. "I have only too much reason to believe that the injuries were inflicted by—one of his school-fellows!"

"Bless my soul! Impossible, surely?"

"I fear it."

Dr. Short pursed his lips.

"If the matter turns out so serious as to require the intervention of the authorities, of course, that step must be taken," said the Head. "But unless it is absolutely necessary—you comprehend—"

"I understand. The matter is in your hands, not mine," said Dr. Short. "We shall be able to judge better of the boy's condition to-morrow."

And the little medical gentleman took his leave.

Mr. Railton and the Head regarded one another in silence for some moments.

"Levison!" said the Head, at last.

"I see no other explanation, sir. But—there is a possibility—at all events, Racke will be able to state exactly what happened, when he recovers."

"That such disgrace should come upon this school!" said the Head bitterly. "But—there is a chance, a hope, that—as you say, Racke will be able to tell us what happened. Until then, judgment must be suspended."

The two gentlemen left the ward. In

his bed, watched by the patient nurse! Racke, of the Shell, lay still unconscious, moaning from time to time.

CHAPTER 17.

Startling News.

CLANG! clang! clang!
Tom Merry turned out of bed in the Shell dormitory.

His first glance went to Racke's bed. It was still empty. The missing junior had not returned.

The Shell were in an unusually subdued mood that morning as they dressed. What had happened to Racke?

It could no longer be doubted that something serious had taken place. The juniors' faces were grave as they went down.

Levison of the Fourth was already down. He hurried up to Tom Merry as the Terrible Three came downstairs.

"Did Racke come back?" he asked quickly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"His bed's still empty," he said.

"Then—then he's been out all night?"

"Looks like it."

Levison stared at the Shell fellows.

"But—what could keep him out all night?" he stammered.

"Goodness knows!"

"Unless you know, Levison," said Manners quietly.

Levison gave him a fierce look.

"How should I know?"

Manners shrugged his shoulders, and the chums of the Shell walked on. Tom Merry tapped at Kildare's door. The captain of St. Jim's was already up, and he opened the door. His handsome face darkened at the sight of Levison.

"What is it?" he asked curtly.

"About Racke," said Tom. "You didn't find him last night—"

"Yes, he was found."

"He didn't come back to the dorm!" exclaimed Lowther. "Where is he, Kildare?"

"In the sanatorium."

"Oh!" said the Terrible Three together.

"He was hurt," said Kildare. "The doctor's got him in charge now. That's all I can tell you. I daresay you'll hear the rest soon from the Head. Cut along!"

Levison sprang forward.

"You say he's hurt, Kildare?"

"You ought to know," said Kildare bitterly.

"I? How should I know? He wasn't hurt when I felt him—not much more than I was. Do you think—"

"That's enough, Levison! You haven't got to answer to me, but to the Head—or to a magistrate," said the captain of St. Jim's drily.

"A—a—a magistrate!" stammered Levison.

Kildare walked away without replying. Levison stood in the passage, his face pale as death, looking stunned.

"A magistrate!" said Tom Merry, whose face had grown pale, too. "Levison, you mad idiot, what did you do to Racke?" Levison seemed to gasp for breath.

"I—I licked him! That's all, I swear! He was hard hit, but so was I. But—but he could have got home if he liked. I know that. What did that fool mean by talking about a magistrate?"

"What does Racke's being in sanny mean?" said Manners grimly. "A chap isn't sent into sanny for a licking."

"You fool!" shouted Levison. "What do you think I did to him then?"

"I don't know. I know you'll have to answer for it."

"It was a fair fight," said Levison huskily. "A fair fight—man to man. If they say I hurt him enough to put him into the sanatorium, it's a lie!"

"He's there," said Tom Merry.

"Then I—I can't understand it."

Levison hurried out of the house. His brain was in a whirl. What had happened to Racke?

He dashed across breathlessly to the Head's garden, and scudded through the garden to the sanatorium. Miss Marie, the girl nurse, was outside; she had just come out, her sweet face very grave. Levison ran up to her.

"Miss Marie! Is Racke here?"

"Yes. Miss Pinch is with him now."

"What's he here for?"

"He is hurt," said Marie.

"But—but how was he hurt?" asked Levison. "A chap isn't hurt so much as all that by a scrap."

Miss Marie looked at him curiously. She did not know the cause of Levison's anxiety. She could only suppose that, as a schoolfellow of Racke's, he was anxious about his state.

"He has been very cruelly used," said the girl gently. "Some ruffian has attacked him, and beaten him brutally with a cudgel."

Levison staggered.

"With a cudgel!" he repeated faintly.

"Yes."

"And—and he is badly hurt?"

"It is not so serious as it might have been, but he will be ill for some time," said Miss Marie. "You need not be anxious

about him; he has every care, and will recover in time."

Levison broke into a hard, jarring laugh. He was not anxious about Racke.

"Beaten with a cudgel?" he said. "Has the doctor seen him?"

"Yes, last night. He is coming again this morning."

"Does he say he was beaten with a cudgel?"

"Yes, of course."

"He's a silly fool, then!" said Levison, and he turned and strode away, leaving Marie staring after him in surprise.

Levison returned to the School House. All the fellows were down now, and Racke of the Sholl was the one topic of conversation. Questions had been asked on all sides, and the facts as to Racke's condition were pretty well known. By breakfast time all St. Jim's knew that Racke had been found in the wood, insensible, the victim of a brutal attack. At the Fourth Form table, the fellows sitting near Levison squeezed as far away from him as they could. The looks that were cast upon him were full of horror and aversion.

Levison sat like one stunned.

His first idea had been that the doctor had been mistaken—that Racke, with some tortuous schemes of revenge in his cunning brain, had deliberately deceived him, in order to make serious trouble for Levison.

But a little reflection proved that that could not be the case. Dr. Short must know what was the matter with Racke.

How had it happened, then?

Not by his hand—he had used no weapon. He had fought out the fight with his enemy—savagely, ruthlessly, he admitted that; but he had used only his fists. Who had attacked Racke, then, after he had left him? For it came to that. Some unknown hand had inflicted the injuries Racke was suffering from, that was clear. But whose hand?

Levison came out of the dining-room with the rest of the Fourth, who shrank away from contact with him. Only Cardew and Clive joined him in the passage. Their faces were gloomy and troubled. Levison gave them a bitter look. He read in their faces the same black suspicion that was in every other round him.

"You utter fool, Levison!" muttered Cardew. "What have you done?"

Levison gave a hard laugh.

"Fool yourself! What do you think I've done?"

"You know how Racke was found," said Clive. "The prefects found him in the place you left him in—"

"So it seems."

"And you——"

"I left him there, in the grass," said Levison steadily. "I didn't touch him with anything but my hands."

"Then how do you account——"

"I don't account for it. But I've got nothing to be afraid of," said Levison contemptuously. "Somebody seems to have laid into Racke with a stick. Some footpad, perhaps, to rob him—you know Racke was always bursting with money. When Racke comes to he can say."

"Then you say that Racke will clear you when he comes to and tells what happened?" asked Cardew.

"Of course."

"By gad, that's good news!" said Cardew, eyeing Levison. "If it's true, I shall be jolly glad to hear it. It sounds a bit thick, I must say."

"You'd rather believe that I did it—that I acted like a cowardly brute of a Hun?" said Levison, between his teeth.

"Not at all. But it does sound thick, all the same. But if you give me your word——"

"Well, I give it."

"All serene!" said Cardew. "I take it. We'll wait till Racke comes to, and see what he says."

"I say the same," said Clive, after a moment's hesitation. "Goodness knows, I don't want to believe such a horrible thing of you, Levison! But I saw you when you went out yesterday, and you looked——"

Kildare came up to the three juniors.

"You're wanted in the Head's study, Levison," he said curtly.

"Yes, Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's looked curiously at the Fourth Former as he went. Levison held his head erect, and he did not look like a fellow who was going to answer for a brutal act of ruffianism. His head was still erect and his step was firm as he entered the Head's study.

CHAPTER 18.

Be ore the Head.

DR. HOLMES fixed his stern eyes upon Levison. Mr. Railton was standing by the window, and his eyes, too, turned searchingly upon the Fourth Former. Levison's face was calm and firm.

"You sent for me, sir?" His voice did not falter.

"Yes, Levison, I sent for you," said the Head. "Doubtless you are aware of the

circumstances under which Racke of the Shell was found last night?"

"I have heard what the fellows say, sir."

"Racke lies in the sanatorium at present," said the Head. "I learn that he has recovered consciousness, but by the doctor's orders he must not be questioned yet. I fear, however, that there is no doubt as to how he came by his injuries. They were inflicted by your hand."

"No, sir."

The Head raised his eyebrows.

"You deny it, Levison?"

"Certainly, sir."

"It appears, from what Mr. Railton has told me, that you followed Racke yesterday in order to fight with him."

"That is true, sir."

"You fought with him in the wood, close by the lane to Rylcombe, where there is a dip in the road?"

"Yes, sir."

"You left him there, lying in the grass? So much you have already told Mr. Railton."

"That is quite correct, sir."

"Upon that spot, Levison, Racke was found last night by Kildare. He was insensible. Was he insensible when you left him?"

"No, sir."

"He was insensible when he was found. His injuries, though they will not, fortunately, impair his health permanently, are of a serious nature, and were inflicted by a heavy stick, according to the doctor's report. He was, in fact, beaten in the most cruel and cowardly manner with a cudgel while he lay defenceless. Do you deny doing this?"

Levison's lip quivered.

"I deny it, sir. I hadn't the faintest idea that such a thing had happened. I couldn't believe it at first when I heard it."

The Head's keen eyes searched his face. He had, after all, expected denial—not that denial was of much use.

"I couldn't have done such a rotten thing, sir!" panted Levison, who easily read his condemnation in the severe face before him. "I shouldn't do such a rotten, cowardly thing, whatever Racke had done to me! We had a fair fight; you can see that I was hurt, too."

"You did not use a stick or weapon of any kind?"

"Of course I didn't!" said Levison passionately. "It's an insult to ask me whether I did or not!"

"Calm yourself, Levison. Unfortunately, the matter appears only too clear. But you will have the strictest justice;

You need not fear as to that. I shall be only too glad if it can be proved that it was not a St. Jim's boy who committed this vile deed. Your contention, then, is that after you had left Racke someone else must have assaulted him in this cruel manner?"

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"It does not seem probable, Levison."

"I can't help that, sir. If Racke is injured as you say, it was not I who did it."

"I have seen him, Levison, and there is no doubt as to his state. You repeat that he was conscious when you left him?"

"Certainly he was. A fellow doesn't lose his senses from being punched, I suppose. I didn't punch him much harder than he punched me."

"If he was conscious, Levison, and was attacked by another person after you were gone, he must be quite aware of the fact, and will say so."

"Of course, sir."

"Very good. The matter, then, will stand over until Racke's evidence can be obtained," said the Head.

Levison drew a deep breath.

"That's all right, sir; I'm not afraid. I suppose it was some footpad. Racke has lots of money—"

"A footpad would not be under the necessity of using him so cruelly, Levison, in order to rob him. Is Racke the kind of boy to resist desperately in such a case?"

"Well, no, sir. He is a good deal of a funk."

"In that case," said the Head drily, "he would have yielded his money to a footpad without resistance."

"I—I suppose he would, sir."

"That completely puts the supposed footpad out of the question, I think."

Levison was silent.

"You may go, Levison. You will be called when required."

Levison turned to the door, and turned back.

"One moment, sir," Levison's keen brain did not fail him, even in that emergency. "I must point out something to you, sir."

"You may speak."

"Somebody must have done this to Racke after I left him. I can't think it was a St. Jim's chap. And why should a stranger hurt him? It must have been a footpad, sir."

"I have already dealt with that suggestion, Levison."

"Yes, sir; but there's another point. Racke had a lot of money about him; he never has less than twenty pounds. If it

was a footpad who went for him, his money will be gone. Have you looked, sir?"

The Head glanced at Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster coughed.

"Shall I make the examination, sir?" he asked.

"Pray do, Mr. Railton."

The Housemaster left the study at once. Dr. Holmes scanned Levison's face as if he would read his soul.

"Levison, you have made a suggestion that I cannot avoid acting upon. If Racke's money is gone, there is at least a possibility that he was assaulted and robbed by a footpad. That possibility makes it incumbent upon me to place the matter in the hands of the police."

"Yes, sir," said Levison quietly.

"If you are guilty, Levison, you must realise what this means for you. The police having once taken the matter up, they may not let it drop again. Instead of being judged for your conduct by me, you may be judged by a magistrate."

"I am willing to answer for my conduct anywhere, sir," said Levison steadily. "I have told the truth."

The Head was silent till Mr. Railton returned to the study. He brought Crooke with him.

"I have searched Racke's clothes, sir," said the House-master. "His watch and chain are gone, and there is no money, no purse, or pocket-book. As Crooke is Racke's study-mate, he knows, doubtless, whether Racke had money with him, and can tell you."

"Do you know, Crooke, whether Racke had money with him when he left the school yesterday?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir," said Crooke. "I saw him put his pocket-book in his pocket, and he had put currency notes into it. He had just had a registered letter from his father."

"What was the amount of the money?"

"There was a five-pound note, sir, and a lot of currency notes. I don't know how many."

"I was not aware that a junior in the school was supplied with money in this way," said the Head, frowning. "You are sure of what you state, Crooke?"

"Oh, quite, sir. Racke always had plenty of money. He never went about without a good deal in his pockets."

"You are certain he had this pocket-book with him, with so much money in it, when he left the school yesterday?"

"Quite certain, sir."

"Was he wearing a watch and chain?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good! You may go, Crooke."

Crooke left the study, with a sidelong

glance at Levison. There was a short silence.

"Levison," said the Head at last, "it appears that Racke was robbed last night—at all events, that his money was taken."

"You couldn't suspect me of doing that, sir," said Levison, almost smiling.

"No, Levison. But it may have been a trick, in the hope of making it believed that a footpad had done what you had done. Boy, if you removed Racke's property, and concealed it, with this object in view—"

Levison compressed his lips.

"I did not, sir."

"You can see, Levison, the position in which I am placed. Racke cannot be questioned to-day—perhaps not even to-morrow. The money is missing. I have no resource but to telephone to Inspector Skeat at Rylcombe, and ask him to call here. The matter will then be in the hands of the police."

"I understand that, sir."

"For the last time, Levison, have you any confession to make before the matter passes out of my hands?"

"None, sir," Levison's voice was firm and hard. "I have told you the truth."

"Very well! You may go."

Levison left the study quietly. Dr. Holmes turned to the telephone and took up the receiver.

CHAPTER 19.

The Benefit of the Doubt.

ST. JIM'S was at morning lessons when Levison left the Head's study. He went directly to the Fourth Form room, and went to his place. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth glanced at him, but made no remark.

Levison was quite calm now.

Amazing as it seemed, there was no further doubt that after he had left Racke some unknown rascal had attacked him and robbed him of his money and jewellery. As soon as Racke was able to speak the truth would be known, and he would be have reason to be obliged to Levison, too, for having let the police so promptly on the track of the thief. Until Racke could speak Levison had to remain under suspicion.

There was no help for that. But the knowledge that it could not be for long calmed him. He could face black and scornful looks, knowing that in a day or two at the outside the fellows would be sorry for their suspicions.

He went through morning lessons sedately. Mr. Lathom had no fault to find with him.

If he was guilty his nerve was wonderful. But the juniors knew Levison's nerve from of old. He had been famous for his cool nerve in the days when he was known as the hardest case at St. Jim's. Guilty or not, he was not likely to fail in that quality. In another fellow, perhaps, such calmness would have given an impression of innocence. It was not so in Levison's case. His old hardihood was a little too well known.

How could he be innocent? The suggestion that after he had left Racke some unknown person had assaulted the Shell fellow in that savage manner was possible—but it sounded, as Cardew had said, too thick. Levison had declared that he had licked Racke, and, after all, Racke was the bigger and more powerful of the two—it was easy to suppose that, finding himself getting the worst of the fight, Levison had resorted to a weapon of some kind. His cool assurance that he would be cleared as soon as Racke could speak was regarded simply as impudence—"Neck," as Herries expressed it.

When morning lessons were over Cardew and Clive joined their study mate, but the rest of the Fourth avoided him. Levison noted it, with a sardonic smile that was very like the old Levison. He strode up to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the quadrangle, and stopped directly in front of him.

"I've got something to say to you," said Levison, "and to all the fellows."

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass and gave him a withering look, with the assistance of the famous monocle.

"Pway don't address me, Levi-on." ●

"Why not?" said Levison coolly.

"Because you are an uttah wotah, and I wefuse to have anythin' whatevah to say to you," exclaimed Augustus indignantly.

"Just a word," said Levison calmly. "You believe that I treated Racke in that rotten cowardly way?"

"Yaas, watah!"

"We know you did," growled Jack Blake. "What's the good of talking? You'll be kicked out of the school for it; that's one comfort."

"Give the chap a chance!" said Cardew. "Can't you wait till Racke comes round, and says whether it was Levison!"

"What rot!" said Herries. "We know it was Levi-on."

"Yes, rather," said Robert Arthur Digby, with emphasis. Study No. 6,

evidently, were in no doubt about this matter.

Levison smiled bitterly.

"I give you my word that I did not do it, and that it will be known as soon as Racke can speak," he said. "Can't you give me a chance till then?"

"Bai jove! If you weally give your word Levison—"

"Honour bright!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated.

"Weally, you fellows, we have no wight to wufuse to take Levison's word, when it will be put to the test to-morrow."

"That just dawned on you?" said Levison sarcastically.

"Weally, Levison—"

"Well, I don't either," said Blake.

"I don't want to give a fellow a kick when he's down. If you didn't do it, Levison, you seem to have taken a lot of trouble to make things look as if you did. Still, I suppose we can wait till Racke speaks before we make up our minds."

"Yaas, that's only fair play."

"Fair play's all I want," said Levison.

"Well, you'll have it. But—when it comes out—ahem, I mean if it comes out that you did it, you know what to expect."

"The sack!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I know that," said Levison. "But I'm not expecting the sack all the same. I've got nothing to fear."

In spite of themselves, Levison's assurance made an impression on the juniors. Why should he lie, to be found out in so short a time?

"The Head's letting the matter stand over till Racke can give evidence," added Levison. "I ask you fellows to do the same. That's not asking much."

"That's a go," said Blake.

"Bai jove! Heah comes old Skeat."

All eyes were turned upon the portly form of Inspector Skeat, as he crossed from the gates of the house. The juniors looked very serious when the fat Inspector had passed in.

"So the peelers are taking it up?" said Clive.

"Naturally," said Levison, "Racke was robbed as well as beaten—watch and chain and pocket-book. That's where Skeat comes in."

"You're sure he was robbed?" asked Blake.

"Quite; Railton searched his clobber and found everything gone."

"Bai Jove! We could hardly suspect Levison of wobbin' him, you chaps!"

"Well, no," admitted Blake.

Crooke had joined the group, and he broke in with his sneering laugh.

"You can't see the dodge!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "That's Levison's game—he's hidden Racke's things somewhere—to make out that he was robbed, to put it on some tramp or other."

"Bai Jove! I neval thought of that!"

Crooke's suggestion took root. It was probable enough, if Levison was guilty. Levison walked away with a frowning brow. He met the Terrible Three a little later, and they did not avoid him. Tom Merry came up to him frankly.

"Blake's told me what you've said, Levison," he began. "I think it's only fair to leave the matter open till Racke speaks. There's not going to be any ragging—"

"Ragging!" repeated Levison.

"Well, some of the fellows were suggesting it. We've put our foot down."

"Thank you for nothing," said Levison coolly. "I can look after myself."

"I don't think you'd have much chance against Grundy. However, that's been put a stop to," said Tom quietly. "The matter stands over till Racke gets better. Then the school will let you know what it thinks of you."

"Then the school will find out that it's a silly ass," said Levison; and he walked away.

A little later, as the Fourth Former was walking moodily under the trees, there was a sudden outburst of yelling. Levison looked round, to see his minor and Piggott of the Third engaged in deadly combat. Piggott's head was in chancery, and Frank Levison was pounding away as if for a wager.

Levison burst into a laugh.

"Hold on, Franky! Do you want to slaughter him?"

Frank looked round with a crimson face. Piggott tore himself loose and fled, his fingers to his streaming nose.

"What on earth's the row?" asked Levison major. "You're not usually such a fiery fire-eater, Frank."

"He—he said—he said——" Frank stammered.

Levison understood, and his brow darkened.

"About me?" he asked.

"Yes, Ernie." Frank came closer to his brother. "I know it isn't true, it's a rotten lie. You couldn't do such a thing! I—I've had three fights in the Third already."

Levison's face softened.

"You're a good little chap, Frank! O!

course it isn't true. And it will be proved to-morrow at the latest—perhaps to-day."

"I knew it!" breathed Frank.

"You'd better go and bathe your eye," said Levison, laughing. "Don't do any more scrapping on my account, Frank. Let 'em say what they like!"

Frank nodded as he cut away, but his look was not pacific at all. Until Levison's name was cleared, it was probable that Frank's career in the Third Form would be a warlike one.

A few minutes later Levison was called into the House to interview Inspector Skeat. The inspector questioned him closely, in the presence of the Head, with very keen eyes fixed upon his face, and dismissed him at last, leaving Levison to guess what opinion he might have formed. And Baggy Trimble, who had waited in the passage with the charitable hope of seeing Levison marched off in handcuffs, was disappointed.

CHAPTER 20.

Racke's Evidence.

RACKE lay still, his bruised face looking out from the whiteness of the pillow. It was very quiet in the ward. Near the head of the bed, Miss Marie sat, sewing, and watching over the patient. Racke's eyes turned upon her, and turned away again. He was in pain—acute pain. He could not move his limbs without pain. His eyes gleamed with a baleful light as he lay, his thoughts working.

He had long been conscious, but he had not spoken yet. The doctor had been to see him twice already that day, and was satisfied with his state. Racke knew that it would be a long time before he recovered from that cruel beating—weeks, perhaps. Beyond that there was nothing to fear. Bill Jenner had acted like the brute he was, but he had not desired to earn a long sentence in case of discovery and capture. Racke had been thrashed so severely that he was bruised and bleeding, but that was all. It was enough for Racke; he was not grateful that it was no worse. His heart was full of savage bitterness as he lay there.

He had remembered that scene in the wood, every detail of it was clear in his memory. But it was not towards the ruffianly tramp, but towards Levison, that his bitter hatred was directed. Levison had thrashed him, had left him lying there helpless to fall a victim to the tramp's revenge. What Jenner had done

to him was no more brutal than what he had done to Jenner. He would gladly have inflicted the most savage punishment upon the ruffian, not from a sense of justice, but from angry revenge. But his feelings towards Jenner were mild compared with his feelings towards Levison.

Miss Marie little guessed the thoughts that were working behind Racke's burning eyes.

What was he to say when he was questioned? That thought hammered in Racke's brain. For his story would be followed by a search for the tramp, and the arrest of Jenner; there was little doubt of that. And the tramp would tell his own story, in extenuation of his brutality, and it would all come out that Racke had been out of bounds on Tuesday night, that the tramp had met him in the lane between eleven o'clock and midnight, that could not be concealed.

Through this unlucky happening, his shady secrets would be exposed to the light of day. It could not be helped. Some explanation would be required as to why Jenner had used him so savagely; the robbery did not account for that. The tramp's story would supply the explanation. Racke's secret rascality, so long and so carefully hidden, would be dragged to light. He was now an object of sympathy, but he would become an object of scorn and condemnation, and he would be expelled from the school!

He had little doubt of that. Some of his shady ways had become known already, and he had received serious warning from the Head. Clear proof that he had stolen out of the school late at night to meet low characters at a public-house would be the finishing touch.

What was he to say to his father?

The purse-proud war-profitier had sent him to St. Jim's with an object. He was to make "nobby" acquaintances there, to gain the "polish" which was so necessary to the parvenu. And if he were kicked out of the school in disgrace, under circumstances which would make it practically impossible for him to be admitted to any school with a reputation to keep up, what would his father say?

Racke would imagine the rage and wrath in Mr. Racke's face, his angry disappointment and fury. Not that the elder Racke would have had much condemnation for the act which had caused the expulsion. The morality of the war-profitier was not on a very high level. It was the being found out and sacked that would enrage Mr. Racke chiefly.

And what would follow?

He would be sent to some third or fourth-rate school, perhaps not to school at all, but into his father's office. The thought made the pseudo-proud, arrogant son of the war-profiteer writhe. What a fool he had been!

It was all due to Levison—Levison from beginning to end! Racke ground his teeth as he thought of Levison.

And if he were sacked, he could not even have the small satisfaction of ruining Levison along with himself. There was nothing against Ernest Levison now—nothing that he could prove, at all events.

Miss Marie glanced at him kindly. She did not like Racke a little bit, but she was all kindness now.

"Is there anything you would like?" she asked softly.

Racke made an impatient gesture.

The girl resumed her sewing.

Miss Marie could not help him. What was he going to do? That was the question. His reckless escapade had to be kept secret somehow, but to keep it secret, Jenner must be allowed to escape. He could easily make up his mind to that; he hoped the ruffian was a hundred miles away. But could he refuse to tell what had happened, and how could he refuse? When the Head questioned him—and it could not long be delayed now—what was he to say? He would have to tell how he had come by his injuries. The rest would follow.

It was as he lay brooding over that maddening problem, that a thought came into Racke's mind that made him start, and brought a blaze of malicious joy into his eyes.

Levison!

Fool that he had been not to think of it before! Levison! His revenge upon Levison, and the keeping of his secret at one blow. His eyes blazed as he thought of it, and he laughed—a harsh, jarring laugh that made Miss Marie glance at him quickly. She feared for a moment that her patient was becoming delirious.

Racke smiled at her.

He could smile now—he felt better already. His difficulties had vanished like snow before the rising sun, and his purpose was fixed.

There would be no search for Jenner, no inconvenient story told by the tramp when he was in the hands of the police. He had nothing to fear. No one but himself knew that Jenner had appeared on the scene at all, and he had only to keep his mouth shut. But Levison—Levison, his enemy, would be overwhelmed with disgrace and shame, and driven from the

school—more, ten times more, than he had ever hoped to be able to inflict upon the object of his hatred. If he had been in his usual cool state of mind, he would have thought of this at once. But he had thought of it at last!

"Miss Marie!"

The girl raised her eyes.

"Yes?"

"I—I suppose there's been a lot of talk about this—about what's happened to me?"

"I think so."

"Is the Head coming to see me?"

"He is coming in soon," said Marie.

"If you are strong enough, he will speak to you. Not till you choose."

"I'm strong enough now," said Racke.

"I will tell Dr. Holmes when he comes"

Racke lay silent again.

There was still that unnatural gleam in his eyes that disturbed his nurse a little. But Racke was quite calm now. He was almost glad now that the ruffian, Jenner, had handled him like this. It had placed his enemy in his power in a way he had never dreamed of. Not a spark of compunction was there in his hard heart for the wrong he was about to do. He felt only savage satisfaction. He was eager for the Head to come.

Miss Marie rose from the bedside quietly, and moved out of his sight. He heard a murmur of low voices.

Then the stately form of the Head appeared at the bedside, and the kind eyes looked down upon Racke's bruised face.

"You feel better, my boy?" asked Dr. Holmes gently.

"Yes, sir," said Racke faintly.

"The doctor has given permission for you to speak, if you feel strong enough, Racke. Do you feel able to tell me what happened to you yesterday?"

"If you wish, sir."

"Pray tell me."

"I—I don't want to get a fellow into trouble, sir," said Racke. "I'd rather not give his name sir."

Dr. Holmes's face hardened.

"One word, Racke. Was it a boy belonging to this school who used you in this way?"

"Yes, sir."

Racke's voice did not falter. The die was cast now.

"His name, Racke?"

Racke did not speak. He desired to keep up an appearance of reluctance to betray his assailant.

"Was it the boy you fought with in the wood, Racke?"

"Yes, sir."

"Levison, of the Fourth Form?"

"Must I tell you, sir?"

"I command you, Racke!"

"It—it was Levison, sir."

The Head set his lips. He had had no doubt of it, but if he had had any doubt, that doubt would have disappeared now.

"Racke, one word more. Levison states that he left you conscious and well in the wood. He suggests that after he left you, someone else may have done you this injury."

"Oh, sir!"

"Levison's statement is not correct, Racke?"

"No, sir."

"That will do, my boy."

"I—I don't want to get Levison into trouble, sir," said Racke. "He—he didn't mean to hurt me so much, perhaps, but—but with a stick he didn't realise how much it would hurt—"

"I understand you, Racke. Rest now, my poor boy."

Dr. Holmes moved away.

Racke lay and stared at the white ceiling. For a moment he scarcely felt the pain that ached through his bruised body. He suffered, but his situation was enviable compared with Levison's. He would recover, he would resume his place in the school as of old; but for Levison, of the Fourth, driven from St. Jim's in shame and disgrace, what hope was there?

CHAPTER 21.

Expelled from St. Jim's.

TOM MERRY & CO. were about to march out of the Shell room after lessons, when Toby, the page, came in with a message to Mr. Linton. The form-master's face became very grave.

He turned to his class again.

"You will go into the Big Hall, my boys," he said. "The Head has directed that the school assemble there."

The Shell fellows marched out, wondering a little. As soon as they were in the corridor, a buzz of excited voices broke out.

"Big Hall!" said Telbot. "What's that for?"

"Flogging, or the sack for somebody," remarked Gore.

"My hat!" ejaculated Grundy. "Levison, of course. Levison's going to be sacked. Well, I must say he asked for it."

"Looks like it," said Monty Lowther. "I suppose the Head's seen Racke, and Racke's told him what happened."

The Fourth Form were streaming out

now, Levison among them. Levison was not looking alarmed.

"You fellows been told?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We've got marching orders for Big Hall."

"Same here," said Tom Merry.

"What's on the carpet?" asked George Figgins. "Somebody up for a terrific row—what?"

"Levison, I suppose."

There was a cackle from Baggy Trimble.

"He, he, he! Levison's been found out! He, he, he!"

"Is it about you, Levison?" asked Redfern.

"It can't be," said Levison calmly.

"Why should the school be called together on my account?"

"It means an expulsion, of course," grinned Crooke. "You're going to get it in the neck for smashing up Racke, you rotter!"

"By gad, it looks bad, Levison," muttered Cardew.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Now, then, into the Hall with you!" called Kildare, coming along the passage.

"What's it all about, Kildare?"

"You'll see soon enough," said the captain of St. Jim's, gruffly. "Cut along with you."

"I say, Kildare, is Levison going to be sacked?" giggled Baggy Trimble.

"Shut up and cut along!"

The juniors made their way to the Big Hall. The seniors were going in, too, all the Forms of St. Jim's, and both Houses. It was an assembly of the whole school. Plainly something of a most unusual nature was to take place, and it could scarcely be anything but a flogging or an expulsion. And who could be the scape-goat but Levison, of the Fourth? Nobody else in the school was under the frown of the authorities.

Levison's face was a little pale now.

In spite of his coolness and his confidence in his innocence of the more serious part of the charge against him, he could not help feeling a vague unrest and alarm. Were all these preparations on his account? But the Head had promised to defer the matter until Racke could speak. And if Racke had spoken, his innocence was clear. What had he to dread? Yet a deep uneasiness weighed in his heart.

Frank Levison caught his brother's sleeve as he went into the hall. The fag looked up at his face, with terror in his own.

"Ernie!" His voice was scarcely audible. "Ernie! It—it can't be— Oh, Ernie!"

Levison shook his head, and tried to smile.

"It's not on my account, Frank."

"You—you're sure?"

"Quite sure, kid! I've nothing to fear. Cheer up! Get along to your place, Franky."

Frank rejoined the Third, somewhat comforted, but still with fear in his heart. Piggott grinned at him maliciously. Piggott had no doubt about what was going to happen. Wally D'Arcy looked downcast and worried. He had little regard for Levison, and he believed him guilty; but he understood what a shock it would be to Frank, and Frank was his chum.

"Buck up, kid!" muttered Wally. "It mayn't be all about your major after all, you know. Perhaps Crooke's been found out—or Cutts of the Fifth."

Frank would have been glad to think so. He nodded to Wally, but did not speak. He could not speak at that moment. He could only wait in dumb apprehension for the blow to fall. In spite of his hopes, in spite of his brother's assurance, he felt that it must fall. He could read it in every face about him.

In the ranks of the Fourth Levison stood erect. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. He would not betray by his looks the secret misgiving in his breast. Yet what had he to fear? He asked himself passionately again and again. As soon as the truth was known, the fellows would realise that they had wronged him. He had nothing to fear—yet, why was Kildare looking at him like that? Kildare must know why the school was assembled. Why did Mr. Railton avert his glance as he passed him? Why? Why was his Form master, Mr. Lathom, looking at him so strangely? Was it he, after all, who was the central figure in this scene? But why—why?

His heart beat almost to cation. But outwardly he was calm. The nerve that had never failed him in the old days did not fail him now.

The subdued hum of voices died away as the door at the upper end of the hall opened, and Dr. Holmes entered.

All eyes were fixed upon the Head.

The Doctor's face was grave and sombre.

For a moment he stood silent, his eyes sweeping over the sea of faces before him: all the Forms of St. Jim's standing ranked in the great hall. A pin might have been heard to drop in that moment. Then the Head's deep, clear voice broke the silence.

"Levison major! Stand forward!"

Levison did not stir. It was he, then—

he was the cause of this! But he stood rooted to the floor, dumb.

"Levison major!"

Mr. Lathom made a movement, and tapped Levison on the shoulder. The junior looked at him dully, and then moved up the hall.

He moved slowly. In the deep silence his footsteps sounded with a strange clearness.

He felt the sea of faces that turned upon him, as he walked slowly, with heavy steps, up the great hall to where the Head stood on the raised dais.

He stopped at last, under the eyes of the Head, bent sternly upon him.

"Levison!" The Head's voice was not loud, but it penetrated to every recess of the hall. "You stand before me, and before your schoolfellows, proved guilty of a dastardly outrage! You attacked a schoolfellow with unheard-of brutality, with such results that he will be ill for weeks. A schoolboy fight, even if carried to a brutal excess, might possibly be pardoned—but your offence is much greater than this. With some heavy weapon you beat your schoolfellow into a state of insensibility. For that there can be no pardon. You have disgraced your school, and you are about to leave it for ever!"

Levison licked his dry lips.

For a moment all turned dark about him. The Head's stern brow—the sea of faces—the big stained windows—seemed to swim in that terrible moment. He stood like one in a dream.

"You do not speak?" said the Head. "Perhaps, at this moment, some sense of shame ties your tongue. There is, indeed, nothing you could say in extenuation of your offence—I should say your crime. It is possible—I cannot say—that the law may take cognizance of your action. You will be held in custody, in the punishment-room of this House, until that matter is decided. But from the school you have shamed you are expelled!"

A gasping cry broke from Levison.

"Dr. Holmes! I—I— You promised—you would wait till Racke could tell you—"

"Wretched boy!" said the Head sternly. "I have questioned Racke, and he has told me all."

Levison staggered.

"He—he has told you—"

"Undoubtedly."

"But—but— Levison pulled him self together. "He—he has told you that I—I did that—Racke has told you—"

"Did you think it could be kept secret?" said the Head sternly. "Were you depending upon a mistaken sense of school-boy honour in your victim? I commanded Racke to give me the name of his assailant; reluctantly he obeyed my command. He gave me your name."

"My name!" stammered Levison. "My name! But——"

"Enough! You are expelled from the school, Levison! Public expulsion is the least punishment I can inflict; and if that is all, you may count yourself fortunate. You will remain in the punishment room till Inspector Skeat has seen you. Mr. Railton, will you take this boy away?"

The School House-master stepped forward.

Levison backed away, panting. "It's false!" he shouted. "It's false! Racke lied—I tell you he lied——"

"Take him away!"

The House-master's strong hand fell upon Levison's shoulder, and he was led from the hall. In the ranks of the Third there was a sudden movement as Frank Levison sought to rush towards his brother—but Wally held him back. The House-master passed from the hall with Levison. And there was a murmur of deep-drawn breath as he disappeared. The chequered career of Ernest Levison was over at last—the gates of St. Jim's were to close behind him—cast out of the school in shame and ignominy. It was the end!

CHAPTER 22. Loyal to the Last!

"**S**ACKED!"

The word was upon every lip as the juniors swarmed out of hall.

There were few to sympathise.

The act for which Levison had been condemned was so cowardly, so brutal, that sympathy was not easy to feel for him.

And the proof was clear. It had been clear enough before, for that matter; but it was placed beyond the shadow of a doubt now.

Levison himself had been content to let the verdict wait till Racke should speak. Racke had spoken—to condemn him!

He had relied, doubtless, upon a school-boy sense of honour in Racke—a refusal to "sneak" even under such extreme circumstances.

He had been foolish to rely upon it. In such a case no fellow could have refused to answer the Head's questions; and Racke, in particular, was not held to have a very keen sense of honour.

He had given the name of his assailant. He had been bound to give it.

If Levison had relied upon his keeping silence, he had not shown his usual keenness.

"It's a wotten bizney," Arthur Augustus said glumly, in the common-room. "Of course, there's no excuse for Levison—but it is wotten."

"I can't understand it," said Talbot, in a troubled tone. "I couldn't have believed it of him, only——"

"It's clear enough now," said Tom Merry.

"It was before!" growled Blake.

"I can't quite believe it now," said Talbot. "I don't say the evidence isn't clear enough, but——"

"Wats, deah boy! But it's wotten, all the same. You fellows wemembah how I backed up Levison in turnin' ovah a new leaf," said Arthur Augustus dismally. "I nevah thought it would end like this."

"There's some excuse for the poor rotter," said Tom Merry, knitting his brows. "Racke was down on him, in every rotten way, since Levison began trying to be decent. He never gave him any rest. And—and that yarn Racke told me about him, I daresay it was lies. It looks now as if it was. Levison couldn't have lost control of himself to this extent. I think, if what Racke said was the truth."

"I was sure that was false, anyway," said Talbot quietly. "Levison was playing the game right enough."

"I couldn't do anything but what I did," said Tom. "I couldn't keep him in the eleven, under the circumstances. That was at the bottom of this, I suppose; but I can't blame myself."

"Wathah not, deah boy! We should have scalped you if you'd kept him in the team for the Woodwood match."

"It's rot, there's no excuse for him," said Kangaroo. "A licking, if you like; but hammering a fellow with a stick till he's covered with bruises—pah! The sooner he's kicked out the better."

"I agree there," said Tom Merry. "But I'm sorry Levison's turned out like this."

"Like what?"

It was Frank Levison's voice. The fog had come into the common-room, and he heard Tom Merry's words.

The captain of the Shell gave him a look of compassion. What Frank was feeling like then showed plainly enough in his white, drawn face. The boy seemed to have grown years older in an hour.

"Like what?" repeated Frank, his eyes blazing, his little fists clenched.

"You rotter—you rotter! Do you believe he did it, then?"

Tom Merry was silent. He did not resent the fag's words. He would not have resented anything from poor Frank at that moment. Silence fell upon the juniors.

Frank's flashing eyes went from face to face, as if seeking one who would speak against his brother. But no word was spoken.

"You fools!" There was a break in his voice. "You fools! You think he did it—Ernie! He wouldn't—he couldn't!"

Crooke burst into a scoffing laugh.

"None of your heroes here!" he said contemptuously. "Your brother's a rotten hooligan, and he's sacked for it, and serve him jolly well right—why, you young idiot—keep off, oh, gad!"

The big Shell fellow was staggering back before the little fag's fierce attack. More by surprise than anything else, Crooke went with a crash to the floor as Frank's fists dashed into his face.

He scrambled up furiously.

"By gad! I'll—I'll—"

Talbot's strong arm swung him back.

"Let me go!" yelled Crooke. "I'll smash him!"

"You won't!" said Talbot grimly. "You'll let him alone! Keep your cowardly mouth shut!"

Tom Merry had taken Frank by the arm.

"Easy does it, young 'un," he said.

"That kind of thing won't do any good."

Frank gave him a fierce look; but he read only kindness and compassion in Tom's face, and his features worked.

"Ernie never did it," he muttered.

"He couldn't! Oh, it's wicked! One of the best fellows breathing—" His voice trailed off, and a heavy sob shook him from head to foot. "It's wicked! Ernie never did it."

Tom Merry did not reply. There was nothing to be said to faith like that. And he would not have shaken poor Frank's faith in his brother, if he could. If Frank could go on believing in Levison, let him.

Frank recovered himself in a moment. He would not give way to his misery under the sneering eyes of Crooke.

"Where's Clive—Cardew?" he muttered.

"Here," said Clive quietly. Cardew looked curiously at the fag, but did not speak.

"Do you believe this, Clive?"

Clive did not answer.

"You do?" muttered Frank. "And you, Cardew?"

"I—I—don't be an ass, young 'un," muttered Cardew.

"Then you believe it, too?"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders impatiently. What was the use of asking him if he believed what could not possibly be doubted?

Frank gave him only one look, and turned and quitted the room quickly. Cardew, after a moment's hesitation, followed him. He understood that Frank had come there to see his brother's friends, with some purpose in view. Cardew was more than willing to help him in any way he could. He owed that much to Levison low as he had fallen.

Tom Merry looked round at the juniors when Levison minor was gone.

"You fellows can see how that kid takes it," he said. "It's hard on him—rotten hard! No need to rub it in. Let him believe in his brother if he can."

"Yaas, watbah," said Arthur Augustus dismally. "Of course, nobody would think of speakin' to poor old Fwanky about his bwotah."

"Wouldn't they?" sneered Crooke.

"You won't!" said Tom Merry, fixing his eyes on the cad of the Shell. "You'll let Levison minor alone, Crooke! If you don't, you'll be sorry for it."

Crooke slunk away without replying. But he bore the warning in mind, and he did not seek Levison minor.

CHAPTER 23.

The Last Hope.

TRAMP! TRAMP!

Levison of the Fourth paced to and fro monotonously, regularly, in the narrow limits of the punishment-room.

Mr. Railton had conducted him there—overcome, almost stunned, by the misfortune that had befallen him. Without a word, though with a glimmer of compassion in his face, Mr. Railton had turned the key of "Nobody's Study," and left Levison to his thoughts.

Now he was alone.

Tramp! tramp! His ceaseless footsteps sounded dully on the bare boards of the floor.

Outside, occasionally, he caught the sound of footsteps.

But no one came near the door.

The punishment room in the School House—Nobody's Study, as it was called—was No. 1 in the Shell passage. It lay well back from the passage, at the end of a deep recess. It was barely furnished—seldom ever used. The bedstead was bare, in case of the room being occupied for the night, the page would have brought in bedding and bedclothes. But the roof

was not to be used that night. The prisoner was not to remain long.

Levison understood what was to happen.

He was to remain there till Inspector Skeat arrived from Rylcombe. If the inspector thought fit, he was to be taken away in custody. If otherwise, he was to be taken to the station by a master, and seen off to his home. Darkness was already falling; but he was not to pass another night under the old roof of St. Jim's.

The blow had fallen, but even yet Levison could scarcely realise it. Sacked from the school—for something that he had not done! In his old wild days, he had earned that sentence richly, a dozen times over; but his luck had always held. The black sheep of the School House had never wanted for a trick, a dodge, to save himself from punishment. Had he lost his cunning in giving up the old evil ways? For a whole term the past had been thrown behind—he had been without stain or reproach. And now the blow had fallen. Guilty, it had spared him; innocent, it had fallen upon him and crushed him! It was the irony of fate.

Racke had lied, of course. Levison had not foreseen that. Now that he knew it, he could hardly believe in such baseness. How could he expect others, then, to believe in it?

This was the revenge of the cad of the Shell. He was willing to allow his real assailant to escape, in order to compass Levison's ruin. Of Racke's secret and stronger motive for allowing the ruffian to elude punishment, Levison knew nothing. He did not know that Racke feared the ruffian's arrest, and what he would say when arrested. He did not know all the happenings of that reckless night out of bounds.

There was no help—no help! Look which way he would, he could see no gleam of hope. Somebody had assailed Racke in the wood; but without Racke's evidence, there was no chance that the unknown assailant would be discovered, or even thought of and searched for.

There was no hope!

To and fro the hapless junior paced, tirelessly, hopelessly, while the small square of the window grew darker and darker.

Alone, deserted by all! Where were his friends, his study mates? They believed him guilty, of course, as all the school did. After all, what else could they believe? But even so, might they not have come to him—to give him one word of comfort, one word of loyalty. They did not come. And

Frank—where was Frank? Had his brother deserted him, too?"

Levison felt a chill at his heart as he wondered. Had even Frank lost faith in him at last? His brother—and his father—he thought of his father now! The Head would telegraph, of course—a letter of explanation would follow—what would his father believe? He would believe the worst, probably he had had reports of Levison from the school before. What reception was he to receive at home?

If he went home at all! What if the inspector took him away—to a cell in Rylcombe Police Station! For Racke's money had been taken, and it could only be believed that Levison had taken it. For a trick—to give a false impression, the Head believed—but the return of the money would be demanded. If it was not returned, Levison would be considered as a thief. Thief, as well as ruffian—that was what St. Jim's would think of him! As in a horrid vision, Levison seemed to see a crowded court—the stern face of the magistrate—the constable at his side. He shuddered. He could not face that!

The unhappy junior crossed to the window, and stood upon a chair and looked out. There had once been iron bars to the window, but some tellow shut up in the punishment-room had filed them away. Two thick wooden bars had been screwed across, far beyond anyone's power to break. And between the bars there was little more than room for an arm to pass. There was no escape from the punishment room. The prisoner could only await his fate.

Like a wild animal caged, Levison moved about the room. To be taken away from the school with a policeman's hand on his shoulder—his cheeks burned crimson at the thought. But there was no escape. And even Frank had deserted him!

Tap!

Levison stopped suddenly.

It was a faint tap at the thick oaken door of Nobody's Study. It was followed by a whisper through the keyhole.

"Ernie!"

Levison drew a deep breath. He had done Frank injustice in his thoughts. His brother, at least, had not fallen away in his hour of misfortune. He made a spring to the door, and bent down.

"Is that you, Frank?"

"Yes, Ernie." There was a catch in the whispering voice. "Ernie, I—I couldn't come before. The prefects have been told to keep anyone away from here—but Langton has just gone downstairs. I—I've been watching for a chance. Ernie, I I——" His voice trailed off.

"Poor old Frank!"

"Ernie, you know I don't believe it—not a word of it—it's all lies, lies! I know it is—"

"It is all lies, Frank, on my honour!"

"But—Ernie—how is it—Racke says—oh, Ernie!"

"Racke told the Head a lie, Frank, to get me sacked!" said Levison quietly.

"I don't know who hurt Racke, but Racke knows, and he doesn't choose to say."

"Oh, Ernie!"

Levison smiled bitterly. As well as if the fag had told him, he knew the struggle in Frank's loyal breast. He believed Levison; but if Levison had not been his brother, he could not have believed him. It was from his heart, not from his head, that Frank's faith came.

"It's true, Frank—I give you my word," said Levison quietly. "I know it sounds steep—I don't expect the fellows to believe me—but I've told you the truth, kid!"

"I know you have, Ernie. And—and if you are going, I shall go with you!" said Frank, with a sob in his voice.

"Nonsense!" said Levison, quite sharply. "You can't, you young duffer! What would the pater say? But—but if you'd like to help me, Frank—"

"Anything—anything!" said the fag breathlessly. "Tell me how I can help you, Ernie!"

"I've got to get out of this," Levison whispered through the keyhole. "Franky, you know what they've done—sent for the inspector from Rylcombe. I can't stand that, Frank. I've got to get out!"

"I'll help you, Ernie, but—but how?"

"Get round under the window, with a screwdriver and a rope. I'll let down a string to pull them up," whispered Levison eagerly. "Will you do that, Frank?"

"Of course I will, Ernie. Wait for me!"

"Cut off before you're seen, then."

Frank quitted the door, and Levison listened anxiously. There was a voice in the passage without—he recognised the tones of Langton of the Sixth.

"Now, then, cut off. You're not allowed here—you know that!"

Langton's voice was not unkind. Frank, without replying, scuttled away down the passage.

In the punishment-room, Levison stood by the window and waited. From the disgrace that had fallen upon him there was no escape, but at least he would escape the last and bitterest humiliation.

CHAPTER 24.

The Escape.

"FRANK, I've been looking for you!" Cardew of the Fourth caught Levison minor by the shoulder. Frank shook off his hand. The youngster's eyes gleamed fiercely.

"Let me alone!"

"But, Frank—"

"You believe my brother's guilty, don't you?" said Frank savagely. "Well, I want nothing to say to you. Let me alone!"

Cardew hesitated.

"Look here, Frank, you're up to something, I know that. What is it? Can I help you?"

"No, you can't!"

"I thought you were looking for me when you came into the common-room."

"So I was," said Frank bitterly. "But I don't want your help now—not if you believe my brother guilty! Let me alone."

"You've spoken to your major, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And—and he hasn't owned up to you?"

Frank gave him a fierce look.

"You fool! My brother's innocent!"

"He's told you so—even yet?"

"Of course he has!"

"Look here, Frank—"

"Oh, let me alone!"

Frank hurried away, and Cardew, after a few moments' irresolution, followed him. He wondered whether it was possible that there was something in the fag's faith in his brother—whether, after all, Levison might be the victim of a strange series of circumstances. It did not seem possible, yet—

Frank had gone into the Third Form room, where he took out a screwdriver from the tool-chest in his locker, and hid it under his jacket. He wanted a rope now—a rope that would bear Levison's weight from the window of Nobody's Study. That was not easy to get. Cardew might have helped him there—that was why he had sought his major's chum. But he would ask nothing of anyone who did not share his faith in his brother.

Cardew joined him in the dusky form-room. He caught the fag by the arm as he would have brushed by.

"Frank, don't be a fool!" he said hurriedly. "I saw what you took from your locker. Is Levison going to cut?"

"Yes," said Frank, between his teeth. "Keep your mouth shut!"

"You don't think I'd give him away, do you? Levison's been a good pal to me, and I'm not down on him like the rest. I daresay Racke asked for all he got."

"You fool! Ernie did not——"
 "Well, he did not, then," said Cardew, humouring him. "Look here, I'm with you, Frank. I'm going to help. What is it you want?"

"A rope!" whispered Frank, after a short hesitation.

Cardew nodded. He understood.

"How are you going to get it to him?" he asked.

Frank explained in a breathless whisper. "Get along, then, and let him have the screwdriver," said Cardew. "The bars will take some time. I'll join you with the rope—rely on me for it. I'll get some of the old cords in the box-room and plait them together."

Frank panted with relief. He had not thought of that.

"Good!" he said.

And he ran off. Five minutes later Levison, watching the darkened window of the punishment room, heard a cautious whistle below. He had already made a string to let down—of threads from his necktie, strips from his handkerchief, attached to fragments of string from his pockets. He tied a pencil to the end to weight it, and lowered it from the window.

A few minutes more, and there was a jerk on the string from below, and Levison drew it up, finding it heavier as he pulled.

The screw-driver attached to the string clinked faintly against the window-sill in the darkness. Levison reached his hand between the bars, and pulled it in. He let the string float down again, for the rope to be attached; and began work with the screw-driver at once.

The thick wooden bars were tightly screwed into the window-frame. The screws, driven home to the head, were not easy to move. But Levison seemed to have wrists of steel. One by one the screws were drawn out and laid aside; first one and then the other bar came loose in his hand. It had taken him nearly half an hour. But then he leaned head and shoulders from the little window, and stared down into the night.

The string was swaying as it was jerked from below; Levison pulled it in, and it came up slowly and heavily. To the end was attached the rope. He drew in the rope, with a beating heart. It was thick and strong, a number of old cords tightly plaited together, more than capable of bearing the weight of a full-grown man.

"Good old Frank!" murmured Levison.

He pulled the rope in, and fastened the end to the bars in the fire grate. All was ready now.

Levison listened for a moment. There was no sound without. The inspector had not yet arrived from Rylcombe. When he did arrive, he would find that the bird had flown. Levison smiled grimly at the thought.

From the window of Nobody's Study, the distance to the ground looked dizzy; but Levison did not think of faltering. With perfect coolness, he climbed out on the sill, and took a firm grip on the swaying rope.

Then he swung clear, his feet in the air, and terrible death below him if he fell!

But his nerve was of steel. Hand below hand, he swung himself down the swaying rope.

"Ernie!" breathed a voice.

His feet touched the ground. Two figures looked up in the gloom beside him, as he let go the rope, and stood breathing deeply after his exertions.

"Well done, by gad!"

Levison started; it was Cardew's voice.

"Cardew! You!"

"Why not?" grinned Cardew. "I'm givin' Frank a helpin' hand. By gad, what a surprise for the merry inspector when he arrives!"

Levison peered at him in the gloom.

"What's the next move?" asked Cardew. "Makin' a break for home? Like me to help you over the wall?"

"You're going home, Ernie!" whispered Frank.

Levison shook his head.

"I can't go home! If the inspector's after me, he would go there."

"That would be awful!" muttered Frank.

"I'm going to clear," said Levison.

Frank caught his arm.

"But—but—Ernie! You can't! What are you going to do?"

"Listen to me," said Levison quietly.

"I did not touch Racke—in the way he says, I mean. Somebody did it. That somebody's got to be found. If I had a pal to stand by me, he'd try to find out the truth, and help me clear. You can't do anything, I'm afraid, Frank."

"I'll try, Ernie."

"And you, Cardew?" said Levison bitterly. "You've helped me get out—why?"

"I'm standing by you, as long as you like."

"You don't believe in me?"

Cardew was silent.

"That's enough," said Levison, as Cardew did not speak. "Come on, Frank!" He drew his brother away into

the gloom; and Cardew, with a sombre and thoughtful face, moved off slowly to the School House.

Levison paused by the slanting oak, at the school wall. The quadrangle was dark and deserted. But as they stood in the deep shadows, there came the sound of a heavy footstep grinding up the gravel drive to the house. Frank caught his brother's arm.

"The inspector!" he whispered.

A burly form was for a moment dimly visible in the gloom. It vanished, and the footsteps died away. Levison drew a quick breath.

"It'll all be out soon, Frank! Help me up the wall."

The bag clung to him.

"But where are you going, Ernie?" His voice broke into a sob. "Ernie, you can't go—you can't—"

"I must! They'll know in a few minutes that I'm not in the punishment room. I can't go home! Listen to me, Frank; you know the old monk's cell in the wood—a couple of miles from here."

"I—I know."

"I'll wait there till I've seen you again," whispered Levison. "Come along to-morrow some time—mind you're not seen—you'll find me there. It won't hurt me to camp out one night, Frank. Now help me up!"

The bag mechanically obeyed. His eyes were blind with tears. Levison drew himself up on the wall. Frank heard the light thud, as he dropped into the road. Then silence.

With a sob in his throat, Frank Levison turned back towards the School House.

CHAPTER 25.

Cardew Faces the Music.

"**B**OLTED!" Buggy Trimble burst into the common-room with the startling news.

"Bolted! Levison's bolted!"

"Bai Jove! Bolted!"

"Levison gone!"

Trimble's round eyes danced with excitement. Seldom had he had so startling an item of news to impart.

"Yes, rather! Clean gone! Hooked it by the window, you know—he, he, he! You should have seen old Skeat's face! I saw it—he, he, he!"

"Bolted!" repeated Tom Merry dazedly. "How could he bolt?"

"Rope from the window!" chortled

Trimble. "I heard old Skeat say so as he came out. He looked like a Hun. Railton's face was a corker—he, he, he! Somebody got a rope to him, and he's cleared."

"By gad! Who could have done that?" said Cardew.

"Nobody knows—means a flogging for somebody," said Trimble. "And he's gone—clean gone! Railton yelled to the prefects to search the quad for him—bet you they won't find him!"

"I don't quite see why he should bolt," said Tom Merry. "I suppose he will go home—and he was to be sent home, anyway."

"Unless they arrested him!" grinned Crooke.

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps old Skeat was goin' to awwest him! Shokkin' disgwaco for the school! I weally considah that Levison has acted vewy wpopahly in avoidin' such a howwid scene."

"Lot Levison cared about that!" sneered Crooke. "I know why he's bolted. He's got Racke's money about him."

"What!"

"You know Racke was robbed," said Crooke coolly. "Twenty pounds at least. His watch and chain, too—worth no end of money. Racke always did splash money about. Levison's bagged the lot, of course!"

"What utter rot!" said Tom Merry frowning. "Levison isn't a thief, anyway."

"What's he done with the money, then?"

"Rot!" said Blake uneasily. "I should say he hid Racke's tin somewhere, so as to make out that Racke had been assaulted and robbed by some footpad. I'm jolly sure he didn't mean to keep it."

"He's bolted with it," said Crooke.

"It does look like it, and no mistake," chimed in Mellish. "Fancy Levison clearing off with the loot!"

"I don't believe it for a minute," growled Tom Merry. "Shut up, for goodness' sake. Levison's got it bad enough, anyway, without your piling it on."

"Yaas, wathah! Don't pile it on a chap when he's down."

"He's got Racke's money," said Crooke obstinately.

"That's a lie!" said Clive, looking the cad of the Shell in the face. "You don't believe that yourself, Crooke."

"All balderdash," said Cardew. "The money's been hidden somewhere, most likely, and it will turn up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Cave—here's Railton!"

The School House-master, with a stern brow, entered the room. His grim glance swept over the boys.

"My boys, someone conveyed a rope to Levison in the punishment room, and he is gone. He descended from the window at a great risk. I require to know the name of the boy who helped him escape."

Silence.

"If the boy is present he had better come forward," said the House-master, his brows getting darker.

No one stirred.

"Very well," said the House-master, quietly. "The matter will be inquired into. Whoever helped Levison to commit this foolish act, performed a very ill service for him. He is now under suspicion of theft. The foolish boy must be brought back as quickly as possible. If anyone here knows where he is gone, it is his duty to tell me."

Still silence.

Mr. Railton compressed his lips and left the common-room.

"Must have been Levison minor," said Crooke, when he was gone. "Nobody else would have anything to do with Levison now."

"It means a row for him," said Tom Merry. "I suppose it was Frank. Railton's sure to question him."

Cardew gave a start.

"By gad! I didn't think of that!" he exclaimed. "He's sure to, I suppose."

All eyes turned upon Cardew.

"Bai jove! Was it you?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Right on the wicket."

"Cardew," muttered Clive.

"I rather believe in sticking to a chap when he's down, you know," yawned Cardew. "As a matter of fact, I helped Franky. But if Railton questions him—"

"He's sure to," chuckled Crooke.

"Bet he's going to send for him to his study now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cardew nodded coolly.

"Then I shall have to own up to my share in it," he remarked. "Couldn't leave the kid to face the music alone, could I?"

"Wathah not!"

"It's up to you," said Tom Merry.

"Exactly. And if I'm goin' to take my gruel, I may as well butt in at once and take it, and leave Franky clear, what?"

"Bai jove! That is a wathah good ideah, Cardew. The kid has enough to

stand without having a licking thwown in."

"Just my idea," said Cardew.

He sauntered out of the common-room. Mr. Railton was in his study doorway, speaking to Kildare. Cardew heard his words as he came up.

"Please find Levison minor and send him to me, Kildare. I think there cannot be much doubt as to who assisted Levison in his flight."

"If you please sir," said Cardew meekly.

"What do you want, Cardew?"

"I've decided to own up, sir."

"What?"

"I got the rope for Levison," said Cardew coolly.

"You did, Cardew," exclaimed the House-master sharply. He signed to Kildare to remain. "And how dared you do anything of the sort, Cardew?"

"Levison was my study-mate, sir, and he's done me a lot of good turns," said Cardew. "He wanted to get away without a public disgrace, and I thought it was up to me to help."

"Then it was not Levison minor who assisted him?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"I made the rope myself, sir," said Cardew, without directly replying to the question. "I plaited it out of the old cords in the box-room. I—I thought I ought to stand by Levison, sir."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Railton grimly.

"You must learn, Cardew, that you cannot set the discipline of the school at defiance, whatever your motives may be. You will follow me to the Head at once, and repeat your confession to him."

"Very well, sir."

Cardew followed the House-master, and the door of the Head's study closed upon him. It was ten minutes later when he came back into the common-room, his face slightly pale, and rubbing his hands. But in manner he was as cool and unconcerned as ever.

"Had it bad, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, sympathetically.

Cardew made a grimace.

"Horrid! Blessed if I knew the old scout was such a giddy athlete. He seemed to be in a terrific wax."

"And Levison minor?" asked Tom Merry.

"He's dead in this act," said Cardew, laughing. "The cheery old Head didn't seem to guess that I had a companion in crime. Lucky, wasn't it? Six on each hand—ow!"

"And where's Levison gone?" asked Kangaroo.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Haven't the faintest idea. But I fancy he's far enough away by this time. Ow! Ow!"

Trimble rolled in with the news that the inspector was departing, and some of the juniors went out to see him go. Inspector Skeat's face was very grim. It was not difficult to guess what was Mr. Skeat's opinion of Ernest Levison's flight. Mr. Skeat had no doubt whatever that the missing junior and Racke's money would be found together.

CHAPTER 26.

In the D of Night.

"BUCK up, kid!"

Wally spoke as comfortingly as he could.

Wally's private opinion was that Levison major had got what he deserved, and that St. Jim's was well rid of him. But he would not have told Frank so for worlds.

There was general compassion for poor Frank, not only in his own form, but in the school generally.

The little fellow's attachment to his major was well known, and it was known, too, that whatever Levison's faults might be, to his minor he had always been kind and affectionate.

Frank's belief in his brother's innocence was touching enough. Few would have liked to disturb it.

Frank, peaceable enough as he was, was quite ready to fire up at a word about his brother. While the matter had remained in doubt, Frank had had several fights on his hands. But now that Levison of the Fourth was gone, even Piggott let the matter drop.

Indeed, any fellow who had ventured to taunt Levison minor with his brother's expulsion would have had to reckon with Wally, who was a terrific fighting-man when he was on the warpath.

Wally squeezed Frank's arm as they were going up to the dormitory, and gave him an encouraging grin.

Levison minor smiled faintly.

He knew what Wally believed, but it was no use quarrelling with the whole school because they counted his brother guilty—when he had been found guilty by the Head and sentenced. Frank could only hope that something would yet turn up to prove that the whole school was wrong. He understood that D'Arcy minor meant to comfort him. But there was little room for comfort. All that weary evening his thoughts had been with

his brother. St. Jim's generally supposed that Levison major had fled to his home. Only Frank knew that he was lingering near the school.

He was glad of that. He would see him again, at least. And Frank did not intend to wait till the morrow for that.

He went into the dormitory with the rest of the Third. Knox of the Sixth saw lights out, and the Third were left to themselves.

When the rest of the fags had dropped off to sleep, Levison minor remained wide awake. He was in no mood for sleep, and he was waiting.

His brother was there, in the deep wood, alone. He was camping out in the old monastic cell—without food or blankets, or even a coat. That much his minor could do for him, at least—take him the things of which he was most in need. It was risky, but where his brother was concerned, Frank did not think of the risk. He was only waiting till it should be time to go, with a fair chance.

When eleven o'clock sounded dully from the clock-tower, Frank Levison slipped from his bed, and dressed quietly in the darkness.

He took a pair of shoes in his hand and crept from the dormitory.

The Schoolhouse was still and silent.

With trembling fingers the fag unfastened the window in the lower box-room. He did not falter, but his heart was beating in great thumps. The window opened quietly.

Then the fag groped in a trunk for the parcel he had placed there in readiness during the evening.

He dropped it lightly upon the leads outside, and, kneeling on the sill, pushed the window shut.

Then he clambered to the ground with the parcel, and scudded away in the darkness.

At the spot where he had helped his brother over the school wall earlier in the evening, he clambered up with the aid of the slanting tree. On the top of the wall he paused to breathe and to scan the dark road before him. Then he dropped into the road and ran.

On the lonely road at that hour he passed no one. But suddenly in the lane he caught a glimmer of a lamp ahead. He knew it was the lamp of Police Constable Crump, of Rycombe—the village policeman was making his rounds. Frank plunged into the dark trees beside the road, and waited there with throbbing heart, till the heavy footsteps of Mr. Crump had passed and died away in the distance.

Then he groped his way into the wood, with outstretched hands.

It was dark in the wood—only a few pale gleams of starlight filtered through the foliage overhead.

At any other time the silence and darkness, the solitude of the whispering wood, might have daunted the fag. But he did not think of shadowy dangers now. His brother was there, and he was going to him!

He knew the way well enough, even in the night. Frank was a member of D'Arcy minor's patrol of Boy Scouts, and he had explored the old wood many a time, and often passed the ruined cell in the heart of the wood, where in ancient days a hermit had dwelt. Slowly, but without a pause, he picked his way through the trees and thickets, till he came out into the glade where the old stone cell—what remained of it—stood.

There he paused to recover his breath.

The starlight fell into the glade. Save for the whispering of the wind in the trees, and the occasional scuttle of a rabbit or stoat, the dark woods were still and silent.

Under a big tree by the side of the grassy glade, the old stone building stood—four shattered walls and an empty doorway, matted over with ivy and creeping plants.

Was his brother there?

Had he, after all, taken refuge in that lonely spot, far from any human habitation? There were many fellows who would have hesitated to camp alone there in the night.

Frank stole across the glade. There was no sound or movement from the cell. If Levison major was there, doubtless he was sleeping. The fag stopped in the shattered doorway, and whispered:

"Ernie!"

Silence and stillness.

"Ernie!" He raised his voice a little.

"Ernie, old chap, are you there?"

There was a sudden movement in the cell.

"Who's that?"

"Ernie!"

"Frank!"

A match glimmered out in the gloom, and Levison major stared blankly at his brother.

CHAPTER 27.

The Outcast of St. Jim's.

"FRANK! You here!"

"I—I had to come, Ernie—"

The match went out.

"You young ass!" said Levison.

"You ought to be in bed. Did you get out without being spotted?"

"Yes, yes! I was careful. Were you asleep, Ernie?"

"Yes, I was asleep. I've made up a bed of grass and ferns—luckily it's dry weather." Levison laughed softly. "I can rough it a bit, Franky. If I'd had more time I should have brought some things with me—it's a bit chilly. Never mind. You shouldn't have come, Frank."

"I've brought you some things, Ernie."

"My hat! You have?"

"I've got a bundle here," whispered Frank. "Your bike lantern, and some oil and matches—and your overcoat—and a travelling rug. And some grub, Ernie."

Levison laughed again.

"That's thoughtful of you, Frank. I was jolly hungry when I turned in. I should have been hungrier in the morning. What have you got?"

"Sandwiches, and a cake, and some tongue, and half a loaf," said Frank. "I—I couldn't get more, now we're allowed, you know. But it's better than nothing."

"A jolly good deal better! I'll try those sandwiches now."

Frank hastily unfastened the bundle.

Through the roofless opening of the cell the starlight glimmered in, and he could see his brother and the bed of ferns from which Levison major had risen. Levison began on the sandwiches with a good appetite.

"Sit down, Frank—there's a chunk of masonry just behind you. That's right! Weren't you afraid to come into the wood at this time of night?" said the Fourth Former curiously.

"I never thought about that," Frank replied simply. "Shall I stay with you a bit, Ernie? I—I'd like a rest before I go back."

"You bet! It's jolly lonely here. Did the inspector come for me after all?"

"Yes. He looked very black when he went away."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison's laugh echoed oddly in the silence of the wood. Frank looked at him in wonder. Even yet Levison of the Fourth had not lost his nerve, and his courage was not failing.

"Ernie," said the fag, after a pause. "I—I think perhaps you made a mistake in going, after all. The—the fellows say—some of them—"

"Well, what do they say?"

"You know Racke's money was taken from him?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, they say—they say——" Frank faltered.

"I know what they'd say," said Levison, with a sneer. "Some of them, at least—Crooke, and Mellish, and Scrope, and that set—they think I had Racke's money, and that I cleared off with it."

"Yes, Ernie."

"And if I went home I should be called for by a policeman!" said Levison, between his teeth. "What a merry prospect!"

"Ernie, something will have to be done! It can't rest like this. You can't remain here long. You'll have to go home or come back to the school."

"If a chap had a pal to stand by him!" muttered Levison.

Frank's lip quivered.

"I'd do anything I could, Ernie——"

"I know you would, kid—but you can't do anything," said Levison moodily. "You're only a kid. Cardew might, or Clive, or Tom Merry—but, of course, they believe the worst about me, and they're glad to be rid of me, I suppose."

"What could they do that I couldn't do, Ernie?"

"There's a chance," muttered Levison. "The ghost of a chance. But—but you're only a kid——"

"Well, let me try! Ernie, you haven't told me what happened when you met Racke. You know I believe you, but—but what was it that happened? How could Racke have been hurt like that?"

"I fought with him in the wood," said Levison quietly. "I left him knocked out. He was fairly knocked out, but that's all. I hadn't touched him with anything but my hands. After I was gone somebody else did that. That's the only explanation."

"But—but who would?"

"That's a problem I give up. Somebody who had a spite against him, I suppose."

"Not a St. Jim's chap, Ernie?"

"I can't think so," said Levison. "There's hardly a fellow in the school brute enough to do it—Crooke, perhaps, but he is Racke's pal. No, it wasn't a St. Jim's chap. Perhaps one of the precious gang at the Green Man—Racke might have fallen out with his friends there. Some beastly ruffian, anyway, and a thief, too. Racke was robbed."

"But—but a fellow who robbed him wouldn't want to beat him like that, Ernie—why should he? Racke wasn't the chap to put up much of a fight."

"I know, I know. It was somebody who had a spite against him; and that's a clue if there was anybody to follow it up."

"And—and you think Racke would let him off after that, Ernie?"

"I know he would, because he has. He's let the right man get away for the sake of fixing this on me," said Levison.

Frank was silent. He believed it. Yet he could not help realising how improbable it sounded.

"He loses his money by that rotten trick, but I daresay he'd give the money, if it came to that, to have me branded as a thief," said Levison savagely. "Or he may have forgotten all about the money when he told that lie to the Head. But it's clear enough that he was robbed, Frank, and the thief took his banknotes—two fivers and a lot of currency notes, Crooke told the Head in my presence. Frank, I've been thinking this over while I've been lying here, and I can see daylight—if there was only somebody to follow it up!"

"I—I don't see——"

"Don't you understand?" said Levison eagerly. "The man who ill-used Racke has his notes—banknotes and currency notes. What do you think he will do with them?"

"Spend them, I suppose."

"Exactly. And notes are numbered," said Levison; "and as soon as they're put in circulation, they can be traced."

"Oh!" muttered Frank.

"Do you see now? If some footpad ruffian could be found with Racke's notes in his possession, he would have to account for them. That would let some light into what happened after I left Racke in the wood."

"Racke may have the numbers——"

"Not a word to Racke!" exclaimed Levison. "He wouldn't give the numbers; he would rather deny having had any notes at all. Don't you see, now he's pitched his yarn to the Head, it would show him up if the real man was found."

"I—I understand. But——"

"Racke had those notes from his father," said Levison. "I heard Crooke say so. His father will know the numbers, or can get them from the bank. But he's a dashed war-profiteer—he wouldn't give his precious son away, if he knew the game he was playing. If those numbers could be got from him somehow, and the notes traced——"

"Perhaps father——"

Levison made an impatient gesture.

"The pater couldn't do anything. He'll take the Head's view of what's happened, and he wouldn't believe me; he can't think such a jolly lot of me as it is. And if he believed me, and called on old Racke, he'd let out what it was for, and old Racke would be as mum as an oyster about the numbers of the notes."

Frank was silent.

His face had brightened with hope at first, but it was clouded again now. Levison's cool, keen brain had discovered a clue to the truth as he had reflected in the silence and solitude of the wood. But how was it to be followed up?

"Old Skeat could do it," said Levison, with a sneering grin. "But he's satisfied in his mind, of course, that I'm the giddy culprit; and if he could lay hands on me, he wouldn't want to look any further. But I'm going to think it out—I've got lots of time for thinking here, anyway. Racke's won the first round in the game, but that isn't the finish. What are you thinking about, kid?"

"I—I was thinking—perhaps I could help—" stammered Frank. "There's nobody but me, Ernie."

"That's true enough," Levison smiled. "But you'd better out off now, Frank. You'll be as sleepy as an owl in the morning, and you mustn't let them spot that you've been out of bounds."

Frank rose.

"I'll see you to-morrow, Ernie."

"I'll come with you through the wood," said Levison.

It was half an hour later that they parted, on the border of the wood, and Frank hurried away in the darkness for the school, while his brother returned to his solitary retreat. As he hurried on, Frank's eyes wore bright, and there was the light of a resolve in his face. He was only a kid, but he was the outcast's only friend, and if he could not help him, there was no one to help. And the devoted fag was prepared to move earth and heaven to clear his brother's name!

CHAPTER 25.

"Ripping of Racke!"

"FEEL bettah, deah boy?"

Aubrey Racke grunted.

It was the following day. Morning lessons were over, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing at the bedside of the invalid in the school sanatorium.

It was known that Racke was well enough to see visitors; and the fact had been made known, doubtless, in order that Racke's friends might call in and cheer him up with a few minutes' talk. Racke's friends did not seem over-anxious to avail themselves of the opportunity. Crooke and Scrope of the Shell did not drop in; Mellish and Piggott gave the school hospital a wide berth. Perhaps they thought invalids a bore; or perhaps they intended to drop in later. At all events,

they had not come, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, feeling that it was up to somebody to visit Racke, had called to see him.

Racke was no friend of his, certainly, and Arthur Augustus had a most profound contempt for the heir of Messrs. Racke & Hacke. But, as he explained to Blake, there was such a thing as "nobless oblige." Jack Blake assented, and stated that he was willing to stick to cricket and leave the nobless oblige to Gussy; and Horries and Dig heartily concurred. So the three went down to the cricket ground while Arthur Augustus called on Racke.

The swell of St. Jim's could not flatter himself that his visit delighted Racke. That polite individual stared at him and grunted.

"Feelin' wathah bad, I suppose?" ventured D'Arcy.

"Did you expect to find me enjoying myself?" asked Racke sarcastically.

"Ahem! No. I'm awfully sorry for this, Wacke."

"Thanks!" grunted Racke.

"Of course, I do not like you personally, Wacke—"

"Eh?"

"But I sympathise with any chap who is down on his luck; and I should nevah think of wememberin', at a moment like this, what a wotwah you are," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"You silly ass!" snorted the invalid.

"Weally, Wacke—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Ahem!"

Racke lay and scowled. He rejoiced in his triumph over Levison. He had heard of the expulsion, the flight, and the black suspicion that was fixed upon the fugitive. All that was to the good, from Aubrey Racke's peculiar point of view.

But it did not alter the fact that he was laid up for perhaps a month, and that he had lost about twenty-five pounds. Money was little to Racke, who was liberally supplied with it. His millionaire father took pride in the fact that Aubrey made the money fly, and outshone every other fellow at St. Jim's in that line, at least.

Still, twenty-five pounds was a large sum to pass into the hands of a rascally drunken tramp. And there was no possibility of recovering it. Any step in that direction meant risking the discovery of the whole truth.

"Somethin' wowwyng you, Wacke?" asked D'Arcy, after a pause.

"Yes," growled Racke.

"What is it, deah boy?"

"A silly idiot blinking at me!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus's aristocratic face crimsoned. Certainly kindness to Racke was not an easy matter.

"I will wetiah!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Hold on!" muttered Racke. "Is that dashed nurse here?"

"If you are alludin' to Miss Mawie, Wacke——" began D'Arcy, in a shocked tone.

"Yes. Is she here?"

"She is in the ward, Wacke."

"No chance of a chap getting a smoke, then," growled Racke. "Look here, can you slip in a few fags to me to smoke if I get the chance?"

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I feah, Wacke, that I must wefuse to do anythin' of the kind."

"Go and eat coke, then!"

"Is there anythin' else I can do for you, Wacke?" asked D'Arcy mildly. There was a heavy step in the ward, and he glanced round. "Bai Jove! Heah is Mr. Skeat, Wacke."

The inspector advanced to the bedside. Arthur Augustus stepped back.

"No need to go, Master D'Arcy," said Mr. Skeat. "I want only a few words with Master Racke. The doctor has given me permission to see him."

"Yes?" mumbled Racke, wondering what the inspector wanted.

"It appears clear that Master Levison when he left the school yesterday evening took a sum of money belonging to you," explained the inspector.

"He certainly did," said Racke.

"He took it from your pockets, I understand, after the assault upon you in the wood? You remember?"

Racke hesitated a moment. Was there even the faintest possibility of the truth coming to light? Dare he commit himself to a lie direct? Somehow, under the keen eye of the inspector, the lie did not come with the usual facility.

"He must have taken it after I became insensible, sir," said Racke at last. "I can't say I remember it exactly."

"It amounts to the same thing," said Mr. Skeat with a nod. "Your House-master found that the money was missing from your pockets when you were brought in."

"That settles it."

"Precisely. But the money, of course, must be recovered if possible. I understand that it was quite a large sum—twenty pounds, more or less?"

"Something like that."

"In notes, of course. Now, if you can

give me the number of those notes, Master Racke, I have no doubt that the money can be recovered. I have communicated with Mr. Levison, and find that his son has not returned home. Where he has gone cannot be said at present, but where ever it is, he will need money—and undoubtedly he will expend the stolen money. If you can provide me with the numbers of the notes, the boy may be traced by means of them, and the bulk of the stolen property recovered."

Racke breathed hard.

"I—I'm afraid I couldn't. I never take the numbers of notes," he muttered.

"That is careless, but quite natural in a schoolboy," said the inspector indulgently. "But you need only tell me whence you received the notes, and I will inquire there. Did they come from your father?"

"My pater doesn't take the numbers of currency notes—nobody does," muttered Racke. A vague fear was growing in his breast.

"I understand that there were some five-pound notes among them? One of your schoolfellows told Dr. Holmes you had such notes in your possession at the time."

Racke inwardly anathematised the busy-body who had given that information. But he strove to control his face; the inspector's sharp eyes were upon it.

"I—I'd rather the matter dropped, sir," said Racke. "Levison was an awful cad, but—but he was my schoolfellow, and I can't agree to disgracing my own school by making a fuss about it. I—I'd rather lose the money."

Mr. Skeat frowned.

"I suppose Levison can't be prosecuted, unless I prosecute," said Racke. "Well, I don't want to, I want the matter to drop. Besides, as—as I didn't actually see Levison take my pocket-book, I—I can't accuse him. Suppose—suppose it dropped out of my pocket—while they were carry'ng me home."

"You have stated your belief that it was taken by Levison!" interjected the inspector sharply.

"I—I believe it was. But while there's the slightest chance that it wasn't, I'm not going to accuse him," said Racke doggedly. "I'd never forgive myself if it turned out a—a mistake! He's been punished for what we know he did—that was his assault upon me. I'm not going to accuse him of theft. I'd rather lose the money."

"It is a large sum."

"I can afford it," said Racke, with a touch of his old arrogance. There was a pause. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was smiling approval at Racke from behind the portly inspector. Arthur Augustus approved with all his heart of the line Aubrey Racke was taking, little dreaming of his real motives.

"You refuse, then, to give me the numbers?" asked the inspector at last.

"Not exactly that—but I'd rather not. I can't and won't make an accusation against a schoolfellow, rotter as he's turned out to be."

"Bwavo, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus involuntarily.

The inspector frowned and grunted.

"Your Headmaster will not approve of your taking this line, Master Racke."

"I think he will, sir," said Racke. "Anyway, I can't make such an accusation against Levison, and I'm willing to take my chance of my property turning up."

"Then there is nothing more for me to do here," said the inspector tartly, and with that he walked out of the ward.

"Bai Jove, Wacke, that was wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have always regarded you as a wathah mean wottah, but I take it back now. Bettah let the wotten money go than bring disgwance on St. Jim's! Pewwaps Levison nevah had the tin aftah all, as you say. I stwongly doubt it myself."

"Rot," growled Racke, "he had it right enough."

"But you told the inspector——"

"I'm not going to be made a party to mixing up the name of my school in a rotten scandal," grunted Racke. "Let the matter rest. I don't care about the money, I can get plenty more of that."

"I wish you had not told the inspectah a whoppah, Wacke."

"Oh, rats!"

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"Howevah, it is toppin' of you to lose the money wathah than have a wotten disgwance brought on the school, and I'm going to tell the fellows. It will make them think better of you, bai Jove!"

"You needn't trouble——"

"Oh, wats! I wegard it as a duty."

"Look here, D'Arcy, keep your mouth shut!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am goin' to do you justice, Wacke. It will show the fellows that you are not weally such a fwrightful wottah and out-sidah as is generally supposed."

"You silly idiot!" roared Racke.

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps I had bettah wettiah now, Wacke, you look wathah excited and the doctah johnny said you were not to be excited. Good-bye, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus retired.

CHAPTER 29.

Arthur Augustus Approves!

WAKE up, fathead!" Wally drove his knuckles into Levison minor's ribs to add force to his injunction.

Frank gasped, and backed away.

"What are you going to sleep for all day!" demanded Wally. "Didn't you get any sleep last night?"

"I—I didn't sleep much, Wally."

"I expected old Selby to be down on you, like a hundred on bricks, when you nodded off in the form-room," said D'Arcy minor. "Perhaps the Head's given him a tip to go easy with you. Thoughtful old scout, the Head. Look here, young Levison, I'm not going to have you moping! What's happened to your major can't be helped. It was bound to come sooner or later."

"What?"

"I—I mean, it's bad luck, but it can't be helped," amended Wally, hastily. "No good going about moping, you know. You've got to buck up."

Levison minor was silent. He did not feel like bucking up just then.

It was not only that his brother's calamity weighed on his heart and his mind, but the loss of sleep on the previous night had told upon him heavily. All that day he had been in a heavy, dull state, which Wally attributed to "moping." Wally had no suspicion that Levison major was still in the vicinity of the school, and that Frank had visited him under the shadows of night.

"Yes, cheer up!" chimed in Reggie Manners. "No good moping, Frank. Just shove it out of your head, you know."

Frank smiled faintly.

"Come an' punt a footer about," suggested Joe Frayne. "I've got an old footer."

"Not just now."

"Come down to cricket," said Wally.

"Look here, you're in the Third Form team, Frank, and you've got to keep fit. We're going to play the Fourth later on, you know, and we've got to beat them."

"I don't feel quite up to practice now," said Frank.

"Rot!" said Wally decidedly. "You're

not going to mooch about and mope. Just come along to cricket."

And D'Arcy minor fairly collared Frank and marched him off to the cricket ground.

Frank's heart, was not in the game, though he was a keen cricketer as a rule. But probably the exercise did him good, and helped to clear off the heavy despondency that lay upon him.

His face was much brighter when he came in to tea with Wally and Co. The Third were having a feed on herrings, that succulent article of diet not being restricted. But Frank Levison slipped quietly away from the festive party in the Third Form room.

He wanted to think—he had been trying to think all day. Lessons had passed like a dreary dream to him; but even Mr. Selby had been considerate towards the fag whose brother had been expelled. The rough sympathy of the Third Formers touched Frank's heart, but it did not help him. How was he to help his brother out of the pit into which he had fallen? That was the question that hammered in his mind.

Whom could he consult?

Wally and Co. were not much use in trying to solve that problem; besides, they had no doubt whatever of Ernest Levison's guilt, and so they could not have approached the subject with open minds. Frank thought of Cardew—of Sidney Clive. They had been Ernest's friends and study mates. But they were useless to him now. They did not think for a moment that Levison was a thief, as some of the fellows did; but they believed in the charge upon which the unfortunate junior had been expelled. Frank, bitterly as he resented it, could hardly blame them. How could they resist such overwhelming evidence? In his heart he knew that he would have believed as they did, but for the fact that Ernest was his brother.

He had written home to his mother that day—a letter full of passionate faith in the expelled junior. The mater, perhaps, would believe in Ernest. Fred doubted whether his father would. Mr. Levison was a hard man, and Ernest's former ways had lowered him in his father's opinion. Levison's reform had not yet lasted long enough to eradicate that old, bad impression. Mr. Levison had never received a favourable report of his son from the school, and he knew that once or twice Ernest had been in serious danger of being sent away by the Head. To him it would simply seem that Ernest had gone to the bad—with a crash.

And yet his brother was innocent. Frank was passionately certain of that. But how was it to be proved? How was Racke's tissue of falsehoods to be disentangled?

Who was to advise or help him? Tom Merry passed him in the passage with a kind nod and smile. Monty Lowther spoke to him with great urbanity, evidently with the intention of cheering him up. But there was no help from them—they believed that Ernest was guilty. Even Talbot of the Shell, who had always stood by Levison, was silent now. In all the great school there was only one whose faith in the expelled junior remained unshaken—and that was Frank.

The sound of voices in the common-room, and the mention of the name of Racke, drew the fag there, as he mooched in the passage. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was telling the fellows about his visit to the sanatorium. It had seldom or never happened that the swell of St. Jim's had a good word to say for Aubrey Racke, but he had one now, and he said it.

"Wacke's conduct is weally wippin'." Arthur Augustus was saying, as the fag looked in. "I should nevah have believed that Wacke was so vewy sensitive about the honah of the school."

"Bow-wow!" said Blake disrespectfully. "Pitch us an easier one, Gussey!"

"It is quite twue, Blake."

"Rats!"

"Pewwaps you will allow me to explain," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Wacke has wefused to give the inspectah the numbahs of the notes that are missin'."

"Why on earth?" exclaimed Crooke.

"He wefuses to charge Levison with stealin' them, for the honah of the school," said Arthur Augustus.

"Rot!" said Talbot. "Levison did not steal his rotten money. Nobody can believe that, at all events."

"Wathah not. Wacke thinks he did, but Wacke is a wottah. He owns that he did not see Levison take it. I heard him."

"Levison shoved it somewhere, to give an impression that Racke had been robbed with violence," said Blake. "That's how I work it out. He saw he'd gone too far, and hoped to get clear that way."

"Poss., deah boy; or the pocket-book may have fallen out when Dawwel and Kildare were cawwyin Wacke home."

"Quite possible," said Talbot.

"Wacke wefuses to bwing a charge against Levison. He pwefers to lose the money. I am suah the Head will approve of that. And it is wathah a large sum—twenty or twenty-five pounds. You

know how Wacke wolls in money. Believin' as he does that Levison had it, it's wippin' of Wacke to let the mattah dwop. I wegard him as bein' wathah decent for once."

"Silly ass, in my opinion," grunted Crooke. "I know I jolly well wouldn't lose the money."

"Your unfavourable opinion, Cwooke, is a compliment to anybody."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it is rather decent of Racke," said Tom Merry. "I shouldn't have expected it of him. I thought he'd be glad of a chance to down Levison."

"Thank goodness he's taken that line, anyway," remarked Manners. "If Racke doesn't choose to regard it as a case of theft, nobody else can, and the matter drops."

"Yaas, wathah. I told Wacke I should tell all the fellows how wippinly he has played up. He didn't want me to, weally, but I insisted."

"Besides, the money will turn up," said Digby.

"The inspectah was disappointed," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "He thought he had a sewious case to handle, and it has vanished into thin air, you know. He was wathah watty, but Wacke was quite firm."

Levison minor at the doorway listened quietly, without approaching the group of juniors. But when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came out of the common-room, the fag touched him on the sleeve.

D'Arcy glanced very kindly at him.

"Hullo, kid! Like some help with your books, you know?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Poor old Levison used to help you a lot, I know. But I'm a wippin' hand at coachin' a chap. Come to my studay."

"It isn't that," said Frank. "About Racke—"

"Wacke's gettin' on all wight, kid," said D'Arcy reassuringly. "You needn't wowwy about Wacke. I am suah that there won't be any twouble for Levison aftah he's home, eithah."

"I'm not wowwy about the cad!" said Frank. "But—"

Arthur Augustus became very grave.

"Don't call Wacke names, deah boy—"

"You say he refused to give Inspector Skeat the numbers of the notes?" said Frank.

"He declined to do so, Frank—for the honah of the school, you know."

"A lot Racke cares for the honour of the school!" said Frank bitterly. "But you are sure of it, D'Arcy?"

"I was pwesent."

"Good!" said Frank.

It came into his mind to confide the whole matter to Arthur Augustus, and ask his sage advice. But he refrained. If the truth was to be discovered by means of the missing bank-notes, it was necessary for Racke not to be put on his guard. And an incautious word would be enough.

"Then Mr. Skeat is letting the matter drop?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah! Nothin' to wowwy about. You see, if Wacke is wolved to take the view that his pocket-book was not stolen, the inspectah cannot very well insist that it was," smiled Arthur Augustus. "So there is no dangah whatevah of that howhid charge bein' made against your bwothah."

"I understand," muttered Frank.

It was quite clear to him. Racke's refusal to allow the notes to be traced was a proof, to Frank's mind at least, that Levison's theory was correct—that the tracing of the notes would provide proof that it was not Levison of the Fourth who had assaulted Racke!

The fag hurried away, Arthur Augustus gazing after him in some surprise. The swell of the Fourth had rather expected some expression of gratitude towards Racke for his ripping conduct. But Levison minor did not appear to be in a grateful mood.

CHAPTER 30.

Levison Minor takes the Plunge.

POLICE-CONSTABLE CRUMP, of Rylcombe, was adorning the steps of the little police-station with his portly person, and gazing solemnly down the village street, when a diminutive figure stopped outside, and mounted the steps.

Mr. Crump regarded him with dignified inquiry.

It was Levison minor, of the Third Form at St. Jim's. The fag's cheeks were flushed, but his manner was resolute.

"Is Inspector Skeat here, Mr. Crump?" he asked.

Mr. Crump nodded solemnly.

"The hinspector is hinside," he said.

"Can I see him?"

"No law against it," said Mr. Crump, with a smile. "You jest walk in."

"Thank you."

Levison minor walked in.

Inspector Skeat was struggling into his coat, and was apparently just going out. He fixed his eyes on the schoolboy.

Frank stood before him with flushed face. "Well?" jerked out the inspector.

"Can I speak to you, sir?"

"Certainly." The fat gentleman regarded the fag a little more closely.

"Your name is Levison?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so." Mr. Skeat had seen the resemblance to Levison major in the fresh, honest young face. "Have you anything to tell me, my boy?"

"Yes," said Frank eagerly. "I—I—I think I ought to tell you, sir, if you'll listen to me."

"One moment," said the inspector. "So far as I am concerned, the matter is over. Whether the assault committed by your brother upon Racke is proceeded with judicially depends upon the attitude of Racke's parents in the matter."

"It's not about that."

"What is it, then?"

"The—the money."

"Oh!" The inspector looked very sharply at Levison minor. "If you know what has become of the money, of course it is your duty—ahem—to give any information in your power. You may step into my room."

Mr. Skeat's manner had become suddenly dry. Levison minor did not guess the reason: that the inspector supposed that he had come there to give information against his brother. Whatever opinion Mr. Skeat might have of such an informer, it was his duty to listen to him.

Frank followed Mr. Skeat into his private room, and the door was closed. The inspector motioned him to a chair.

"Now, my lad!" he said brusquely.

Frank cleared his throat. He knew how much depended upon this interview, and upon the impression he made. Even now he could hardly understand how he had found the courage to visit the grim police-inspector—bearding the lion in his den, as it were. His heart was beating painfully.

"I have seen my brother, Mr. Skeat," he began.

"Since he left the school?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he has told you where the money is?" Frank started.

"No! How could he? Ernie doesn't know where the money is. He has never seen it."

Mr. Skeat looked puzzled.

"What have you come to see me about?" he asked sharply. "My time is valuable."

"I—I know, sir. But—but to see justice done—that's what you want, isn't it?" faltered Frank. "You would like to find the thief."

"Undoubtedly," said the inspector drily.

"My brother has told me everything that happened on Wednesday afternoon, sir. He had a fight with Racke, but he left him quite well—only punched, you know. After that someone else assaulted Racke."

"Ahem!"

"And—and robbed him, sir!"

"Come, come!"

"That's the truth, Mr. Skeat. I am certain of it."

"How can you be certain of such a preposterous thing?"

"Ernie told me," said Frank simply.

The inspector coughed again. He felt that he was wasting his time, but the earnest faith in the schoolboy's face moved him, in spite of himself. He resolved to hear Levison minor out, at all events.

"Well, go on," he said.

"Whoever it was that attacked Racke, sir, took his money. If the notes could be found—they're all numbered, of course—that would prove it."

"If what you describe happened, my boy, Master Racke must be perfectly well aware of it."

"Yes, yes! Racke knows."

"But Racke has assured your Headmaster that it was Levison who assaulted him, as was suspected from the first."

"It wasn't true."

"Come, come," said Mr. Skeat, not unkindly. "It's right to have faith in your brother; but one must show a little common sense, you know."

"Racke hates my brother," said Frank. "He told the Head that lie to injure him. That's why he doesn't want the money searched for."

"Wha-a-at!" Mr. Skeat, in spite of his disbelief, was struck by this.

"Don't you see, sir?" exclaimed Frank eagerly. "If the notes are traced, they won't be traced to my brother—they'll be traced to the unknown person who robbed Racke. That will prove that Racke lied to the Head, won't it?"

"It certainly would—if it happened."

"Racke wouldn't give you the numbers of the notes, would he, sir?"

"No," said Mr. Skeat, very slowly.

"That's the reason," said Frank. "He doesn't want the man found—he prefers to have my brother ruined. He has always been his enemy."

"You are making a very serious accusation against Master Racke, my boy!"

"Everybody knows what a cad he is," said Frank hotly. "If he thought that my brother could be made out a thief, he would jump at the chance. But he

daren't have the notes traced—he daren't. Mr. Skeat, if you could get the numbers of the notes, and trace them, it would prove that my brother is innocent! I know you want to get justice done."

"That is certainly the case." The inspector tugged at his moustache. He had been puzzled and a little annoyed by Racke's refusal to proceed in the matter of the missing notes. "Master Racke, however, cannot give the numbers."

"He could, but he won't," said Frank. "But his father could. Mr. Racke sends him no end of money, and he would keep the numbers of the five pound notes, at least. If he didn't, he could get the numbers from the bank—my brother says the numbers are always noted at banks."

"Your brother is quite right there," said the inspector, with a slight smile. "Did your brother suggest your coming to me?"

"No, sir—he didn't think of it. But he suggested finding out the truth by tracing the notes."

"H'm! If the notes are traced, Master Levison, the result may very probably be to fasten the charge of theft upon your brother. You see that?"

Frank winced.

"Ernie isn't afraid of that, sir—and I'm not afraid. They were stolen by someone else."

Inspector Skeat was silent, thinking hard. It was possible that there was something in the schoolboy's point of view. He admitted that. It was not likely, but it was possible. He was dissatisfied with dropping the case while the missing notes remained unaccounted for.

"If you would find the numbers, sir, from Mr. Racke—without telling Racke of the Shell, of course—he would try to keep his father from giving the numbers, I know—then—"

The inspector made him a sign to be silent.

Frank stopped, and waited.

Mr. Skeat took a turn or two up and down the room. Finally he turned to the fag of St. Jim's.

"You can leave the matter in my hands," he said. "I shall act as I consider my duty demands. You need not be afraid that your brother will not receive justice. Good-evening, Master Levison!"

"Good-evening, sir," faltered Frank.

His heart was throbbing as he went down the village street. What would the inspector do? He could not tell. But there was hope in his breast now—new hope that seemed like new life to him.

CHAPTER 31.

A Shock for Racke.

TOM MERRY and Co. were concerned about Levison minor. They were well aware that he would take his brother's disgrace and expulsion deeply to heart; and in many little ways they showed kindness to the fag.

But, as a matter of fact, after the first day or so, Frank Levison seemed to have recovered to a great extent from the despondency that had fallen upon him at first.

His face was certainly not quite so merry as of old; but it was no longer downcast, and he answered cheerfully when spoken to.

Wally and his friends in the Third Form were glad to see the change. They concluded that Frank was getting over the shock.

To no one at the school had Frank confided the new hope he was cherishing—not even to D'Arcy minor.

He felt assured that the inspector would follow up the clue. And if he followed it up, what could the result be but to clear Ernest Levison?

Frank would not allow himself to doubt.

Had he told his secret to any other fellow at St. Jim's, that fellow would certainly have thought that he had by his interference given his brother up to punishment—that the stolen notes would be traced to Ernest Levison himself.

But Frank's faith in his brother was too strong for that idea to find a lodging in his mind.

Meanwhile the disappearance of Levison major caused a mild excitement at the school.

It was known that the expelled junior had not returned home. Letters had passed between his father and the Head; but Mr. Levison, who was busily engaged upon war work, had not been able to come down to the school.

That Frank knew where his brother was did not occur either to the Head or to Mr. Levison. The House-master kept an eye on the fag's correspondence, in case his brother should communicate with him. But no letter came from Levison major.

He had written home once, that was all.

In his letter home he had told his father that he was innocent, that he hoped it would be proved, and that then he would return—to St. Jim's.

That was all that was heard from the missing junior. The postmark on the letter was Abbotsford. The hidden junior

had taken a long walk in the night to post it.

Meanwhile Frank was keeping the secret carefully, and his visits to his brother were few. He could not venture to risk discovery.

Sometimes after lessons, once or twice in the night, Frank had made his way to the old hermit's cell in the heart of the wood, to take necessities to the outcast.

He had carried him food, books, clothes, a little at a time; and, above all, he had carried him encouragement!

If Frank had entertained the least doubt, the satisfaction with which Levison heard of his visit to the inspector would have removed it. It was evident that, from Mr. Skeat's investigations, Levison had nothing to fear.

Several days had passed, and no word came from Mr. Skeat. Frank could not venture to call at the police-station again. But he hoped.

There was a good deal of interest among the juniors when Mr. Racke came down to see his son. Racke of the Shell had been in the sanatorium nearly a week by that time. He was progressing favourably, but it was likely to be some weeks more before he rejoined his class. Mr. Racke was able at last to spare time from war-profiteering to come down and see his injured son. He was shut up with the Head for some time, and when he came out of Dr. Holmes's study the Head called to Tom Merry, who was in the passage.

"Merry, you will kindly take Mr. Racke to the sanatorium."

"Certainly, sir," said Tom.

The stout gentleman followed him.

Miss Pinch, the head nurse, was watching the patient, who lay with his usual sullen and dissatisfied face. Racke was, as he would have expressed it, dying for a smoke, but none of his friends had ventured to smuggle cigarettes to him in hospital.

"Your father's come, Racke," said Tom, giving the invalid a cheery smile.

"Oh! All right!" grunted Racke.

He did not seem specially delighted. Tom Merry left Mr. Racke with his son. Racke shook hands with his father in a very perfunctory manner.

"Getting on well, hay?" said Mr. Racke, as he sat his ponderous weight down in a chair by the bedside.

"Oh, all right!" said Racke. "I'm mending."

"And the young rascal hasn't been found, hay?"

"Levison! I believe not."

"The young villain!" said Mr. Racke.

"I suppose he's afraid of a prosecution if he shows up. And by gad, he'll get it too—assault and robbery, by gad! That kind of thing wants putting down, Aubrey."

Racke shifted uneasily on his pillow.

"I'd rather let the matter drop, father. It means a lot of disgrace for the school, and that won't do me any good."

"Nonsense!" said his father sharply.

"Do you want to throw away twenty pounds or more? Not that there's much risk of that, though, I think. The money—or some of it at least—will be recovered."

Racke's eyes dilated. He gazed at his father almost in terror.

Since his interview with Mr. Skeat he had supposed that the matter of the missing notes was closed.

"What—what do you mean, father?" he asked in halting tones. "The—the money was lost—"

"It was taken by that young rascal who assaulted you," said Mr. Racke sternly.

"But—but—"

"You needn't worry about it, Aubrey. He won't be allowed to make much use of it," said Mr. Racke. "The numbers are known now all over the kingdom, and as soon as he tries to pass a single note, he will be collared. Collared, my boy, and haled off!"

And Mr. Racke rubbed his fat hands with satisfaction.

Racke's face went whiter than the pillow upon which his restless head lay.

"The—the numbers!" he said faintly.

"Certainly."

"But—but—how—who—" Racke panted. "Father! How can the numbers be known as—as you say? I did not tell Mr. Skeat—"

"But I did, Aubrey."

"You did!" shrieked Racke.

"Don't excite yourself, my boy," said his father soothingly. "Nothing to get excited about."

"Have you—have you seen Skeat?"

"Oh, no! He wrote to me at the end of last week," Mr. Racke explained. "He told me there was hope of recovering the notes if the numbers were known. He had learned from a friend of yours—Crooke, isn't his name?—that you had had a large remittance from me the morning of the day you were robbed. What is the matter with you, Aubrey?"

"N-n-nothing."

"As it was pretty certain that the notes stolen from you were the notes I had sent you, he asked if I could ascertain the numbers. Naturally that was easy

enough. You know my methodical habits, Aubrey. I sent him the numbers by return of post—bank-notes and currency notes as well. As you had had no time to spend any of them, it is clear that they could only be placed in circulation by the thief."

"I—I had spent one—in Rylcombe."

"That one has already been traced," said Mr. Racke with a smile. "Mr. Skeat let me know that on Monday. It was in the possession of Mrs. Murphy in the village, and she had received it from you last Wednesday. That's correct—hay?"

"Yes—yes. But—but—"

"That was a pound note. The rest have not been traced yet. But that won't be long, I expect. The young rascal, wherever he is, must spend money to live—hay?"

"Oh!" muttered Racke.

"You don't look so well as when I came in, Aubrey. Excitement a bit too much for you, hay?" said Mr. Racke, rising.

"No, no!" Racke raised himself in bed, his face ghastly. "Father! I—I don't want the notes found! I—I—"

"What?"

"It—it means a scandal, and—and I'd rather not—"

"I'm the best judge of that, Aubrey. Besides, that's too late now. The thing is done," said his father soothingly.

"You—you could stop the inspector; you could tell him to let the matter drop; you could—"

"Impossible, Aubrey! I could not make myself so absurd; and I doubt, too, whether Mr. Skeat would let the matter drop if I asked him. Come—come, don't be excited! I will leave you now."

"Father! I—I—" Racke's voice trailed off.

What could he say?

Confess all to his father, and throw himself on his mercy? Then, at least, Mr. Racke would realise the importance of not recovering the notes. But, unscrupulous as the war-profitreer was in the way of business, Racke could not hope that he would lend himself to so base a scheme against a schoolfellow of his son's. If his father had discovered the truth, common decency would have compelled him to see that the false charge was withdrawn. At all events, Racke could not be sure that he would keep silence.

What should he do?

His brain was in a whirl. Before he had a chance of thinking the matter out Mr. Racke had taken his leave.

He left Aubrey Racke white and terror-stricken.

What was to happen now?

Suppose the notes were traced, they must be traced to Bill Jenner, the ruffian who had robbed him. The true story of the assault in the wood would be known. Racke's falsehood would be exposed in all its baseness, as well as the story of the midnight excursion in which he had first encountered the tramp. He had only staved off discovery, after all, by accusing Levison—staved it off at the price of making it worse when it came! For, in addition to the escapade he had been guilty of, he would have to answer now for having borne false witness against his schoolfellow.

What had made Inspector Skeat move in the matter after all?

Racke could not understand.

But it mattered little. While he lay there helpless, the inspector was grimly working up his case.

Would Jenner be found? Racke found momentary hope in the thought that the ruffian must have fled from the county, at least, after that brutal assault. He must have expected the affair to be reported to the police, and search to be made for him. Perhaps he was far away, perhaps a hundred miles away. It was possible that the notes would not be traced.

Racke lay in torturing doubt. Miss Marie found him much worse that evening, and Dr. Short, when he visited him, detected traces of feverishness. They did not know the cause.

CHAPTER 32.

Crooke Makes a Discovery.

"IT'S vewy remarkable!"

Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The School House juniors were discussing the disappearance of Ernest Levison, in the common-room.

It was more than a week since Levison's flight, and nothing had been heard of him.

"Extwemely remarkable," agreed Monty Lowther, with a playful imitation of Gussy's noble accent.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Levison minor is picking up," remarked Tom Merry. "The kid seems to have got over it already."

"Yaas, and that is quite wemarkable, too. He seemed fairly knocked ovah at first."

"He, he, he!" That unmusical chuckle proceeded from Baggy Trimble, who had just entered the common-room. "What's that about Levison? Has he been found?"

"No, fatty."

"I jolly well know why he's keeping dark," grinned Trimble. "Awful rotter, you know. They've found Racke's watch-and-chain. Levison had pawned them."

"What rot!" said Talbot sharply.

"Look here, you know, it's true. Old Skeat's just called on Railton," said Trimble. "I happened to be near Railton's door—quite by chance, of course."

"You howwid eavesdwoopin' boundah!"

"Of course, I wouldn't listen," said Trimble loftily. "I'm a bit more particular about such things than some fellows here—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But I happened to hear a few words. These things will happen, you know."

"They will when you're near a keyhole," said Clive in disgust.

"And what did you hear?" asked Crooke.

"I wufese to listen to a wotten eavesdwoopah—"

"Oh, rats!" said Trimble crossly. "I tell you I just happened to hear it. Old Skeat had Racke's watch and chain; they've been discovered at a pawnbroker's at Lexham—that's twenty miles from here. Pawnbroker johnny says they were popped by a man, so Levison got somebody else to do it for him. Skeat brought them to Railton to be identified. He had circulated the description of the things—"

"I gave the description," said Crooke with a nod. "I was asked. Racke wanted to let it all drop, I believe."

"Well, now they're recovered," said Trimble, "I fancy they'll find Levison next. You see, they'll trace the man who popped 'em, and he'll tell 'em where he got the things from Levison, and there you are."

"I wufese to believe for one moment that Levison stole a watch-and-chain! It is impos. for a St. Jim's chap to do anythin' of the kind."

"More likely chucked them away, and some dishonest rotter picked them up," said Blake.

"Yaas, that's much more pwoob."

"Look here, you know, you know Levison robbed Racke— Leggo my ear, Cardew, you beast! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

And Baggy Trimble's remarks came to a sudden end.

The news that Racke's watch-and-chain had been recovered was not long in spreading. Levison minor heard it with a throb of satisfaction. It was the proof he had been waiting for that the inspector had taken the case seriously in hand. Levison minor hoped that it was the beginning of the end, and his face was very bright that evening. It was news for his brother, too, and he resolved to lose no time in conveying it to the outcast. It meant breaking school bounds again that

night; but the fag, as a rule so quiet and orderly, had come to regard that as a trifle when it was for Ernest's sake.

"You're looking jolly chippy, young 'un," said Wally as the Third were going into their dormitory.

Frank smiled.

"I feel rather chippy," he said.

"Heard from your brother?" asked Manners minor. "I say, hasn't he gone home yet, young Levison?"

"He hasn't gone home," said Frank. "He is coming back to St. Jim's when his name's cleared."

"Bow-wow!" said Reggie.

"Cheese it, Reggie," said Wally. "Haven't we agreed that Franky is to talk any piffle he likes about his major? You know he's potty on the subject."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Wally, you ass—" began Frank hotly.

"Shush! Tumble in, or you'll have Knox on your track."

The Third Form turned in, and Knox of the Sixth put the lights out. Frank did not sleep. He was only anxious for the hour to come when he could safely slip out of the school to visit his brother. It would have been safer to wait for midnight; but he was fearful of falling asleep, and his impatience was great. At half-past ten he slipped from his bed, dressed, and arranged a dummy under the bedclothes—a trick he had learned to perform with as much skill as Racke or Crooke, or Cutts of the Fifth. With his shoes in his hand, he tiptoed to the box-room.

As he reached it he found the door open. He thought he caught the sound of a hurried breath in the darkness before him, and he stopped stock still to listen. His heart was thumping as he stood.

But the silence that followed reassured him.

It could scarcely be a suspicious prefect making his rounds without a light. It came into Frank's mind that perhaps one of the bold blades of the House was on his way out; he knew that Crooke and Co. did such things. He stepped into the box-room, closed the door, and whispered aloud:

"Is anyone here?"

Deep silence.

Quite reassured now, Frank crossed to the window, and slipped out on the leads. He closed the window softly above him, and dropped to the ground. A minute later the window was pushed up again softly, but Frank did not see it. He was scudding away in the night.

"Levison minor, by gad!" Croke of the Shell blinked from the window, and whistled softly. "The young hypocrite! Following in his major's merry footsteps. By gad!"

Croke grinned in the darkness.

The cad of the Shell was engaged in one of his shady excursions to the Green Man at Rylcombe. He had recognised Levison minor's voice as he whispered in the box-room.

Was the innocent-looking little fag bound upon the same errand?

That was Croke's first suspicion; but he shook his head. Levison minor was the very reverse of a bold blade and merry dog. But if it was not that, what had taken him out of the school after lights out?

"His brother, by gad!"

Like an illuminating flash it came into Croke's mind.

There was nothing else to account for Frank's action. He was going to meet his brother who must have communicated with him somehow.

Croke slipped out, closed the window, and dropped to the ground. He scudded away, and as he reached the school wall he heard, as he expected, the sound of a climber by the stanting oak. He waited till he heard the mud of falling feet in the road, and then climbed himself.

Faintly heard, Levison minor's footsteps were dying away down the silent road.

Croke followed, keeping upon the grass by the roadside to deaden the sound of his footsteps, and conceal his pursuit.

He felt sure that his surmise was correct, and he was very keen to put it to the proof. The little gamble at the Green Man could wait for another occasion. If he had any luck in playing the spy, this might lead to Levison being collared. Croke's eyes gleamed at the thought. That would be good news for Racke—and very satisfactory to Gerald Croke. Faint as were the footfalls of the fag, Croke kept him in hearing, till Levison minor quitted the lane and took to the wood.

There Croke hesitated for a few moments.

Croke's courage was not of the strongest kind, and he did not like the dark shadows and silence of the deep wood. But where the fag had gone, he was ashamed to be afraid to follow. His brief hesitation over, his curiosity keener than ever, he followed silently along the footpath.

His surmise was as good as proved now. Levison minor could only be going to an appointment at a fixed spot, and with whom could it be but with his outcast brother?

There was a rustling in the thickets as Levison minor quitted the footpath and plunged into the thick wood.

Again Croke paused.

He could not follow further without betraying his pursuit to the fag by the rustling of the bushes as he passed.

He reflected while the sound of Levison minor's movements grew fainter.

Where was the fag going? Evidently he had some fixed destination, for which he was making by the shortest track. Croke did not need to reflect long. He knew all about the old hermit's cell in the wood, and the direction Levison minor had taken, away from the footpath led directly to it. Croke smiled in the darkness.

He waited patiently now till several minutes after all sound of the fag had died away. Then he went on, picking his way through the trees, heading for the glade where the hermit's cell lay. If that was the fag's destination, as he felt sure it must be, he would find him there; if he was mistaken, it was not too late to redirect his steps to the convivial party at the Green Man.

The spy came through into the glade at last, and looked about him. He saw the twinkle of a light in the gloom.

"They're there!"

Keeping in thick shadow, Croke skirted the glade and drew nearer to the ruined cell. From the masses of ivy and creepers a light twinkled out—the light of a bicycle-lantern half concealed.

He stopped as he heard a murmur of voices.

"You shouldn't have come, Frank, really you shouldn't! It's too risky for you—the third time you've broken bounds."

It was Ernest Levison's voice.

"It's safe enough, Ernie. I'm careful. And I had to tell you the news."

"It's good news. If they've found the watch, they may find the notes next. You're a good kid, Franky, one of the best! By gad, if it turns out all right, I shall be glad to get out of this."

"It must be horribly lonely for you here, Ernie."

"Oh, I can stand it, especially since you brought me the books. I've been mugging up Latin." Levison laughed softly. "I shall surprise old Lathom at the way I've got on—if I come back."

"You—you don't feel afraid—at night?"

"What is there to be afraid of?"

"Nothing. But—but—"

"It's safe as houses, nothing to be afraid of; and not much chance of anybody coming here, since the keepers have all

gone to the way. You've not told anybody, Frank?"

"Of course not, Ernie."

"And they don't suspect—that I'm anywhere near the school?"

"Not a bit of it."

"You're a little brick, Frank, to stick to me like this."

Crooke backed silently away, his eyes gleaming. He knew all he wanted to know now, more than he had expected to learn. What he had learned astounded him. All the time Levison was missing, while the fellows were wondering what had become of him, the fellow was hidden within three miles of the school, and his brother—deep little rascal!—was taking him food and things! Crooke almost gasped as he thought of it. Cheeky little beggar! And, as he had said, nobody suspected—till now.

And now Gerald Crooke knew the secret. The cad of the Shell laughed as he groped his way through the wood. The old hermitage was no longer a safe hiding-place for the outcast of the school, but he would not know that—till the blow fell!

CHAPTER 33.

Betrayed.

GERALD CROOKE rubbed his sleepy eyes as he turned out of bed at the clang of the rising-bell the following morning.

But he was not feeling so seedy as was usual after a "night out."

He had missed the smoke-laden atmosphere of the little parlour at the Green Man, and he had brought back all the money he had set out with in his pockets, which was not usual after a visit to that delectable spot.

Crooke was feeling sleepy, but he was feeling very satisfied, too. He grinned when he saw Levison minor in the quadrangle that morning.

Frank was looking a little heavy-eyed, but very cheerful.

Crooke reflected that he wouldn't have looked so chippy if he had known what he (Crooke) knew.

The secret of Levison's hiding-place was in Crooke's hands, and the cad of the Shell had not the slightest intention of keeping it secret. He had not forgotten his old, bitter grudge against Levison.

He fully intended to betray the hiding-place of the outcast of St. Jim's, but he was in no hurry to act. He had to be careful.

He could not make his statement to the House-master. Mr. Railton would have wanted to know what he was doing out of

school bounds at such an hour of the night, and Crooke could not very well have explained.

The information had to be conveyed without Crooke appearing in the matter personally at all, and that required thinking out.

Crooke was thinking it out during morning lessons, with the result that Mr. Linton came down on him sharply several times for inattention.

But by the time the Shell were dismissed from the form-room, Crooke had decided upon his course of action.

When Mr. Railton came into his study, after dinner, he found a sheet of notepaper pinned to the wall in a prominent position.

The School House-master glanced at it, and started. With a knitted brow he looked at the paper more carefully.

Upon the paper several sentences were written, in large Roman letters, evidently so that the hand should not betray the writer. And the paper ran:

"ERNEST LEVISON IS HIDDEN IN THE OLD HERMIT'S CELL IN RYL-COMBE WOOD. HIS MINOR GOES THERE TO TAKE HIM FOOD."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

He unpinned the paper. There was no clue to the writer. The paper was a half-sheet of common note; the ink was such as was used in the school; and the capital Roman letters betrayed nothing. Who had written that strange communication?

Mr. Railton stood in deep thought with the paper in his hand. Some sneak, who naturally desired to remain unknown—sneaks were not popular at St. Jim's—had taken that cunning method of conveying the information to him. But was it well founded, or was it a schoolboy joke?

Sneaking was not a thing that Mr. Railton approved of or encouraged. But it was his duty to take notice of such information brought before him. It was very necessary to find the junior who had been missing for over a week, if only to relieve the anxiety of his parents. A few questions to Levison minor would soon prove whether the paper was genuine or not.

The House-master stepped to the door, and called to a fag in the passage.

"Please send Levison minor to me at once, Hobbs."

"Yes, sir."

Hobbs hurried away, and the House-master waited for Levison minor.

Levison minor was not long in coming. He entered the study with a cheery face, which only expressed wonder at why he

had been sent for. He evidently had no suspicion of the message that had been conveyed to the master of the School House.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Levison minor." Mr. Railton regarded the fag searchingly, but kindly "I have a question to put to you."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where your brother is?"

Frank started at the unexpected query, and the colour forsook his cheeks. Mr. Railton, looking at him, hardly needed a reply.

"My—my brother!" stammered Frank at last.

"Yes. Where is he?"

"I—I—I——"

"I have reason to believe, Levison minor, that your brother has not left the neighbourhood of the school at all, but is concealed in an old ruin in the wood near here."

Frank made an unsteady movement: It seemed as if his legs would fail under him. His eyes were dilated.

"He is there, Levison minor?"

Frank groaned. He could not speak.

"You have been taking him food, and helping him to remain in concealment?"

"Yes," muttered Frank.

"I shall not punish you, Levison minor, for a reckless action which seems to have been dictated by affection for your brother. You have nothing to fear, my boy."

Frank leaned on the table, scarcely able to stand. He hardly heard what the House-master said. It was not punishment for himself that he was thinking of. That was a light matter.

"You—you—oh, sir! You—you won't let him—he is innocent, sir!"

"Your brother must be found, and taken to his home, Levison minor. You must be aware that your parents are anxious about him. You may go."

Frank staggered to the door.

"Stay a moment!" Mr. Railton had caught the sudden gleam in the boy's eyes, and perhaps guessed what was flashing through his mind. "Levison minor, you will remain within the gates! Do you hear?"

"I—I—I——" muttered Frank.

"Your brother will be fetched here, and taken home in charge of a master," said Mr. Railton.

"So—so that the police can find him if they want him!" muttered Frank.

"I know!"

"I do not think there is much cause to fear that, Levison minor, but—stay! Where are you going? Boy! Stop!"

shouted Mr. Railton. The fag had darted from the study, and was fleeing down the passage.

Mr. Railton strode out of the doorway.

"Levison minor!" he thundered. "Stop at once! Come back!"

Frank Levison did not heed. Even his House-master's voice had no authority for him now. His one thought was to reach his brother, to warn him, so that he could escape. He ran on desperately.

"Kildare, stop him!" shouted Mr. Railton, as the captain of St. Jim's appeared at the end of the passage.

The surprised Sixth Former caught at the fag. Levison minor dodged desperately, but Kildare's strong hand closed on his collar, and he was stopped.

"You young ass——" began Kildare.

"Let me go!" Levison minor was struggling and kicking. "Let me go, Kildare!"

"By Jove!"

"See that he does not get away, Kildare!"

"Yes, sir!"

The big Sixth Former held the struggling fag at arm's-length as easily as if he had been a child. Frank ceased to struggle—it was futile. A sob shook him from head to foot, and he burst into passionate tears.

Kildare looked at the House-master in wonder.

"Calm yourself, Levison minor," said Mr. Railton sharply. "How dare you act in this disrespectful manner? Kildare, it appears that Levison of the Fourth—formerly of the Fourth, I mean—is hidden near the school, with his minor's knowledge. I am about to send for him. Will you see that this boy does not leave the school in the meantime?"

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said Kildare.

The House-master hurried away to the Head's study. Kildare took the Third Former into his own room. Frank did not resist.

"Now, sit quiet, kid!" said Kildare, kindly enough. "No good making a fuss, you know."

Levison minor did not reply. A sob shook him, and he sat dumb, with dismay and misery on his face.

CHAPTER 34.

Run Down!

"THAT'S the place, I suppose." Kildare and Darrel paused on the edge of the glade, where the afternoon sunlight fell in golden patches through the foliage.

The old hermit's cell was visible from where they stood.

St. Jim's were at afternoon lessons; and Levison minor had been taken into the Third Form room, where he was safe under the eye of Mr. Selby. The House-master did not intend to give him an opportunity of warning his brother. And while the rest of the school were at lessons, the two prefects had started for the wood to bring Ernest Levison back.

There was no sign of life about the old hermitage. Kildare and Darrel scanned it curiously. The junior who had made his home in that secret spot was not lacking in nerve. The two seniors were not wholly pleased with the task they had in hand.

"Keep an eye open, Darrel," said Kildare, as they crossed the glade towards the hermitage. "The young rascal may try to dodge. He's game for anything, I believe."

There was a sudden movement in the ruined stone building as the Sixth Formers left the cover of the trees.

A face looked out, startled.

"Levison!" muttered Darrel.

"Quick!" said Kildare.

They ran towards the cell.

Levison regarded them for a moment, breathing hard, with a bitter look on his face. He did not need to ask why they had come. He had been found, and he was to be taken back to the school, to be sent home—perhaps to be handed over to the police.

A desperate light gleamed in his eyes. The two Sixth Formers were running towards him, and they were already close. There was no escape from the doorway.

Levison darted back into the cell.

With quick decision, he scrambled through one of the gaps in the shattered wall behind the cell, and dropped outside. Then he ran.

A moment or two later the two seniors rushed into the cell. Levison's coat and rug lay upon a bed of ferns in the corner—a tin of salmon was open, and half a loaf of bread lay beside it. The outcast had been at his meal when the alarm came.

"Bolted!" said Darrel.

Kildare compressed his lips.

"After him! We can't go back without him."

It was easy enough to see the way the junior had gone. Kildare and his companion scrambled out after him.

Levison was dashing away through the trees. Kildare and Darrel dashed in pursuit.

"Stop!" shouted Kildare.

Levison did not heed.

He dodged and twined among the trees,

scrambled through the thickets, stumbled and rose again, without a pause, heedless of scratches from thorns. But he was not equal in pace to the athletic Sixth Formers.

Hard as the race was, they gained on him.

Levison was heading for the deepest and thickest part of the wood, in the hope of finding concealment there.

But the pursuit was too close.

Kildare's hand dropped on his shoulder from behind, and he was caught and swung back.

"Now stop, you young fool!" panted Kildare. "Oh, my hat! Lend me a hand with this mad young idiot, Darrel."

Levison was struggling furiously.

Darrel lent his aid, and the desperate junior was soon reduced to helplessness in the grasp of the two big Sixth Formers.

"Don't play the goat, kid!" said Darrel. "We don't want to hurt you. We've got to take you back to school."

Levison panted.

"I won't go back!"

"You won't stay long," said Kildare grimly. "But you've got to come back now. Now, come quietly! I suppose you don't want the frog's march?"

There was no help for it. With an iron grasp on either arm Levison had to submit.

He was walked back to the cell, where Kildare picked up his coat and rug. The captain of St. Jim's glanced curiously about the old hermitage.

"You've been here all the time?" he asked.

"Yes," growled Levison.

"I should think you'd got fed up with it," remarked Kildare. "Didn't you find it a bit lonely at night?"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Where did you get your grub?" asked Darrel.

No answer.

"That was his minor," said Kildare, with a smile. "The young rascal has been keeping him supplied, I understand."

Levison started.

"How do you know?" he exclaimed shrilly. "Frank——" He broke off.

"Frank didn't give you away," said Kildare. "Mr. Railton found it out somehow. You needn't worry about your minor. I don't think he will be punished for this; at least, nothing's been said about it so far. The young rascal wants a licking, though, by gad! Anything here you want to take away with you?"

"No!" snapped Levison.

"Then come on!"

With a black brow, the captured junior walked away between the two prefects. They did not let go his arms. His look showed plainly enough that he was only watching for a chance to escape.

They left the wood behind, and came out into Rylcombe Lane, and walked down to the school gates. Levison's teeth were hard set.

At the gates he stopped, as if with the intention of resisting; but the strong grip on his arms marched him onward.

Old Taggles blinked at him from his lodge as he was taken in. In the opinion of the old porter, these "goings on," as he expressed it, were extraordinary and reprehensible. He shook his head very severely as the black-browed junior passed.

Levison was marched, with dragging steps, into the Schoolhouse. Mr. Railton met the party in the hall. His glance dwelt very sternly on Levison of the Fourth for a moment. But he did not address him.

"I am glad you have found him, Kildare," he said. "Thank you very much for going. The Head has decided to keep him here until his father can fetch him personally from the school. He must be placed in security."

"Yes, sir. The punishment-room?" asked Kildare.

"Yes; the window has been repaired," said Mr. Railton. "Levison must be searched to see that he has no means of making his escape again. Will you see to this, Kildare?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Take him away, then. Leave the key in my study after you have locked him in."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Railton!" exclaimed Levison.

The House-master looked at him.

"Have you anything to say to me, Levison?"

"About—about my minor, sir." Levison's voice faltered for a moment. "Frank only helped me because—because—well, he felt bound to, sir! It wouldn't be fair to punish him for what he did. It was really my fault for letting him."

Mr. Railton's stern face relaxed a little.

"Your brother will not be punished, Levison. The Head is ready to make every allowance for him in the circumstances."

"Thank you, sir," said Levison quietly.

He was led away then.

A few minutes later he was locked in Nobody's Study, and the key was taken

away. The outcast of St. Jim's was a prisoner once more—to wait till his father had been communicated with—and had come down to the school to fetch him away. Frank was not likely to have an opportunity of helping him to escape again. Levison sat on the bed, his hands driven deep into his pockets, his brows knitted in a gloomy frown. His struggle was over, and there was, at length, something like despair in his breast.

CHAPTER 35.

Racke is not Pleased.

TOM MERRY dropped his hand kindly on Levison minor's shoulder. The pale misery in the fag's face alarmed him a little, as he came upon him in the quadrangle after lessons.

"What's wrong, kid?" asked the captain of the Shell.

Frank looked up at him. His eyes were red, and his lips quivering.

"Don't you know? My brother——" His voice trembled. "They've found him, he's brought back."

Tom Merry started.

"Levison! Here?"

Frank nodded.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry, in astonishment. "Where was he found, then?"

Arthur Augustus came hurrying up, with great excitement in his noble visage.

"Bai Jove! This beats the whole mewwy band, you know," exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. "Twimble's nosed it out—wemarkable way Twimble has of nosin' things out. Levison's in Nobody's Study again."

"Then he couldn't have gone far off when he cleared out of St. Jim's," said Tom.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"That young boundah knew where he was all the time, didn't you, Levison minah?"

Levison minor gave a nod.

"My hat! You deep young sweep!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"He was hidin' in the old hermitage in Wylcombe Wood," grinned Arthur Augustus. "It's all come out now. Waitton found it out somehow, and sent a couple of prefects for him, and they brought him in while we were at lessons. Twimble says Levison minah had been takin' him food and things. I weally don't know how Twimble knows."

"It's true," said Frank.

"He'll go home now, I suppose," said Tom Merry hesitatingly.

"My pater's coming to fetch him, I think," said Frank heavily. "He will have to stay till to-morrow; I suppose. And—and Railton's made me promise not to try to help him get away again. I suppose he guesses now that I helped last time. Now I can't help him."

"It's bettah for him to go home, Fwanky."

"You don't understand," muttered Levison minor. "Racke's father believes that Ernie did that—you know—and he may be charged with it, and—and punished. The police may take him into custody. That's why he was keeping away. And—and it's not proved yet that he didn't do it."

"Ahem!"

Tom Merry and D'Arcy looked uncomfortable. Frank's faith in his major's innocence touched their hearts but could not change their conviction.

The fog gave them a dark look.

"My brother's innocent!" he said fiercely. "And it's going to be proved, too! It may come out any day now. Racke lied about him to the Head!"

"I—I am suah I hope so, deah boy," stammered Arthur Augustus.

Frank walked away, with an angry brow. He did not want sympathy from fellows who did not share his faith in Levison of the Fourth.

"It's a wotten bizney, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with a clouded face. "I weally wish Levison had got cleah away. Do you think it pwob that old Wacke will take the mattah up like that, and wun the poor beast down? Bai Jove, he might be sent to a weformatowiy if there is a pwosecution."

"I don't know," said Tom thoughtfully. "Old Racke's a hard case, and he's very bitter against Levison for damaging Racke. Crooke saw him when he was here, and he says so. It may come before a magistrate."

"That will be feahfully wotten," said D'Arcy dismally. "Of course, Levison was an awful wottah to treat Wacke like that, but—but—"

"It will be rotten for the school to get into the newspapers," growled Tom Merry. "Old Racke might let it drop. The sack is punishment enough for Levison, I should say. But I suppose it depends on what old Racke does."

"I weally wish the old merchant would stick to his war-pwofiteewin', and let the mattah dwop."

"Let's hope he will."

The news that the runaway had been recaptured, and was again a prisoner in

the punishment-room, was soon over the whole school. Many details that would not otherwise have been known became known through Baggy Trimble, who exercised his great gifts as an eavesdropper with unusual pertinacity on this occasion.

Crooke of the Shell heard the news with much satisfaction, though he was careful not to state the part he had played in the capture. He was doubtful whether even his own precious pals, Mellish and Scrope, would have fully approved of that.

He visited Racke in the sanatorium to acquaint him with the news, which he expected to give great pleasure to that amiable youth.

Racke did not seem greatly pleased, however.

"Why couldn't they let him alone?" he grunted. "He was sacked and done with. They might have let him alone."

Crooke stared.

"Don't you want him lagged?" he asked. "Isn't your pater going to make it hot for him for knocking you about with a cudgel?"

"Being sacked was enough," said Racke. "I shall ask my father to let the matter drop."

"Why?" demanded the astonished Crooke.

"Oh, rats! I'm sick of the whole affair."

"You'd have to give evidence in court, of course," said Crooke, with a very curious glance at his chum. "You'd be on oath then, Racke. But I suppose that wouldn't worry you."

As a matter of fact, that prospect was worrying Racke very considerably. If his father proved obstinate, Racke's position would not be pleasant. He was far too cunning to commit perjury in a court of law, even if he had no moral objection to doing so; but it would be difficult to explain a refusal to give evidence against Levison.

"The rotter ought to be sent to a reformatory," continued Crooke. "That's the right place for a hooligan like that. Don't you agree with me?"

"Oh, rats!"

"One thing's jolly queer, though," said Crooke. "It seems that Levison has been sticking in that old hut in the wood all the time. How the dickens did he get your watch and chain pawned in Lexham, twenty miles away? Queer, ain't it?"

Racke grunted.

"If you have to give evidence, I'll come with you, if I can get off," said Crooke, watching Racke's face. "I should think you'd enjoy it, as you love Levison so much."

"Oh, rot!" snarled Racke.
 "I say, Racke." Crooke lowered his voice. "I say, old scout, is it all straight?" Racke stared at him.

"What do you mean?" he snarled.
 "About Levison? If he really handed you like that, you'd be as keen as mustard to get him the worst you could for it. I—I suppose you haven't been pitching yarns, have you?"

"Oh, don't be a silly idiot!"
 "Well, I couldn't help thinking it for a minute," said Crooke. "The whole story is a bit queer, isn't it?"

Aubrey Racke turned his face away, and refused to reply. Crooke left the ward with a very thoughtful brow. It had not occurred to him before, but it came into his mind very strongly now that Racke's eagerness to have the whole matter finished and done with was suspicious. Had Racke lied? Was the whole charge false and unfounded? Crooke wondered. But the estimable youth decided that it was no business of his, any way, and he did not confide his suspicious to anyone else.

CHAPTER 36.

Good News!

ERNIE!" It was a low whisper at the door of the punishment-room.

Levison of the Fourth rose, and crossed to the door. The sound of his minor's whispering voice was a relief to him.

"Hullo, Frank!"
 "I can only speak for a minute, Ernie; they're watching the passage," muttered Frank. "I—I can't help you again, old chap. Railton made me promise not to. If I hadn't promised, they were going to lock me in somewhere."

"That's all right, kid. Have you been liked?"

"No, no. The Head's given me a jawing, that's all. He's written to the pater, Ernie, to fetch you away. Father will be down here to-morrow most likely."

Levison set his teeth.
 "I—I wish I could help you, Ernie."
 "Don't worry, kid! Has anything been heard from old Skeat yet?"

"Nothing," said Frank. "But I hope

His voice broke off suddenly, and a heavy step sounded in the passage.

"You young rascal!"
 It was the voice of Knox of the Sixth. A heavy hand grasped the stooping bag by the collar, and dragged him to his feet. Knox shook him savagely.

"So I've caught you!" he growled. "You've been told not to come here, you young sweep!"

Frank did not reply. He had disobeyed his Housemaster's injunction in coming there. But he had not been able to resist speaking a word to his brother, useless as it was.

"You can come with me," said Knox. "I've got to report this!"

He marched Levison minor away down the passage, with a hand on his collar. The bag went quietly.

The prefect marched him downstairs, and knocked at Mr. Railton's door and opened it.

"I have to report this junior, sir, for communicating with the boy in the punishment-room. Oh, I beg your pardon," added Knox as he saw that the Housemaster had a visitor in the study.

The visitor was Inspector Skeat.

The stout inspector glanced at Levison minor with a curious smile. Knox's hand dropped from the bag's collar.

"Very well, Knox," said Mr. Railton. "Levison minor, you may go for the present."

Knox backed out rather hastily. But Levison minor did not go. He stood before the inspector, with his face reddening and paling by turns.

"Excuse me, sir," he stammered, "may I—may I ask you—if there's any—any news?"

Mr. Skeat nodded.
 "There is news, my boy," he said—"good news for you and for your brother! But run away now while I speak to your Housemaster."

Mr. Railton made a gesture, and the bag left the study.

He closed the door, and stood for some moments, almost giddy. Good news the inspector had said—what did he mean by good news? He could mean only one thing.

"Good news!" murmured Frank. "Good news for Ernie! Oh, if they have only found out the truth!"

His heart was beating almost to suffocation.

He moved down the passage like a fellow in a dream. Good news for his brother. What could the good news be, but that Ernie was cleared, that his innocence was known and could be proved?

The Housemaster's door opened, and the inspector came out with Mr. Railton. Frank watched them dumbly. They went directly to the Head's study. What was it the inspector had to say to the Head? Levison minor would have given worlds to know.

He wandered away, hardly knowing where he went. Wally called to him in the passage, but he did not even hear. He found himself in the junior common-room. The Terrible Three were there, chatting by the window, and they did not observe the fag.

"Julian, I suppose," Tom Merry was saying. The Shell fellows were discussing the Rookwood match, which was to take place on Saturday. "I shall play Julian, I think, or Kerruish? The fact is, we shall miss Levison from the team."

"Not if he'd played as he played in the House match last week!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"He was a jolly good man at his best," said Tom. "I can't help feeling sorry that he came such a mucker. If he hadn't taken to playing the giddy goat again, and had stuck to the game, he would have done jolly well at cricket this season. I suppose it was too much to expect."

He looked round as he heard a movement, and coloured as he saw Levison minor.

"Hallo Frank! I didn't see you."

"What's the matter with the kid?" said Manners. "Are you ill, Frank?" Levison minor shook his head.

"You—you were saying, Tom Merry—"

"Nothing," said Tom.

"About my brother. Suppose—suppose—suppose it comes out, Tom Merry, that he was innocent!"

Tom smiled indulgently.

"My poor kid—"

"I think it's coming out," said Frank. "Skeat's here, and he's come about that; he's gone to see the Head about it. And he told me there was good news—good news for me and my brother!"

Tom Merry started.

"Inspector Skeat told you that?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

"That's jolly queer," said Manners.

"What the dickens could Skeat have meant? Must have meant something, I suppose."

"I think—I hope it means that Ernie's going to be cleared," said Frank with a proud look. "I never believed anything against him, and you fellows will be sorry you did when it comes out!"

"I should be sorry, if it turned out like that, that I'd ever believed anything against him," said Tom. "But—"

"Well, you'll see! But—but if it comes out that Racke lied about him—about what happened in the wood, I mean, then

you'll admit that Racke lied about him the other time—about his going to the Green Man with him?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I never said I believed that, Frank. I simply couldn't take risks with the team."

"But now—now if Ernie's proved innocent," persisted Frank—"if it's proved that Racke lied to the Head—"

"In that case that makes a difference, of course," said Tom.

"And you'd play Ernie in the Rookwood match, then?"

Tom Merry looked curiously at the fag. In spite of himself, in spite of his fixed conviction, Frank's earnestness was making an impression upon him.

"Yes," he said, after a pause. "If that should come out, Frank, I'll take it that Levison was cleared all along the line. If he's cleared, he'll play in the Rookwood match, and I'll be glad to have him. But—but you're talking rot, kid! How could it possibly be proved?"

"You don't know all about it yet," said Frank. "But you'll see. You don't know what's been done. But you'll see! Oh, I wish I knew—I wish I knew!"

The Terrible Three looked after the fag as he left the common-room. Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"There can't be anything in it," he said. "If ever anything was proved against a chap up to the hilt, that was proved against Levison. Poor old Frank's potty on that subject."

And the chums of the Shell resumed the discussion of the coming Rookwood match. But they were interrupted again. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into the room, his eye gleaming behind his eyeglass.

"Somethin's goin' on, you chaps," he remarked. "Old Skeat's heah, shut up with the Head, and jawin'. Twimble says they're jawin' about Levison, but Kildare found the wottah listenin', and kicked him along the passage. Twimble is groanin' feahfully."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, it serves Twimble wight," said Arthur Augustus, with a nod. "But I've been thinkin', you chaps."

"You have?" ejaculated Monty Lowther, in pretended astonishment.

"Pway don't be a funny ass, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus severely. "This is a wathah sewious mattah. I suppose that old boundah of an inspectah has come here to awwest Levison. It would be a frightful disgwace for St. Jim's for Levison to be walked off like Eugene Awum, with gyves upon his wrists."

"They don't use gyves in these days,"

said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. I think they call 'em darbies."

"I was speakin' figuratively, Lowthah. It would be uttably wotten, and I have been thinkin' that it is up to us to put a stop to it."

"Oh, my hat!"

"If the old boundah wants to awwest Levison, let him awwest him somewhah else," said Arthur Augustus warnly. "It's simply cheek on his part of doin' it heah! Now, my ideah is to pwevent him."

"Prevent him!" yelled Manners.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "My ideah is to take the mattah in hand, and wush him!"

"Rush him!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Rush the inspector!"

"Yaas, wush him, and give him the swog's march out of gates. I wegard that as bein' a pwopah punishment for his feahful nerve, and it would pwevent the awwest taking place."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

Arthur Augustus surveyed the Shell fellows severely.

"I fail to see any weason at all for this wibald laughtah," he said frigidly. "Blake cackled just like that when I made the suggestion to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And so did Talbot, and Talbot's usually a wathah sensible chap. Howevah, I think it is a wippin' ideah, and if you fellows will back me up—"

"You want us to back you up?" asked Lowther, with a wink at his chums.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Then here goes. Back up, you fellows!"

"Yawooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as the Terrible Three seized him, and backed him up—against the wall, with a bump. "You uttah asses—gwoogh—yah—welaase me—yawooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell fellows released Arthur Augustus, so suddenly that he slid down the wall and sat on the floor. Then they strolled out of the common-room.

Arthur Augustus sat and gasped.

"Gwoogh! Yoooh! Hoop! Yow-ow-ow! Where's my eyeglass? Gwoogh! Bai Jove, I'll give the feahful wottahs a feahful thwashin' all wound! Gwooooh!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled up, and fielded his eyeglass, and glared round in great wrath for the humorous three. But Tom Merry & Co. were gone, and instead of taking vengeance, the swell of St. Jim's proceeded to study No. 6 to get a clothes-brush—which was really more necessary.

CHAPTER 37.

The Proof of Innocence.

DR. HOLMES did not look happy as the inspector entered his study with Mr. Railton, though his manner was courtesy itself. The affair of Racke and Levison was unpleasant enough to the Head of St. Jim's. The sooner it was ended and allowed to be forgotten, the better it would be, from his point of view. He felt keenly the disgrace it had already brought upon the school, disgrace which would be intensified if Mr. Racke's animosity caused him to pursue the matter further, as seemed probable. Serious as the attack on Racke had been, the Head was of opinion that the expulsion of the culprit was a sufficient punishment, and he had endeavoured to impress that view upon Racke's father. That the police should be called upon to intervene in the affairs of the school was gall and worm-wood to him.

Mr. Railton well understood the Head's feelings on the subject; indeed, he shared them. And he hastened to speak.

"Mr. Skeat has very surprising news for you, sir," he said. "Some very extraordinary discoveries have been made, which let a new light in upon the matter of Levison's attack upon Racke of the Shell. But the inspector will explain."

"Pray be seated, Mr. Skeat," said the Head. "You are aware, doubtless, that the runaway has been caught?"

"Mr. Railton has told me so, sir," said the inspector, with a nod.

"If you wish to—see him—" Dr. Holmes hesitated.

"Not at all necessary, sir. I may have to see Master Racke, though," said the inspector grimly. "However, that matter can be left in your hands, if you desire. Master Racke was careful to make no accusation in my presence."

"I do not understand—"

"I will explain, sir. On the occasion when Master Racke was attacked in the wood, he was robbed of a considerable sum in banknotes."

The Head made a gesture.

"I understand that Racke declined to charge Levison with that action, Mr. Skeat. For my part, I cannot believe that the boy, wicked as he was, was a thief. My belief was that he removed the money, and probably threw it away or hid it, in order to give a colour to his story that Racke had been assaulted by some foot-pad. He appears to have believed that Racke would refuse to mention his name as his assailant."

The inspector smiled.

"The money was never touched by Master Levison, sir. Racke refused to charge him with taking it for the excellent reason that he did not take it, and that Racke knew perfectly well who had taken it."

"Mr. Skeat!"

"A few days ago, sir, I received a visit from Levison's younger brother, a boy in this school."

"Levison minor."

"Yes. He believed in his brother's innocence, and requested me to make an effort to trace the stolen notes as a means of proving it."

"The foolish lad!"

"Not so foolish as I thought at the time," smiled the inspector. "I was not quite satisfied with Racke's refusal to furnish the numbers of the notes. I obtained the numbers from his father, and since then every effort has been made to trace them."

"And they have been traced?"

"Some of them were traced. Racke's watch and chain were pawned in Lexham, as you are aware, and in that district the search for the missing notes was very carefully pursued. Several of them have come to light, chiefly in the possession of publicans."

"Publicans?" said the Head, frowning.

"Then Levison—"

"Master Levison was concealing himself in some recess in Rylcombe Wood all the time, from what Mr. Raiton tells me," said the inspector. "So far as can be ascertained, Levison has not been anywhere near Lexham."

"But the notes were passed, you say?"

"Undoubtedly—by the man who stole them from Racke."

Dr. Holmes looked curiously at the inspector's fat, satisfied face. It was easy to see that Mr. Skeat had made a startling discovery, which he was about to reveal in his own way; also that the stout gentleman was remarkably well satisfied with himself.

"In a word, Mr. Skeat, you mean that Levison had nothing to do with the taking of Racke's money?"

"Nothing whatever!"

"Then a third party was concerned in the matter?"

"Exactly."

"Racke has made no mention of that," said the Head, perplexed.

"If he had done so, it would have disproved his false accusation against Master Levison."

Dr. Holmes started violently.

"A false accusation, Mr. Skeat?"

"That is so. But to proceed. Several of the stolen currency notes having been traced to Lexham, the man who had passed them was traced out. He was found to be a ruffianly character named William Jenner, and was, in fact, lying in a state of intoxication when he was apprehended. The pawn-ticket of Racke's watch was found upon him, and the remainder of the missing notes—including two five-pound notes, which he had not yet ventured to pass. The man was taken into custody last night, and I have seen him and questioned him to-day."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"He has made a full confession," resumed the inspector. "He knew, of course, nothing whatever of the accusation made against Levison; and, having been found in possession of the stolen notes, he had no interest in making any concealments. He expected to be charged with assault as well as theft, and so, I presume, he will be. The facts are these: he had a grudge against Racke, owing to the fact that Racke had treated him, as he declares, with great brutality on a certain occasion—"

"Surely that cannot be possible!" exclaimed the Head. "How could Racke have had any previous connection with such a character?"

"The man's story is that on a certain night last week he begged of three boys in Rylcombe Lane. There is not much doubt that he threatened them, though he does not say so. They resisted him, and one of them—Racke—lashed him cruelly with his own stick, which was taken from him. He still has the marks about his shoulders and back where the blows fell—there is no doubt that he received a terrible thrashing. This occurred between eleven and twelve o'clock at night."

"Good Heavens! Then Racke was out of school bounds at that hour, if the story is true!"

"So it appears. With two companions, whose names Jenner does not know. One of them, according to his account, interfered to save him from Racke's brutality. He had a deep grudge against Racke on this account, and on the following day, in the wood, he was a witness to a fight between Racke and another boy, whom he does not know, but who undoubtedly was Levison. Racke was beaten in the fight, and left lying in the grass. After Levison had gone, Jenner appeared on the scene. He thrashed Racke, and robbed him of all he had about him. That is his confession."

"Good Heavens!"

"Master Racke did not see fit to acquaint you with these circumstances," said the inspector drily. "Doubtless he had his reasons. Certainly, as it now appears, he had excellent reasons for refusing to give me the numbers of the stolen notes. The arrest of Jenner, as he foresaw, could prove that his story was false."

The Head's face was greatly agitated.

There was silence in the study for some moments.

"It appears, then," said the Head at last, "that a very great injustice has been done to Levison?"

The inspector nodded.

"He was telling the truth," said Mr. Railton. "He fought with Racke, as he said; but Racke's injuries were caused by the tramp's assault, which came later, after Levison was gone."

"But—but Racke——" the Head stammered. "How could the boy have had the wickedness to assure me—— It is terrible!"

"It appears that there was ill-feeling between the two boys—indeed, their fighting shows as much," said Mr. Skeat. "That was partly Racke's motive. But I think he had another, and a stronger one. If Jenner had been arrested, he would have explained, in extenuation of his brutality—as, indeed, he has now actually done—how Racke attacked him on the previous night. This would have revealed that Racke had broken school bounds at night. Doubtless Racke was anxious to keep that circumstance a secret."

"I—I suppose so. Yet such depravity—— I can hardly credit it now! You say this man Jenner confesses to committing the assault. There can be no doubt on the subject, then. And—and poor Levison!" The Head was greatly distressed. "The unfortunate boy! He was innocent."

"Quite so."

"I cannot thank you sufficiently, Mr. Skeat, for having brought these facts to light," exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "You have prevented a terrible injustice from being done."

The inspector smiled expansively.

"That is my duty, sir," he said.

"Quite so, quite so; but I am deeply grateful. To think that I drove that unfortunate lad in shame and disgrace from the school, and he was innocent——" The Head's voice trembled. "But the wrong shall be righted at once!"

"You need not blame yourself, sir;

you could only decide upon the evidence, which appeared conclusive." The inspector rose. "I am very glad, however, that the facts have come to light. Racke will be required, later, to give evidence against Jenner. Of course, the man's statement that Racke had ill-used him is no excuse—he will certainly go to hard labour for robbery with violence. As for Racke's previous statement, he may have some explanation to give you." The inspector smiled. "In any case, that is a matter resting in your hands. He had not legally committed perjury, though morally that is his offence."

The Head shook hands very warmly with the worthy Mr. Skeat as he took his leave.

When the inspector was gone, Dr. Holmes passed his hand over his brow, and sat for some minutes in silence. He looked at Mr. Railton at last.

"This is a terrible affair, Mr. Railton!"

"It is very fortunate that the truth has come to light, sir," said the House-master.

"Yes, yes. I cannot be sufficiently thankful for that. Levison shall be set right in the eyes of his schoolfellows, and I will write to his father at once. But Racke—what is to be done with Racke? I must see him at once. Will you have the school assembled, Mr. Railton? Levison's vindication must be as public as was his disgrace."

"Certainly, sir!"

And the Head proceeded at once to the sanatorium. There was a somewhat unpleasant interview in store for Aubrey Racke.

CHAPTER 38.

The Blow Falls.

"BY gad! Here's the Head, Racke," murmured Cardew.

Cardew had dropped in to see Racke from an impulse of kindness. He had found the patient in very depressed spirits. Racke had not been getting on so well the last few days, and the doctor and the nurses were puzzled by it. They did not know the mental torment of doubt from which Racke was suffering.

Ever since his father's visit, Aubrey Racke had been in fear and doubt. He had repented bitterly enough of having borne false witness against his school-fellow. The possibility that the falsehood might be brought home to him was the cause of his repentance. When he had uttered that falsehood, the possibility of discovery had not seemed to exist; and, though he did not know it, he owed his

present danger to Levison minor, and the fag's efforts to clear his brother. It was certain enough that but for Frank the inspector would not have followed up the matter to the end. Racke was not aware of that; and all his anathemas were poured upon the unconscious Skeat.

As Cardew announced that the Head was coming, Racke's face turned so ghastly white that the Fourth Former looked at him in alarm.

"The Head!" muttered Racke huskily. "Yes. Miss Marie's just bringin' him in. What's the matter? He's only comin' to ask how you are, I suppose," said Cardew. Racke shivered.

"Buck up!" said Cardew. "The Head won't eat you! What have you got to be afraid of?"

"I—I'm not afraid!" gasped Racke. But he was afraid—terribly afraid; and his terror showed in his face and his eyes.

Cardew stepped back as Dr. Holmes advanced to the bedside.

He motioned to Cardew to withdraw, and the Fourth Former left the ward, wondering.

"Racke," the Head's voice was very stern, "it has come to my knowledge that the statement you made to me respecting Levison of the Fourth was false. It was not Levison who assaulted you in Rylcombe Wood on Wednesday last week." Racke cowered.

"I—I—" His palsied lips refused to form the words.

"You were assaulted by a tramp named Jenner, now in custody!" said the Head. Racke groaned.

"Have you anything to say?" asked the Head grimly.

The wretched schemer panted for breath. "I—I—" What could he say? Lies came easily enough to his lips, but what lie could serve him now.

"You caused me," said the Head, his voice trembling a little, "you caused me to treat Levison with injustice. He was disgraced and driven from school, on your false statement, Racke. Fortunately, the truth has come to light in time for justice to be done. Levison will be righted, and will take his place in the school in all honour. But you—what can I say to you, wretched boy?"

Racke's eyes gleamed feverishly. "I—I never meant—" he muttered. "I—I was ill, sir, and—and hardly knew what I was saying. I—"

"You knew that you were bearing false witness," said the Head. "I am not unacquainted with your motive, Racke.

You feared that this man Jenner might reveal the fact that you were in the habit of breaking school bounds at night. You condemned an innocent boy to disgrace to save yourself from that discovery."

"I—I— Listen to me, sir."
"I will listen to you, Racke, if you have anything to say."

"I—I have, sir. I—I thought it was Levison—"

"What?"
"Levison knocked me out, sir, in that fight in the wood, and—and I think I fainted after he left me," muttered Racke. "Then—then that man must have come, and—and—as I was—was unconscious, I—I—did not know—"

Dr. Holmes made a gesture.
"I cannot believe that, Racke."
"It—it's true, sir!" moaned Racke. "I never knew—"

"Be silent!" said the Head. "If this was the case, you would have told me before. You accused Levison, and Levison's innocence is now proved. As soon as you are well enough to be removed, Racke, you will leave the school. I have nothing more to say to you."

Dr. Holmes turned and quitted the ward. Racke lay silent, his face white, and his eyes gleaming.

So this was the end!
The poet has told us that "the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley." Racke's schemes had gone agley with a vengeance.

Sacked!
Levison was to return, and he, Aubrey Racke, was to be turned out of the school in disgrace! That was the outcome of all his scheming.

As soon as he was well enough to move, he was to go. Racke's eyes gleamed as he turned that thought over in his mind. Was there a chance yet? Perhaps he was not, after all, at the end of his resources. He could face a flogging—he could face contempt and avoidance—he could face anything but being sent home in disgrace, to meet the wrath of his father. That evening the doctor found Racke worse, and Dr. Short shook his head seriously when he left him.

CHAPTER 39. Righted at Last.

"WHAT'S on?"
"What the dickens—"
"Now, then, all you kids get into Hall!" said Kildare; and the captain of St. Jim's walked away, leaving the juniors in a buzz.

(Continued on page iii. of cover.)

"Somebody else going to be sacked?" grinned Monty Lowther. "Have they found you out, Crooke?"

Crooke scowled.

"Or is it you, Scrape?" asked Jack Blake. "Is the chopper coming down on you, old scout?"

"Go and eat coke!" growled Scrape.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I weally think Kildare might have explained. Pewwaps it's somethin' to do with Levison."

Crooke burst into a jeering laugh.

"The Head wouldn't neddle the school to see him arrested," he said.

"Wats! The inspectah has gone," said Arthur Augustus. "There is not goin' to be any awwest."

"Did you rush him aft'er all?" asked Monty Lowther innocently.

"Wats!"

"Hallo, here's Levison, by Jove!"

Langton of the Sixth was coming downstairs, and Levison was by his side, his face very bright.

The juniors stared at him blankly.

Langton had fetched Levison from the punishment-room; and Levison of the Fourth certainly did not look like a fellow who was going to be sent home in disgrace. His face was bright and his eyes were shining. He laughed as he met the surprised looks of Tom Merry & Co.

"You going to take Levison home, Langton?" asked Crooke.

"No!" snapped Langton.

"But his pater hasn't come for him, has he?"

"His pater is not coming for him, aft'er all," said the prefect. "Come on, Levison!"

"Sorry to disappoint you, Crooke," said Levison calmly. "I know it will be a blow to you—but I'm not going."

"Not going!" shouted Crooke.

"Sorry—no!"

Langton laughed, and led Levison away, leaving Crooke dumbfounded, and the rest of the crowd in a state of great excitement.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, with an air of great wisdom. "Somethin' must have happened, deah boys!"

"Go hon!" said Blake incredulously.

"Weally, Blake——"

Levison minor came speeding up, his face flushed, and stopped Levison major as he was following Langton to the Head's study. He caught his brother by the arm.

"Ernie!"

Levison smiled at him.

"It's all serene, Frank!"

The fag caught his breath.

"You—you mean——"

"It's all right, and I owe it to you, kid," said Levison, in a low voice. "I sha'n't forget it, Frank."

He followed Langton, and the Head's door closed behind them. Frank stood with a shivering face. The inspector had meant what he said, then. It was "good news"—it was the best!

Curdew caught the fag by the shoulder. Curdew's expression was very curious.

"What do you know about it, young 'un?" he exclaimed. "Has anything been found out?"

Frank laughed happily.

"You heard what Ernie said," he replied. "I told you Racker had lied, and now it's been found out. That's all!"

"By god!" said Curdew.

"If that's so, I'm jolly glad," said Clive heartily. "But—but I'm blessed if I catch on, all the same."

"But Jove! Do you mean to say, Pwanky, that it wasn't your majah aftah all who luvvanded Wacke?"

"Didn't I tell you so?" chortled Frank, in great delight.

"Yess, wathah! But——"

"But it's got to be proved," sneered Crooke.

"Looks as if it's proved, from what Levison said," said Tom Merry in wonder. "I suppose this means that the Head's got something to say to us about it. That's what the school's assembled for."

"And old Bcent nosed it all out, I suppose," said Monty Lowther. "Who said the age of miracles was past?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I helped him," said Frank proudly.

"You did?" shouted the juniors.

"Yes, I did," grinned Frank. "I knew Ernie hadn't done it, and you'll all have to own up you were silly idiots."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Levison minah——"

"Well, if it turns out that Levison wasn't guilty, we'll all make it up to him somehow," said Tom Merry.

"Suppose we get into Hall," suggested Talbot, with a smile.

"Yess, wathah. That's a good ideah."

The juniors were keen enough to get into hall now. The possibility of an announcement that Levison was innocent after all was exciting. But certainly it looked like it now, unexpected as it was.

Levison minor marched into hall with Wally and Reggie Manners and a crowd of the Third, feeling as if his feet hardly touched the floor, so brimming with satisfaction and delight was he. Wally and Co. were also looking very pleased. Levison minor had told his chums of the part

he had taken in clearing his brother; and Wally and Co. felt justly that it reflected great credit on the Third Form of St. Jim's.

All St. Jim's gathered in Big Hall.

There was a buzz of voices as the door at the upper end of the hall opened, and the Head came in with Levison of the Fourth.

Levison was walking with his head very erect. In the ranks of the Third, Levison minor gave a little chirrup.

"My boys!" The Head's voice was very clear. "I have called you together to make an announcement that, I am sure, you will be very glad to hear. Last week, your school-fellow, Ernest Levison of the Fourth Form, was condemned to expulsion, for having, as was believed, made a savage and brutal attack upon a boy in the Shell. Upon the evidence that was before me, I could come to no other conclusion. Fresh evidence, however, has now come to light.

"Racke of the Shell stated that his injuries were due to Levison. There was other presumptive evidence that bore out his statement. That statement has now been proved to be—ahem—incorrect. Racke's motive in making such a false statement I need not enter into now. But its falsity is proved beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"The person who really assaulted Racke, and robbed him, was a ruffianly tramp named Jenner—now in custody. He has confessed.

"Levison was unjustly disgraced in the eyes of his schoolfellows," continued the Head. "The school has been assembled in order that justice may be done to an innocent lad as publicly as the wrong that was done him. Ernest Levison stands before you without a stain upon his honour.

"Racke, I need hardly say, will leave the school as soon as he is well enough to be moved. Levison is cleared, and he will resume his place in the Fourth Form; and I trust that his schoolfellows will give him a hearty welcome."

The Head paused.

Then Cardew of the Fourth shouted:

"Three cheers for Levison!"

There was a roar at once that made the old rafters ring.

"Hip-hip, hurray!"

There was another roar as the Head shook hands with Levison, whose face was glowing. Then Dr. Holmes retired from the scene, and there was a rush of the fellows towards Levison.

He took it all very coolly.

"I wish you'd kick me," said Cardew. "I ought to have guessed—I knew about Racke having a row with that tramp—but I never knew the beast was still in the neighbourhood—never thought of him, in fact."

"Thank goodness it's all cleared up," said Tom Merry. "You'll feel like cricket on Saturday?"

Levison grinned.

"Quite!" he said.

Levison of the Fourth was righted at last; and there were few fellows at St. Jim's who did not rejoice at it.

As for Aubrey Racke, there was nothing but contempt and disgust for him; but the feeling of the St. Jim's fellows underwent a little change when it was learned that Racke's state was worse, and that his illness was likely to be serious. The dismal prospect before him had its effect upon the wretched boy, and Dr. Short consulted very gravely with the Head. With great reluctance, the Head decided, at last, that Racke should be allowed to remain, and with that news the invalid took a turn for the better, though many weeks passed before he was able to leave the sanatorium. Probably the scorn and distrust of his schoolfellows were a sufficient punishment for him.

Meanwhile, Levison of the Fourth had taken his old place in the school, and these were happy days for him. He was in Tom Merry's team for the Rookwood match, and helped to beat Jimmy Silver's eleven by a handsome margin of runs, and proving that he was quite in his old form. No. 9 Study were united once more; and one of the most popular fellows at St. Jim's was the junior who had been driven from School.

THE END.

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