"WORKING HIS WAY!"

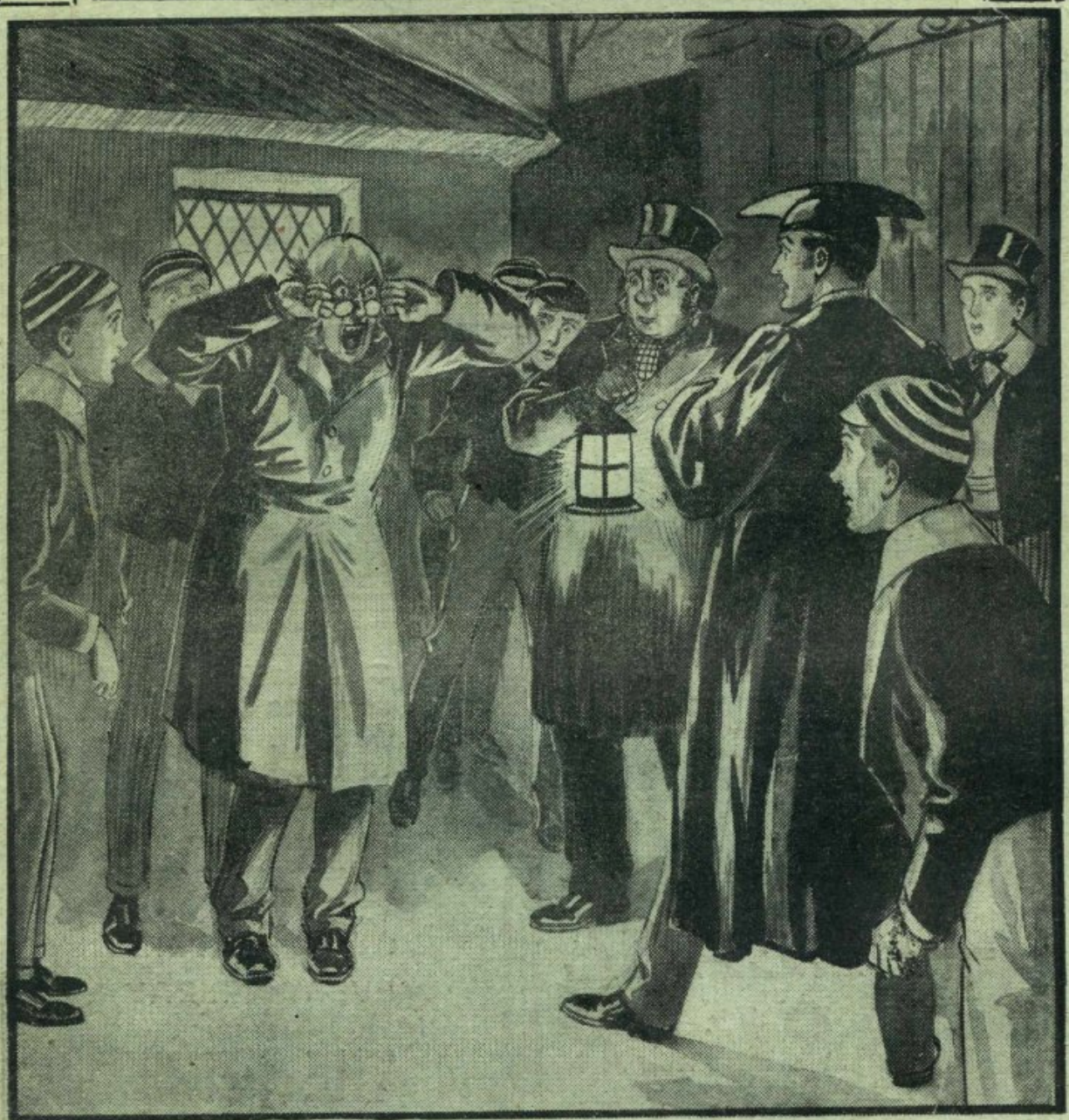
A Complete School Tale and Grand War Serial in this issue.

Complete Stories for ALL, and Every Story a GEM.

The GEM LIBRARY 1D

No. 352.

Vol. 9.



POOR OLD RATTY IN TROUBLE AGAIN!

(An amusing incident in the splendid complete school tale contained in this issue.)

OUT THIS FRIDAY—

3

NEW ADDITIONS TO

"THE BOYS' FRIEND"

3d. Complete Library.

No. 280.

THE BOOTBOY OF ST. BART'S!

A Magnificent Complete Tale of School Life and Football.

By ROBERT MURRAY.

No. 281.

SEALED ORDERS!

The Story of the Humorous and Dramatic Adventures of Midshipman Bob Hardy.

By DAVID GOODWIN.

No. 282.

NELSON LEE IN THE NAVY!

A Splendid Complete Tale of the World-famous Detective.

By MAXWELL SCOTT.

EACH BOOK ONLY COSTS

3d.

—PLEASE ORDER TO-DAY

PUBLISHED IN TOWN AND COUNTRY EVERY WEDNESDAY MORNING

The GEM LIBRARY 1D

COMPLETE STORIES FOR ALL, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

WORKING HIS WAY!

A Grand Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Hooper swung up the boots, and hurled one of them. There was a loud biff as it crashed upon Mr. Ratcliff's chest. "Seize him!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER 1.
Boots on the Warpath!

"BLESS his boots!"

"Hallo!"

"Blow his boots!"

"By Jove!"

"Bust his boots!"

Figgins & Co., the heroes of the New House at St. Jim's, stared in surprise at Hooper. Figgins & Co. were just coming down the stairs in the New House, being bound for the other House, where Tom Merry & Co. were entertaining a little party to tea. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were in a hurry to get to the School House—especially Wynn. But they stopped as they caught sight of Hooper.

Hooper was the youth who filled the honourable position of "boots" in the New House at St. Jim's. He was generally a mild and civil youth. But there wasn't much mildness or civility about him now.

He was carrying a pair of boots in his hands—Mr. Ratcliff's boots. Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was very particular about his boots. He was fussy and fault-finding in very many things, and there were few persons under his authority who had not cause to dislike him. All the fellows who belonged to the New House at St. Jim's had experienced the sharp edge of Mr. Ratcliff's tongue

Next Wednesday:
"SAVING TALBOT!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

more than once. Naturally, the boots had found it sharper than the schoolboys. Mr. Ratcliff had a way of nagging servants, which led to frequent changes in the staff of the New House—a contrast to the School House, under Mr. Railton's rule, where such changes were very uncommon. Hooper was apparently bringing those boots away from Mr. Ratcliff's study, after having taken them there. And he was furious.

His remarks were not addressed to anybody in particular. They were hurled into space loudly and emphatically. He blessed, blowed, and busted Mr. Ratcliff's boots in a voice that was quite possibly audible in the Housemaster's study itself.

"What's the matter, kid?" asked Figgins kindly over the banisters, as the Co. stopped at this unwonted display on the part of the boots.

Hooper looked up at the three juniors on the stairs and snorted.

"It's 'is blessed boots!"

"Ratty's?" asked Kerr sympathetically.

"Yes. Look 'ere!" The boot-boy held the boots up for inspection. "Ain't they clean? Look at 'em! That's wot I say—look!"

Figgins & Co. smiled and inspected the boots. Certainly they looked very nice, and the Co. said so.

Hooper gave a snort of deep disgust.

"Which he's in one of his tantrums," he said disrespectfully. "And he's told me to take 'em away and clean 'em properly! Ain't they cleaned properly—wot?"

"Ahem!" murmured Figgins.

If Mr. Ratcliff was in one of his "tantrums" it was not surprising that he had come down heavily on the boot-boy, who had been unfortunate enough to be nearest. The thunderbolt might have fallen on Figgy himself, or anybody else, who happened to be near the ill-tempered Housemaster. As the juniors often remarked, Mr. Ratcliff was a beast, but not a just beast.

"So I says bust his boots!" said Hooper. "I ain't going to stand it! That I ain't! Which 'ere he's been out and got his boots muddy, and calls on me in the middle of the arternoon to shine 'em, which I does it—and it ain't my dooty by no means for to clean boots in the arternoon—and now he says, says he, go and clean 'em again, says he, you lazy young rascal, says he. Which Britons never shall be slaves, and I ain't going to stand it."

"Shush!" murmured Figgins.

"I says, bless his boots——"

"You'll get into a row, kid," said Fatty Wynn. "Better go and blow off steam in the boot-room; it's safer there."

"Bust his boots, and bust him!"

"Shush, you young fathead!" said Figgins, anxious for the boot-boy, in the kindness of his heart. "You'll get the sack, you know."

Hooper gave another emphatic snort.

"I don't care if I does!" he said. "It ain't all beer and skittles here; and now my father's got a fried-fish shop in the Mile End Road I ain't bound to stick it if I don't want to. And I ain't going to! I ain't a slave! Wot are we fighting Germany for, if Britons are going to be slaves—wot?"

"Shush!"

"Called me a lazy young rascal, and said he would box my years!" spluttered Hooper, evidently boiling with indignation. "I ups and says to him, 'No, you won't!' says I. 'Git outer this room, you impertinent young vagabone!' he says!"

"Hallo! What's all that thundering row about?" exclaimed Montieth, the head prefect of the New House, coming along the passage. "You young rascals ragging the boot-boy?"

"No fear!" said Figgins. "Not a bit of it!"

"It's all right, Montieth!" said Kerr. And he added in a whisper over the banisters to the boot-boy: "Hook it, you young ass!"

"Clear off, Hooper!" said the prefect. "Don't hang about here with your boots!"

He did not speak unkindly, but Hooper was not in a reasonable mood. For a very long time Hooper had stood what he termed the "airs and grices" of Mr. Ratcliff, having no resource for a livelihood but his job as boot-boy in the New House at St. Jim's. But matters were changed now—now that his parent had opened a fish-shop in the Mile End Road. With that new and dazzling resource behind him, Hooper could afford to be independent. The proverb says that the worm will turn. Hooper had turned at last! The "push" no longer had any terrors for him!

"Who you torking to, Master Montieth?" said Hooper defiantly.

The Sixth-Former stared at him.

"Hallo! What did you say? Clear off, kid!" went on Montieth, kindly enough, guessing that the boy was fresh from one of Mr. Ratcliff's naggings. "Don't jaw so much, or you may get into trouble. Now, then!"

"Which I says, I ain't standing it! Bust his boots!"

"Hooper!" called out Mrs. Kenwigg, the House-dame, from a distance. "Hooper, come downstairs at once!"

"Which he ain't satisfied with his boots, ma'am!" replied Hooper. "And if he ain't satisfied—why, he can clean 'em himself!"

"Now, cut off!" said Montieth.

"Blow his boots, and blow him!"

"Mr. Ratcliff will hear you, you young duffer——"

"Let 'im 'ear me!" vociferated Hooper. "Let 'im! Don't I keep on telling you that I ain't standing it any longer? The old blighter!"

"Hooper!"

"I ain't in this 'ere school like you, and can't git out!" said Hooper, evidently comparing his position in the New House very favourably with that of Figgins & Co. and Monteith. "I can go when I like! I ain't under his blessed thumb! Box my ears, will he? By Gosh, let him try it on! Yah!"

"Hallo! Is this a circus, or a Suffragette meeting, or what?" asked Sefton of the Sixth, lounging in on the scene. "What is that young blackguard kicking up a row for?"

"Blackguard yourself!" retorted Hooper promptly.

The bully of the Sixth jumped. Never had he dreamed of receiving such a reply from such a person as a boot-boy.

"Why, you cheeky young hound——" he exclaimed.

"Oh, you go and chop chips!" said Hooper. "And don't put your paws on me, or you'll get a boot in the heye—and sharp!"

Sefton, who was reaching out, backed away very suddenly, as Hooper swung a boot into the air. Figgins & Co. burst into a chuckle. The sudden retreat of the Sixth-Form bully tickled them.

Mr. Ratcliff's door opened. The Housemaster had heard the noise in the passage, and he looked out of his study, with a thunderous frown on his always sour face.

"What is this?" he snapped. "Hooper, how dare you make a disturbance in the passage? How dare you, I say! Do you want to be discharged?"

"Which I don't care tuppence!" said Hooper independently.

"What? What?"

"Blow your boots, old Ratty, and blow you!" said Hooper.

"Wha-a-t!"

"And if you want 'em cleaned again, you can clean 'em yourself!" said Hooper. "Box my years, will you? My years! You jest try it on, Mr. Ratty—Ratcliff—and see 'ow quick you'll git a oner in the weskit!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The boot-boy's loud voice had brought a dozen fellows into the passage, and there was an irresistible burst of laughter at his extraordinary address to the Housemaster. Never had such plain language been addressed to Mr. Horace Ratcliff in his own House. And the juniors—who would have given a great deal to be able to address Mr. Ratcliff in a like strain—enjoyed it exceedingly.

The New Housemaster stood transfixed.

For some moments he could only gasp. Then he strode towards the boot-boy, his gown rustling, his eyes gleaming.

"You—you impertinent young rascal! You are discharged! You hear me? You are discharged on the spot!"

"Who cares?" jeered Hooper. "Which I'm ready to go and jolly glad to see the last of you, sir!"

"You—you vagabond! I—I will thrash you before you go! I will——"

"'Ands off, old codger!" said Hooper, swinging up the boots. "I've 'arf a mind to let you 'ave 'em in the neck now!"

"Good—good heavens! Boy—wretch—rascal——"

"Bow-wow!" said Hooper disrespectfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys! How dare you laugh at this—this vulgar and blackguardly display?" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "Every boy present will take fifty lines! Hooper, you—you young rascal—you unspeakable hooligan——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"I said shut up, and I mean shut up!" retorted Hooper. "I'm a-goin' this blessed arternoon, and I 'ope you'll like cleanin' of your own blessed boots in the mornin', old Ratty! And afore I go, I'll tell you what I thinks of you, and wot all the fellers thinks of you, only they don't dare to say so. You're a mean skinflint! You're a bully! You're a nagger! And I'm glad to 'ave done with yer!"

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Kerr. "Ratty is getting it straight from the shoulder this time."

Mr. Ratcliff, red with rage, fairly rushed at the boot-boy.

Hooper swung up the boots, and hurled one of them, and there was a loud biff as it crashed upon Mr. Ratcliff's chest. Then it clumped on the floor as the Housemaster staggered against the wall, gasping.

"Seize him!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "Monteith—Sefton, seize him—the ruffian—the—the——"

Monteith made no movement, but Sefton ran at the boot-boy. He staggered back as the second boot whizzed through the air, and caught him under the chin. Sefton ingloriously rolled over on the floor, with a loud bump and a louder howl.

"Well bowled!" gasped Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hooper stalked independently away, unpursued, and retreated triumphantly to the lower regions. Mr. Ratcliff, gasping, and casting a furious glance round, retreated into his study, and closed the door with a bang. His dignity had suffered very much in that ridiculous encounter with the rebellious boot-boy, and he realised it very keenly. And he knew that all the onlookers had enjoyed the scene, which added to his annoyance and rage.

A quarter of an hour later, Hooper, the rebel, with a tin trunk on his shoulder, shook the dust of St. Jim's from his feet. And Figgings & Co., who had lingered to give the boot-boy a handsome tip before he went, took their way to the School House, brimming with merriment.

CHAPTER 2.

The Guest of Honour.

"TALBOT'S not here yet!" remarked Tom Merry.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were in their study in the School House, looking very cheerful.

The study table was laid for tea, and the "spread" was one of unusual dimensions and plentifulness. A guest of honour was expected that afternoon.

Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, came in, looking very cheerful also. They, too, were looking forward to the arrival of the expected and distinguished guest.

"Bai Jove! Talbot hasn't awwived!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Talbot not here!" said Blake. "It's nearly six!"

"I twust he is not goin' to disappoint us, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "I am weally lookin' forward to seein' old Talbot again! Besides, I've thought of an ideah."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that statement very impressively.

But, somehow or other, the juniors did not seem to be very much impressed.

D'Arcy waited a moment for eager inquiries as to what the idea might be, but they did not come. The swell of St. Jim's sniffed, and polished his famous monocle, and jammed it into his eye.

"I wemarked that I have an ideah, deah boys," he said.

"Whose?" yawned Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I twust you will not be funnay on a sewious subject. I have thought of a wheeze for gettin' old Talbot back to St. Jim's."

"Get it off your chest!" said Tom Merry. "Might be something in it. 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings——'"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a babe and sucklin', you ass! Howevah, to come to the point. It is agweed on all hands that old Talbot has got to come back to St. Jim's——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course, there has been sneerin' on the point fwom Levison and Mellish and Cwooke, and one or two othah cads," said Arthur Augustus, "but that won't make any diffewence to us—nor to old Talbot."

"Not a bit of it!"

"We have agweed to forget the past. It cannot be denied that old Talbot was bwought up vewy badly—in the cwiminal classes, in fact—and that when he came to St. Jim's befoah, he was, in point of fact, a cwacksman—nothin' more or less——"

"Leave that out!" growled Tom Merry. The chums of the School House did not like to be reminded of the unpleasant past of their pal Talbot.

"Come to the point, if there's one to come to!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"I am comin' to it, deah boys. You all know that old Talbot weformed, and became a weally wippin' chap; you all know that he wisked his life to wescue my young bwothah Wally; you all know he's a weal bwick——"

"Tell us something we don't know, Gussy!" murmured Manners.

But the swell of St. Jim's had evidently thought out that little oration in advance, and he went on, unheeding.

"You all know that Talbot, at pwesent, would be a cwedit to any school. And now he is fwee as air! He has weceived the King's pardon, and the past is done with. He starts afwesh. When he comes heah, he will have a lot of fwiends to back him up. Therefore, I wepeat, we're goin' to have him back."

"Hear, hear!"

"But what's the idea?" demanded Blake. "We've had a lot of gas, but we haven't come to the idea yet."

"I'm comin' to that, deah boy! Talbot is at pwesent without a home. He has lost his job at Slingsby's Farm, as Farmer Slingsby does not want extwa hands now that the wintah is comin' on. He has agweed to come heah to tea with us befoah he cleahs off out of this neighbourhood."

Blake sat down with a resigned expression.

"Wake me up when he gets to the point," he said. "I can do with a nap for an hour or so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass, Blake! I'm comin' to the point. My ideah is this—Talbot is goin' away, and pewwaps we shall nevah see him again. Well, my ideah is not to let him go."

"What!"

"We have alweady offahed to waise the money to pay his fees heah, and he wefuses, because he is so beastly independent, you know. Well, my ideah is not to take 'No' for an answah. He's comin' heah to tea—may be heah any minute. My pwoposal is to collah him and keep him heah."

"My hat!"

"We simply won't let him go!" pursued Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, evidently greatly taken with his idea for capturing the former junior of St. Jim's. "We'll pile on him, and collah the boundah. Then we'll bump him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In a purely fwiendly way, of course; but we'll bump him, as fwiends, until he gives us his word to stay!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" was echoed from the doorway, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy swung round, and saw the junior who was the subject of his excellent scheme.

"Talbot, deah boy!"

The handsome junior came into the study.

There was a warm greeting for Tom Merry & Co. Very fit and handsome Talbot looked. It was only lately that he had come out of hospital, but he looked quite fit and well. The hard, open-air life on a farm had set him up wonderfully. And there was a bright and happy expression on his face. It was like wine to him to find himself once more at St. Jim's, among his old chums, who had never forgotten him.

All St. Jim's knew Talbot's story, but there were few of the fellows who did not like him and respect him.

That he had been brought up a member of a cracksman gang was common knowledge; but it was common knowledge, too, that he had thrown the old life over at the first chance, and since then had been straight as a die.

And now he had won his pardon by a deed of heroism that had thrilled his friends with pride—at the risk of his life baffling a German spy who had attempted to blow up a railway-bridge and wreck a troop-train.

It was no wonder that the juniors of St. Jim's were proud of him, and, with very few exceptions, were ready to forget the black past, and take Talbot to their hearts and their friendship, as he was now—one of the best and bravest and most straightforward fellows that ever breathed.

"Sit down, old fellow," said Tom Merry, pushing Talbot into a chair. "This is the last tea-party with all of us together, and it is going to be a corker. Figgins & Co. ought to be here by this time. You heard Gussy's idea. What did you think of it?"

Talbot laughed merrily.

"Just like Gussy!" he remarked. "I only jolly well wish I could come back to St. Jim's, that's all!"

"You're goin' to, deah boy."

The junior who had once been known as the "Toff," the comrade of Hookey Walker the cracksman, shook his head.

"Nothing doing!" he said. "You fellows have treated me awfully decently. I shall never forget it. But I fancy there are some fellows in the school who wouldn't overlook the past as readily as you have done."

"Oh, wats!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "That's all wubbish! Let the dead past buwy its dead, you know!"

"And then—the Head!" said Talbot.

"The Head is all wight; I know he wants you to come back," said Arthur Augustus. "I happen to know that he has consulted some of the Governin' Board on the subject as to whethah there would be any objection. And there isn't. You see, my patah is on the Board of Governahs, and the Head jawed to him about it, and the patah asked me lots of questions about you, and I told him what a wegulah bwick you are. Of course, he had heard of the way you

dished that German wottah and saved the twoop-twain. So it's all wight about the Head and the governahs."

"Then it's only a question of cash!" said Tom Merry.

"Rather a serious question, as I haven't any," said Talbot, with a smile. "I've even had to give up my job on Slingsby's Farm now that the winter's coming on. I've got to get to London and look for work—not that it's a very good time to look for work, now that the war's on. But that can't be helped. I wish I were old enough to take the King's shilling. But that can't be helped, either."

"You are comin' heah!"

"You see, you can let us stand by you, as your old chums, Talbot," urged Tom Merry. "We can raise the cash among ourselves——"

Talbot shook his head.

"And after a term or so, you'll win a scholarship," said Tom. "Redfern and Owen and Lawrence of the New House are here with scholarships, you know, and you can do the same!"

"In the long run, yes," said Talbot. "But that would take time, and meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile, we'll look after you."

"It's impossible, old chap. I'm awfully obliged, and I know you mean jolly well, but I couldn't take charity, and that's really what it would amount to. It's rotten hard to have to stay away from St. Jim's, but there you are; it can't be helped!"

"I wefuse to let you go, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "Gentlemen, as Talbot pwoves to be an obstinate ass, I suggest cawwyin' out my ideah. We'll collah him, and bump him till he agrees to stay."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a thump on the door, and Figgins & Co. came in grinning. They shook hands warmly with Talbot.

"You're late!" said Tom Merry.

"Sorry, there's been a kick-up in the New House!" said Figgins, chuckling. "You should have seen Ratty—quite green!"

"It was stunning!" said Fatty. "You should have heard him! You know Hooper, our boot-boy, not a bad kid. He's been slanging Ratty, and he's got the sack, and he's gone—just cleared off."

"Rotten!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, he's all right!" said Kerr, laughing. "His father's got a new fried-fish shop in the Mile End Road, and Hooper didn't want to keep his job any longer. So he got his back up at last, and gave Ratty the straight tip. You should have heard him talk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "And you should have seen him biff Ratty with a boot! It was worth a term's pocket-money!"

The juniors laughed joyfully. Mr. Ratcliff was equally unpopular in both Houses at St. Jim's, and the idea of his being "biffed" with a boot tickled them immensely.

"And now Hooper's got his rise in life and gone, we're stranded without a boot-boy," said Figgins. "Ratty will have to find another one jolly quickly, or we shall have to clean our own boots in the morning. Not that that will hurt us, either. It was worth more than that to see Ratty biffed with a boot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. sat down to tea in great spirits.

CHAPTER 3.
A Very Surprising Idea.

TALBOT had been silent for some time while the merry talk ran on in the crowded study in the Shell passage. There was a wrinkle of deep thought upon his boyish brow. He was thinking hard.

Figgins's story of Hooper's rebellion and sudden departure had brought a new and curious idea into his mind.

He hesitated to communicate it to the other fellows; but he was thinking—hard.

Tom Merry noticed his abstraction, and regarded him curiously.

"Penny for 'em!" he said.

Talbot started, and coloured a little.

"Eh—for what?" he said.

"Your thoughts, of course," said Tom, laughing. "You seem to be thinking out some awfully deep problem."

"I—I've got an idea," said Talbot. "I don't know what you fellows will think of it——"

"An idea for staying at St. Jim's?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

"Heah, heah!" chirruped Arthur Augustus.

"Pile in, old chap!" said Figgins heartily. "If there's anything we can do, we're yours to command; you know that."

"I know, old fellow!" said Talbot gratefully. "I'm not likely to forget the splendid way you fellows have stood by me. I've been thinking about Hooper."

"Hooper!" repeated Figgins, in surprise. "What about Hooper? He's gone."

"He has left the school?"

"Yes, rather! Ratty fired him on the spot. He wanted to go, really; he didn't want his job here any longer," said Figgins, laughing.

"Then he won't want to come back?"

"Not likely. Ratty wouldn't let him, if he did."

"Then," said Talbot slowly, "it wouldn't be like taking another chap's job away. I couldn't do that, of course."

"Eh?"

"What!"

"There's a new boot-boy wanted in the New House," said Talbot, looking at the surprised juniors quietly. "Why shouldn't I take the place?"

"My hat!"

"Mr. Ratcliff must get a new kid, and he can't have found one yet. In fact, as Hooper has left without giving notice, it will be rather awkward for Mr. Ratcliff, I should think. He can't fill the place to-day, unless somebody comes and offers. Well, why shouldn't I offer?"

"You!" gasped Tom Merry.

"I!" said Talbot. "I can clean boots, I suppose, and work a knife-machine, and do odd jobs, quite as well as Hooper can!"

"Great Scott!"

"You—a boot-boy! By Jove!"

"Why not? It's honest work, and nothing to be ashamed of in it, that I can see. Better than what I used to be, anyway," added Talbot, with a gloomy contraction of the brows. "If Mr. Ratcliff would accept me——"

"Oh, Talbot!"

"I can give him a character—extending back some weeks!" said Talbot. "Mr. Slingsby will speak for me, so far as he knows me. I dare say the Head would put a word in for me too."

"B-b-b-but——"

"Then I could stay here, at all events, if only as a boot-boy," said Talbot, his eyes glistening. "I should have a chance of going on with my lessons in my spare time."

"Bwavo!"

"What—what an idea!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "I—I say, you'll find Ratty a jolly bad master, Talbot, old chap. He will rag you."

"Let him!"

"But you—you'd be a servant!" said Lowther.

"Beggars can't be choosers!" said Talbot, with a shrug of the shoulders. "So long as a chap does honest work, and does it well, there can't be anything to be ashamed of in his position. Only a snob would think so."

"Yes, that's right enough!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a sage shake of the head. "If there were anythin' to be ashamed of in bein' a servant, deah boys, it would be w'ong to keep servants, as the weceivah is as bad as the thief!"

"Oh, there are no silly snobs here!" said Tom Merry. "That part is all right, Talbot. But you'd find it a hard job, and jolly unpleasant."

"I don't expect to find it pleasant anywhere working for a living, without having been taught a trade," said Talbot.

"Bai Jove! It's a jollay good ideah, if Talbot could stand it," said Arthur Augustus. "The chief dwawback is that he would be in the New House, and not in the School House along with us."

"Oh, we'd look after him!" said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. cordially.

There was an excited discussion on the subject. Tom Merry & Co. wanted Talbot to stay at St. Jim's as one of themselves; but that was not possible. And the next best thing was to keep him at the school on any terms that were possible. The juniors all agreed upon that. It seemed a little curious to think of Talbot in the role of a boot-boy, but there was no false pride about the Toff. He was prepared to work, and to work hard, and certainly he would make an excellent boot-boy if he tried.

"It's settled," said Talbot at last. "Of course——" He coloured a little. "Of course, in my new position things will be changed. I understood quite well that it won't be possible for you fellows to talk to me as—as you're doing now. There will be a bit of a change."

"Wats! I shall wegard you as a pal, undah all possible circs."

"So shall we all!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

"Don't talk out of the back of your neck, Talbot!"

advised Figgins. "I suggest your going to the Head first and asking him to speak to Ratty. He will give you a good character."

Talbot rose to his feet.

"I'll go to the Head now," he said. "Nothing like striking the iron while it's hot, you know. Later on there may be rivals after the job."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come back and tell us how you get on," said Tom.

"Right-ho!"

Talbot left the study. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another. Talbot's idea had taken them by surprise. But they were glad to think of keeping him among them on any terms whatever.

"I hope he'll get the job," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Later on he may get a scholarship, like old Reddy."

"Yaas, wathah! I should be willin' to spend a lot of my spare time coachin' him," said Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Ratty is a rotten master," said Figgins, "and some of the chaps in our house are not—not quite up to our mark. Talbot won't have a first-class time, I'm afraid, if he's taken on. But at least he'll have us to stand by him."

There was no doubt about that. Boot-boy, or junior or whatever he might be, Talbot was always sure of the hearty friendship of Tom Merry & Co. And that would certainly make a great deal of difference to him in his new position.

CHAPTER 4.
Talbot's Chance.

"HALLO, Talbot!"

Talbot, on his way to the Head's study, paused as he met Levison of the Fourth in the passage. Levison stopped, and looked at him curiously, flushing a little.

"Well?" said Talbot coldly.

Levison had always been his enemy. When he had been at St. Jim's, the cad of the Fourth had always been against him; and later than that, when Mr. Foxe of Scotland Yard was hunting for the "Toff," Levison had helped the detective to run him down. Talbot's hands clenched involuntarily at the sight of the Fourth-Former. He expected a sneer or a jeer from the cad of the School House; but there was a surprise in store for him.

"I—I didn't know you were here," said Levison awkwardly.

"I came to see Tom Merry."

"I'm glad to see you!" said Levison. "I—I suppose you know I helped the detective fellow when he was looking for you the other week?"

"I know it."

"And—and afterwards you jolly nearly got killed in saving the troop-train," said Levison. "Well, I—I've thought about that, and—and I'm sorry, Talbot."

Talbot stared at him in surprise. It was the last thing he had ever expected to hear Ernest Levison say.

Levison laughed awkwardly.

"I suppose you didn't expect me to look at it like that?" he said.

"Well, no; I didn't."

"I can't say more that that," said Levison. "I'm sorry I was down on you, as it's turned out. That's all."

"Thanks!" said Talbot, more cordially. "It's decent of you to say so, Levison. I don't bear any malice."

Levison held out his hand, and Talbot shook it genially enough. Then he went on his way to the Head's study with a brighter look on his face. Levison's action seemed a good augury for his new career at St. Jim's. It would make a great deal of difference to him if he had no longer the bitter enmity of Levison to confront. And in his new position, if he obtained it, it would have been in Levison's power to cause him many petty annoyances. It was something to be relieved of that.

Talbot knocked at the door of the Head's study, and the doctor's pleasant voice bade him come in.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was chatting with the Head when Talbot entered.

Both the masters looked very kindly at him, and shook hands with him cordially. To them Talbot was no longer the "Toff," the confederate of Hookey Walker & Co; he was the heroic lad who had almost lost his life in saving the troop-train.

"I am glad to see you, Talbot!" said the Head. "The fact is, I was just speaking about you to Mr. Railton. We were discussing whether it could possibly be arranged for you to resume your old place in this school."

"You are very, very kind, sir!" said Talbot. "But I have no money, sir, and that makes it impossible for me to come here on equal terms with the other fellows. But if you would do something for me, sir——"

"Anything I can do, my boy."

"Mr. Ratcliff has discharged the boot-boy in the New House, sir. He wants another boy to take Hooper's place. I thought that perhaps you might speak a word for me," said Talbot diffidently.

The Head started.

"You—you wish for the place?"

"Yes, sir; if you see no objection."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"I have learned to work hard, sir," said Talbot. "I should be able to perform the same duties as Hooper. Of course, I want experience; but I should very quickly learn the work, and I would do my very best."

"Dear me!"

"Of course, if you don't approve, sir, I will not think anything more of it," said Talbot anxiously.

"My dear boy, I do approve!" said the Head warmly. "It can be arranged, also, that your studies can be pursued, though of course not to the same extent as if you were in the Shell as heretofore. What do you think, Mr. Railton?"

The School House master nodded approvingly.

"I think it is an excellent idea, sir, if Talbot is prepared to face the difficulties of the position. I am afraid, my boy, that you will find it very different from what you were accustomed to when you were here before."

"I'm ready for that, sir. If I can keep on my school work to some extent, I should be more than satisfied," said Talbot.

"Very well," said the Head. "I will speak to Mr. Ratcliff, and I have no doubt that he will accept you in the place you mention. I will also speak to your former Form-master, Mr. Linton, concerning your instruction. You may be sure, my dear boy, that all of us are eager to benefit you in any way possible. We are proud that you once belonged to this school."

"You are very kind to say so, sir."

"I will see Mr. Ratcliff immediately," said Dr. Holmes, "then you can call upon him and offer your services. You will wait in the House?"

"I shall be in Tom Merry's study, sir."

"Very good. I will send you word."

Talbot retired from the study in a mood of great satisfaction. The job was as good as his now. Mr. Ratcliff was not likely to refuse a request from the Head. Talbot sighed a little as he thought how much better it would have been if his new place had been in the School House under Mr. Railton. But that could not be helped. After all, if he did his duty well, there was no reason why he should not satisfy even the irascible Mr. Ratcliff, and, at all events, he would give that unpleasant master no cause for complaint.

His step was light as he returned to Tom Merry's quarters. The juniors greeted him with a general chorus:

"Well?"

"I think it's all right," said Talbot. "The Head's going to speak to Mr. Ratcliff. I suppose that will settle it."

"Bound to!" agreed Tom Merry.

"And I'm going to keep on lessons in my leisure time, as far as possible," added Talbot. "Of course, that won't be so much as I should like, but it will be something. And I shall have time to work up for a scholarship, I hope."

"Yaas, wathah! I'll help you, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus generously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughter, you fellows. I am goin' to stand by old Talbot like anythin'. You wemembah I used to coach that chap Lynn——"

"I don't remember that Lynn got much benefit from it," grinned Tom Merry.

"Wats! I am wathah a dab at coachin'. As a mattah of fact——"

"And Talbot will be able to play footer too," Figgins remarked.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Figgins!"

"Go hon! You'd like to practise with us, Talbot?" said Figgins. "I've only seen you play footer once—at Abbotsford; but you are jolly good at the game, I could see that. You'll be a recruit for the New House junior eleven."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry warmly. "Talbot is a School House chap. He was in the School House when he was here before."

"He's going to be in the New House now, though," said Figgins warmly.

"Yes; but——"

"Undah the circs——"

"Look here, Figgins——"

"Bosh!" said Figgins. "Talbot's going to play for our eleven! We want him! We're going to have him! 'Nuff said! Rats!"

"Hold on!" said Talbot, laughing. "You forget that I

shall be only the boot-boy. You don't play boot-boys in junior House elevens, Figgins."

"Oh, we'll manage it," said Figgins. "If anybody raised any objection, I'd jolly well give him a thick ear! I can't say fairer than that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Talbot can come into our study and do his prep with us," said Kerr.

"Good egg!"

"Wats! Talbot can come ovah to Studay No. 6 and do his pwep——"

"Bow-wow!" said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins, I do not wegard that as an intelligable wemark. I shall insist——"

"Order!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I wish we could fix it for Talbot to be boots in this House instead of the New House. I suppose it can't be done. But you won't have a very nice time with Ratty, I'm afraid, old chap!"

"Oh, I shall be all right!" said Talbot cheerfully. "If only Mr. Ratcliff takes me, and I hope he will!"

"Here comes Toby!" said Monty Lowther, a little later. "Well, Toby, what's the verdict?"

Toby, the School House page, put his head into the study with a grin.

"Master Talbot wanted," he said.

"Good!" said Talbot.

"Which you are to go over to the New House, and see Mr. Ratcliff in his study," said Toby.

"Right!"

Toby looked curiously at Talbot. Like everybody at St. Jim's, he knew the history of the "Toff," but he liked him immensely. Talbot had always been kind and considerate towards Toby when he was a Shell fellow in the School House.

"I say, Master Talbot," went on Toby, "skuse me, but you are goin' to take old 'Ooper's job in the New 'Ouse—wot?"

"If I can get it," said Talbot.

"You—a blessed boots!" said Toby, with a whistle.

Talbot laughed and nodded.

"Well, that beats it!" said Toby.

"I'll tell you what, Toby," said Tom Merry. "Suppose you were to change jobs with Talbot—you go into the New House, and——"

Toby shook his head emphatically.

"Which I'd rather 'ave the push than live in Mr. Ratcliff's 'Ouse," he said. "And I'm sorry for you, Master Talbot. You'll 'ave a 'oly time!"

And Toby, with a commiserating look at the prospective victim, departed. Talbot, however, looked quite cheerful as he made his way across the quadrangle, and entered the New House. He was to stay at St. Jim's, and that fact alone compensated for all drawbacks.

CHAPTER 5.
The New Boot-boy!

"COME in!" said the acid, unpleasant voice of Mr. Ratcliff, as Talbot tapped at the Housemaster's door in the New House.

Talbot felt a slight sinking of the heart as he entered, but his face remained calm and composed, his manner respectful.

Mr. Ratcliff was seated at his writing-table. He was not looking good-tempered. The "row" with Hooper had left its effect upon him, and it had not yet worn off. Also he was suffering from indigestion—a complaint he was very subject to, chiefly owing to want of exercise. When Mr. Ratcliff suffered from indigestion, Mr. Ratcliff's unfortunate neighbours generally suffered from Mr. Ratcliff.

Talbot stood respectfully before the table, and the narrow eyes of the New House master rested upon him.

"Dr. Holmes has spoken to me concerning you, Talbot," began Mr. Ratcliff snappily.

"Yes, sir."

"It appears that you wish to take the place of the boot-boy whom I discharged for insolence this afternoon?"

"I hope you will give me a trial, sir."

"You can work, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, certainly."

"As the Head has made the request, I do not care to refuse it," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Otherwise, I should hesitate very much about accepting your services, Talbot. Your record is—ahem!—peculiar."

Talbot flushed.

"I understand that you have had a very extraordinary upbringing. You were the—ahem!—associate of thieves and vagabonds from your earliest years!"

"That is true, sir."

"You were, in fact, what is called a cracksman, boy as you are?"

"Yes, sir," said Talbot, his flush deepening.

It was just like Mr. Ratcliff to "rub it in" in this way. Whenever Ratty had an opportunity for saying anything unpleasant, he never left it unsaid.

"I trust, Talbot, that all your connection with this kind of life is—ahem!—over and done with?" pursued Mr. Ratcliff.

"If it had not been, sir, Dr. Holmes would hardly have recommended me to you for a place in this House," said Talbot, his voice trembling a little, in spite of his self-control.

"Ahem! Yes, quite so. I have no doubt that you have satisfied Dr. Holmes. I may as well tell you, however, that I am no great believer in these sudden reformations, and I am surprised at Dr. Holmes wishing to admit you in this school in any capacity!"

"There are a good many persons now, sir, who will answer for my character," said Talbot.

"Probably; but I have my own ideas about that," said Mr. Ratcliff. "However, I hope you will prove trustworthy. I sincerely hope so!"

Talbot's face was crimson.

"If you do not think so, sir, I suppose it is useless for me to come here," he said. "I am sorry!"

He made a movement to retire.

"You need not go," said Mr. Ratcliff, in a rasping voice. "As it happens, I need a new boot-boy in rather a hurry, and I am disposed to give you a trial. I trust that you will be properly grateful."

"I trust so, sir."

"Another point," said Mr. Ratcliff. "You were formerly here as a junior in the Shell. Of course, you understand that that is all changed. If you enter this House as a servant, you will be expected to conduct yourself as a servant!"

"Certainly, sir," said Talbot, biting his lip hard.

"There must be no assumption of equality with the young gentlemen—no airs of familiarity, or anything of that kind," explained Mr. Ratcliff. "I am a believer in the strict upholding of proper class distinctions. If you are here as a boot-boy, you will be expected to act as a boot-boy!"

"I quite understand."

"Dr. Holmes has informed me that he will take measures for your education to be looked after as much as possible," continued Mr. Ratcliff. "What a boot-boy can want with Latin and mathematics is beyond my comprehension, and I do not conceal from you, Talbot, that I hardly approve of this. However, that is Dr. Holmes's affair. It must be understood, however, that you are to fulfil all your duties, and not to neglect your work with this curious idea of taking lessons, and that I myself have no time whatever to devote to your instruction—none whatever!"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff coughed.

"Ahem! I think that is about all," he said. "You can go to the housekeeper's room now. Mrs. Kenwigg will deal with such matters as—ahem!—your labour and your remuneration, and so on. You may go!"

"Yes, sir."

Talbot quitted the study.

His interview with Mr. Ratcliff had not raised his spirits. For some moments he wondered whether he had done wisely in seeking the place. The Housemaster had as good as said that he did not quite believe in the "Toff's" reform of character, and that it was only by the Head's desire that he was receiving the boy into the House at all, even in a menial capacity.

That interview did not promise very well for the future; but Talbot set his teeth, and resolved to go through with it. It would be cowardly to yield at the first rebuff, and he was anything but a coward. After all, he could keep out of Mr. Ratcliff's way. The path of a boot-boy did not often cross that of a Housemaster. And by hard work and civility, by strict attention to duty, he might convince even Mr. Ratcliff in the long run that his estimate of him was mistaken.

"Hallo! Here's the giddy cracksman!" sang out a voice, as Talbot went down the passage on his way to the housekeeper's room.

Talbot flushed and looked round.

It was Clampe of the Shell who made the remark.

"What the deuce are you doing here, young Bill Sikes?" asked Clampe, in surprise.

"Shut up, Clampe!" growled Redfern of the Fourth. "Hold your silly tongue, you rotter! How do you do, Talbot, old man?"

"Well, he is a cracksman, ain't he?" said Clampe, grinning. "Or he was, anyway!"

Redfern shook hands with Talbot, and Owen and Lawrence,

Figgins suddenly embraced Talbot, and waltzed him round the room, gasping. "You're going to play in the eleven this afternoon!" he shouted. (See Chapter 13.)

who were with him, followed his example. Clampe indulged in a sneer.

"Good enough for you County Council School bounders, no doubt!" he remarked. "I'd prefer not to shake hands with a cracksman myself!"

"Pile it on," said Talbot quietly.

"Yow!" roared Clampe suddenly, as Redfern caught hold of his collar and unceremoniously banged his head against the wall. "Yarooh! Leggo, Reddy, you beast!"

"Going to shut up?" asked Redfern genially.

"Yow-ow-ow! Yes."

"Good!" Redfern released Clampe, who stood rubbing his damaged head furiously. "You talk too much, Clampey—much too much!"

"Will you tell me where the housekeeper's room is, Master Redfern?" asked Talbot.

Redfern jumped.

"Master Redfern!" he repeated. "What are you 'mastering' me for, you ass!"

Talbot smiled.

"I'm the new boot-boy," he explained.

"Eh? What? Off your rocker?"

"It's so," said Talbot. "I'm the new boot-boy, and I want the housekeeper's room. I begin work here to-day, Master Redfern."

"Well, my hat!"

"Boot-boy!" shrieked Clampe. "My hat! By gosh! You a boot-boy! Well, this takes the whole giddy cake! Ha, ha, ha! You'll burgle the boots! You'll crack the knife-machine! He, he, he!"

And Clampe of the Shell fled, as Redfern made a ferocious movement towards him, and rushed away to tell the surprising news in the common-room.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence surrounded the new boot-boy in great surprise.

"Look here, is it a fact?" exclaimed Lawrence.

"Yes, Master Lawrence."

"Don't 'Master Lawrence' me, you fathead!"

"But I must, sir. I have to get into the habit," said Talbot.

"I'll jolly well punch your head if you do, all the same!" growled Lawrence.

"Well, this takes the cake!" said Redfern. "I wish you luck, Talbot, old man, but you haven't got a nice place. Mrs. Kenwigg is an old duck, but Ratty—ahem! Well, I'll show you to the House-dame's room, anyway."

And Redfern led the new boot-boy to that apartment. Talbot thanked him, and tapped at the door, and Mrs. Kenwigg called to him to come in. The plump, comfortable dame was seated in an armchair before her fire in the cosy room, knitting, and she raised her eyebrows as she saw Talbot.

"Dear me, it's Master Talbot!" she said. "I heard all about your saving the train, Master Talbot. It was very brave and noble of you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Kenwigg. I——"

"And how kind of you to call on me now you have come here," added Mrs. Kenwigg. "Sit down, Master Talbot."

"The fact is——"

"Take that chair near the fire."

Talbot flushed a little.

"The—the fact is, Mrs. Kenwigg, I'm the new boot-boy."

Mrs. Kenwigg dropped her knitting in her astonishment.

"Deary me! You, Master Talbot! Deary me! You don't say so!"

"But I do, ma'am," said Talbot, with a smile. "Mr. Ratcliff has kindly taken me on in Hooper's place, and he has sent me to you to be told my duties."

"Well, bless my soul!" said Mrs. Kenwigg. "Thank you, Master Talbot," as Talbot picked up the fallen knitting and handed it to her. "Well, you 'ave took my breath away. And you are not joking; you are really a boot-boy?"

"Yes, really, ma'am. I—I hope I shall give satisfaction."

"Deary me!" was all Mrs. Kenwigg could say.

And it was some time before she recovered sufficiently from her astonishment to initiate the surprising new boot-boy into his new duties.

CHAPTER 6.
At Work.

TALBOT very quickly dropped into the ways of his new place.

In two or three days he was quite as satisfactory a boot-boy as the dismissed Hooper had ever been.

He was up early in the morning, long before the rising-bell rang out to call the St. Jim's fellows from their beds. And he went to bed later than the juniors. But he always looked very fit and well.

He did his work well, and many of the fellows remarked, grinning, that the boots were much better cleaned than in Hooper's time.

Mrs. Kenwigg, too, was satisfied with the way the knives were cleaned. Talbot never broke any of them in the knife-machine, and Hooper, as the House-dame was never tired of repeating, broke on an average a knife every week. When Talbot lent a hand with the washing-up he never dropped a plate or a cup, which Hooper had frequently done. The House-dame had had her doubts at first. She liked Talbot; everybody did, or nearly everybody. But she had had very natural doubts whether a boy who had once been at St. Jim's as a pupil would take properly to the place of a boot-boy. She fully expected trouble below stairs, and above stairs, too.

It was only to be expected that a lad so peculiarly placed should show signs of "side" towards the other servants, and impertinence towards the upper servants, and perhaps towards the schoolboys.

But Talbot never did, and Mrs. Kenwigg's kind heart was soon set at rest upon that point.

Talbot was no fool. He knew his place. He believed in his heart, with Robert Burns, that "the rank is but the guinea's stamp, the man's the gold, for all that!" But while he was in the place of a boot-boy he made it a point to know his place, and to keep in it.

And so the new boot-boy in the New House was not long in winning golden opinions from all sorts of people.

His work was always done, and done well, and he was willing to help others with their work if they wanted him to, without raising an argument as to whether it was his "place" to do certain things or whether it wasn't.

Above stairs he came into contact with the boys as little as he could, and when he did come into contact with them his manner was irreproachable.

Clamps of the Shell, who had anticipated cheek and "side," had told the other fellows that he would jolly soon put the boot-boy in his place. But Clamps made the discovery that the new boot-boy did not want putting in his place; he kept there without any putting.

And when Clamps, who was a good deal of a bully, went out of his way to make himself disagreeable to the boot-boy, trying to provoke him into what he would have called insolence, he found that Talbot was not to be drawn. The boot-boy was very quiet, very respectful, and quite inoffensive, and Clamps had to let him alone for very shame's sake. To say nothing of the fact that if Master Clamps had gone too far he would have had Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co. very promptly "on his neck."

Many of the fellows besides Clamp expected "side" from the new boot-boy, but as they did not discover any signs of it, they loftily admitted that the kid knew his place, and left him to himself.

And, once satisfied that he knew his place, some of them were very kind to him.

Indeed, Sefton of the Sixth carried his kindness so far as to offer him a shilling one day as a tip for carrying a message to Rylcombe. And Sefton was very much annoyed when Talbot offered cheerfully to carry the message, but declined the tip.

"You don't want the bob?" said Sefton, with a stare. "Why not?"

"I am paid for my work here," Talbot explained patiently.

"But your fellows always take tips; you're jolly keen after them as a rule," said the Sixth-Former.

"Perhaps so, but I'd rather not, if you don't mind."

Sefton slipped the coin back into his pocket, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like," he said. "I suppose this is cheek on your part because you were once a junior in this school—eh?"

"I don't mean to be cheeky, sir," said Talbot quietly.

"Well, all right; you can cut off," said Sefton.

And the boot-boy cut off.

Excepting in that one particular, that he declined anything in the nature of a tip, Talbot was a boot-boy to the manner born, and he gave satisfaction on all sides. Even Mr. Ratcliff had no fault to find with his boots. Not that Talbot escaped the keen edge of Ratty's tongue; far from that. When Mr. Ratcliff was irritable his nearest neighbour generally had the benefit of it, and Talbot had his share. But he bore it all quietly. It was no more than the juniors of the New House had to bear, as a matter of fact, and what the schoolboys could endure the boot-boy could endure.

Tom Merry & Co. were a little disappointed.

They had expected to see a great deal of Talbot when he was once more installed at St. Jim's, but it did not prove so. Talbot had plenty to do. His work occupied him most of the day, and his scanty leisure hours were chiefly devoted to study. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, had very kindly undertaken to help him. Talbot had been a hard worker when he was a junior in the Shell, and he had won the Form-master's good opinion, and it stood him in good stead now. Mr. Linton gave him an hour every day, and Talbot made the most of it. And in his little garret in the New House he often worked by candlelight when the fellows had gone to bed.

That garret had once been occupied by Hooper, and when Talbot took possession of it it had been adorned by flaming oleographs on the walls and a collection of picture postcards of celebrated actors and actresses. Talbot had made a change. The gaudy adornments disappeared promptly, and a little shelf, which Talbot made himself, was loaded with books, the principal possessions of the new boot-boy. And when he had an evening to himself Talbot would spend it in that little room, high above roofs, "slogging" away at his books with an energy which would have earned him the reputation of being a "swot" if he had belonged to a Form at St. Jim's.

The hope was always strong in his breast of gaining one of the many scholarships that belonged to the ancient foundation of St. Jim's, and thus recovering his old place as a junior in the school.

Yet he was not dissatisfied now.

He regarded himself fortunate to a great extent. He was doing honest work, he was proving that his reform was sincere and lasting, and he was earning money by his labour, and he had long since learned that a half-sovereign earned by honest work was better than a hundred pounds obtained by dishonesty.

It was in the field of sport that he felt his position most keenly. He was a keen footballer, and he would have gladly taken his place in the junior team of the New House. He would gladly have joined the fellows in their practice. But it was impossible. Most of them, certainly, would have welcomed him in their ranks. But he felt that it would not do. He was a boot-boy, and he had no right to mix with the schoolboys, and he could only mix with them on sufferance, and his pride was too strong to allow of that.

But his friends in the junior forms did not see it in the same light. Talbot, owing to his peculiar experiences, had an old head on young shoulders. But the juniors were not given to thinking very deeply, and they began to feel a little sore at Talbot's keeping himself so strictly in his place.

And before he had been a week in his new position, with-

out once putting in an appearance in Figgins's study, where he would have been heartily welcome at any time, Fggins & Co. decided to "put it to him straight," as Figgy termed it.

And the Co. proceeded to the boot-room, a little apartment that had a view of the stables and a paved yard, to talk to him "like Dutch uncles," as Figgins said.

Talbot was there. The knife-machine was installed in the boot-room, and Talbot was cleaning knives. The juniors heard the whir of the machine as they came along, and a cheery sound of Talbot humming a tune. He was humming "Ah, Fors' e Lui!" from the opera "La Traviata"—a curious enough thing to hear hummed in a boot-room by a boot-boy. Figgins kicked the door open, and the Co. marched in.

The knife-machine stopped, and Talbot looked round. He was in his shirt-sleeves, with an apron on, and looked cheery but a little dusty.

"Hallo!" said Figgins.

"How are you getting on?" asked Kerr.

"Very well, thank you, Master Kerr!"

Kerr sniffed.

"Don't 'master' me, fathead! I don't like it!"

"Excuse me, sir, but I must. Mr. Ratcliff would be angry with me if I did not address you in the proper manner—and quite rightly, too."

"Oh, pile it on!" said Kerr. "Why haven't you been to our study, ass?"

"I—I feel that I oughtn't to come, sir."

"Rot! Why not?"

"Because I'm the boot-boy, and you——"

"Well, you're coming in to tea this time," said Figgins. "We've got a special tea."

"And a steak-and-kidney pie," said Fatty Wynn temptingly. "You know, one of Mrs. Taggles's steak-and-kidney pies!"

"When will you be free here?" asked Kerr.

Talbot hesitated.

"This is my last job for the present, unless anything special should be wanted," he said. "But—but, really, Master Kerr——"

"Then come along as soon as you've finished."

"We're having the School House fellows over," said Figgins. "We'll ask anybody you like to meet you, Talbot. Some of them are growling because you never speak to them. I give you that straight!"

Talbot looked distressed.

"I hope they don't misunderstand me," he said. "I'm only trying to keep in my place. My employers would not like my having much to do with the fellows. It wouldn't be right!"

"Oh, rats! Look here, you're coming to tea?"

"I—I—I'll ask Mrs. Kenwigg's permission," said Talbot.

"All right. We'll come with you and ask her," said Figgins; "and if she says 'No,' we'll tie a tin can to her cat's tail every day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And when the knives were finished, and Talbot had doffed the apron and donned his jacket, the party proceeded to Mrs. Kenwigg's room. Talbot was feeling a little uncomfortable.

He was almost painfully sensitive on the point of keeping in his just position, and not assuming any privileges that his position did not entitle him to; yet it was difficult to resist the influence of Figgins & Co.'s genial friendship. His heart yearned for the company of his old comrades.

"Can Talbot come to tea in our study, Mrs. Kenwigg?" asked Figgins, plunging into the subject at once. "He used to be our pal, you know!"

Mrs. Kenwigg smiled and nodded.

"Certainly, if you wish," she said kindly.

"Thank you! You're a brick, ma'am!" said Figgins joyfully. "Come along, Talbot, you bounder! This way!"

And the Co. marched Talbot off in triumph.

CHAPTER 7.

Mr. Ratcliff is Shocked.

TOM MERRY & CO. came cheerily into the study. Kerr had cut across to the School House to inform them that Talbot had come to tea, and the Co. had come over joyfully. They had almost completely lost sight of their old chum since he had become boot-boy in the New House.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, slapping the boot-boy on the shoulder. "You're almost a stwangah, deah boy!"

"Why haven't you been over to Study No. 6, you bounder?" demanded Blake indignantly.

"Or to our study?" growled Monty Lowther. "We want you to help us get up the new number of the 'Weekly'—Special War Number!"

"Anyway, here the bounder is now," said Digby. "And mind, while we're here at tea, we're all pals again. None of your Master This and Master That, or you'll get a thick ear!"

"Yaas, wathah! Dwop all that for the pwesent, Talbot, deah boy!"

Talbot laughed. His face was very bright. Once more in the genial circle of the juniors of St. Jim's he was thoroughly happy. It was hard, hard luck that he could not take his old place in the school. But he was prepared to enjoy the present occasion as long as it lasted.

And it was enjoyable. Under the experienced care of Fatty Wynn, a really stunning spread had been prepared. The study was soon in a buzz with cheerful, happy voices—indeed, the cheerfulness in the study was so emphatic that several fellows stared in to see what was "on." Redfern and Owen and Lawrence came in to join the party, which taxed the space in the study to the utmost. Clampe of the Shell looked in and giggled.

"My hat! The boot-boy to tea!" he ejaculated.

And then he retreated with a howl as a squashy orange caught him in the eye.

Talbot did not seem to have heard Clampe's unpleasant remark. He would not damp the good spirits of his friends by showing how it affected him.

But that cheery little party was destined to be interrupted.

The study door was suddenly thrown open, without the preliminary of a knock. There was the rustle of a gown, and Mr. Ratcliff strode in.

The juniors jumped to their feet at once. Talbot rose with a flush on his face, the words dying away on his lips. He understood at once that Mr. Ratcliff's coming boded no good to him. The New House master's eyes were fixed upon him.

"You are here, Talbot!"

"Yes, sir," said Talbot.

"Are you aware that you have been rung for?"

"No, sir. I am sorry!"

"I desired to send you with a message," said Mr. Ratcliff crushingly. "I found that your services were not at my disposal. This is not what you are employed for, boy!"

Talbot made no reply. He might have argued that his hours of duty did not extend to twenty-four a day, and that the house-dame had informed him that his services were not required just then. But he knew that it would be useless to appeal to Mr. Ratcliff's reason or sense of fair play. Mr. Ratcliff lacked both.

"And you!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with a withering glance at the juniors, who were looking very red and uncomfortable. "I am surprised at you! Indeed, I am shocked!"

"Indeed, sir!" said Tom Merry, with a glitter in his eyes. "Is anything the matter?"

"I twust, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great dignity—"I sincerely twust that we have not shocked you in any way, Mr. Watcliff!"

"You have shocked me," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I am shocked and pained—I may say, disgusted. Do you know no better, then, than to associate on equal terms with a boy employed in the house to clean boots and knives?"

The juniors became crimson.

"We are not snobs, sir," said Arthur Augustus, rather unluckily, for his remark might be taken to imply that Mr. Ratcliff was a snob, as indeed he was.

The Housemaster glared at the offending junior.

"D'Arcy, how dare you make such a remark?"

"It is twue, sir," said D'Arcy sturdily. "I should be vewy sowwy to be a snob!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Mr. Ratcliff raised his hand, and pointed to the door.

"With you School House boys I will not deal," he said cuttingly. "If you choose to act in a manner calculated to degrade you, I suppose it is a matter for your own Housemaster to deal with. You shall not do so here, however. Kindly leave this house at once!"

"I—I asked them to tea, sir!" stammered Figgins. "I—I think——"

"Silence, Figgins!"

Mr. Ratcliff was still pointing to the door, and the School House fellows, almost trembling with rage, passed out. Then the Housemaster turned his eyes upon the equally enraged New House fellows.

"With you I shall deal!" he said grimly.

"What have we done, sir?" asked Kerr.

"You have acted in a disgraceful manner by asking a boot-boy to tea in your study!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"We think——"

"I will not allow you to argue with me, Figgins. If you have no sense of proper distinctions, it is my business to

teach you. Once and for all, I forbid this kind of familiarity with the servants employed in this house. Do you understand?"

Figgins did not reply; he could not. If he had spoken, he would have uttered some startling home-truths concerning Mr. Ratcliff, which would have earned him a flogging at least.

"As for you, Talbot, you can return to the kitchen at once!"

"Yes, sir," said Talbot, in a stifled voice.

"I forbid you to assume these airs of equality with the boys of this House. Will you remember that?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you fail to do so on another occasion, Talbot, I shall discharge you!"

"Very well, sir."

"Now go!"

Talbot went.

Mr. Ratcliff remained a few minutes longer to lecture Figgins & Co., and to give them an imposition all round of a hundred lines of Virgil. Then he retired, with a comfortable feeling that he had made quite a large number of persons thoroughly miserable.

When he was gone Figgins closed the door, almost choking. He brandished a pair of big fists at the door, as if it had been the countenance of Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

"Oh," gasped Figgins, "why—why can't we handle him? Why can't we jump on him? I—I can't stand much more of him! Beast! Rotter! Cad! Snob! Worm!"

"He's all that, and more!" groaned Redfern. "Fancy jumping on poor old Talbot like that! Oh, the rotter—the awful rotter!"

"He never did like Talbot," said Fatty Wynn dismally. "He only likes fellows like Clampe, who're ready to lick his beastly boots."

"The rotten cad!"

"The beastly snob!"

"We'll make him wriggle for it, somehow," said Lawrence vengefully. "Housemaster or not, he's no right to insult Talbot like that!"

"Poor old Talbot! This knocks on the head any more teas in the study," said Owen.

"I suppose it does—the beast!" said Figgins.

"I—I wonder how old Talbot's feeling about it now?" muttered Kerr.

"Pretty rotten, I should think."

"We'll make Ratty feel rotten, too, before we've done with him," said Figgins, gritting his teeth. "I don't feel inclined to finish this feed, for one. Let's get over to the School House—Ratty can't rag us there—and we'll hold a council of war, and decide how to make the beast wriggle for this."

"Good egg!"

And the angry juniors followed Tom Merry & Co. to the School House. They found those usually cheery youths in the same vengeful frame of mind, angry and gloomy; and the whole crowd held an excited council of war in Tom Merry's study, the object of which was a scheme of avenging Talbot's wrongs, and making the obnoxious "Ratty" sit up. And when Tom Merry and Figgins & Co. put their heads together to scheme a scheme something generally came of it.

CHAPTER 8.

Clampe Catches It.

TALBOT was at work in the boot-room.

But he was not humming a tune now, and his handsome face was clouded.

The small-souled and mean-minded Ratty had succeeded in deeply wounding one whose nature was so much finer than his own that Ratty had no chance whatever of understanding it.

It had been against his better judgment that Talbot had accepted Figgy's invitation to tea in the study.

He knew that the Housemaster, if he should hear of it, would not look at in the same light as the juniors.

Mr. Ratcliff had no special cause to dislike Talbot, excepting that he disliked all frank and high natures, which were so different from his own. It might even have been supposed that a boot-boy was too insignificant a personage to be noticed by a great person like a Housemaster at all. But Mr. Ratcliff had keen and prying eyes for everything. And he was a snob of the first water. Talbot was a boot-boy—a servant in the Housemaster's employ. Therefore he must be made to feel his position. That he had once been a junior in the school was an additional reason, in Mr. Ratcliff's eyes, to take care that he did not assume upon his former position. Talbot's carefulness for the past week had kept him clear of the Housemaster and his petty tyranny. His first mistake had brought Mr. Ratcliff down on him. And Mr. Ratcliff was really glad to be able to feel some justification for his vague dislike of the boy.

According to Mr. Horace Ratcliff, Talbot's position in the school was all nonsense. The boy ought to have been sent to prison, Mr. Ratcliff thought. Anyway, the Head's regard for him was an absurdity. Mr. Ratcliff simply fumed at the idea of a mere boot-boy going over to Mr. Linton's study for tuition. A boot-boy's place was to clean boots; and even the fact that he did not drop his "h's" savoured of impertinence to Mr. Ratcliff.

The New House master, indeed, had made sarcastic remarks to Mr. Linton on the subject, remarks to which the master of the Shell replied so drily that Ratty had felt extremely mortified, and so disliked Talbot all the more.

Mr. Linton had, indeed, allowed observations to escape him, which hinted at his secret opinion that Mr. Ratcliff was a snob, and Ratty did not forget it.

Talbot's heart was heavy now.

He had made a mistake in yielding to Figgy's pressing demands, he knew, but it would not have mattered in the other House. In the New House it mattered very much.

After all, he was servant there, and it was only judicious, to say the least, that the boys should be on familiar terms with the staff "below stairs."

Talbot knew it, and he had determined to keep in his place; and the first time he had departed from that wholesome rule the thunderbolt had fallen.

It was bitter enough for Talbot.

Indeed, he was thinking now, as he worked at polishing silver, with quick hands, but a heavy heart, whether he had done wisely in coming back to the school at all.

He had intended to work his way upward, and one of the many scholarships on the old Foundation might be easily within his grasp.

But—— There was a big "but."

He had been so happy, for that hour in Figgy's study, before the Housemaster descended in his wrath.

Talbot could not help suspecting that Mr. Ratcliff resented the Head having so warmly recommended him to give Talbot the place. The Housemaster could not, of course, refuse a request from the Head.

But he was very jealous of his authority in his own House, and to his small and suspicious mind it probably seemed like an encroachment upon his authority.

He had lectured Talbot soundly, and he had spoken somewhat sharply to Mrs. Kenwigg on the subject, directing that good lady to see that there was no "more of it."

And poor Mrs. Kenwigg, much irritated by the Housemaster's reprimand, had been somewhat irritable with Talbot in consequence.

The boy polished away at the silver, with a clouded brow. After all, would he have done better to keep away from the school he loved—to make a clean cut, and make up his mind to it? he wondered.

At all events, there could be no more friendliness with his old friends. That was completely knocked on the head. To them, in future, he must be nothing but an ordinary boot-boy; neither more nor less.

There was a cautious step in the passage, and there came a slight tap on the boot-room door, and it opened. An eyeglass glimmered in.

"D'Arcy!" muttered Talbot, in dismay.

The swell of St. Jim's insinuated himself into the room, and closed the door. He smiled benignly at Talbot.

"Yaas, deah boy! I've come ovah to see you, old chap! We all want to tell you how sowwy we are for what happened this aftahnoon, you know."

"Thank you!" said Talbot. "But you'd better clear. There will be trouble if you are found here speaking to me."

"That's all wight, deah boy. Watty's gone out," said Arthur Augustus. "I felt bound to come ovah and speak to you. I haven't let anyone see me comin' in. I'm wathah a deep chap, you know."

Talbot smiled.

"Yes; but——"

"Hard at work?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes."

"Can I help you, deah boy?"

Talbot laughed.

"No, thanks! It's all right. You'd better clear, Master D'Arcy—really. If you should be seen here, it means trouble for both of us."

"We all wegard Watty as a fwightful cad," said Arthur Augustus; "and we're not goin' to stand it! We're goin' to punish him."

"Punish him!" said Talbot.

"Yaas, wathah! Wag him, you know."

"My dear chap——"

"We're all in it," grinned Arthur Augustus. "Us School House chaps, you know. Figgins & Co. are goin' to be left

out, because Watty might get down on them. It's a School House wheeze, and I thought it would make you feel bettah to know that Watty is goin' to be put thwough it—wight thwough."

Talbot looked worried.

"Not on my account!" he exclaimed. "I wish you'd give up the idea. Don't do anything of the sort. It will lead to more trouble, old man."

Arthur Augustus smiled reassuringly.

"That's all wight, deah boy; we're goin' to be awf'ly careful. And I'm goin' to get you out of this too."

"What do you mean?" asked Talbot, in wonder.

"Out of this posish, undah Watty's thumb," explained Arthur Augustus. "My pathah is comin' down on Satahday aftahnoon, to see the juniah House match, and I am goin' to put it to him. As a governah of the school he is bound to do somethin', considewin' that you saved my minah's life, and that you wisked your life to save the twoop-twain. I am goin' to put it quite stwaight to my governah."

"Don't!" said Talbot. "We've been through all that already. I tell you, I can't accept charity from anybody. I'm going to work my way up, if I've got it in me. And I think I have. And now, do get off, D'Arcy, there's a good chap."

"Vewy well, deah boy—good-bye!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took his departure. Talbot went on moodily polishing. He had had to send away his friend, but the gloomy little boot-room seemed ten times gloomier when the swell of St. Jim's had gone.

Champe of the Shell met Arthur Augustus as he came up the stairs from the regions below, D'Arcy almost ran into him as he stepped into the passage. Clampe stopped.

"At it again—what?" he sneered.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the cad of the New House.

"I fail to appwehend your meanin', Clampe," he said, with dignity.

"Mr. Ratcliff's forbidden that boot cad to have anything to do with the fellows," said Clampe. "You'd get into a jolly row if he knew you'd been to see him."

"Are you weferrin' to my fwiend Talbot as a cad?" asked Arthur Augustus, dropping his eyeglass to the end of its cord, and pushing back his immaculate cuffs.

Clampe backed away a pace or two.

"Look here——" he began.

"Pway answah my question!"

"Yes," growled Clampe; "and I—— Yaroooh!"

Clampe gave a yell, and staggered back against the wall, and pressed both hands to his nose. The elegant swell of the School House was a hard hitter when his temper was roused, and it was roused now.

"Yow-ow!" roared Clampe. "Yah! School House cad! Rescue! Yow-ow!"

There was a rush of New House juniors to the spot at once.

"School House cad! Kick him out!"

"Bump him!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Hold on!" roared Redfern of the Fourth, shoving his way forward. "Hands off! Come along, Gussy; it's all serene!"

And Redfern escorted the swell of the School House out of the dangerous quarter. Then he returned to Clampe, while Arthur Augustus trotted away across the quadrangle.

"You rotter!" howled Clampe. "Sticking up for a School House cad——"

"Yes; look here, Redfern——" began Pratt of the Fourth.

"Rats!" said Redfern. "I heard what Clampe said. He was calling Talbot names. He ain't fit to clean Talbot's boots!"

"Boot-cleaning ain't my trade!" sneered Clampe.

"Caddishness and snobbishness are more in your line—what?" said Redfern. "I'm jolly glad D'Arcy dotted you on the nose; and if you say another word, I'll dot you in the eye!"

"Look here—— Yah! Oh!"

Redfern suited the action to the word, and Clampe sat down on the floor with a yell.

"Have some more?" said Redfern sweetly.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Clampe did not want any more. And Rerfern walked away, and left him caressing his nose with one hand, and his eye with the other.

CHAPTER 9.

Tricked on the Telephone.

BUZZZZZ!

Mr. Ratcliff raised his head and grunted. It was the telephone bell. And Mr. Ratcliff, who was busy with examination papers, did not like the interruption. However, he rose, and crossed to the telephone, and took down the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" came a voice along the wires, which Mr. Ratcliff failed to recognise. "I've rung you up to tell you that it's all right about Golden Rain."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Golden Rain—the geegee for the Autumn Handicap."

Mr. Ratcliff snorted. It was evidently a mistake. Mr. Ratcliff was not in the slightest degree interested in racing, and he had never heard either of Golden Rain or of the Autumn Handicap. Somebody had given the wrong number, apparently.

"It's all right," the voice was going on; "and you've won, Railton."

Then Mr. Ratcliff jumped.

Railton!

He thought he understood. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House—whom Mr. Ratcliff disliked as intensely as it was possible for a small nature to dislike a big one—Mr. Railton had been dabbling in racing, then! Mr. Railton—who kept up such excellent appearances, and seemed to think of nothing but his work and athletics—Mr. Railton had backed Golden Rain for the Autumn Handicap! Mr. Ratcliffe's eyes glittered green. What a discovery!

He had intended to tell his unknown interlocutor that he was on the wrong number, and to ring off. Now he did nothing of the kind.

Mr. Ratcliff was not above prying into another man's affairs. And to catch the other Housemaster on the hip, that was worth a little trouble. There had more than once been sharp words between the two Housemasters of St. Jim's, though they contrived to keep up an outward appearance of civility.

Mr. Ratcliff's meddlesome nature made him prone to interfere with the boys of the other House—which the School House master very naturally resented. And a series of snubs had not had the effect of teaching "Ratty" to mind his own business, but they had had the effect of making him feel exceedingly bitter towards Mr. Railton.

"I say, that is you, Railton?" went on the voice, after a pause. "I'm on the right number—what?"

"Yes," said Mr. Ratcliff steadily.

He intended to hear more now. Already, in his mind's eye, he saw himself in possession of a secret that would give him the whip-hand. For if Mr. Railton's dealings with bookmakers and races should come to the knowledge of the Head, it was extremely probable that Mr. Railton would be asked to resign his position at St. Jim's. Housemasters were supposed to instruct by example as well as by precept.

"Good! Can I come this evening?"

"This—this evening?"

"Yes. As Golden Rain has won, that clears up our account, you see. I can give you back your paper!"

"M-m-my paper?"

"Your I O U, you know."

"Oh, yes—yes!" stammered Mr. Ratcliff.

"I'll come along to-night," went on the voice. "Say half-past eight—what?"

"I—I——"

"Of course I can't come into the school. Wouldn't do for you to receive a visit from Freddy Welsh, the bookmaker—would it, Railton?"

"N-no!"

"You can't come down to the Green Man, as usual?"

"Upon my word!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff, almost overcome. So the School House master was in the habit of frequenting the Green Man, the low public-house in Rylcombe. A St. Jim's senior had once been expelled for haunting that place. And a Housemaster! Mr. Ratcliff's eyes were almost dancing now. If he only had proof of this, how he would have his old rival under his thumb—the fate of the man he disliked, and who despised him, in the hollow of his hand! It really seemed almost too good to be true.

"I'll come," went on the voice. "I've got your I O U, and I know you're anxious to have it back. Not very safe to have paper with your name on it going about, is it? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nunno!" stammered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Well, I'll bring it this evening."

"I must get that piece of paper!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff, sotto voce. "Written proof—written proof, upon my word! I think Mr. Railton will find it to his advantage to be some-

what more civil in the future." He chuckled softly. "What a discovery to make—all through this scoundrel getting on to the wrong number! Of course, it is my duty to look into the matter, and make quite sure whether Mr. Railton is—ahem!—indeed such an utter blackguard as he appears to be. In that case, certainly it would be my duty to bring the matter to Dr. Holmes's knowledge——"

"You are there, Railton?"

"Yes, I am here."

"How goes it? Pretty chippy—what?"

"Ye-e-es."

"How's that rascal, Ratty?"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Still the same sneaking, rotten old worm—eh?"

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, almost bursting with wrath. So that was how the other Housemaster talked of him among his low associates!

"Well, I'll be along at half-past eight," went on the voice. "As I can't come into the school—it wouldn't do, would it?"

"N-no!"

"Then I'll come to the side-gate. At exactly half-past eight I'll tap on the gate. You can open it. I'll hand you the paper, and walk on. It won't take a minute; no need even to speak. I understand how you have to keep your connection with me dark, of course. Will that suit you?"

"Quite!"

"No likelihood of that sneaking cad Ratcliff hanging about, I suppose?"

"N-o-no!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Right-ho, then! Half-past eight exactly."

"Very good!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Mr. Ratcliff, and he hung up the receiver.

Then he sat down to think.

Mr. Ratcliff's brain worked quickly sometimes—especially when it was spurred on by hatred or malice. He had made up his mind at once what he would do. This rascally bookmaker, Freddy Welsh, was playing into his hands, as if on purpose. At half-past eight he would come to the side-gate. He would hand over the paper to a man whom he could not see in the dark. He would not guess for a moment that it was Mr. Ratcliff, and not Mr. Railton, any more than he would guess that he had been given the wrong number at St. Jim's, and had talked to the wrong Housemaster over the wires. All Mr. Ratcliff had to do was to be there at the appointed time, take in the paper that the unsuspicious bookmaker would hand in, and then he would possess proof, in Mr. Railton's own handwriting, of that master's nefarious dealings on the Turf.

And that paper shown to the Head—from a sense of duty, of course—would mean a very uncomfortable interview for Mr. Railton with Dr. Holmes. After that the School House master could not remain at St. Jim's. That would be impossible.

Mr. Ratcliff chuckled at the thought. It had been a stroke of luck—a tremendous stroke of luck for him—that the wrong number had been given to the unseen Freddy Welsh on the telephone.

. . . . . .

In the prefects' room in the School House there was a telephone, which the juniors sometimes used—generally when the room was empty. At this very moment it was empty, save for a group of juniors, and one of them was at the telephone. It was Monty Lowther of the Shell.

Lowther had just rung off, and he was grinning. The other fellows were gasping.

Mr. Ratcliff's interlocutor was not so far away as he had deemed. He had not known where "Freddy Welsh" was. He would have been surprised if he had known that he was no further off than the School House, and that his real name was Montague Lowther!

"Well, what do you think?" grinned Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"

"My only hat!"

"It takes the cake!" said Tom Merry. "I hardly thought it would work, but it has!"

"Like a charm," said Lowther serenely—"like a giddy charm! I knew that Ratty would simply jump at a chance of finding out anything against old Railton!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Any decent man would have said at once that I'd got the wrong number, and refused to hear another man's secrets," went on Lowther. "But I knew Ratty wasn't that sort!"

"No fear!"

"What a rotten cad!" muttered Blake. "Awfully rotten beast! And what a silly ass to think that Railton is a plunger on the Turf!"

"A fellow like Ratty always suspects people; and the better show they keep up, the more he suspects 'em!" chuckled Lowther. "He'd give an ear to get old Railton down! Now he thinks he's got a chance! And he's jumped at it! If it hadn't worked, we could have thought of something else! But I knew it'd work!"

"And now——" said Herries.

"Now Ratty will be skulking inside the little gate at half-past eight—in the dark," said Lowther. "No moon tonight. It will be jolly dark under the trees, too! His idea is that Freddy Welsh—ha, ha, ha!—won't know he isn't Railton!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And my idea is that he won't know we're not Freddy Welsh. We get out over the wall soon after eight, and at half-past eight we tap on the gate——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And Ratty opens it, all ready for the incriminating document to be passed in——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he gets a garden squirt full of red ink right in the chivvy! That squirt holds nearly a gallon——"

The juniors shrieked.

"And he can have it all! It's worth the price of the ink—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Yaas, wathah! Oh, cwumbs! Poor old Watty!"

"And, whatever he suspects, he won't be able to say a giddy wordlet, for he can't confess that he intercepted a telephone call for Railton, and tried to sneak a paper belonging to him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What's all this cackling?" asked Darrel of the Sixth, coming into the prefects' room. "Outside, you fags!"

And the juniors crowded out, chuckling gleefully. The plan for the punishment of the obnoxious Ratty was working, as Lowther declared, like a charm. And there was much eagerness among the chums of the School House for half-past eight—the fateful hour—to arrive!

CHAPTER 10.

Inky!

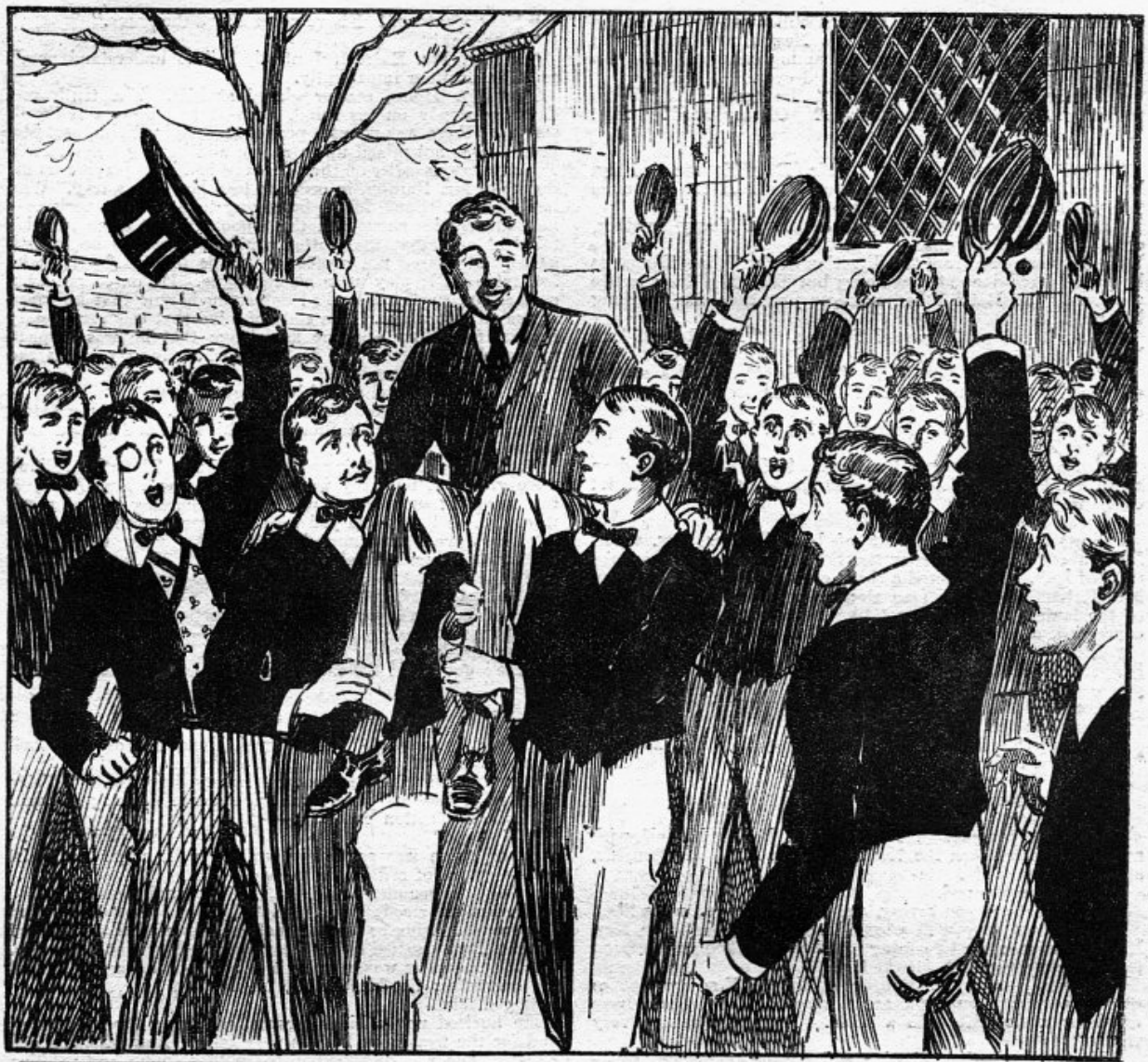
MR. RATCLIFF came out of the New House at a quarter-past eight that evening, muffled up against the cold wind. The collar of his coat was turned up, and he wore a soft hat pulled down over his brows. There was very little of his face to be seen—chiefly his nose, which bore a strong resemblance to a beak.

The Housemaster crossed the quadrangle towards the school gates, to give the impression to any casual observer that he was going out. As soon as the darkness of the quad swallowed him up, however, he changed his direction, and hurried along the inside of the school wall towards the little gate, which was used by masters and prefects, who had keys to it.

It was a cold and windy October evening, and dead leaves whistled and rustled about the quadrangle in the darkness. It was not very pleasant standing there, with the keen wind playing on him, and, well wrapped up as he was, Mr. Ratcliff felt cold and chilled, and not at all comfortable. He was very impatient for half-past eight to strike, so that his disagreeable vigil would be finished.

It was worth a little discomfort, he reflected, to have the man he disliked, the man he regarded as an enemy, in the hollow of his hand. Then, when the written proof was his, he would have a painful duty to do—to acquaint the Head with the real character of Mr. Railton! A very painful duty, which Ratty would perform with great solemnity and sadness, and great inward enjoyment.

The friction that had always existed between the two masters, their mutual dislike, and Ratty's uncomfortable feeling that



Talbot was swung up on the shoulders of Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, and rushed out into the quadrangle. Round him surged the crowd of juniors, waving their caps and cheering. "March!" yelled Figgins. And Talbot was rushed on in triumphant procession. (*See Chapter* 16.)

Mr. Railton despised him—everything spurred Ratty on to play this trick on the School House master.

Not that he admitted to himself that it was a trick. Mr. Ratcliff had an elastic conscience, which approved of everything he did. He was now performing a stern duty—or, at all events, he tried to think so.

He was too busy with his thoughts to notice, especially in the moaning of the wind, a slight sound some distance further along the school wall. It did not occur to him that certain juniors, concealed in the darkness, were clambering over the wall at a distance from him, one of them carrying a large garden squirt very carefully.

Half-past eight chimed from the clock tower.

Mr. Ratcliff unlocked the gate, and remained close to it, ready to open it quickly at a tap from without.

It was very dark where he stood.

When the gate was opened, the man outside would catch but a dim glimpse of him—a figure muffled up in an overcoat, and, naturally, would not be able to see that he was not Mr. Railton.

All would go well! Mr. Ratcliff's heart was beating faster than usual as he waited. The half-hour had struck! It was time!

Tap!

The sharp rap of knuckles on the outside of the gate sounded clearly. Mr. Ratcliff pulled the gate open.

It was very dark without, under the shadow of a tree overhanging the wall. Mr. Ratcliff dimly saw a shadowy form as he reached out his hand to take the letter which should have been handed to him, according to the arrangement made on the telephone.

Then——

Whiz!

Whooosh!

Splash!

A fiendish yell rang out from the startled Housemaster.

A sudden flood of some smelly liquid had dashed full in his face, and he staggered back, choked and blinded and astounded.

"Yah! Oh! Gerrrooogh!"

There was a chuckle from the darkness outside; then a pattering of retreating footsteps.

That was all!

Mr. Ratcliff clasped both hands to his face, gouging the liquid from his eyes and nose and mouth. In his amazement and fury he gasped and yelled and roared, utterly forgetting that he was there on a secret mission.

"Ugh! Ow—ow—yow! Groogh! Oh, help! Ah! Hah! Yah! Grugggh!"

Taggles, the porter, looked out of his lodge, as that remarkable ebullition of noises came to his ears.

"'Allo!" called out Taggles. "Wot's all that?"

"Ow—ow! Yugh! Yoooogh! Grooogh!"

"My heye!" ejaculated Taggles. "Sounds like somebody a-drowndin'! Wot on yairth is it? My heye!"

"Yow—ow! Owwwwgggh!"

Taggles came out of his lodge with his lantern. He was

astounded by the noises. He was still more astounded by the sight that met his eyes. The New House master was gouging at his face, which was streaming crimson. Taggles gazed at him with wide-open, startled eyes.

"My heye! Wot's 'appened?" he gasped. "Wot's makin' your 'ead bleed like that, sir? Oh, my word! 'Elp! 'Elp!"

"Yowwwwwwgggh!"

"'Elp!" roared Taggles. "Mr. Ratcliff 'ave 'ad an haccident! 'Elp! 'Ere, sir, lemme look at it! Lemme 'elp you inter my lodge! Oh, my heye!"

"Hallo! What's the matter?" exclaimed Monty Lowther, coming through the elms.

He did not come from the direction of the School House, as he should have done at that hour; but Taggles did not notice that, and Mr. Ratcliff had no eyes just then for anything but red ink.

"It's a haccident!" gasped Taggles. "Mr. Ratcliff 'ave 'urt 'is 'ead——"

"Dear me!" said Lowther. "My hat! What a stream of blood! The injury must be frightfully serious! Better call a doctor!"

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah heah?"

"What's up?"

"Call a doctor!" roared Lowther. "Mr. Ratcliff's had an awful accident! He's covered with gore—streaming with it! Call a doctor!"

"Great Scott!"

Fellows were streaming out of both Houses now. Mr. Railton came quickly from the School House, with a very startled look. He uttered a sharp exclamation at the sight of Mr. Ratcliff, with his face streaming crimson in the light of the lantern. He did not like his colleague; but he was concerned, of course, at seeing him in such a state.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "What has happened? Take my arm, Mr. Ratcliff. Let me assist you——"

"Groooogh!"

"Where is the wound?"

"Gerroogh! I am not wounded!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. "I have not had an accident!"

"What! But all this blood——"

"It is not blood! It is ink!"

"Ink!" gasped Mr. Railton.

"Yes, ink!" screamed Mr. Ratcliff, beside himself with rage. "I have been the victim of an outrage, and you, sir, are a party to it!"

Mr. Railton jumped.

"I! What are you saying, sir? What do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean!" shrieked the New House master, almost foaming. "I was tricked into coming to this gate after dark—tricked, sir!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Railton coldly. "You are not so utterly absurd, I suppose, as to imagine that I could have anything to do with such a trick! You are speaking very wildly."

"You—you—I—I received a call on the telephone, and—and——" Mr. Ratcliff broke off. Furious as he was, he realised that it would not do to admit in public that he had deliberately taken a call on the telephone that was intended for Mr. Railton, and that he had come there to intercept a paper belonging to the School House master. For, as he had not received the paper after all, he had no proof that it was a "shady" document. Indeed, he began to understand now that the document did not exist at all, and that the caller on the telephone had been simply "pulling his leg."

"You received a call on the telephone," said Mr. Railton wonderingly. "Why should that make you come to this gate, sir? I do not understand."

"I—I—I——" stammered Mr. Ratcliff. There was a crowd round him now, and all were looking at him in wonder, as well as merriment. There were some juniors in the crowd who could have explained, but they did not intend to do so. They enjoyed the scene and kept their little secret. "I—I—I was tricked!" the New House master went on. "I—I was spoken to on the telephone, and—and——"

"But why——"

"I—I will see that someone is punished for this! I——"

"You have hinted that I had a hand in the matter, sir," said Mr. Railton icily. "I beg you to explain your words."

Mr. Ratcliff ground his teeth.

"Your name was used to make me come out here," he snapped.

"By someone on the telephone?"

"Yes."

"That is very extraordinary. It was a trick, of course," said Mr. Railton. "I should think it was quite unnecessary for me to say that I have no knowledge whatever of the matter."

"You have no knowledge of a man named Freddy Welsh, I suppose?" snarled Mr. Ratcliff.

"None whatever! I have never heard the name."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff, I utterly fail to understand you," said Mr. Railton impatiently.

The New House master glared at him. The truth was dawning slowly on his mind, now—it had been a trick all through—there was no such person as Freddy Welsh, and Mr. Railton was not mixed up in racing and betting transactions. The mysterious caller on the telephone had been playing on his dislike of Mr. Railton, in order to lead him into a trap. Who had done it? Some fellow belonging to St. Jim's, perhaps—he had enemies enough in the school; but it came into his mind at once that the matter could not possibly be investigated. He dared not confess in public the shabby trick he had intended to play upon his colleague. He dared not even confess the suspicion he had entertained, now that he knew it was all moonshine. In a state of mind that was very nearly frantic, from fury and the knowledge that he was helpless to punish the japer, Mr. Ratcliff rushed away towards the New House, panting.

Mr. Railton looked after him in astonishment.

"This is simply extraordinary!" he said. "Simply extraordinary!" And Mr. Railton shook his head and walked back to the School House.

Tom Merry & Co. followed him, smiling. The other fellows were grinning, but they were surprised, too. Tom Merry & Co. were not surprised, but they were longing to get somewhere where they could yell with laughter in security.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus ecstatically. "Did you wemark his chivvy, deah boys? He looked wathah wed, didn't he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he can't say a word!" chortled Lowther. "He can't admit he was spying and sneaking——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's got to let the matter drop, in case the truth comes out——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, you chaps!" exclaimed Kangaroo of the Shell suspiciously. "Do you know anything about this?"

"Just a suspish!" murmured Monty Lowther. "We've got a faint idea that Ratty was tricked into thinking he could do Railton a rotten bad turn——"

"My hat!"

"And there was somebody waiting with a garden squirt with a gallon of red ink in it—and——"

"Oh, you bounder! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kangaroo.

Mr. Ratcliff strode into the New House, almost foaming at the mouth. Figgins & Co. met him in the doorway, and stared. They scuttled off to their study to laugh at their ease. The Housemaster was crimson as a newly-boiled beetroot, and his collar, his tie, his clothes, his overcoat, were streaming with red ink.

He hurried up to his bed-room, and rang for hot water, and for the next hour he was very busy. And when he had finished, and was quite exhausted with washing and rubbing and scrubbing, there was still a red-inky flush about his ears and the roots of his hair. And the state of his temper for the rest of that evening was not to be described in words.

CHAPTER 11.

Mr. Ratcliff Comes Down Heavy!

WHO had done it?

Mr. Ratcliff debated that question savagely in his mind.

He had thought the matter over very carefully, and he came to the inevitable conclusion that the unknown person who had called him up on the telephone belonged to St. Jim's. Only someone belonging to the school could have known him well enough to know that he would be willing to take a call intended for someone else. He ground his teeth as he reflected that the call was, in point of fact, intended for him all the time—that his interlocutor had calculated upon his acting dishonourably.

A public inquiry into the matter would probably have revealed the culprit; but it would have revealed, also, the "rotten" manner in which he had acted himself, his desire to take an unscrupulous advantage of his fellow-Housemaster, and from that kind of publicity Mr. Ratcliff very naturally shrank. It was impossible to make the affair public. But if he could have discovered who the "japer" was, he could have punished him in his own way, biding his time, and using his own peculiar methods. But who was it?

The trick had been played, doubtless, in return for some late punishment inflicted upon someone under his authority, and the call had, doubtless, come from a St. Jim's telephone; there were half a dozen in the school. "Freddy Welsh" was

a fictitious personage, having no more real existence than the celebrated Mrs. Harris, and there had been some grinning junior at the other end of the wire. The enraged Housemaster realised that now. Someone who knew him and his peculiar methods and peculiar nature thoroughly well.

Mr. Ratcliff started as a sudden thought came into his mind. He remembered the scene in Figgins's study, and the ill-concealed anger and resentment of the juniors. It was one of them who had played this trick, undoubtedly, or—the boot-boy!

Mr. Ratcliff rose to his feet, his eyes gleaming.

The boot-boy!

Why had he not thought of that before? It was quite clear to him now. This was the revenge of Talbot for the humiliation inflicted upon him. Mr. Ratcliff saw it all! He rang, and told the maid to send Talbot to him.

The boot-boy of the New House came into the study a minute later, with his usual quiet and respectful manner. Mr. Ratcliff fixed a baleful glance upon him.

"You are aware of what has happened this evening, Talbot?" he exclaimed.

"No, sir," said Talbot. "I did not know anything had happened. I have only just come back from Mr. Linton."

"You have been with Mr. Linton?"

"Yes, sir. He has been giving me my tuition."

Mr. Ratcliff grunted. He did not approve of that kindness on the part of the master of the Shell.

"Have you used the telephone to-day, Talbot? There is a telephone in the housekeeper's-room."

Talbot looked astonished.

"I never use the telephone, sir."

"You have not used it to-day?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Have you been outside the school walls this evening?"

"No, sir."

"You know nothing of the outrage that has been perpetrated upon me?"

"I—I didn't know anything had happened, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff looked at him scrutinisingly. Talbot appeared as if he were telling the truth; but Mr Ratcliff did not believe him. Mr. Ratcliff never took anybody's word about anything.

"Someone drenched me with red ink at the gate, Talbot."

"Indeed, sir! I had not heard of it."

"And I suspect," pursued the Housemaster, "that it was done in revenge for my calling you to order this afternoon and very properly putting a stop to your insolence in assuming familiarity with the boys here."

Talbot started. He remembered what Arthur Augustus had stated during his visit to the boot-room.

"Ah, I see that touches you!" said the Housemaster sarcastically. "You may consider yourself discharged, Talbot."

"Discharged, sir?"

"Yes. Kindly tell Mrs. Kenwigg that you will be leaving at the end of the week. You may go."

Talbot stood rooted to the floor.

Discharged!

That afternoon he had been thinking, dispiritedly enough, whether he had done wisely in coming to the school at all—whether it would not be better to go. But now that he was told to go he realised how much he wished to stay. As boot-boy, as anything, he wanted to remain in the school he loved.

"But—but—but, sir," he stammered.

"That is enough," said Mr. Ratcliff icily. "You may go. I may add that I did not approve of your coming here at all, considering your unpleasant record. A reformatory would be a better place for you, in my opinion. Go!"

Talbot turned crimson.

"You have no right to discharge me without a fault!" he exclaimed. "I have done nothing; I did not even know what had happened until you told me yourself, sir."

"I do not believe you!"

Talbot bit his lip hard.

"Very well, sir, I will go. I hope you will be sorry for your injustice some time."

"Silence! Go!"

"And before I go," said Talbot steadily, "I shall explain to the Head that I am leaving by no fault of my own. That much is due to myself. Dr. Holmes will be disappointed, and I have a right to explain that to him."

"Leave my study!"

"Very well, sir."

Talbot left the study. His face was pale and troubled as he went down the passage. Here was an end of his hopes and dreams. The scholarship he had hoped to win—that was out of his reach now. The petty spite of the Housemaster had frustrated all his plans. He had done nothing to offend, but the blow had fallen upon him! The unfortunate boy's heart was heavy as he returned to his room.

Should he go to the Head? He shrank from the possibility of causing trouble between the Head and the Housemaster; he shrank from appearing to complain. Enough had been done for him already; he could not ask the Head's interference now. His pride rose at the thought. He had received favours, and he would not ask for more. Better to go, and then he would write and explain to the Head, and thank him for all that he had done. That was better.

But to go—to leave the school—to throw up all his hopes and plans!

He sat on the edge of his bed thinking it over. It was hard! It was the end of all his dreams! Even in a menial capacity there was no place for him in the old school.

But it was up to him to bear it in silence.

It was late when he went to bed, and it was later before he slept. He had tried to study, but his eyes were dim with tears. Hope was gone from his breast.

What was the use of the struggle, after all? The thought came into the unhappy lad's mind that it was useless—that it was folly to think of redeeming the past, or of working his way to better things. He was almost penniless. He was willing to work; he wanted only a chance. And within his grasp was wealth, if he chose to take it, and a welcome from his old associates. He knew that Hookey Walker had escaped from the police, he knew where he could find him; he knew how gladly his old confederate would welcome him back to the ranks of crime. What if he threw it all up—if he abandoned the hopeless struggle—if Talbot disappeared, and the Toff came to life again?

As he lay sleepless in the hours of darkness the temptation assailed him; the thought would not be driven from his mind.

The old wild life, the adventure, the risk, the wealth of it! What was the use of struggling against his fate?

In those dark hours the fate of the unhappy lad trembled in the balance.

But he drove the tempting thought from his mind at last. Whatever happened, there could be no going back for him. Honesty was the watchword he had set for himself, and he would keep to it—he must keep to it!

He slept at last.

On the morrow morning he was pale and quiet. He saw the fellows go into class. He wondered what his friends in the Fourth and the Shell would think if they had known that he was to go.

He avoided coming into contact with any of them that day; he did not wish them to know. He knew how they would be distressed if they knew that their action had been the cause of his discharge. They had meant to punish Ratty for his caddish conduct, but it was upon Talbot that the punishment had fallen. They should never know that! When he went, they should not know why; and after he was gone they could not ask him. He would spare them that knowledge.

In the evening he took his way as usual to Mr. Linton's study. He was there half the evenings in the week. He usually went with a light step and a light heart, his work done; the study he keenly desired and valued did not seem like work to him. But this time his step was slow and his heart heavy. It was the last time he would see the master of the Shell.

Mr. Linton greeted him kindly, as usual. The master of the Shell was a somewhat cold and severe man, but he was always kind to Talbot. He observed at once the cloud on the lad's brow, and could not fail to see that he was absent-minded and distraught during his lesson.

"You are tired?" asked the Shell-master kindly, as he closed his books at last.

"It isn't that, sir," said Talbot, with an effort. "I—I sha'n't be coming any more, sir, that is all."

Mr. Linton raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed! You are giving up your studies? You find that you cannot pursue them along with your other work?"

"It's because I'm leaving, sir."

"You are leaving your employment?"

"Yes, sir."

The master of the Shell regarded him gravely.

"Of course, that is your own affair, Talbot," he said, after a pause. "Yet if you will take advice from me, I should recommend you to persevere. You are making excellent progress—indeed, considering the disadvantages you labour under, I may say that your progress is wonderful. You have every chance of gaining one of the Founder's Scholarships in the course of time. Next term, in fact, you may be able to take your old place in the Shell. Unless you really feel the work too much for you, I should strongly advise you to keep on."

"I—I can't, sir!" Talbot almost gasped. "I'd like to, but I can't!"

"May I ask why not?"

Talbot was silent. To say that he was "sacked" was like asking for sympathy.

But the master of the Shell guessed the state of the case.

"Do you mean that you are not leaving of your own accord, Talbot?" he asked.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Has Mr. Ratcliff discharged you, then?"

Talbot nodded.

"I am sorry," said the master of the Shell. "It is a pity you could not give satisfaction there—a great pity. I trust you have done your best."

"It is a mistake, sir," said Talbot. "Mr. Ratcliff thinks somehow that I was concerned in what happened to him last night."

"But you were not?"

"Certainly not, sir."

Mr. Linton pursed his lips.

"I will see Mr. Ratcliff," he said finally.

"Oh, no, sir!" exclaimed Talbot, flushing hotly. "I didn't mean that, sir. I—I don't want to ask any favour of Mr. Ratcliff."

"If it is a mistake it should be cleared up, and you ought not to suffer for a mistake," said Mr. Linton. "I regard it as my duty to see Mr. Ratcliff about this matter. Say no more, Talbot! I trust I can arrange the matter."

Talbot said no more. Mr. Linton lost no time; ten minutes later he was in Mr. Ratcliff's study in the New House.

CHAPTER 12.

Figgins Is Interrupted.

MR. RATCLIFF received the master of the Shell with chilly politeness. He had not forgotten their previous talk on the subject of Talbot. Mr. Linton felt a certain awkwardness in beginning, and he plunged into the subject at once.

"I am very distressed to hear that Talbot is leaving his situation here, Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "He is progressing so well with his studies that it is a great pity they should be broken off."

"I do not approve of that kind of thing for a servant employed in my House, as you are aware," said Mr. Ratcliff icily.

"Ahem! Of course, I am carrying out the instructions of the Head," said Mr. Linton. "It appears to be a mistake that has caused you to——"

"Nothing of the kind!"

"But, really, Mr. Ratcliff——"

"Excuse me, I cannot listen to any criticism of my way of conducting my House," said Mr. Ratcliff. "That is purely my own affair."

"Quite so!" said the master of the Shell, flushing. "But as this is a mistake, it is my duty to prove it to you. It appears that you were assaulted last evening in the quadrangle by some practical joker——"

"By Talbot!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"You believe so?"

"Certainly! And I do not care to discuss the matter."

"Last evening," said Mr. Linton, "Talbot was in my study, working with me. He came in just after eight o'clock. He stayed until later than half-past nine. While he was there I heard something of a disturbance in the quadrangle. That was when this very unfortunate occurrence took place. As Talbot was with me at the time, you will see for yourself that he cannot possibly have been the person who played that very disrespectful trick upon you."

Mr. Ratcliff bit his thin lips. As he had been drenched with ink at half-past eight, and Talbot had been in Mr. Linton's study from eight to half-past nine, it certainly could not have been Talbot. It was a complete alibi.

"You see, sir, that it is a—a misapprehension," said Mr. Linton, as the Housemaster did not speak.

"It—it appears so," stammered Mr. Ratcliff. "I—I suppose it could not have been Talbot, under the circumstances, as—as you say!"

"Then may I tell the boy that you have excused him—ahem!—that he need not regard himself as discharged?"

"No, sir!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I do not consider it consistent with my dignity to bandy words with a boot-boy! Talbot is discharged!"

Mr. Linton's eyes glittered.

"Very well, sir," he said. "I will discuss the matter with the Head, and we will see what can be done for the boy. It is due to him that Dr. Holmes should know that he is discharged for no fault of his own."

Mr. Ratcliff started.

"There is no need for the matter to be mentioned to the Head at all!" he exclaimed hastily.

"I consider it due to the boy."

"The—the Head would probably not look at the matter as I do," said Mr. Ratcliff, biting his lip very hard.

"Probably," assented Mr. Linton drily.

"In—in short, if you—you assure me that the boy was, in fact, in your study at the time of the outrage——" muttered the Housemaster.

"I do assure you on that point."

"Then, taking everything into consideration, I will rescind my decision. I will tell the boy he may remain," said Mr. Ratcliff ungraciously.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ratcliff!"

The New Housemaster made no reply to that, and the master of the Shell retired satisfied. Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth. He did not care for his petty injustice to come to the knowledge of the Head, knowing the kindly interest Dr. Holmes took in the boy. But he was pale with vexation as he sent for Talbot.

"Ah! Ahem!" said Mr. Ratcliff, as the boot-boy came in. "I learn that—that you could not have had a part in the outrage last evening, Talbot. Under the circumstances, you may keep your—ahem!—place."

Talbot's face lighted up.

"Thank you, sir!"

"You need not thank me!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I simply desire to be just. I do not approve of you, Talbot, and do not approve of your being here. I have taken you into my House at the request of Dr. Holmes. I cannot very well send you away without just cause. That is all. You may go."

Talbot bit his lip, and went.

He knew that he had to thank Mr. Ratcliff for nothing. It was to the master of the Shell that his gratitude was due. It was bitter enough to keep his situation on such ungracious terms. But there was the scholarship—he must work for that—and perhaps next term he would be out of the power of the unpleasant Housemaster. Beggars could not be choosers.

But he went to bed in a more cheerful mood.

The next morning, just before breakfast, Figgins came cautiously into the boot-room, where Talbot was at work.

"I want to speak to you, old scout," said Figgins. "To-morrow's Saturday, you know——"

"Buzz off, old chap!" said Talbot hurriedly. "I—I mustn't speak to you! There'll be trouble——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Figgins. "Reddy and Owen and Lawrence are going off to-morrow afternoon—going to see Redfern's people, you know—and so they won't be able to play in the House match. Now——"

The door was flung open, and Mr. Ratcliff appeared.

Figgins broke off in dismay. Talbot groaned inwardly. He was in for it again. The Housemaster was simply glaring.

"Have I not warned you, Talbot, about this familiarity with the juniors of this House?" he thundered.

"I—I say, sir, it was my fault!" stammered Figgins. "I—I came here, sir! Talbot told me to clear out—he did really, sir!"

"Silence, Figgins! This is the last time I shall warn you, Talbot. On the next occasion you will be sent away immediately."

"Yes, sir," said Talbot heavily.

"I will not be put to the trouble of watching my servants to see that they are not guilty of presumption and familiarity," said Mr. Ratcliff.

"I—I say, sir——" gasped Figgins. "I—I really——"

"You may go, Figgins! You will take five hundred lines!"

"Oh!"

And Mr. Ratcliff marched Figgins out of the boot-room in an almost homicidal frame of mind. Later that morning Figgins confided the incident to his chums, and the wrath of the Co. was not loud, but deep.

"Only we can't speak to the chap again!" grunted Figgins dismally. "Ratty comes down on him as well as on us, so it won't do. We've got to give him a wide berth, or else he'll get the sack. Poor old Talbot!"

"I shall dot Ratty in the eye some day!" said Fatty Wynn, with conviction. "I've got a feeling that I shall do it!"

"Wait till I'm grown up!" said Figgins, brandishing his fists in the air. "When I'm an Old Boy I'll come back and see Ratty; and then——"

Figgins sparred furiously into the air, by way of showing what he would do then.

"Never mind. To-morrow afternoon Ratty is going out," said Kerr. "He goes to Abbotsford, you know. Then we can speak to Talbot and get him to play in the eleven, perhaps."

"Ratty would hear of it afterwards," said Fatty Wynn. "Then he would be down on Talbot."

Figgins snorted.

"Blow Ratty! We've got to work it somehow. We're not going to lose the House match to please him! Reddy and Owen and Lawrence will be away, and we've got to make up the team somehow. Talbot's the man! He's a ripping player! We want him!"

"But Ratty——"

"Boil Ratty!" growled Figgins. "We've got to work it somehow. Blessed if I don't ask the Head if Talbot can play in our team! He'd say yes like a shot! He's a brick! And as Ratty will be out, that will be all right. He won't be able to chip in. And when he snarls afterwards, Talbot can tell him he had the Head's permission. Savvy?"

The Co. regarded the great Figgins admiringly. Truly, it was a great idea!

CHAPTER 13.
Figgy's Recruit.

SATURDAY afternoon came. It was an important occasion for the juniors of St. Jim's.

Football was in full swing. The senior eleven, led by Kildare, was playing Abbotsford.

But the juniors were not bothering their heads about the First Eleven match. They had a much more important matter to think of—the junior House match.

House matches were contested very keenly at St. Jim's. Each House was determined to be cock-house in footer, at least. And on this particular afternoon prospects were not very rosy for the New House junior team.

Three good men were missing from the ranks. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence were away. Figgins had reserves to put in their places, certainly, but the reserves were nowhere up to the form of the missing trio. And the School House fellows were in great form. Figgins had a very natural objection to seeing his team "walked over" by Tom Merry & Co. of the School House.

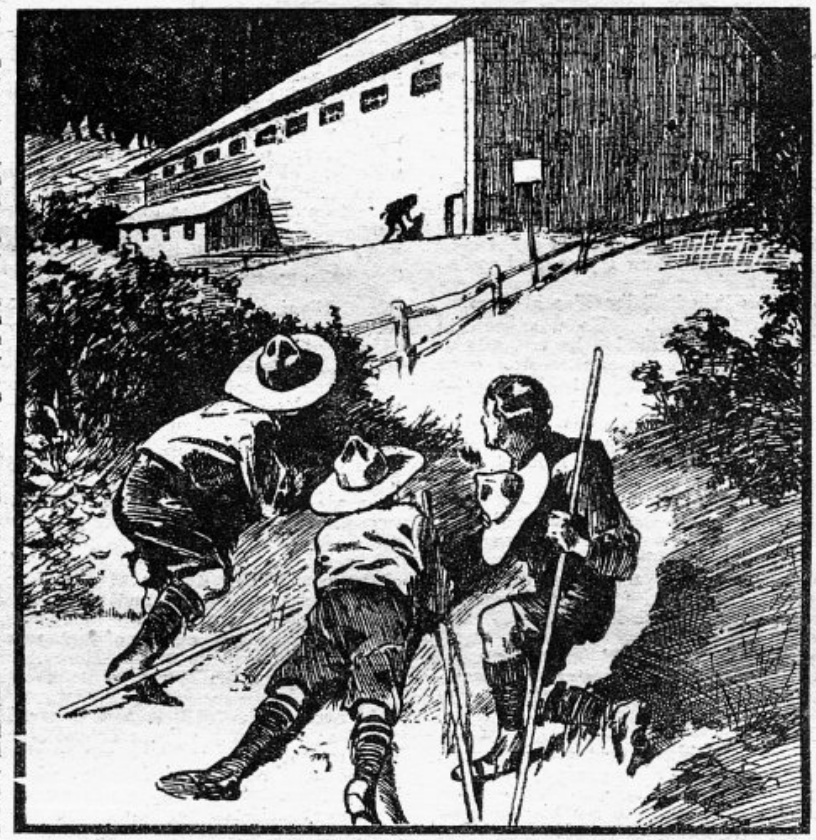
There was a good player to be had if only Figgins could contrive it. He had seen Talbot play football only once, but he had seen enough to know that Talbot was a first-class player, and far above the average. And there was no earthly reason why Talbot shouldn't play for Figgins in the junior eleven.

Why shouldn't he? What did it matter whether he was a boot-boy or not? He was a first-rate sportsman, and a ripping forward. He would take Lawrence's place in the front line, and play up better than Lawrence could, and so make up for the absence of Redfern in the second line to some extent. Talbot would be a tower of strength to the eleven, and would compensate for the necessity of playing a couple of duds. Figgins had thought it out, and he was determined upon it. Talbot simply had to play!

It was useless to ask permission of Mr. Ratcliff. If it had been old Railton, as Figgins remarked bitterly enough to his chums, it would have been all right. Railton would have given instant and cordial permission.

But it was no good with Ratty.

But after dinner Figgins & Co. watched Mr. Ratcliff depart for Abbotsford with great satisfaction. Mr. Ratcliff had a friend at Abbotsford School, with whom he was to pass the afternoon, as he frequently did. And never had the heroes of the New House been quite so glad to see the back of their obnoxious Housemaster.



The Boy Scouts of Britain, to whom the nation is already indebted to a very large extent, are, in spite of their youth, very redoubtable foes when they are on the warpath. The above picture shows how three members of a North London troop, having tracked a suspected person to an important airship base, proceeded to keep him under strict observation. The man proved to be a dangerous spy in the pay of Germany, but, thanks to the vigilance of the scouts, who effected his capture and found on him three bombs, he has now been committed to one of His Majesty's prisons.

"All serene!" said Figgins joyfully. "Mrs. Kenwigg will let Talbot off—I know that. She's as good as gold, and we can coax her, if necessary. Only we've got to have permission to shut Ratty up when he begins to snarl. I'm off to see the Head."

"Good luck!" said the Co.

And Figgins proceeded to the Head's study as bold as brass. Dr. Holmes was there, and he gave the junior a kindly nod.

"If—if you please, sir," said Figgins, feeling a little less bold now that he was in the presence of the Head—"if—if you please, sir——"

"Well, Figgins?"

"We—we're playing a House match to-day, sir," said Figgins, "and some of our men are away. We've got to fill up the places. Would—ahem!—would there be any objection to Talbot playing for us, sir?"

"Talbot?" said the Head.

"Yes, sir. He's a ripping player, and—and I think he could get off. It's only for an hour and a half, you know, sir."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"I see no objection, Figgins," he said. "Indeed, I think it will make a pleasant change for the boy. I may say that I am glad to see that this change in Talbot's position has made no difference to your friendly feeling towards him."

"Not a bit, sir! We all like him!" said Figgins eagerly.

"Well, I have no objection, certainly. However, it is to your Housemaster you should go, Figgins. You must ask Mr. Ratcliff."

"He's gone out, sir. I—I'm afraid he won't be back till after the match."

"In that case you may ask the House-dame, Figgins, and if she does not require Talbot he is quite at liberty to play for you."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

And Figgins cut off, full of joy. He burst like a whirlwind into Mrs. Kenwigg's room in the New House.

"Deary me!" exclaimed Mrs. Kenwigg. "Master Figgins, whatever——"

"Can we have Talbot for a little while, Mrs. Kenwigg? You can let him come out for an hour and a half," said Figgins.

"Mr. Ratcliff does not approve——"

"The Head says so, ma'am," said Figgins hurriedly. "I've just asked him, and he says Talbot can play in the match if you don't need him."

"Then it is all right," said the House-dame graciously. "He is a good boy, and works very hard, and I am sure I shall be glad to see him have a little pleasure. You may tell him he can go, Master Figgins!"

"You are a duck, Mrs. Kenwigg!" said Figgins enthusiastically; and he rushed out, leaving the good dame smiling.

There was another whirlwind in the boot-room. Talbot was at the knife-machine, in his apron and shirt-sleeves, when Figgins rushed in, caught him by the shoulders, and waltzed him round the room, gasping.

"Hallo! What the dickens——"

"Come on!" trilled Figgins.

"I—I say——"

"You're going to play in the eleven this afternoon!" shouted Figgins. "Savvy?"

Talbot's face lighted up for a moment. Keenly enough he would have enjoyed a footer-match that bright, sharp November afternoon; but he shook his head.

"Can't be done! Mr. Ratcliff——"

"Head's permission!" hooted Figgins.

"What!"

"Ratty's out, and I've asked the Head! Got it all right—full permission from the Head and Mrs. Kenwigg! Come along and change. I'll lend you some clobber!"

"But—but Mr. Ratcliff will be ratty! I—I really can't come, Figgins!"

"Head's permission, you ass!"

"Yes; but——"

"Don't you want to come, you slacker?" demanded Figgins, in surprise and dismay. "Why, I thought you'd be jolly keen to play!"

"Of course I'd like to come," said Talbot wistfully. "I'd like nothing better; but——"

"Then come on!" said Figgins. "Here's Fatty and Kerr. It's all right, you fellows—got permission, and Talbot's going to play!"

"Hooray!"

"Lend a hand," said Figgins; and the Co. seized hold of Talbot and jerked his apron off, and waltzed him out of the boot-room half resisting.

"But—but I say, you chaps——"

"You see, we need you," said Figgins. "Come on! We've got three men away, and unless we do something the House is booked for a record licking. You're a New House chap, ain't you? I don't care whether you're in a Form or in the boot-room. You belong to the New House, and you've got to play for us!"

"You don't want to see us licked, Talbot?" said Kerr.

Talbot had a struggle in his mind. He was keen to play, and surely with the Head's permission he was safe to play without fearing unpleasant consequences. And even if Ratty was down on him, wasn't it worth it? To play in the glorious old game, among his old chums, if only for once. His face brightened, his heart beat, his eyes flashed merely at the thought of it. And if they needed him—— Then he thought of the cold, thin face of the Housemaster, and his brow clouded again.

"You really need me—honest Injun, Figgy?"

"Never needed anybody so badly—honest Injun!" said Figgins. "I tell you Reddy and Owen and Lawrence are away. We're booked for a thumping licking, unless we can strengthen the team somehow. You're the man we want. We know how you play. I can put in a couple of passable reserves and you! You'll save the game for us!"

"I'll try," said Talbot; "but——"

"No buts! You're playing! Come on!"

And Talbot gave way—against his better judgment, perhaps; but there was no resisting Figgins & Co. And the Head's permission—surely that would make it all right, even with Mr. Horace Ratcliff.

Figgins lent him the footer "clobber" that was necessary, and he walked down to the Little Side ground, with his coat and muffler on over his football rig, with the New House team. All the team were glad to see him in their ranks; and there was a shout from the School House eleven, who were already on the ground, at the sight of Talbot.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon Figgy's new recruit. "Talbot, by Jove!"

"Yes, rather," grinned Figgins. "A rod in pickle for your old eleven—what?"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "I'm jolly glad you're playing, Talbot; but you're on the wrong side. You ought to be in the School House team!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rot!" said Figgins emphatically. "Talbot's a New House chap, ain't he?"

"Well, yes," admitted Tom Merry. "Anyway, it's all serene. I'm jolly glad he's playing. We shall have to look out now, you fellows!"

Talbot laughed.

"It's ripping to play," he said—"simply ripping! I'm afraid you'll find me a bit out of practice, Figgins——"

"Oh, bosh!" said Figgins cheerily. "You're as fit as a fiddle, anyway! You School House bounders can look for a whopping!"

"Oh, we'll give you a bit of a tussle!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "You've got a good man there, but the result is a dead cert, all the same. This is where you are going to get it where the chicken got the chopper!"

"Yaas, wathah! It is weally wippin', as my patah will be able to see Talbot's playin'!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The governah may be down heah any minute now—— Bai Jove! There he is!"

And Arthur Augustus rushed away to greet his noble "governor" as a motor-car hooted into the gates of St. Jim's. Tom Merry and Figgins tossed, and the kick-off fell to the School House.

Arthur Augustus, having exchanged greetings with Lord Eastwood, rushed back just in time to take his place in the ranks. Lefevre of the Fifth, who was referee, blew the whistle, and the match started, watched from the start by an interested crowd of juniors, all the more interested because the boot-boy of the New House was playing in the New House ranks!

CHAPTER 14.
Sacked!

"GOAL!"

"Bravo, Talbot!"

Figgins slapped his new recruit ecstatically on the shoulder. It was the first goal of the match, and it had been taken in the first ten minutes. And it was the boot-boy of the New House who had taken it!

"Good old Talbot!" chuckled Figgins. "Didn't I tell you fellows—what? Bravo!"

"Wippin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, picking himself up. He had been floored by Talbot's rush down the field. "Simply wippin'! Congwats!"

The New House team walked back to the line triumphantly. Figgins's faith in Talbot had been more than justified. And Tom Merry told his men that they would have to pull themselves together.

The juniors remembered Talbot's prowess as a cricketer when he had been in the Shell at St. Jim's. It was quite evident that he was equally reliable in the great winter game.

And Figgins & Co. rejoiced. Tom Merry & Co. rejoiced too, but with mixed feelings. They were glad to see Talbot enjoying himself, glad that he was getting a good game; but it was likely to cost the School House dear.

But the School House were not beaten yet. The ball was kicked off again, and Tom Merry & Co. attacked, and pushed their attack home, and the New House felt the loss of Redfern in the second line. But Fatty Wynn in goal was as strong as ever, and he sent the ball out every time it was popped at his citadel. But it was cleared at last, and the forwards had another chance; and the front line came sweeping down the field, passing beautifully, Talbot well to the fore.

The New House crowd cheered the advance of their champions. Mr. Railton of the School House had come down to see the match, and with him was Lord Eastwood, Gussy's noble pater.

His lordship, as a matter of fact, was not wholly attracted there by the exploits of the Hon. Arthur Augustus. His gaze was upon the opposing ranks—upon the lithe, sturdy figure and handsome face of Talbot.

"So that is the lad?" he said to Mr. Railton.

"Yes; a fine fellow," the School House master replied.

"I like his looks."

"He was a universal favouite when he was here," said Mr. Railton. "Everybody was sorry when he left, in spite of the—ahem!—the peculiar circumstances. But I think it must be owned that the boy has redeemed his unfortunate past by that act of heroism which earned him the King's pardon!"

Lord Eastwood nodded.

"I quite agree with you," he said; "and I cannot forget that when he was a schoolboy here he saved the life of my youngest son. Neither of my boys has allowed me to forget it, in fact. I am fully of your opinion, and Dr. Holmes's, that this boy deserves to be given a chance, and I have urged my opinion upon the board of governors. I shall be glad to speak to Talbot after the match. He cannot refuse what will be offered to him—a Foundation Scholarship!"

"He is very proud and very sensitive," the Housemaster remarked. "Still, there is no reason at all why he should refuse. It does not smack of charity in the least. The scholarships were founded for poor scholars, and he cannot hesitate to accept a favour from a donor who has been dead four hundred years!"

"Quite so. I shall insist upon his taking it!" said his lordship. "By Jove, sir, how well the boy plays! Look!"

Mr. Railton was looking. Talbot was coming through the School House defence again like a knife through cheese—though the defence was good, too. The enemy could not stop him. And Herries, in goal, could not save the quick shot that came in. It lodged in the net, and there was another roar from the New House crowd.

"Goal! Goal! Hooray!"

"Good old Talbot!"

The New House were two up! But Tom Merry & Co.

were exerting themselves now, playing for all they were worth, and just on the stroke of half-time Tom Merry sent the ball in, beating Fatty Wynn at last. Then the whistle went.

"Two to one!" grinned Figgins, as the panting players left off for a well-earned rest. "And to think that Ratty would have kept him out of the match if he'd been here! Bow-wow!"

"How do you like it, Talbot?"

Talbot smiled joyously.

"Ripping! It was splendid of you to play me, Figgins!"

"Good thing for our side," grinned Kerr. "They'd have been all over us otherwise. We're going to beat them hollow."

But the School House bucked up well in the second half. With a fine attack they brought the ball down to the New House goal, and Jack Blake sent it whizzing in, Fatty Wynn nearly turning a somersault in a vain attempt to save, and the score was equal—two to two.

Then followed a gruelling tussle for the winning goal, and for a long time Fortune smiled upon neither side as the game swayed up and down the field.

Mr. Railton and Lord Eastwood remained watching the match for some time, and then walked away to the School House. All, or nearly all, the juniors of St. Jim's were gathered round the field, watching the strenuous game. And when Talbot brought the ball right up to goal after a splendid run, the New House cheered him wildly, and even Clampe was seen to clap his hands. The goal did not "come off," however, and the School House pressed on again in their turn.

Both sides were fighting hard, and it was getting near time. Again the New House forwards got away, passing like clockwork, and there was a tussle in front of the School House goal. It was going on, fast and furious, when Mr. Ratcliff came in at the gates of St. Jim's, and crossed towards the New House, Mr. Ratcliff heard the shouts from the direction of the playing-fields, but he did not glance in that direction. Mr. Ratcliff was not interested in football.

But suddenly, half-way to the New House, Mr. Ratcliff paused. A thunderous roar from the football-ground came to his ears, and he started and set his teeth.

"Goal!"

"Well kicked, Talbot!"

"Talbot! Talbot! Hurray!"

Mr. Ratcliff swung round towards the football-ground as if on a pivot. Talbot! There was only one fellow at St. Jim's of that name, and he was boot-boy in the New House.

Talbot on the football-field! Mr. Ratcliff's narrow eyes gleamed green, his thin lips set hard, and he strode towards the football-ground with a hasty stride.

"Talbot!" he muttered. "Is it possible? The insolent young rascal, after my warning to him! Upon my word, I will teach him that this insolence is too much!"

The players were lining up again. There was ten minutes to go, and the New House were once more up. Mr. Ratcliff pushed his way through the thronging juniors and reached the ropes. There was the New House boot-boy lining up with Figgins & Co.! Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glittered.

"Talbot!"

The whistle was just going for the kick-off. Mr. Ratcliff's sharp, acid voice struck upon Talbot's ears like a knife, and brought him suddenly back to earth, as it were. He looked round.

"Talbot! How dare you! Come off the ground immediately! This instant! Do you hear?"

Talbot stood rooted to the ground.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" burst out Figgins. "The Head——"

"Silence, Figgins!"

"But, sir, we had——"

"Hold your tongue! Talbot come off the field, and go into the house instantly!"

Talbot gave his chums a hopeless look There was no help for it. Mr. Ratcliff had to be obeyed. With downcast face and heavy steps he left the football-field. There was a shout from the crowd.

"Shame!"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff furiously. And he stalked away after Talbot, in the direction of the New House.

"Shame!"

And the crowd gave a deep groan for Mr. Ratcliff.

Talbot disappeared into the New House, with Mr. Ratcliff in his wake. The footballers stood dismayed and furious.

"Did you ever see such a beast?" hissed Figgins, almost crying with rage. "After we had the Head's permission, too!"

"The uttah wottah! Let's appeal to the Head!"

"Only make it worse for Talbot!" groaned Figgins. "We've got to stand it. We'll finish this a man short. Line up!"

"No, you won't!" said Tom Merry. "Put another man in."

Figgins called a New House junior from the crowd. The match went on, but all the spirit had gone out of it. It finished with the score unchanged; the New House had won by three goals to two, but they did not look joyful as they came off the field. They were angry, indignant, and apprehensive for Talbot.

And they had reason. Mr. Ratcliff had marched his victim into the New House, and there he poured out the vials of his wrath.

"I have warned you, Talbot," he said venomously. "It seems impossible to make you realise your true place in this house. Your place, sir, is in the boot-room—in the servants' hall. As you cannot understand it, I refuse to allow you to remain here!"

"Figgins asked the Head's permission for me to play in the match, sir," said Talbot dully.

"Don't argue with me! I have had enough of your insolence, of your outrageous assumption of equality with the boys here. You are discharged. You understand, you are discharged! You will pack your box and leave to-day. Not a word. Go!"

"Very well, sir," said Talbot quietly.

And he went to his room.

Mr. Ratcliff strode fuming into his study. He had had his way at last. The boy he disliked was "sacked," and this time there was no one to say nay to the petty tyrant of the New House.

Talbot packed his box. In spite of his courage and his pride, the tears welled into his eyes as he bent over the box. It was all up, then—all over at last! It was the end!

He finished packing the box, he corded it, and then he sat down. Where was he to go? He hardly knew. Out into the world again, out into the battle of life, away from all he held dear, once more an outcast. It was bitter—bitter. He had asked nothing but to work his way, and that was denied him. The past had to be paid for, but surely Fate was exacting too high a price!

CHAPTER 15.
Talbot of St. Jim's

TAP!

Talbot looked up wearily as the door opened. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who came in. His face was very bright.

"Hallo, old chap! Lookin' wathah down in the mouth—what?"

Talbot nodded; he could not speak.

"Watty playin' the wottah again!"

"I'm sacked!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I'm going this afternoon," said Talbot heavily. "I'm glad to be able to say good-bye to you, D'Arcy. It's all over for me here!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "So Watty's sacked you, has he? All the bettah, deah boy!"

"What?"

"You're not goin'," said D'Arcy. "You're comin' with me now; my governah's in the School House, and he wants to speak to you. He's got good news for you."

"News for me!" said Talbot, not comprehending.

"Yaas, wathah! And, oh, bai Jove, won't it be a surpwise for Watty!" chuckled the swell of St. Jim's. "Buck up, deah boy; it's all sewene! Come along!"

"But—but——"

"Come on, I tell you! You can't keep my patah waitin', you know!"

Arthur Augustus fairly dragged Talbot out of the room, and almost rushed him out of the School House. Wondering, and almost dazed, Talbot allowed himself to be led across the quadrangle and into the School House. A crowd of fellows awaited him there—Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins & Co.—and they were all looking very bright and cheery.

Evidently they had heard the news, whatever it was.

"Here he is!" chirruped Blake. "Hurrah!"

"He's sacked!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Watty has sacked him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, deah boy!"

Talbot, in a state of amazement, was led into Mr. Railton's study. Why did the fellows laugh at the news that he was sacked? Were they glad he was going? That was not possible. But what then——

"Talbot!" A handsome old gentleman rose to meet the

bewildered boy, holding out his hand cordially. Talbot shook hands with him mechanically.

"Heah he is, dad!" said Arthur Augustus jubilantly. "Watty—ahem!—I mean Mr. Watcliff—has sacked him for playin' in the footah match. Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is Lord Eastwood, Talbot!" said Mr. Railton, with a warning glance at the exuberant Arthur Augustus. "Lord Eastwood is a Governor of St. Jim's. He has mentioned your case to the Board of Governors at the last meeting, and he has news for you."

"Good news, I trust you will think, my boy," said his lordship. "You may be aware—h'm!—that the Governing Body of this school has in its gift certain scholarships called Founders' Scholarships, which are bestowed upon poor scholars, entitling you to three years' tuition at St. Jim's, with a due allowance in money to be paid quarterly."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Talbot.

His head seemed to swim for a moment.

"There are free scholarships in the gift of the governors," Lord Eastwood explained. "You must not make the mistake of supposing that there is anything of the nature of charity in this. The scholarships were founded for this specific purpose by a gentleman—h'm!—who has been dead for four centuries—h'm! In recognition of your heroic conduct in saving the troop-train, and for other reasons with which Dr. Holmes has acquainted them, the Board have bestowed this scholarship upon you. I congratulate you, Talbot, and I am sure that you will deserve this, and will prove a credit to this great and historic school!"

As Arthur Augustus remarked later in Study No. 6, "The governah was weally quite eloquent, bai Jove!"

Talbot stood dazed.

For some moments he could not speak. The change in his position was too startling to be grasped at once. But slowly he understood. He was no longer a boot-boy—sacked. He was really a St. Jim's Fellow again, on equal terms with all the rest, in the same position as Redfern of the Fourth—a scholarship pupil of the old school! It seemed too good to be true, but it was true.

He found his voice at last, but it was hard to control it when he spoke.

"I—I——" He stammered a little. "I—I don't know how to thank you, sir—you and the Head. I don't deserve this——"

"Wats!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"I—I don't—but I'll try to!" stammered Talbot.

"I am sure you will, my boy!"

"But—but——" Talbot flushed crimson. "I—I must tell you, sir; perhaps you do not know what—what I have been——" His voice broke.

"I know your whole history, my dear boy," said Lord Eastwood, and there was emotion in the old gentleman's voice too. "I have been fully acquainted with it for some time. I think you have been more sinned against than sinning, and I know you have bravely striven to redeem the past. You have succeeded. There is not a boy or master in this school who does not honour and respect you, or at least ought to do so!"

"Hear, hear!" came from the passage.

His lordship smiled.

"You will take your old place in this House, Talbot," said Mr. Railton. "You will occupy your old study. You belong to the Shell now, as before. I congratulate you, my boy!"

"Thank you, sir! I'll try to deserve your kindness!" faltered Talbot.

He seemed to be walking on air as he left the study.

In the passage the juniors were waiting for him. Talbot understood now their joyous looks; he understood why they had laughed at the news that he was "sacked" by Ratty. He was boot-boy in the New House no longer; he was Talbot of the Shell once more—Talbot of St. Jim's!

"Hurrah!"

"Hip-pip!"

"Shoulder-high!" sang out Blake.

And there was a rush for Talbot.

He was swung up on the shoulders of Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, and rushed out into the quadrangle. Round him surged the crowd of juniors, waving their caps and cheering.

"Right round the quad!" yelled Figgins. "Under the windows of the New House!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"March!"

"Hold on!" gasped Talbot. "I say——"

"Rats! March!"

"Hurrah!"

And Talbot was rushed on in triumphal procession. From a couple of hundred throats burst in a roar the old refrain, "He's a jolly good fellow!" The roar was at its loudest as the juniors swept by the New House. It reached the ears of Mr. Ratcliff—as it was intended to do. Like a fox from his lair, as Blake put it afterwards, Mr. Ratcliff came striding forth. His face was dark with anger.

"Talbot, get down instantly! Merry—Lowther—how dare you! How dare you, I say, treat in this manner a servant whom I have discharged! Talbot, go into the House instantly! Do you hear me, you insolent, wretched boy——"

Talbot laughed. He was no longer under the thumb of the tyrant of the New House. Mr. Ratcliff's power over him had crumbled away.

"Excuse me, sir!" said Talbot, with great politeness. "I am under the orders of my own Housemaster, sir, if you please!"

"What—wha-at!"

"As I belong to the School House, sir, I take my orders from Mr. Railton," said Talbot cheerfully.

"I—I—you—what——"

"Talbot's one of us now, Mr. Watcliff!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joyfully. "He's got a Foundation Scholarship, sir—I'm suah you will be pleased to heah it, sir—and he belongs to the School House, sir; he's in the Shell, and—and we've bwought him heah for you to congwatulate him, sir!"

"Hear, hear!!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff stood transfixed for a moment. He was utterly beaten. He murmured something which it was just as well that the boys did not hear, and rustled back into the House. He had no more to say. And the grinning juniors marched Talbot on, shoulder-high, making the circuit of the old quad, and from the distance came in a roar to the ears of the New House master:

"He's a jolly good fellow!
And so say all of us!"

THE END.

OUR GRAND NEW WAR SERIAL.

A Bid for a Throne.

A Thrilling War Story.

By CLIVE R. FENN.

READ THIS FIRST.

Paul Satorys, the rightful heir to the throne of Istan, lives quietly in England as a private gentleman until he hears that his place in Istan has been usurped by an adventurer named Jem Stanton, who is the exact double of Satorys. Worse than this, Stanton has decoyed Grace Lang, Satorys' fiancee, out to Istan with him. Grace, however, discovers the deception and escapes from the usurper. She falls into the hands of a tribe of natives, who make her their queen, and call her Nada. Satorys himself is subsequently captured by the natives and brought before the queen, who, however, he does not recognise owing to her veil. Nada offers to help him, and Paul leads her native troops against Istan. He is defeated, however, but saves himself by donning the uniform of an Istan officer, and mixing with the Istan Army. With his faithful followers, Peter Mardyke and Anton, he enters the city, and gets into conversation with an Istan officer. He learns that Germany has declared war on England, and that the troops of Istan are going to help Germany. Paul Satorys, with Peter Mardyke and Anton, succeed in reaching England with the Istan troops undetected. Staking all on a bold coup, Satorys then declares himself to the army as the rightful king, and calls upon his troops to follow him over to the side of the British in a body. The men of Istan are won over, Stanton, the impostor, flees, and Paul comes into his own. Herr Von Blumstock, a German Secret Service agent, uses the likeness between Stanton and Paul for his own benefit, and Paul is decoyed to a house and trapped at his orders. Stanton, once more assuming the identity of the King of Istan, is paid by the agent to secure information in London likely to be of use to Germany, and while he is strolling down the Strand one night he is tapped on the shoulder, and, turning, he finds himself face to face with a very old friend, Sam Bourke. After having had a chat with Stanton, Bourke realises that his companion is a spy in the pay of Germany, and he resolves to thwart him in his treacherous designs. He follows Stanton and Blumstock to an hotel, where the two rogues endeavour to persuade Grace Lang, who is imprisoned there, to help Stanton in his nefarious work; but she flatly refuses.

Meanwhile, Satorys overpowers his guards, and makes a great effort to escape, with the object of warning the police of the spies' headquarters.

(Now go on with the story.)

Sam Bourke to the Rescue.

The place was guarded like a fort. At each door stood a man, armed. Satorys drew back into the shadow as the sound of voices fell on his ear. How soon would it be ere his room were visited and the discovery made of the man lying there pinioned and with his coat fastened over his head?

The fugitive breathed again as he saw a number of men pass by him. He began to feel his way down the dusky corridor just ahead of him. The windings of the vast building were well-nigh interminable.

At last he found himself out of the maze, and he brought up quickly, for just ahead he saw a sudden blaze of light, and he realised he was in a sort of gallery which ran along one end of a large room, this being evidently the ball-room or theatre of the mansion.

The fugitive darted into the shelter of some dark hangings as voices were heard approaching. Only a few feet away from him, and on a slightly lower plane, he saw that a meeting was in progress, and as something of what was being said floated up to him, Satorys understood even better than before the gulf impassable which existed between England—the British Empire—and Germany.

He felt as if he must remain and hear, well-nigh forgetting his danger, as one of the men spoke of the future, when London was in the hands of the invader, and England was asking for mercy from its conqueror. The listener understood better than before the implacable hatred of Germany for its rival—hatred based on intense jealousy of the success of the land which was superior to her, and which owned the mastery of the seas.

"The rising has been delayed, but the time has come." The words rang out clear. "The thousands of Germans in England await the Imperial summons. I am speaking for the august master in Berlin, and it is decided that the time is now."

The talking went on in a louder tone. Satorys, from his place of concealment, heard all.

"I am glad to say that all is prepared. The summons is for next week, and the loyal sons of Germany will rally at Portsmouth, in accordance with the orders which have already been given."

Satorys listened intently. He heard high-sounding phrases, which dealt with a great coup in preparation; and as he listened he understood the peril of the country, for there were thousands of Germans all over the land.

It was just a plot for the overthrow of Britain, and for the seizing of all the centres of communication.

Satorys gave a sigh. He knew the magnitude of the issue, knew to the full that every second was important now, and that London must be warned in time; but he knew, too, that at any moment his escape from the room where for days he had been rigorously guarded until, apparently, his captors had come to look upon him as harmless, would be discovered.

There was the sound of steps quite near him, actually at the end of the gallery. The sound was the tramp of a sentry—heavy, methodical, now loud, now slowly dying away. And, meanwhile, the talking went on.

It was really the astute Von Blumstock who was speaking, and his words crystallised the whole philosophy of Germany—the arrogant notion that the Prussian was a superman, a being who was privileged to trample over the rights of the rest of the world to the end that Germany might indeed be over all, no matter what suffering was occasioned, what national ideals were crushed out of existence, nor how many harmless citizens were massacred in the process. There was plenty more in the same strain.

The watcher turned, thinking only of getting away and carrying the warning to the police. He saw a door ahead of him, and it seemed, so far as he could judge, to lead out of the intricate network of passages in which he had been lost. But the noise he made as he turned caused one of the men to look in the direction of the exit.

"There is someone there!" cried the man, whose suspicions had been aroused. "There are traitors here!"

The speaker sprang forward. Blumstock waved him back.

"There are no traitors amongst us," he said.

Despite the confident assertion of the leader, the man who had raised the alarm was not satisfied.

Satorys saw the man coming slowly in his direction, threading his way amidst the chairs, taking no notice of the "Hush!" which was now heard. Satorys darted back into the gloomy corridor, and there he paused, thinking that, maybe, the other would return to the room, convinced that he had been deceived.

The fugitive saw him standing in the bright light on the threshold gazing right and left, while Satorys drew further into the shelter of the curtains against which he had backed.

Then he felt all was over. There was a quick step, a shout, and the man had dashed at the slightly moving curtains, gripping at the thick hangings; and then collapsed, as Satorys drove him back with a blow between the eyes.

As the German struggled to his feet the alarm was given. Satorys raced down the corridor, thinking only of the necessity of giving the alarm of the imminent rising of the Germans in the country.

"Not a dog's chance!" he muttered bitterly, as he ran on, flying from one room to the other, for he had dashed out of the corridor where he had downed his man.

The whole pack of the Germans seemed to be after him now—the darkness alive with them. In one apartment through which Satorys flashed a man was seated at a table lit by tall candles, and before him was strewn a number of playing-cards; and as the fugitive appeared the German sprang to his feet, with an oath, and, raising a revolver which was lying in front of him, he fired. The shot went wide, and Satorys was at the window. Not such a well-guarded part of the house, this. He had seized the sash of the window, and run it up just as his pursuers were on to him. Satorys felt a hand on his shoulder; but he threw it off, and was on the sill, gazing out, everything then seeming to be compressed into a fraction of time.

It was dawn. Tiny points of light—light like old silver, soft and wonderful amidst the trees of a vast garden—deep shadows; ghostly reflections out there amidst the darkness of the spreading cedars; and an impression, which was startling and desirable, held him. Behind him he knew there was a mob of desperate men—men who, maybe, did not yet know that he, the spy as they thought him, was really their prisoner.

Then he leaped, not knowing how far it was—knowing, in fact, nothing but that it was up to him to carry the news of the sinister plot to those who could thwart the new scheme of the powerful and never-resting foe. He felt the rushing past him of the cool night air, saw the flash of firearms, gauged rather than visioned the lighted window, the faces of his enemies, and behind them he sighted, in a freak of the imagination, the vista of the battlefields of Europe, gaunt and grim, the touch of gloomy, lonely horror, burnt towns, and those who slept so well.

He felt the ragged branches of a tree tearing his clothing, then the soft, moist, scented turf. He had lost knowledge of time. He was lying there, and it might have been a long time, with a pain in his shoulder which stabbed and dazed him. Then he was up and running once more, dodging in and out amidst the shadowy trees; and the dawn was creeping more and more into evidence, revealing tenderly the outlines of flowers and the rugged barrier of a towering wall.

Another shot cracked, whiplike through the dying stillnesses of the night. Satorys paused in the shelter of a giant tree, to realise, as he caught his breath and clapped his hand to his aching arm, that now the garden was full of foes—men tracking him down; for no escape was permitted from a place like Larches, which was a portion of the German Empire placed secretly in the heart of England.

For a moment Sartorys lost the acute sense of danger, though every fibre in him was taut. He was thinking absurdly of the man who had first tried to hold him, and who had been sent slithering back into the folds of the curtain.

Again, as he moved away from the black trunk of the tree, which looked weird and sad in the pearly light of the new day, he was dwelling on his part in the great struggle for freedom from a brutal Prussian tyranny; and it was now only the thought of the peril of Miss Lang which really troubled him, for he sensed that Fate, which had flung him into such strange adventures, would permit him to give the warning as to the uprising.

"They dare not injure her!" he murmured to himself.

The muttered words somehow gave him relief. He was gliding on once more. Close to him he heard guttural cries in German, but his spirits rose as he guessed his pursuers were all at fault. Satorys stopped once more, then gained the shadow of another of the centuried trees which shut in the place. He saw now, as on a fantastic screen, his own share in the events of the past months; saw that his double would be again posing in the place of the man he had wronged; but beyond his own personal sufferings there was the conjured-up picture of distracted Europe, a world plunged in sorrow, and ——. He drew up suddenly and peered into the silvery gloom.

"It's all right, sir!" came in a husky whisper—a Cockney whisper. "I have been watching that place." Satorys saw the stumpy figure of a man emerge from the shadows, and the stranger gave a backward jerk of his hand towards the house, which could be seen faintly against the whitening sky of the morning. "Don't ask me a lot of questions, sir. We'll get away first, and if you will follow me it will be all right. I'm London, I am."

"But we are surrounded," said Satorys in the lowest of tones.

There was a sniff of contempt.

"They are only Germans, after all," said the other.

Sam Bourke had waited long. The effraction of the mansion had not presented any special difficulty to him, for he was an expert housebreaker; but somehow he did not exactly wish to tell the man he was out to help, the truth, and the moment was not propitious, anyway, for confidences of any kind.

Satorys, in his weak and exhausted state—for the hurt he had received was troubling him greatly—was content to accept the providential assistance which had come.

The morning looked bleak now, cold and sombre, and as Satorys followed Bourke and came to know something of the man's motives, for Bourke dropped a word now and then—a word which compressed vast meaning, there seemed to be sufficient reason for confidence that they would get away.

"This is the way I come in," said Bourke. "I have been watching the place. I will tell you for why afterwards. They will look for you along the walls, but there's a place underneath which I came in by, and——"

There was a quiet movement a few paces away, and Bourke dragged Satorys back. They were pressing on again, diving through a tangle of bushes, and then Bourke cautioned his companion, telling him to stoop.

It was an old watercourse by which they had come to halt, and in the still, dim light, Bourke saw the other drop on his hands and feet.

"This was my way," he said, his voice sounding muffled as he pushed his way into an unseen opening.

Satorys followed suit, guessing that the little tunnel led beneath the high boundary wall.

"All right?" asked Bourke.

Satorys grunted a reply. He was half stifled now. Bourke was ahead of him.

"Go on!" cried Satorys, for the man had stopped.

"Yes, all right; but this is where we come out, and I want to see that it's all safe."

The two scrambled out into a ditch which ran under the wall of the far side. Bourke raised himself and looked carefully round.

"Given the beggars a miss!" he said. "There's a lane here close by, and we shall get help."

Satorys rose stiffly. All around the country looked dreamlike and sad, while brown leaves were strewn across a winding path which ran by the edge of a copse. He was doubtful yet as to the chance of getting clear. The roads would be watched.

"You had very special reasons for wanting to get away, sir," said Bourke. "I know a bit. I knew a chap called Jem Stanton—yes, I met him down at a place where he passed a lot of time, and he has been playing a rum game since. Didn't think I should run against you, Mr. Satorys—for I can see that you are that gentleman—when I followed a fat German party down here all the way from London. But one never knows, and I always try to chance things. I wanted to do my bit for the Old Country, though it never thought much of me."

Bourke had risen, and was proceeding cautiously towards the wood.

Satorys pushed his way through the welter of brambles. The wood shut out the misty view of the house now, and from a matter of fifty yards ahead came the sound of wheels on a metalled road.

The sound spurred Satorys on. As he went forward he said something to Bourke, pleased with him, ready to trust the rough-looking fellow through thick and thin, though he could hardly have said why. Bourke shook his head.

"Please don't say a word about it, Mister. I want to help, and see that blighted Kaiser downed for good."

They had reached the road. The clip-clop of a horse's hoofs was plain. Did it mean relief or capture?

Satorys was ready to stake all on the chance. He saw a dogcart bowling down the lane, and he sprang into the track

from the high bank of the wood, shouting as he did so to the driver of the vehicle to stop.

The man drew up—a farming sort of man, in a slouch-hat and with a cutty pipe in his mouth. Bourke ran to the horse's head.

"Stand away!" cried the driver. "What might you want?"

He was addressing Satorys, and seemed to be as far removed from the thought of the war—of all it meant, with the thrones crumbling, and the roar of artillery which never ceased

"Give us a lift on the road, will you?" cried Satorys desperately. "I must get to the town."

The driver of the dogcart seemed ready to refuse, but a second glance at Satorys reassured him, and he moved sideways on the seat.

"All right," he said. "But you gave me a fair start, jumping out on me as you did. Get up. And you"—the speaker looked doubtfully at the figure of Sam Bourke—"you can jump up behind."

Satorys did as he was asked, and, with Sam Bourke behind the dogcart, went rolling on. The scene was peaceful enough. Across some fields came the chiming of a church clock, and straight ahead the road looked like a soft russet ribbon laid between the lush green of the wayside grass.

Sam Bourke was silent. He kept his eyes on Satorys, but he did not like to ask questions, for from words that Satorys had dropped the ragged man knew his temporary companion was all that he had imagined, "and a bit over," as he put it to himself.

Suddenly the horse shied, backing wildly against a sapling ash which stood close to the road, and the next second the driver gave a savage cry, for from the dense thicket on the left a party of men had sprung, one seizing the bridle, another leaping at the driver, bearing him back out of the cart, while before Satorys could defend himself he was pinioned from behind, while he felt the rim of a revolver-barrel pressed against his forehead.

Germany was as active in that part of England as on the plains of Europe.

"Speak, and you die!" said the man who threatened Satorys.

The latter saw Bourke slip nimbly from the cart and attempt to escape, but a shot rang out, and the poor fellow dropped. The driver was fighting with his captors. The latter were not in the humour to spare life then. There was another shot, and the driver fell limply to the ground, shot dead. The poor fellow had paid with his life for his good-nature in giving the two runaways a lift.

The leader of the German party looked right and left. There was nobody in sight at that hour of the morning, while even at normal periods and during the day very few people passed along that lonely road.

Two of the Germans raised the driver.

"Put him in the cart and whip up!" cried the leader.

His order was promptly obeyed. The silent form of the farmer was placed in the vehicle, and the horse was lashed at furiously, the terrified animal setting off down the lane at a breakneck pace, while the moment after Satorys was being hustled into the midst of the trees. He saw a couple of the men hurry to Bourke and raise him, and heard the poor fellow say something.

A cold rage seized Satorys, and he fought to shake off the grip of his captors.

A Check to Intrigue.

The unexpected does still often occur. It happened that morning as the handful of German Secret Service agents were dragging their two prisoners back to the house called Larches, which was for the time being the chief centre of German activities in England.

Both Satorys and his faithful ally Sam Bourke had suffered severely, but they were not beaten yet. Bourke gave a growl as his captors seized him. He glanced at Satorys. To the latter it seemed past belief that the common enemy of the whole civilised world should be able to commit its outrages on the roads of the country which was to be its next victim.

Satorys was set at liberty, as was Bourke, and the former by him so well, was badly injured, since it was not the way of Bourke to speak over much of his own ills. But good fortune had not quite deserted the fugitives. There was the clatter of horses' hoofs. Two officers of the police trotted up. Blumstock's men were equal to the occasion.

"What's the trouble?" shouted one of the patrol.

"It is quite all right, sir," said one of the Germans. "These men have escaped from the asylum where we are employed. We are taking them back."

"It's a lie!" shouted Satorys furiously.

"What asylum?" asked the officer who had previously spoken.

The man who had offered the plausible explanation was silent.

There was doubt written plainly on the face of the police-officer.

The agents of Blumstock were uncertain how to act. The time had not yet arrived to throw off the mask entirely and act as though they had indeed conquered the land.

But to go on as they had intended, to leave the police mystified, and to drag Satorys and his ally with them—all that was out of the question.

"Well, what have you got to say to this?" growled the first of the mounted men.

Satorys wrestled with the cords which pinioned his arms.

"It is your duty to arrest these scoundrels, officer," he said sharply.

The Germans hesitated. They could have shot down the two patrols, but to do so would have been tantamount to war, and it was the business of the emissaries of Blumstock to keep up the pretence of being peaceful citizens to the last.

The officers barred the lane. The leader of the German party muttered something, and immediately revolvers were jerked out. Satorys saw the intent—to silence him and Bourke. Dead men were eminently safe.

"Don't credit your yarn," said the officer, who was the chief. "Release those men at once!"

The German drew back, thinking of resistance; but he had been taken unawares, and suddenly he made a dash for the wood which fringed the lane, his comrades following him. In a flash all the party had disappeared.

Satorys was set at liberty, as was Bourke, and the former briefly explained the situation, with the result that the police started under the guidance of the ex-prisoners for the house called Larches.

Brief as had been the time the place was deserted, there was not a sign of the occupants anywhere

The inspector of police looked sharply at Satorys.

"This place is empty, sir," he said. "You must have been misled."

Satorys drew back. The search of the rambling old mansion had produced nothing. There was not a soul to be seen, except an old man, who was busy sweeping up the dead leaves in the drive.

"No, I was not misled, inspector," he said. "These people have been too clever for us, that's all there is to it; and the lady—Miss Lang—who was a prisoner here, has been taken away as well. But the pursuit must be carried on afterwards. For the moment we have to let them know in London that a plot is afoot to seize the centres of communication."

He swung round, and the inspector did not say any more about a deception. During the last few months so many surprising things had occurred in England that what would have been loked upon as a wild-cat notion before the war now seemed likely enough.

It was still early in the morning, and as Satorys hurried down the drive everything seemed asleep, as did the village which he gained, mounted on the horse of the second of the officers, the latter following with Bourke on foot.

The little post and telegraph-office was open, but at the mention of a message the man behind the counter shook his head.

"Very sorry, sir," he said, "but it isn't possible until the wires are mended. We have had a breakdown. I have notified Castletown, but it will be midday at least before I shall be able to get through to the main."

Satorys gave an angry exclamation:

"We must get to London and then Portsmouth," he said to the inspector.

The officer was keen enough now. He had come to understand something of who Satorys really was, though he found it difficult to accept the statement of Bourke that Satorys was a king, since why should a king be wandering about the country districts with no other attendant than a tumbledown-looking individual who looked as though he had had a very doubtful past?

"We'll do it, sir," said the officer. "These chaps are equal to anything. I had heard of a possible rising, but then saw it was denied."

There was reason for haste. Blumstock had acted swiftly, and was determined that the coup should not be lost owing to the escape of Satorys. He and his followers had left Larches in motor-cars, taking Miss Lang with them, and making for a second stronghold of which the police could not possibly know anything; but quickly as he had acted, the police under Satorys' directions were as speedy.

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand serial next Wednesday.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

AT THE PAGEANT.

"Are you Appius Claudius?" asked an old lady of a man in Roman attire.

"No, mum," replied the leader of legions, as he crouched under his umbrella. "I'm as miserable as the weather."—Sent in by Miss Lily Young, Cullercoats.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

The pretty girl entered the crowded tramcar, and the old man in the corner began to rise from his seat.

"No, please don't!" she protested. "I don't mind standing for a time."

"But I——" began the old man.

"No, really!" she insisted, and gently pushed him back into his seat.

"No; but——" he protested again, attempting to rise.

But once again she pushed him back.

"I insist!" she declared sweetly. "Your age entitles you to the seat, and——"

"Confound it, madam," thundered the old man, "I want to get out! I've been carried a hundred yards past my street already!"—Sent in by Eric Currie, Co. Fermanagh.

SOMETHING FRESH.

"Anything fresh or new this morning?" asked a reporter, while waiting at a railway-station.

"Yessir!" grunted a porter who was standing near.

"Then here's a shilling for you, my man," said the reporter graciously. "What is it?"

"That paint you're a-leaning against, guv'nor!"—Sent in by Miss A. Clifforth, Greenwich.

THE EDUCATED GROCER.

"Say, mister," said the small boy breathlessly, "take down this order, quick! I've got to go to school. Two pounds of coffee at two shillings, three and one-half of sugar at threepence, six boxes of cocoa at sixpence, two dozen eggs at one shilling, and four pounds of butter at one-and-four. How much does it come to?"

"Fifteen shillings and twopence-halfpenny, my little man," said the grocer. "What address, please?"

"Gee! Thanks!" said the schoolboy, as he made his escape. "That was the only sum I couldn't do!"—Sent in by H. Brocklebank, York.

NOT LIKELY!

A battalion of infantry, on returning from foreign service, were treated by their honorary colonel to an excellent dinner.

The meal was nearly completed, when a waiter, noticing a corpulent private loosening his belt, went to him with a dish of fruit.

"Dessert?" the attendant inquired.

"Dessert?" echoed Pat. "No fear, not me, when I can get a good feed like this for nothing!"—Sent in by A. G. Fenwick, Pimlico.

THEN THE AUDIENCE LAUGHED.

Lecturer (discoursing on his wonderful climbs in the mountains): "The paths up the mountain-side to the volcano are perilous, and are too steep for even an ass to climb; therefore, I did not attempt the ascent."—Sent in by S. Boness, Upper Holloway.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

The dear old lady was chatting amiably with the innocent little lift-boy, as the lift rattled upwards.

"Don't you find this work monotonous?" she asked.

"Oh, no, mum!" came the bright reply. "Sometimes it's quite exciting. Only yesterday a man started to get out too soon, and got his head cracked; and last week the engine broke down, and everybody 'cept me was nearly killed. And now this 'ere rope looks sort o' weak. I shouldn't wonder if it broke any time. And the engineer's away to-day, and that makes things interestin'."—Sent in by R. Redford, Patricroft.

WHAT WAS REQUIRED.

Master: "How do the dogs like the new food, John?"

John: "They don't seem to be taking to it, sir."

Master: "How do you account for that, John?"

John: "Well, you see, sir, it says on the packet that 'Dogs will eat it with avidity,' and they never sent none o' that. But I'll try 'em again as soon as I get the other packet to mix with it."—Sent in by F. Beech, Nantwich.

"AHEM!"

Yank: "Yes, sir, guess we've got hens over there that lay eggs from the size of green peas to footballs!"

Farmer: "Oh, that's nothing! I had a hen that ate a leather bootlace in mistake for a worm, and it laid eleven leather eggs; and it was so broody and so grieved that it—it——"

Yank: "Died—eh?"

Farmer: "Died? No, bless yer! It sat on 'em, and hatched a team of footballers!"—Sent in by G. Bevan, Westminster.

GOOD ADVICE.

The portly lady had accidentally taken a rear seat in a tramcar reserved for smokers. With unconcealed indignation she watched the man beside her fill his pipe.

"Sir," finally came her frigid tones, "smoking always makes me feel sick."

"Do it, now?" said the man, as he carefully lit up. "Then take my advice, and chuck it!"—Sent in by E. Maynard, Upton Park.

HOW HE SUFFERED!

Kind Gent: "How you must suffer, my poor man!"

Tramp: "You're right, guv'nor. It's no joke to carry a brick inside your boot all day to make believe you've got the gout!"—Sent in by H. Chelson, Islington.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, England. Agents for Australasia: Gordon & Gotch, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Wellington, N.Z. South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd., Cape Town and Johannesburg. Subscription, 7s. per annum. Saturday, November 7th, 1914.

FROM THE FIRING-LINE!

A Series of Letters of Enthralling Interest received direct from Corporal Charles, of his Majesty's —th Dragoons, who is an old reader of "The Gem" Library, and is now on active service on the Continent with the British Expeditionary Force.

(Exclusive to "The Gem" Library.)

No. 5.—
A ROUND WITH "JACK JOHNSON."

Since we left Soissons several days ago we've been hard at it. In fact, I've had scarcely more than two hours' sleep each night for nearly a fortnight, and when we do go to by-by it's not on a feather-bed, I can assure you! When we're not feeding or resting we're guarding positions or harassing the enemy all the time.

For all that, you wouldn't find a happier band of boys than the King's Dragoons. They're hot stuff at charging, and fair gluttons for getting into difficult corners and cutting their way out again at the Germans' expense.

Where we are now I'm not at liberty to tell, for big things are on the board. The Kaiser's barbarians are in for a hot time. That's all I dare say at the moment.

The experiences I've had lately have been so many that I scarcely know which will interest you most.

My natural modesty rebels, too, at the idea of making myself out to be a hero. That's a commonplace glory nowadays with so many of Sir John French's gallant boys deserving of the honour. Still, you may like to hear how we had a round—a regular ding-dong, slap-up, fisticuff battle—with "Jack Johnson."

Strictly speaking, I should say the battle was between a battery of horse artillery, aided by a few score King's Dragoons and other cavalry, and a mob of German hussars and artillery, who were looking after one of their mighty siege guns which pop out those thousand-pound pills our boys have named "Jack Johnsons."

The reason is, that they're the biggest things going in shells, and that when they explode, making a hole in the earth big enough to bury a horse and cart, they send out a cloud of oily black smoke.

I expect you know that we've got a wholesome contempt for the German infantry, who fire from the hip, squeal at the sight of a British bayonet—though they're brave enough when frightening defenceless old men and women. As for the "terrible" Uhlans, our chaps have renamed them the "ewe-lambs," which about explains how they terrify us. You can't please our boys better, in fact, than galloping them out to meet twice their number of Uhlans.

The only thing we have the slightest respect for is the German artillery. To do them credit, they know how to hide their guns, and to get the best out of them. At one time, before our flying corps gave their rivals the sack, their aeroplanes, by signalling our positions, enabled the enemy's artillery to give us a worrying. Now we snap our fingers at their ordinary field artillery and howitzers.

It's only the mighty guns they brought up for the siege of Paris, and which after that fiasco they turned to use, that annoy us. Their terrific shells, long-range, and, above all, the clever way they've got of hiding them, gives them an advantage over our own and the French artillery.

I was enjoying a fag—the first for three days—down by the river one night, when I saw our colonel coming towards me with—well, we'll call him the general.

Of course, I dropped the fag, with a sigh, and came to the salute. Instead of passing on, the two officers came across to me.

"This is Corporal Charles, sir," said the colonel, with one of his cheery smiles and a wave of the hand. "This is the lad who went to Liege and Namur, and brought in the champagne Germans the other night."

I think I told you of the twenty Germans and their colonel we captured at a chateau, where they were so intoxicated that they couldn't speak or stand erect.

The general gave a hearty laugh, and produced a cigar-case.

"That was a bright end to a dull, tiresome day," he said. "I see your cigarette's out, corporal," he added, with a sly twinkle, as I put my foot over the smoking end. "Try one of these."

My heart leapt. I took the cigar, but did not attempt to light it. I treasure that more than the Uhlan helmets and the Iron Cross I've bagged as trophies. That's by the way.

"It's like this, corporal," the colonel went on. "You've shown such enterprise and dash that I thought you might care to volunteer to find that big siege gun of the Germans that was doing such damage this morning and yesterday."

I could feel the blood rushing to my cheeks. I think my face showed the pleasure I felt.

"I shall feel honoured, sir, to be allowed to make the attempt," I said.

"You'll find it a difficult task," said the general. "Two different observers went up in aeroplanes to-day, but neither succeeded in locating it. All they know is that it is situated somewhere on the range of hills beyond the wood. You'll have to go through the German lines. It's no good going unless you think you can succeed."

"I won't come back if I fail, sir," I said modestly.

"That's the spirit!" smiled the general. "Better take a chum. Go ahead as soon as you like."

The colonel stayed a moment to whisper to me.

"Good luck, lad!" he said. "If you win through you'll not long be a corporal."

He gripped my hand. What wouldn't a fellow do for a dear old chap like that? At once I went away, and had a few words with my chum. As I expected, Ted jumped at the chance.

As soon as dusk began to descend we determined to make a start. Our chaps looked enviously at us as we rode off, guessing we were out on privileged business.

"What have ye brought those Uhlan helmets for?" asked Ted, as we waved "Ta-ta" to the outposts.

"To put on, of course," I answered. "Our caps would give us away at once to the Germans. With these on, if we keep as far away as poss, they won't be able to see that our uniforms are khaki instead of their grey-green."

Ted guffawed. The idea tickled him. With the helmets on, we kept up a steady jog-trot along a lane bordered by high trees. We kept in the shadows as much as possible. Not until we had left camp three miles behind did we see any sign of the enemy.

At the fork of two roads a patrol of Uhlans, six mounted men, were conversing. We decided not to leave our visiting-cards with them. Going back a little, we climbed a steep bank, and entered a wood.

With our hands on the bridle-chains, we walked our horses. It was necessary to go carefully here. The woods were alive with the enemy. The Red Cross men were at work. Parties were busy digging graves. Everywhere there were heaps of dead, everywhere signs of the terrible havoc of our guns.

They were too busy to take notice of us, though we didn't give them any opportunity of quizzing us. We were glad when we left the wood behind. Out on the road again, we began the ascent of the steep hill, somewhere on which we believed the Germans had their siege gun hidden away.

Now our task became very difficult. We were in the heart of the enemy's lines. We gave up all as lost several times when motor-cars whizzed past us containing important officers. All round us were big bodies of troops. We could see lights moving in the trenches, which the infantry were afraid to leave.

Reaching a coppice, at Ted's request, he stood with the horses hidden amongst some high bushes whilst I went on alone. I didn't feel at all cocky, I can tell you. Darting

(Continued on next page.)

FROM THE FIRING-LINE!

(Continued from page iii of Cover.)

into cover at the sight of every figure, a couple of hours passed before I found my object.

In a depression between a couple of hills I almost stumbled into a pit. As I scrambled noisily back, a great wicker top was raised, and a lantern was thrust up. My hand went to my revolver. I meant to have one more shot at least if the worst happened. I could have easily plugged the greasy-faced fool who blinked out at me.

But I laid still, amazed at what I saw. Down in the pit—a great square cavity—resting upon a concrete base, was the big Krupp siege gun.

More than one German voice growled out from the depths of the pit. What they said I couldn't make out. Anyway, to my relief, the lantern disappeared, and the wicker top—a big square of plaited rush—fell back in its place, completely hiding the mighty gun.

Silent as a cat, I returned the way I came. Ted was all right, but stiff and cold. He was not sorry to make the journey home. We were not so lucky getting back, though. Just as we were about to leave the wood a sentry let fly at us, and in an instant the whole camp was awake, shots rang out all over the place, and a miniature panic was in progress. Even after that narrow squeak we were chased twice by patrols before, forgetting that we were still wearing the confounded Uhlan helmets, our own outposts nearly popped us off on getting back to camp.

It was two a.m., but the colonel was up, and so was the general.

"Well done, corporal!" cried the general, wringing my hand, when I described the position of the siege gun. "We'll test your information when daylight comes."

Ted and I trotted off for forty winks. It seemed as if I'd scarcely put down my head, when I found the colonel's orderly shaking me.

"They've found the Jack Johnson pop-gun!" he grinned. "Come out and see the sport!"

I hurried away towards the crest, where a couple of batteries were working overtime. I saw a sight there I shall never forget.

The gunners had got perfect range. The Germans, obviously in a panic, had determined to save their big gun at all costs. Whilst I watched I saw their horses—forty odd, they say—pulling the mighty gun out of danger between a gap in the range of hills. The cavalry were screening them; but for all that, as their ranks broke suddenly through a bursting shell, we had a distinct view of the mighty, massive gun, seven feet at least from the ground.

It was now that the fun began. Shells were falling like hail amongst us. Out into the open, with a sudden clatter of wheels, rushed a battery of horse artillery. Driven at headlong speed, the horses raced towards the valley. The gun-carriages bounced over the uneven road, whilst shells were turned on them from almost every angle of the enemy's position.

Reaching their ground, the guns were slipped into action as calmly, as at manœuvres. Jack Johnson's popgun swung into view from between a second gap in the hills, drawn by its long train of horses. A fresh squad of cavalry flanked it. Then our field artillery introduced itself with a deep-toned growl and a shower of steel gifts.

Shell followed shell with lightning-like rapidity and deadly accuracy. The little band of British gunners danced round their guns, thoroughly enjoying themselves.

In the matter of moments Krupp's greatest achievement in the art of warfare was beaten into a useless mass of scrap steel. No more Jack Johnsons will call on the British from that gun!

It would have done you good to hear our boys cheer. We were still waving our caps and yelling our hardest when the bugle sounded for a cavalry charge.

The King's Dragoons, the Queen's Bays, and the 9th Lancers were ready. They galloped off with a thud of hoofs and ear-splitting shouts.

It was glorious. The Germans were soon scooting everywhere like rats. When the bugle rang out again, we found ourselves the captors of eleven Krupp guns and over two hundred prisoners, besides the twisted mass of metal that had once been the mighty siege gun.

Ted and I were immensely pleased with ourselves, I can tell you, when the colonel took us to headquarters. I forget how many hands of famous officers we shook, and how many complimented us.

(Another stirring letter from our Chum at the front will appear next Wednesday. Order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance.)

THIS WEEK'S CHAT.

The Editor's Personal Column.

For Next Wednesday—

"SAVING TALBOT,"

By Martin Clifford.

In next week's grand long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's, Levison finds himself placed in a very awkward position, as a result of his nocturnal escapades. It is Talbot who ultimately comes to the rescue, notwithstanding the fact that the Fourth-Former has never shown any particular friendship for the Toff. For once Levison is genuinely grateful, and before long there comes to him a chance whereby he can prove his gratitude. Talbot, still with a stigma on his name in certain quarters is made the scapegoat for another's misdeeds, and it is Levison who puts a spoke in the wheel of the plotters. Tom Merry & Co. are very much surprised at the clever way in which Levison succeeds in

"SAVING TALBOT,"

and he rises high in their estimation.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

A Very Old Reader (Liverpool).—Write to Messrs. Glaisher & Co., Charing Cross Road, W.C., who will be pleased to supply you with the dictionary you require.

"Marguerite."—The cinematograph actor you name is engaged by the Gaumont Company.

DEEDS OF DARING.

A Fellow Named Rowan.

When war broke out between America and Spain the first thing for America to do was to send a message from the President of the United States to the leader of the insurgents in Cuba. This leader, Garcia by name, had to be reached at all costs and told what America meant to do. It was also necessary to know definitely that he would fight on the side of America against Spain.

But could he be reached?

Where was Garcia? He was somewhere in the wild mountains of war-stricken Cuba—somewhere, miles from cities, miles from postmen and telegraph-messengers.

How could the President of the United States reach him? With all the vast wealth and power at his disposal, the great President was helpless. He could not say to Garcia, "Help me, and I will help you." He could not say so simple a thing as that, although he was surrounded by telegraph and telephone wires, and had thousands of men to obey his commands.

But someone came to him and said, "There's a fellow by the name of Rowan who will find Garcia for you."

This fellow Rowan was summoned into the President's presence. He was asked if he could find Garcia. He said he would try. The President liked the look of the man, liked his way of speaking, and gave him a letter for Garcia. Rowan took the letter, and placed it in an oilskin pouch, which he strapped round his waist next to the skin. Then he walked out and disappeared.

In four days' time an open boat crept towards the coast of Cuba under the blackness of a midnight sky. The boat was shot forward on a wave, it grounded on the beach, and before a second wave reached it a fellow by the name of Rowan was walking up the shingle to the cliffs.

Three weeks passed away rapidly. At the end of that time a man appeared on the opposite side of the island, entered a boat, and was rowed away. He had walked from shore to shore, he had penetrated a tangled jungle, he had crossed mountains, he had evaded a thousand rifles and a thousand daggers in a land hostile to his race and country, and he had found Garcia.

Thus appears for a brief moment on the page of history a fellow by the name of Rowan, and as silently as he appears he disappears again into the darkness and the silence, the hero of a flashing moment.

He tells us nothing of himself. We know nothing of his sufferings, his nights passed in jungle and mountains, his days surrounded by fierce and passionate enemies, his reception by Garcia, his return to the President of the United States. A silent hero, a man of no words at all, but a doer. And be sure that this act of his is not the only one which will stand to his credit in the chronicles of the brave. Such a man's life is one long, steadfast service.

THE EDITOR.