# DOWN ON HIS LUCK!

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

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# TALKING STRAIGHT TO RACKE!

# DOWN ON HIS LUCK!

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

## By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

### CHAPTER 1.
### Monty Lowther is Too Humorous.

"HERE'S Racke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke of the Shell looked surprised.

He had just come into the junior Common-room in the School House at St. Jim's. There were a good many juniors in the room, and at Racke's appearance a general chuckle ran through the crowd.

"Bai Jove, it's wathah too bad, you know!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. "It is wathah wuff on Wacke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo!" said Racke, not very pleasantly. "What's the merry joke?"

"You are!" grinned Jack Blake, and there was another chortle.

Racke knitted his brows. It was evident that there was some joke on, and that he was the victim of it. Racke did not take jokes against himself agreeably. Racke was the wealthiest fellow at St. Jim's—wealthier by far even than D'Arcy of the Fourth, who was the son of a noble lord, or than Lumley-Lumley, who had a millionaire for a father. Racke had expected, when he came to St. Jim's, to be "kow-towed" to without limit, but he had been greatly disappointed. The fact that his boasted wealth was derived from war profits did not make him popular. His father, head of the firm of Racke & Hacke, had piled up millions at the expense of his country, and the St. Jim's fellows had a very decided opinion about that kind of thing.

Not that most of the fellows would have been down on Racke for his father's grasping greed. That wasn't Racke's fault. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had proposed treating Racke with politeness in spite of the war profits, pointing out that Racke couldn't help being the son of a profiteer, any more than he could have helped being the son of a burglar, if his father's business had been of a slightly different nature.

But Racke himself was the absolute limit. His wealth was paraded; his conversation ran always on money and on the expensive things money could buy. His tastes were vicious. So far as the limitations of school life allowed, he spent his share of the family war profits in the way war profits generally are spent. He palled with the worst set of fellows in the School House, and led them into reckless rascality which they would never have thought of without his guidance. If the Head had known half as much about Racke as his Form-fellows knew, the heir of Racke & Hacke would not have remained an hour longer in the school.

Swank founded on war profits was not likely to make any fellow popular. Racke was only popular with the few shady fellows who found him profitable as a comrade. If he had been decent, his father's sins would have been forgiven him. But he wasn't decent; he was quite the reverse, and one of his favourite boasts was that Messrs. Racke & Hacke were paying sixty per cent. dividend—out of the war.

Racke was not sensitive, and remarks about war profits did not worry him. But he had a conviction that a pocket-book full of fivers made him a most important person, and it was a grievance with him that the St. Jim's fellows generally regarded him as a person of no importance whatever.

Now he stood in the doorway of the Common-room, his brows knitted and his eyes gleaming under them, surveying the grinning juniors. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were the centre of a group, and Lowther held the latest number of "Tom Merry's Weekly" in his hand. Racke could guess that there was some reference to himself in the "Weekly," and that it was the cause of the general merriment. His own pals, Crooke and Mellish, were chuckling with the rest. Tom Merry was frowning a little. The chief editor of the "Weekly" sometimes found it a little difficult to restrain the humorous proclivities of Monty Lowther, who had charge of the Comic Column. Lowther's little jokes were not always agreeable to the victims, and Tom was too good-natured to wish to hurt anybody's feelings, even Racke's.

Racke came up to the group, the grinning juniors making way for him. Monty Lowther greeted him with a bland smile.

"Something about me in that rotten rag?" asked Racke, his eyes glittering.

"Only a joke, Racke," said Tom Merry. "You needn't worry about it. I really wish you'd draw the line a bit, Lowther."

"I do," said Lowther. "I draw the line at Racke."

"I suppose you can't help being a funny idiot?" said Racke. "Let's see what you've got there about me, you cheeky rotter!"

"No names mentioned," said Manners. "I really don't see why you should conclude it's about you, Racke."

"Cap fit, cap wear, you know," chortled Levison of the Fourth.

"It's too bad, Monty," said Tom.

"What rot! I suppose a professional humorist can make little jokes about war profits in his own column?" said Lowther indignantly. "In fact, it's a duty. How are war profiteers to be restricted, if not by the Press? The law can't touch them, and it's no good appealing to their sense of decency—they haven't any. It's the duty of a journalist to poke fun at them."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "But that doesn't apply to Wacke, Lowthah. He is not a pwofiteeah himself."

"He's got his pocket-book full of war profits," said Lowther. "He spends war profits on smokes, and bets war profits on gee-gees. He plays nap and banker with war profits. He reeks of war profits. He almost smells of war profits. He revels and glories in war profits. Don't you, Racke?"

Racke sneered savagely.

"I dare say you'd like to get your fingers on some of the war profits," he said. "There's a good many fellows here who would borrow as much of the war profits as they could get me to lend."

"Bai Jove, that's wathah a wotten wemark, Wacke!"

"Give me that paper, Lowther!"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "This is only the proof, Racke; the number isn't printed yet. That limerick's coming out before it's printed."

"Bosh!" said Lowther warmly. "It's a jolly good limerick."

"It is wathah too wuff, Lowthah!"

"Rats!" said Manners. "I don't see it. If a chap swanks about on war profits, he wants to see it as other fellows see it. Racke ought to thank Lowther for this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, pewwaps there is somethin' in that," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "Pewwaps it will have a good effect on you, Wacke."

"You silly idiot!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Give me that paper!" shouted Racke, in a fury by this time. He snatched the proof-sheets of the "Weekly" from Lowther's hand.

"What beautiful manners there profiteers have!" sighed Lowther.

Racke glared at the Comic Column, in which the limerick was printed. The School House juniors looked on, grinning, to watch the effect upon him of Lowther's humorous effort. Racke's brow grew darker and darker as he read:

"Of war profiteers there's a pack,
Who are collaring quids by the sack
Some day, let us hope,
They'll be given a rope,
Or at least they'll be put on the rack."

In the last line, of course, there was one of Monty Lowther's atrocious puns. No names were mentioned in the limerick, but the last word was quite enough to make it clear whom it referred to.

Racke crushed the paper in his hand, his eyes full of anger. Lowther smiled at him sweetly. But he ceased to smile the next moment. Racke's hand, with the paper clenched in it, came up suddenly, and his knuckles were dashed full in Lowther's face. Lowther gave a yell as he staggered back, taken quite by surprise, and went with a crash to the floor.

### CHAPTER 2.
### A Fight to a Finish.

"BAI Jove!"

"Right on the wicket!" grinned Crooke.

"Well hit!" chortled Mellish.

Crooke and Mellish regarded their chum with unusual respect. Racke, though he had more courage than either of them, was not a fighting-man at all. He was too smoky and weedy and seedy to excel in anything that required strength or pluck. But there is a point at which the worm will turn, and Racke had apparently reached that point.

Tom Merry and Manners rushed to pick up their chum. Lowther was dazed by the sudden blow, and the back of his head had struck the floor hard. His head was swimming as his chums raised him up.

"Foul blow!" growled Jack Blake.

"Foul!"

"Rotter!"

"Mop him up, Lowther!"

Lowther leaned on Tom Merry's arm, gasping for breath. The blow had been

a cowardly one. Racke had cause for anger, but there was no excuse for striking a sudden and unexpected blow, with such vicious force behind it. The cad of the Shell stood looking at Lowther with a savage smile. It was certain that a fight would follow; but Lowther had been very nearly crocked by that sudden attack, and Racke had gained an advantage.

"Oh, my hat!" panted Lowther. "You rotten cad!"

"I'm ready to fight you," sneered Racke. "You've insulted me, and you've been knocked down for it. You ought to have expected that."

"You coward!" broke out Tom Merry hotly. "Do you call it fair play to take a chap by surprise like that?"

"Lowther can look after himself, I suppose," sneered Racke. "Are you going to fight his battles for him?"

"Yes, I am!" said Tom savagely. "Shut that door, Blake, old man; we don't want the prefects here. Get your jacket off, Racke!"

Blake closed the Common-room door at once, and thoughtfully turned the key. The juniors gathered round in an excited crowd. Some of the fellows had thought that Lowther's limerick was a little too personal for good taste, cad and outsider as Racke undoubtedly was. But Racke's cowardly blow had deprived him of all sympathy. It was in keeping with his character.

"Hold on, Tom!" said Lowther, his voice a little unsteady. "Leave him to me. It's my face he's punched, fathead!"

"Rot!" said Tom. "You're not fit. Why, you can hardly stand!"

"I shall be all right in a minute."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "Leave it to Tom Mewwy, Lowthah—or to me. I should be vewy pleased to give Wacke a feahful thwashin'!"

Racke put his hands into his pockets as Tom Merry strode towards him. He did not intend to fight the captain of the Shell if he could help it. He knew only too well how painful the results would be.

"Is Lowther going to skulk behind you?" he sneered. "Hasn't he pluck enough to stand up for himself?"

"You rotter——"

"Is he only courageous with his pen?" jeered Racke. "I suppose it's one thing to write a rotten limerick, and another thing to answer for it."

"Let him alone, Tom," said Lowther. "I tell you, I'm going to lick him!"

"You're a long time about it," sneered Racke.

Lowther began to peel off his jacket. There was a big bump on the back of his head, and his brain was swimming still. The concussion with the floor had hurt him badly, and he certainly was not fit for a scrap. But his eyes were gleaming with a deadly gleam.

"Look here, Monty; you're not fit now!" urged Tom.

"Rot!"

"Leave it a bit, then. Have the rotter in the gym after tea."

"I'm going to lick him now!"

"Don't be an ass, Monty, you know," urged Manners.

"Oh, rats!"

Monty Lowther was not to be reasoned with. He threw his jacket to Manners, and pushed up his cuffs. Then he advanced on Racke.

"Are you ready, you cad?"

"Waiting for you," said Racke. "Have you screwed up your courage to the sticking-point at last?"

"Put up your hands, you cur!"

Racke put up his hands at once. He was bigger than Lowther, and if he had been in good condition, should have been more than his match at any time. But Racke of the Shell never was in good condition. Smoking in the study, breaking bounds after lights-out, slacking and mooching about with his hands in his pockets, did not conduce to fitness. But Lowther had been so hard hit already that Racke confidently anticipated victory, and he stood up to Lowther with a determination he had never shown before.

Tom Merry and Manners looked on anxiously. Lowther had to be given his head, so to speak; but they were very uneasy for him, in the circumstances. Racke had taken a mean advantage, and evidently intended to make the most of it. There were no rounds, and no gloves; the two juniors piled in hammer and tongs. At any other time Lowther would have made rings round the unfit slacker of the Shell. But he was not at his best now, and Racke drove him back, beating him round the ring, till he went down with a heavy crash.

"Bai Jove! Wotten!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "I weally wish you had left Wacke to me, Lowthah!"

Racke grinned triumphantly. For once in a way, it seemed, he was to be the victor in a fist-fight; victor, too, over a member of the Terrible Three. Mellish and Crooke and Trimble exchanged glances of satisfaction. But the other fellows looked grim. It was not a fair fight, and a dozen fellows would willingly have taken Lowther's place to deal with the cad of the Shell.

Tom picked Lowther up.

"Better chuck it for a bit, old chap!" he muttered.

"I'm going to lick him!"

"But——"

"Rats!"

"Is that fellow coming on, or is he licked?" sneered Racke. "I'm not going to wait for him all the evening!"

"Shut up," growled Clive of the Fourth. "Lowther, you ass, why don't you leave it to one of us?"

Lowther did not reply. He came forward unsteadily, with his hands up. The fight recommenced, Racke attacking savagely.

But he found Lowther harder to handle now. Lowther was recovering from that stunning jar on his head, and he was more himself. He was a skilled boxer, and he kept off Racke's attack this time; and every minute that passed he recovered more, and showed more strength and energy. Racke's certainty of victory was shaken now, and with the doubt his courage waned. His attack grew less forcible, and he began to give ground. Lowther followed him up with grim determination.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think Lowthah will pull it off, aftah all."

"Go it, Lowther!" chortled Herries.

"He's showing funk already," grinned Digby. "Racke's as good as done. Go for his boko, Lowther!"

Racke was backing round the ring now. If he had had a larger allowance of pluck, a determined attack would probably have given him the victory. But pluck had no very great part in the composition of the heir of Racke and Hacke. Lowther's grim determination made him waver; and two or three heavy blows upon his sullen face shook him considerably. A hunted look was coming into Racke's eyes, and his fighting became feebler and hesitating. There was a general chirrup of satisfaction when a right-hander from Lowther sent Racke spinning back, to drop on the floor.

"Bwavo!"

"Well hit!"

Tom Merry was smiling now; all his doubts were gone. Crooke of the Shell picked Racke up.

"Go in and win!" he whispered. "You can lick him yet!"

Racke groaned.

"Hang it! I'm done!"

"Don't be a funk, you know."

"Oh, shut up!"

"You're not done," said Monty Lowther grimly. "You're not licked yet, you funk! You've given me a bump on my head as big as an egg, and you're going to pay for it!"

"Look here——"

"Come on!"

"I—I—I—— Hang you!" howled Racke.

Lowther was attacking, and Racke had to come on. As Kangaroo of the Shell remarked, he had called the tune, and now he had to pay the piper. Driven to resistance, Racke fought savagely, like a rat in a corner, and Lowther received some heavy punishment; but all the time his fists were raining blows on Racke, and at last the cad of the Shell went down again in a heap. He remained on the floor, gasping.

"You're not done yet!" growled Lowther. "There's a lot of fight left in you. Get up and come on!"

"Let me alone!" panted Racke. "I'll yell for help!"

"Bai Jove! I wegard you as a funkay wottah, Wacke!"

"Let the cad alone," said Tom Merry. "He's had enough, Monty."

"Look at the bump on my head!" growled Lowther.

"Well, look at Racke's nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther snorted, and put his jacket on. Racke gave him a deadly look, as he picked himself up.

"I'll make you smart for this, Lowther!" he muttered.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "What have you got to complain of, Wacke! You started it, and you're not weally half licked!"

Racke made no reply. He jammed his jacket on, and left the Common-room without a word. When Racke appeared in public again, his nose looked almost twice its usual size, and there was a purple shade about his eye. That purple shade clung to Racke lovingly for several days; and it led to Mr. Railton inquiring into the matter, and giving Lowther and Racke two hundred lines each.

There, it was supposed, the matter ended. But it did not end as far as Racke was concerned. Monty Lowther had not yet done with the heir of Racke and Hacke.

## CHAPTER 3.
### A Shock for Monty Lowther.

"DON'T!"

Tom Merry and Manners made that remark simultaneously, as they came into No. 10 Study in the Shell passage, some days after the scene in the Common-room.

They made it in tones of entreaty.

Monty Lowther was seated in the armchair in the study, one leg crossed over the other, his elbow resting on his knee, his chin resting in his hand. He was staring into the fire, with a concentrated stare. He was so deep in thought that he did not hear his chums enter.

Hence the remark of Tom Merry and Manners. They naturally supposed that the humorist of the Shell was deep in the composition of some new wheeze or atrocious pun, of which they were to be the victims at tea-time.

Monty Lowther looked up.

"Let it keep!" said Manners. "Keep

t for the 'Weekly,' old chap! Jokes are much better read than listened to. Besides, we may see the pun when it's in print. I don't suppose we should see it now."

"Eh? What joke?" asked Lowther.

"The one you're just going to perpetrate," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Fathead! I don't feel much like joking."

"You don't?" ejaculated Manners.

"No, ass!"

"You're not going to tell us that war profiteers deserve the Racke, or that Mellish will contrive to make a bet by hook or by Crooke, or that this study is famous for its merry Manners——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Nothing the matter, is there, Monty?" asked Tom, looking more closely at his chum.

He noted that Lowther's face was a little pale, and there was a deep line in his forehead.

"Yes," said Lowther shortly.

"Sorry!" said Manners contritely. "What's up?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Trouble at home?" asked Tom. "You can tell us, Monty, old scout, surely?"

"Not exactly!"

"Your uncle ill?" asked Manners, with real concern

The juniors did not know much of old Mr. Lowther, excepting that he was a crusty old gentleman; but they knew that Monty was attached to him.

"No; he's not ill that I know of."

"But the trouble's about him?" asked Tom.

"Ye-es."

"Lost his tin in the War?" asked Manners. "Shares gone down to next to nothing—got his money in Home Rails—what?"

A bitter look came over Lowther's face.

"No, he's not lost any money," he said.

"Well, that's good."

"I wish he had!" grunted Lowther.

"Well, that's a rather peculiar wish," said Tom Merry. "Nearly everybody's lost something or other in the War, excepting the filthy profiteers—and they've lost their self-respect, if ever they had any!"

Lowther winced.

"Don't, Tom!" he said, in a low voice.

Tom stared at him blankly. Nobody had ever been more eloquent on the subject of war profits than Monty Lowther.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Tom.

Lowther did not reply. His face became crimson, and then pale again. He opened his lips to speak, but they closed. Manners and Tom Merry regarded him with something like alarm. It was very rarely that Monty Lowther's high spirits were dashed; indeed, they believed that if he had been going to execution he would have gone, like Sir Thomas More, with a jest on his lips. Nor was he given to being secretive or mysterious. His chums simply could not understand him.

"Look here, Monty, get it off your chest!" said Tom at last. "If there's any trouble, you can tell your old pals. I suppose your uncle isn't thinking of taking you away from St. Jim's, as he did once?"

"I may have to leave!" muttered Lowther.

"What!" Tom and Manners uttered the exclamation together, in tones of utter dismay. "Monty!"

"I—I don't know what I ought to do," said Lowther restlessly. "I—I haven't had time to think about it yet. I—I've been knocked into a heap. I—I've only just found it out, you know."

"Found what out?" asked Tom, utterly mystified.

Lowther did not answer.

"Can't you tell us, Monty?"

"It's so utterly rotten!" muttered Lowther. "I'd never have believed such a thing. I couldn't have. I'd have knocked down any chap who said it—if it had been the Head himself! And now——"

To the alarm of his chums, Lowther's voice broke.

"Monty!" said Manners in dismay.

There was a brief silence in the study. Lowther broke it.

"You remember that row with Racke?" he said, in a low voice. "I wrote that rot about him—about the rotten war profits. Suppose—suppose Racke were able to throw the same kind of thing in my face?"

"But he couldn't," said Tom, puzzled. "Your people haven't anything to do with war profiteering, I suppose?"

"Suppose I found out that they have?" said Lowther.

"Oh!"

There was another silence. Lowther's face was crimson again now. His chums began to understand.

"I've jawed a lot on that subject," said Lowther, with bitterness in his voice. "I've always said what I thought about people who make money out of the War. I've rubbed it in about Racke. I wouldn't have done it if he'd been decent, I must say that. It was because he is a chip of the old block, and glories in it. But—but—but now——"

His voice quivered, and he was silent.

"But it's not possible," said Tom. "Your uncle is a thoroughly decent old chap—a bit crusty, but as straight as a die! He wouldn't touch Racke & Hacke's putrid profits with a barge-pole!"

"Of course he wouldn't!" said Manners. "You know he wouldn't, Monty. What bee have you got in your bonnet now?"

"I—I didn't mean to mention it to you chaps," said Lowther miserably. "For goodness' sake, don't say a word outside this study! I couldn't bear it, I think! I—I couldn't—if the fellows knew. After all I've said, too! After that limerick about Racke—after——"

"We sha'n't say a word, of course," said Tom. "You know that. And if you're in trouble you ought to tell us. But you're making some mistake."

Lowther shook his head.

"I've seen it in print," he said.

"Stuff!" said Manners. "You're on the wrong scent!"

"It fairly knocked me over," said Lowther, unheeding. "I was going to write a comic skit for the 'Weekly' about war profiteers. It goes down, you know. Everybody likes to see somebody going for the rotters. So I thought I'd read up the subject a bit, and I borrowed old Selby's financial paper. You know, old Selby dabbles in stocks and shares, and I knew he had a paper about such rot, and I dropped into his study as he'd gone out. And—and there was a report—I just read it down—about a company that's been in the papers—a gang of Shylocks who've been making seventy per cent. on War goods. You've heard of Grootz & Co.?"

"I've heard the name somewhere," said Tom.

"They've been talked about a lot—about holding back stocks for a rise in prices, and all that. They came near getting into trouble over it, since Parliament has been looking into things of that kind," said Lowther. "The public look on them as a gang of extortioners and rascals, and so they are! People who tried to keep back foodstuffs till the price suited them, and that kind of thing. And—and my uncle's one of them!"

"Impossible!"

"His name was there!" said Lowther. "I—I rubbed my eyes when I saw it. He made a speech at the company meeting. They didn't give what he said; it was at the end of the report. Just a line: 'Mr. James Montague Lowther, J.P., also spoke.' That was all it said. And James Montague Lowther, J.P., is my uncle!"

"There—there might be another James Montague Lowther who's a justice of the peace," said Manners.

"It's my uncle, right enough."

"I—I suppose it is," said Tom Merry. "But—but perhaps, after all, it isn't. If it's true, it's rotten—Grootz & Co. are a worse gang than Racke & Hacke, I must say. But—but a man might hold shares in a company without knowing that it was a rotten concern——"

"Not if he attended the company meeting and made speeches," said Lowther.

"I—I suppose not."

"What a facer for me!" said Lowther bitterly. "I've said that war profiteers ought to be hung, and I still think so! Why, Racke's father is quite decent beside Grootz & Co.! And—and my uncle——"

"You can't help what your uncle does," said Tom, after a pause.

"Racke can't help what his father does, but you know what the fellows think of him."

"That's different!" said Tom warmly. "If Racke was decent, no decent fellow would say a word about his father. It's because he swanks war profits all over the school that fellows are down on him—because he glories in it, as you said yourself. It's different with you."

"Not so much as you think. You know, I'm dependent on my uncle; my fees here are paid out of Grootz & Co.'s war profits." Lowther's lips twitched. "Every bob I spend at the tuckshop is ground out of poor wretches by rotten Shylocks, who can charge what they like, because the war's knocked out German competition. I—I wonder it doesn't leave a stain on the hands. I—I don't know what I ought to do; but one thing's a cert—I'll never take another penny from James Montague Lowther, J.P., if this is true! And it is true; it was in plain print!"

"But—but——"

"That means clearing out of the school," said Lowther. "I can't get a scholarship like old Talbot; I haven't his brains. I can't work and pay my own fees like young Brooke in the Fourth. I'm dashed if I know how he does it. And—and I couldn't look a chap here in the face when this get's out!"

"It won't get out," said Tom. "You've only told us two, I suppose?"

"Of course!"

"Well, you know we sha'n't say a word. Nobody else is likely to read a financial report in a City paper."

"I put the paper into Selby's fire," said Lowther. "He will be ratty when he misses it, but he won't get another copy. I dare say he had done with it already; he only looks at it in the morning for the market reports."

"Then it's all serene," said Tom. "It's as safe as houses. Mind, I don't quite believe it yet. There's some mistake. There might easily be another man of the same name, and we're going to find out."

"Write to your uncle?" suggested Manners.

"Fathead! Write to my uncle, and ask him whether he's a human ghoul?"

"H'm! Better not write to nunky," said Tom. "If it's true, he would be wild; and if it's not true, he'd never forgive you for thinking such a thing for a moment. But there's other ways. It must be easy somehow to find out whether the Mr. Lowther, of Grootz & Co., is the Mr. Lowther, of Holly Lodge, in Hampshire. And I'll bet you a doughnut that he isn't!"

"Not a chance of it," said Manners. "So you can cheer up, you fathead! It's simply a case of two chaps of the same name."

"You really think so?" asked Lowther.

"It's a cert!"

"I think it must be so," said Tom honestly. "Anyway, we'll jaw it over, and find out a way of making sure. So cheer up! No good meeting a trouble half-way, even if it's a real trouble, which this most likely isn't."

And, under the influence of his chums' cheery assurance, Monty Lowther did cheer up, and he looked somewhat like his old self at tea. But he was in a very thoughtful mood, and his chums were thoughtful, too; for, if the miserable suspicion should turn out to be true, it must make a great difference to Monty Lowther.

Lowther was not given to heroics—not in the least. But he had self-respect, and nothing would have induced him to touch tainted money. If the money that supported him really came from the notorious firm whose name was a byword for unpatriotic and unprincipled extortion, Monty Lowther would have none of it. Poverty and hardship would have been pleasures compared with bitter self-contempt.

But Tom Merry and Manners were certain that the member of the firm of Grootz & Co. and Lowther's uncle would turn out to be two different personages of the same name, and Lowther allowed himself to be comforted, and to hope for the best.

## CHAPTER 4.
### Information Required.

"COME in, fathead!" sang out the cheery voice of Reilly of the Fourth.

Study No. 5, in the Fourth, had just finished tea, when there came a tap at the door. Reilly and Kerruish, Hammond and Dick Julian, were all at home. It was Monty Lowther who entered in response to Reilly's cheery invitation.

"Just too late!" said Julian, with a smile.

"Sure, we've finished tay!" remarked Reilly. "But you're in time to wash up the taycups, if ye like!"

Lowther did not smile.

"I wanted to speak to you, Julian," he said. "Another time will do."

"Go ahead!" said Julian. "I'm at your service. Do you want some advice about running the comic column in the 'Weekly.'?"

"Bedad, if we're going to have 'comic column,' I'm off!" said Reilly.

And he strolled out of the study, followed by Hammond and Kerruish, grinning.

Monty Lowther, whose face was unusually grave, closed the door after the Fourth-Formers. Dick Julian watched him in some wonder.

"Anything up?" he asked.

"I want to ask you something. I believe you know something about business and financial matters and that rot?" said Lowther. "I don't mean because you're a Jew, you know," he added hastily. "But your uncle is in that line, I believe?"

Julian nodded.

"Yes, that's so. My uncle talks about such things to me sometimes," he said. "He's going to make me a financier some day—he thinks so, at least. As a matter of fact, I'm going to be a sailor, but I don't tell uncle so just yet. Blessed if I care twopence for bonds and stocks and railway loans and so on! Still, I know something about the game, if you want advice. Are you going to put your allowance into Exchequer Bonds? You can't do better."

"Fathead!"

"If you're thinking of War Savings Certificates, go ahead!" said Julian, with a smile. "You go to the post-office with fifteen-and-six, and they give you a little book. You get a pound back in five years. Good business, and you help on the war."

"It isn't that, ass!"

"Keep out of Mexican mines at present," said Julian, with mock seriousness. "And don't put twopence into the German War Loan; the interest won't be paid very likely. Besides, you'd be sent to chokey! And don't invest in Yankee armament shares; they'll go down with a terrific rush when peace breaks out."

"Look here, Julian, I want a tip from you!" said Lowther, without the slightest sign of a smile. Julian had never before seen the humorist of the Shell so grave. "I want to find out something, and I'm blessed if I know how!"

"Pile in!" said Julian.

"Suppose I wanted to find out the address of a chap who spoke at a meeting?" said Lowther. "Say, a company meeting in the City."

Julian stared.

"My hat!" was his remark.

"How would you do it?" asked Lowther. "Would it be any good writing or telephoning to the offices of the company?"

"Well, it might," said Julian, eyeing Lowther with amazement. "But they'd most likely want to know what you wanted to know for. They might fancy you were a begging-letter writer, or something of the sort. You could find out easily enough in London——"

"But I'm not in London, fathead, and I can't go there!" said Lowther irritably.

"Keep your wool on!" said Julian. "If it's important——"

"It is important, or I shouldn't be bothering about it, should I?"

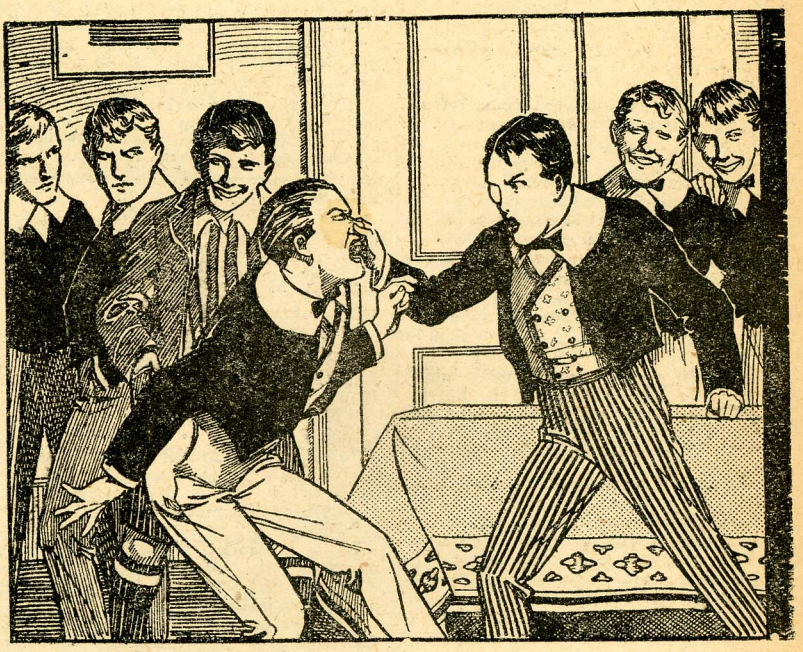
"Blessed if I know! I can't see where the importance comes in. But it isn't my bizney. If it's important, I could ask my uncle. He could tell you at once, most likely. Anyway, he could find out on the telephone."

Lowther closed his lips.

"Who's the man, and what's the name?" asked Julian. "I'll use the telephone in the prefect's room, and put it to nunky now, if you like."

"I—I——" Lowther stammered.

Julian regarded him with increasing astonishment.



**D'Arcy seized Racke's nose and tweaked it.**
*(See Chapter 11.)*

"Don't you want to tell me the name?" he asked.

"I—I'd rather not."

"You're jolly mysterious!" said Julian, in wonder. "Of course, I don't want to know. But I can't ask my uncle without mentioning the name."

"Nunno. I—I suppose you can't."

Julian reflected a moment.

"I'll tell you what, Lowther. I'll ring up my uncle, and tell him you want to ask him something. Then you can speak to him without my being present."

"I—I should have to tell your uncle ——"

Julian frowned a little.

"If it's a secret, you could trust my uncle," he said. "I can't see where the secret comes in. Anyway, Mr. Moses wouldn't say a word about it, if he interested himself in the matter at all."

"I—I know," stammered Lowther, his face very red. "But—but I'd rather not mention it to anybody. Nothing against your uncle, of course, only—only it's a private family matter, really."

"All serene!" said Julian, evidently very much puzzled and perplexed, as was not surprising under the circumstances. "But nunky couldn't very well find you

the address of a man whose name he didn't know, could he?"

"Nunno! Of—of course not," said Lowther, crimson now. "Can't you think of any other way?"

"Your own uncle might know," suggested Julian. "You could write and ask him, anyway. What on earth's the matter?"

"N-n-othing. I—I suppose there's a list of shareholders kept in a big company, isn't there?" asked Lowther.

"Yes; but you'd have to go to London ——"

"Oh, rats!"

"Anybody in business could find out what you want to know, for you," said the perplexed Julian. "A bank manager, if you knew one——"

Monty Lowther brightened up.

"That's a tip!" he exclaimed. "Tom knows the manager at the Wayland and County. He's done business for Miss Fawcett, Tommy's guardian. I suppose he'll tell Tom, if he knew, and Tom asked him."

"He could find out easily enough," said Julian; "and he'd tell Tom Merry if he knows him and knows it's square."

"Thanks awfully!" said Lowther. "I thought you could give me a tip, Julian. I'm much obliged!"

"Not at all," said Julian politely.

Lowther quitted the study, evidently relieved in his mind.

Julian tapped his forehead significantly when he was gone. And, indeed, Lowther's extraordinary desire for information and his amazing secrecy about the matter, really seemed to suggest that he was not quite in his usual senses.

But Monty Lowther was not thinking of Julian's astonishment. He hurried back to his own study, at a run, and there was a yell as he ran blindly into an elegant junior who was coming along the passage.

"Yawooh! You uttah ass, where are you wunnin' to?"

"Br-r-r-r-r!" growled Lowther.

He dodged round Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and ran on, leaving the swell of the Fourth staring after him blankly and wrathfully.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Of all the feahful Huns, I weally think Lowthah takes the cake! What feahful mannahs!"

Lowther hurried into his study, heedless of Arthur Augustus and his indignation.

"Feel inclined for a bike ride, Tommy?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like," said Tom. "What's the game?"

Lowther explained hurriedly.

"Good idea!" said Tom. "Mr. Hutchinson is just the man to tell us. Bank managers know everything."

"Get out your bike, then——"

"N.G.," said Tom. "Banks close before this, Monty, old chap."

"Oh, confound it!" said Lowther, angry and disappointed.

"Hold on, though! I know where he lives," said Tom. "I could go to his private house. He'll think it is a cheek, I dare say, but——"

"Let him!" said Lowther. "I shall be in a fever till I know about it for certain. He knows you well enough to tell you about it, Tom?"

"I suppose so. I've called on him several times with Miss Fawcett, when she's been over here," said Tom. "I've had to go to the bank sometimes, too. He knows me well enough."

"Don't tell him too much," said Lowther, reddening. "Just—just what we want to know, you know."

"That's all right! Bank managers keep as mum as oysters," said Tom.

"Mr. Hutchinson wouldn't be likely to get jawing to kids in the school, you ass!"

"No, I know he wouldn't fathead, but—but——"

"All serene! I'll get out now, and chance locking up."

The Terrible Three went to the bike-shed at once, and Tom Merry wheeled out his machine. Manners and Lowther watched him from the gates as he pedalled away at a good speed. They turned away from the gates when the cyclist was out of sight. Monty Lowther was looking gloomy and thoughtful.

"Come and have a game of chess," suggested Manners.

"Rats! I mean I'd rather not."

"Well, come and get on with your prep!"

"Hang prep!"

Manners whistled, rather nonplussed. Lowther shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and walked away under the elms. He did not mean to be grumpy, but he wanted to be alone with his dark and doubtful thoughts. Manners went into the School House looking rather glum.

"Bai Jove! Heah you are, Lowthah!" It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Are you comin' to the debatin' club meetin', deah boy?"

"No!" growled Lowther.

"Your mannahs have not impwoved lately, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus severely. "This is the second time today you have tweated me with wudeness!"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"I wefuse to buzz off, Lowthah, until I have delivahed my opinion of your wotten mannahs! I wegard you as a Hun!"

"Will you ring off, ass?" snapped Lowther irritably.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass more carefully upon the Shell fellow. "You look rather upset. Is anything the matter?"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

In a moment Arthur Augustus's manner was all kindness. Arthur Augustus had a fatherly way which was not always justly appreciated.

"If you are in any sort of twouble, Lowthah, you cannot do bettah than confide it to a fellow of tact and judgment," he said encouragingly. "Pway tell me all about it, deah boy. You may speak to me as if I were your uncle!"

"Fathead!" was Lowther's ungrateful response. And he turned on his heel and stalked away moodily in the gathering dusk.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

And the swell of St Jim's confided later to Blake and Herries and Digby, in Study No. 6, that the manners of some fellows in the Shell were worthy only of a Prussian Hun.

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## CHAPTER 5
### No Hope!

"MANNERS!"

"Adsum!"

"Merry!"

No reply.

Mr. Railton glanced up, and repeated the name. But no reply came from the ranks of the Shell, and Tom Merry was marked down absent, and the House-master proceeded with the roll-call.

Manners and Lowther were frowning a little as they left Hall with the rest after calling-over. Tom Merry had not returned yet from Wayland, and missing call-over meant lines for him.

The chums of the Shell waited rather anxiously for Tom's return. But he did not come, and they repaired to the study to get on with their preparation.

It was a good hour later when Tom Merry came into the study, somewhat muddy and breathless.

"You're jolly late!" said Manners.

"Quick as I could make it," said Tom, rather ruefully. "I've just seen Railton, and he's given me two hundred lines."

"We'll whack them out."

"You haven't told him where you've been?" exclaimed Lowther anxiously.

"Only to Wayland," said Tom.

"Good!" Monty Lowther looked relieved. The usually cool and nonchalant Shell fellow was in a state of nerves. "Have you seen Mr. Hutchinson?"

"Yes. He was at home, and he was very decent," said Tom. "I had to speak out to him. He knows I had a pal named Lowther, you see—you came to the bank with me once or twice. I asked him whether he could tell me if the Lowther of the Grootz Co. was the Mr. Lowther, of Holly Lodge, Hampshire. He didn't know, but he said he would 'phone in the morning and find out, if it was important. He was surprised, of course, at such a question; but he didn't see any harm in getting the information for me, and he's going to do it. I thought he would."

Lowther looked disappointed.

"I suppose that's the best we could expect," he said. "I wish we could have known at once. He'll let you know to-morrow, then?"

"Yes; he said he would write, but"—Tom hesitated—"one of the bank's envelopes coming here might attract notice, and we don't want that, under the circs. So I'm going to ring him up after morning lessons—he'll know by then. We can dodge into the prefects' room and use the 'phone when nobody's there."

"That's easy enough. The seniors will all be out after lessons," said Manners. "It's not long to wait, Monty."

Lowther nodded, but he looked glum.

"All serene!" he said. "After all, it doesn't make much difference whether we know to-day or to-morrow."

And the Terrible Three settled down to their prep, Tom Merry having a good deal of leeway to make up. They finished before bed-time, however, and came downstairs.

Lowther, in his worried frame of mind, would rather have remained in the study; but his chums wisely determined not to allow him to mope, and they marched him down.

Racke of the Shell came out of his study with a letter in his hand, and he cast a curious glance at the Terrible Three.

They came downstairs together, though without a word—the Terrible Three had no words to waste on Moneybags minor.

Racke was going to the door when Kildare of the Sixth called to him.

"Where are you going, Racke?"

The cad of the Shell looked round. The House was closed, and it was after hours for juniors to be out.

"Only to post a letter, Kildare," said Racke, holding up the letter in his hand. "It's rather an important letter, to my pater."

"All right; off you go!"

Racke left the House, and hurried across the quad to the school letter-box, which was set in the high, thick wall bordering the main road. He came back into the School House in a few minutes, and strolled into the junior Common-room with a peculiar grin on his face.

In the Common-room he glanced at the Terrible Three again, with a peculiar mocking light in his eyes. An acute observer of Racke's actions might have guessed that his letter home had some connection with the Terrible Three, though in what way it would have been

difficult to guess. But no one was specially observing Racke—he was not a person in whom much interest was taken by anybody.

Manners and Lowther were playing chess, but Lowther's thoughts were wandering, and he made the wildest moves. Manners, who was a good player, grunted occasionally; but he was very patient with his chum.

Kildare looked in a little later to shepherd the juniors off to their dormitories.

"Anything up with you, Lowther?" Kangaroo asked, in the dormtiory.

Lowther started a little.

"Why, fathead?" he asked.

"You haven't been talking nineteen to the dozen this evening, and you haven't made a single rotten pun since tea!"

"Oh, rats!"

"It's a change for Lowther," remarked Gore, with a grin. "Are you sickening for the 'flu, Lowther?"

"No, ass!"

"Thinking out something new and stunning in limericks?" chuckled Clifton Dane. "I can give you a subject, if you like. I read something in the paper about a gang of money-squeezers called Grootz & Co. Giddy Germans by the name, I should say!"

"What rot!" said Racke. "It's a British firm. It was founded twenty years ago by a naturalised German, that's all."

"Of course, you'd know all about it!" grinned the Canadian junior. "Quite in your line, Racke!"

"I don't know anything at all about them; I've only heard of them!" snapped Racke.

A look of alarm had come over Lowther's face for a moment. He drew a deep breath of relief at Racke's reply.

"Grootz would be a good subject," continued Dane. "You can rhyme it with 'brutes' and 'loots'—if you can use 'loots' in the plural."

"Bosh!" said Lowther.

"Well, you're so jolly keen on that subject; and, by all accounts, Grootz & Co. quite put Racke & Hacke into the shade," said Dane. "From what the paper says, they came jolly near being had up for holding back supplies from the market. That kind of swindling isn't legal now, as it used to be."

Lowther's face was crimson with mortification. Fortunately, Kildare came in to see lights out, and the subject dropped. Monty Lowther turned in without a word, and he did not join in the usual chatter of the juniors before they went to sleep.

The Canadian junior's innocent words had given him a bitter shock. He was evidently not the only fellow in the school who had heard of the evil fame of Grootz & Co. What if it came out that his uncle was a prominent shareholder in that notorious company, a member of the firm loaded and blackened with public contempt and infamy? That his very subscriptions to the junior football club were a part of the foul profits of the war exploiters?

Lowther almost groaned at the thought. He could never hold up his head at St. Jim's again; he could never remain in the school where everyone, friend and foe, knew his shame.

But the secret, after all, was safe. Only his best chums knew, and they would never breathe a word. While he remained, at least, he would be spared the ignominy of having the shameful secret known.

Lowther did not sleep soundly that night. He still clung to the hope that the morrow's news would be good—that the information from the bank manager in Wayland would relieve him of his dread. It was a faint hope, but there was some comfort in it.

He was not looking his usual self when he turned out at rising-bell. He was absent-minded in the Form-room that morning. In his present state of nervous worry it was not easy to fix his thoughts upon Latin hexameters, and his construe would have been a disgrace to a fag of the Third. Mr. Linton was very severe with him, but Lowther hardly noticed it.

He was only thinking feverishly of the close of morning lessons. Lessons were over at last. Never had Lowther been so glad to get out of the Form-room.

It was a fine, sunny day, and the fellows streamed out into the quadrangle as soon as they were released. The Terrible Three did not go out, however. They hung about till the coast was clear, and then made their way to the prefects'-room.

The telephone there could be used by permission being asked, but the three juniors, naturally, did not want to draw attention to the matter this time. The room, being deserted, they entered, and Tom Merry rang up the bank at Wayland at once. Monty Lowther picked up the second receiver, to listen to the bank manager's reply.

Mr. Hutchinson's voice came through over the wires:

"Is that you, Merry?"

"Yes, Mr. Hutchinson. Have you found out——"

"Certainly!" The manager's tone sounded somewhat amused. Probably Mr. Hutchinson was very much surprised by the peculiar request Tom Merry had made, though he saw no harm in acceding to it. "I have made the inquiry, Master Merry. The address of Mr. James Montague Lowther, who spoke at the last shareholders' meeting of Messrs Grootz & Co.——"

"Yes, yes?"

"Holly Lodge, Hampshire."

Monty Lowther dropped his receiver as he heard the bank manager's reply. Tom Merry was a little pale. Manners did not need to ask a question—he knew what the reply had been from the look of his chums.

"You—you are sure?" stammered Tom into the transmitter.

"Why, yes, of course!"

"I—I beg your pardon—I mean——" Tom stammered. "Thank you very much, Mr. Hutchinson!"

"Not at all. Anything more I can do for you, Merry?"

"No, thank you! Good-bye, sir!"

"Good-bye!"

Tom Merry hung up the receiver. He hardly dared to look at Lowther. The three juniors left the prefects'-room in silence.

"Lowthah, deah boy, you are as white as a sheet. Are you ill?"

"No," muttered Lowther.

He brushed past the Fourth-Former, and strode on. Arthur Augustus looked anxiously at Tom Merry and Manners.

"Lowthah must be ill, you chaps!" he exclaimed, with real concern. "He was lookin' howwid. Bai Jove! I quite forgive him for bein' wude to me yesterday. What's the mattah with him?"

Neither Tom nor Manners was likely to answer that question. They could not reply at all, as a matter of fact, and they passed on without speaking, much to the amazement of Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's was looking quite concerned and uneasy when he joined Blake & Co. in the quad.

"I weally think those Shell boundahs are goin' off their wockahs!" he said to Blake. "Lowthah was lookin' awf'ly ill, and when I asked Tom Mewwy, he just marched on without speakin'. I wegard it as vewy odd!"

"Lowther ill?" said Blake.

"Yaas, he looked feahful! Can you account for it, deah boy?"

Blake looked reflective.

"Had you been singing one of your tenor solos?" he asked.

"Eh? No!"

"Then I can't account for it!" said Blake, with a shake of the head.

To which the Honourable Arthur Augustus replied:

"Wats!"

The Terrible Three had gone to their study. Lowther sat down in silence. His face was white, and his eyes had a look his chums did not like.

"Buck up, Monty!" said Manners. "I—I suppose——" He looked at Tom. "You found out what you wanted to know?"

"What we didn't want to know," said Tom. "It's Lowther's uncle, right enough. I'd never have believed it!"

"I knew it was so," said Lowther huskily. "I hoped it wasn't, but I knew it was, all the same. What will the fellows say when they know?"

"The fellows won't know," said Tom Merry quietly. "Only us three know, and we sha'n't speak."

"That doesn't make much difference," said Lowther. "I'm finished at St. Jim's. I can't stay here on—on that money! It would make me sick!"

Tom Merry and Manners exchanged a hopeless glance. It was bitter enough, but they could not pretend to disapprove of Lowther's decision. The receiver was as bad as the thief; and if he handled a single shilling from the war profits of Grootz & Co. he put himself on much the same moral level as the wretched extortioners themselves. They could not advise him to do that—they knew in their hearts that they would despise him if he did it.

"You know what I've got to do?" said Lowther, looking at them.

"No need to be in a hurry, Monty," said Tom quietly. "You're right—I will say that. But there's plenty of time. Your fees are paid for this term, and that can't be helped now; they wouldn't be handed back in any case. You've got to take time to think the matter out, with our help."

Monty Lowther smiled faintly.

"I'm not thinking of bolting from St. Jim's this afternoon," he said. "There's no sense in doing anything theatrical. I've got to think it out, of course. I've got some money of my own—a little; I can't touch it till I'm of age, but I can arrange for it to be paid back to my uncle for what he's paid for me here. I shall do that. I dare say it will square the account; I don't know,





## CHAPTER 6.
### At the Cross-roads.

"BAI Jove! What's the mattah?" Arthur Augustus asked that question in tones of alarm, as he met the chums of the Shell in the passage.

I think so. That will see me clear till the end of this term, anyway. I sha'n't touch a shilling of his again, I know that!"

"I suppose you couldn't," said Manners. "I—I suppose so. Lots of fellows wouldn't let it make any difference, Monty."

"You'd think me a cur if I didn't let it make any difference to me," said Monty Lowther. "I know what I should think."

Manners was silent.

"Lots of things may turn up," said Tom hopefully. "You're jolly well not going, if it can be helped, Monty! There must be some way out. You know how poor old Talbot was before his uncle took him up and made him an allowance. He was here on a scholarship. You are clever enough to get one. We'll help you work for it. We can look into that, and see if there is anything going this term."

"I suppose there's a chance," said Lowther dismally.

"Of course there is. Anyway, you're all right till the end of the term, and there's no need to decide anything in a hurry. We shall want time to think it out. You needn't be afraid of being chipped on the subject; nobody knows a word I—I suppose you won't say anything to your uncle?"

Lowther's face twitched.

"I can't. He's always been kind to me, in his way; a bit crusty, but he was always fond of me. I can't set up in judgment on him, can I? I can't help what I think and feel, but I can't slang a man who's looked after me since I was a kid. I shall have to tell him the reason when I leave—if I leave—but—but I shall try to put it gently to him. You don't blame me for that?"

"Of course not, ass. I dare say he thinks he's got good reasons for what he does; people look at this in different ways," said Tom. "There are men who have sons at the Front, I've heard, who are making big profits out of the war. They've got a kink somewhere, and don't see that it's rotten, making rotten profits out of the country while their own sons are defending it. I know your uncle is a decent man in his way; I simply can't understand this at all. But you don't want to insult a man old enough to be your father, whatever he's done—a man who's been decent to you, at least."

"That's how it seems to me," said Lowther, in a low voice. "It makes me feel rotten enough to tell him I sha'n't touch his money again; but I shall have to tell him some day. I'm going to write and say I don't want any more allowance till the end of the term. I don't know what he'll make of it, but that can't be helped. I can do without money; it won't hurt me to have tea in Hall." He smiled.

"You won't have tea in Hall, fathead. And as for money, our tin is yours, and you know it, and we'll bump you if you say a word against that!" growled Manners.

"I suppose I can sponge on you till the end of the term?" said Lowther. "I suppose I owe Racke an apology? I didn't know we were tarred with the same brush when I went for him. If I'd found this out a bit earlier, I could have entered for the Craven Scholarship. The date's passed now."

"We'll find something else," said Tom. "Look here, Monty, you're not going to mope over this! You're going to keep your pecker up. And now you're coming down to footer. You've got to face this just as if you were a man and facing the Huns. Never say die!"

Lowther nodded. He had received a terrible blow, but he was not crushed by it. The pluck of a true British lad was in him—the same pluck that faced a savage foe in the muddy trenches could buoy him up to face the trouble that had fallen upon him, and the far-reaching change that had come into his life.

He had already pulled himself together. He was down; but while he was down he had two loyal chums who would stand by him through thick and thin, and that was something that was of greater value than untold gold Whatever the uncertainty of life held in store for the Terrible Three, it would find them united and loyal, facing the hardest blows of Fate shoulder to shoulder.

As the Terrible Three came out into the quadrangle they passed Racke of the Shell, and Lowther paused. After a brief hesitation he went up to Racke, who eyed him in contemptuous surprise.

"I'm going to apologise to you, Racke," said Lowther, forcing himself to speak, in spite of Racke's look. "I'm sorry I made that limerick about you, and it's cut out of the 'Weekly.' I'm sorry I ever said a word on the subject."

Racke whistled

"That's rather a sudden change, isn't it?" he said. "Might a fellow inquire what you have changed your highly moral views all of a sudden for?"

"I've said all I've got to say," said Lowther gruffly.

And he rejoined his chums and went down to the football-ground with them. Racke stood looking after him, with a strange, sarcastic smile upon his thick lips. Lowther had expected the cad of the Shell to be surprised by his apology; but Racke, for reasons of his own, was not so surprised as Lowther supposed.

## CHAPTER 7.
### The Secret Cut.

MONTY LOWTHER looked very much like his old self next day. The blow had fallen, and it had been a heavy one. But he braced himself to bear it, and he found the strength and courage to bear it with calmness.

The trial brought out all that was best and strongest in his nature. He had to face a changed future, and he faced it unflinchingly.

It would have been different if the shameful secret had been known to others. But that was not to be feared. His chums were silent as the grave. So far as the other fellows knew, nothing was changed with Lowther. The Terrible Three kept their own counsel on all points.

But they were unusually busy now. Lowther did not want to leave St. Jim's if it could be helped; if he could remain without losing his self-respect, he would remain. That meant that he must remain by his own efforts, and the Terrible Three inquired into ways and means with great earnestness.

If he could have won the Craven Scholarship, for example, it would have seen him through. The date for entering his name had passed; but the Head had power to use his discretion in that matter, and, for good reason shown, he would have admitted a new competitor even at that late date.

The question the Terrible Three earnestly discussed was whether Dr. Holmes should be approached with a request to that effect. Naturally, the Head would want to know the reason, and it would have to be a good reason. Lowther shrank from telling the miserable story, yet he felt that the reverend gentleman could hardly disapprove of his resolve.

"It's a bit cool to ask the Head now," said Lowther, as they discussed it in the evening. "And I should have to tell him the whole yarn, and show my uncle up. I think I'd better work up the subject a bit first. No good going in for the thing if I can't handle it. I'll get some of last years' papers and work at them, and see whether I've got a chance first."

This was evidently a wise plan, and his chums assented at once. Last year's papers were easy enough to obtain, and the Terrible Three conned over them in the study the next day. It was a difficult examination; there was no doubt about that. The fellow who bagged the Craven would earn it. It was open to any fellow below the Fifth, and more than a dozen of the Fourth and Shell had entered.

Monty Lowther had never been a swot; but he was a good scholar in his way, and he could work. His Latin verse had more than once been praised by his Form-master, and Latin verse was one of the subjects. But, like most fellows of an imaginative turn of mind, Lowther was not good at mathematics, and maths figured largely in the paper.

Manners could have done it on his head, so to speak, but it was a different matter with poor Lowther. His chums eyed him anxiously when they had pored over the paper.

"I can tackle some of them, easy as falling off a form," said Lowther at last. "Some of them are corkers, though. What I get on the swings I shall lose on the roundabouts, I suppose. But I'll give it a week and see how it goes."

"I can help you with maths," remarked Manners.

"I'm going to make you, old chap," said Lowther, with a grin. "It's a case of all hands to the mill, and you'll have to back me up no end if you don't want to lose the pleasure of my society—a great loss for anybody." Evidently Monty was getting to be his old self again. "I'll worry through this dashed paper in a week, and if I can beat it, I can consider I have a chance with this year's paper, and I'll speak to the Head."

"Good man" said Tom.

And from that hour Monty Lowther, the easy, careless humorist of the Shell, was transformed into a swot—a swot whose swotting put even that of Brooke of the Fourth into the shade. There was no time now for comic paragraphs for the "Weekly," no time for ragging the New House fellows, or japing D'Arcy of Study No. 6. Grim hard work lay before the once careless and thoughtless junior. At the parting of the ways Lowther had chosen the right path, and, having set his hand to the plough, he did not turn back.

Tom Merry helped him all he could. But Tom could render little help save by good wishes and seeing that he was not interrupted. Manners was more useful. Manners was one of those thorough-going fellows who get right to the bottom of a subject; and if he could, by some operation, have transferred his knowledge to Lowther, the latter's success would have been assured. Unfortunately, that could not be done; but Manners could coach, and he coached away valiantly. And Monty, who hated anything in the shape of figures, ground away at his work with a deadly determination not to be beaten.

The Terrible Three were so much engrossed in their new pursuit that they dropped many of their usual avocations; almost everything was neglected but football. In his keenness to work, Lowther would have dropped even that. But that Tom Merry would not hear of. Above all, it was necessary to keep fit; healthly open-air exercise was one of the things that could not be dispensed with. To some extent, under the circumstances, the chums lost touch with the other fellows; and so it happened that they did

not observe, for some time, that there was something on in the junior portion of the School House.

If Tom Merry noticed that Racke and Crooke and their friends did an unusual amount of whispering and chuckling, they did not heed it. If they observed somewhat thoughtful expressions on the faces of their own friends, they did not take special note. At any other time they would have seen at once that something was brewing. Now they did not see. Even when Kangaroo stopped Tom one day, with the evident intention of asking him a question, and on second thoughts didn't ask him, but walked away without speaking, Tom did not think twice of the circumstance. The fact that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy often turned his eyeglass upon them in a somewhat curious way escaped their attention.

One day Tom heard a remark as he came into the Common-room. Jack Blake was speaking.

"Look here. I don't believe a word of it, and they ought to be told!" said Blake.

Tom glanced rather curiously at the chums of Study No. 6, wondering what was up; but they went out of the Common-room, and he did not think of the matter again. All his thoughts were given to Lowther's progress in his new and difficult studies.

When the blow fell—as fall it did—it came as a surprise to the Terrible Three. After lessons one day, they had had their usual run on the footer-ground, and they came in to work, Lowther to work, Manners to coach, and Tom Merry to look on with sympathetic interest. And as they came up to their study they stopped, and stared at a large placard pinned on the door.

It was a large sheet of cardboard, and upon it was daubed, in capital letters, with a brush:

"BRANCH OFFICE.

GROOTZ & CO.

WAR-PROFITS WHILE YOU WAIT!"

The Terrible Three stood rooted to the floor, staring dumbly at the placard. For some moments they could not speak.

Lowther's face was white.

"So it's out!" he said, in a husky voice.

"How?" muttered Manners.

Tom Merry jerked down the placard, and they went into the study. The card was consigned to the fire. Monty Lowther looked at his chums with a haggard face.

"It's out!" he said. "They all know!"

"How can they know?" said Tom Merry helplessly. "It's impossible—I mean, I can't understand it!"

"Somebody's been talking."

"Monty!"

"How do they know, then?" said Lowther savagely. "Do you think I've told anybody myself? Is it a thing for me to brag of in the quad?"

Tom reddened.

"Monty, you can't think——"

"Draw it mild, Monty!" said Manners rather tartly. "We gave you our word not to speak about it."

"How do they know?" Lowther's voice rose. "I can see it now. I know now what Crooke was chortling over in the dorm last night. I know why that cad Mellish asked me this morning whether I could lend him a hundred pounds or so. I thought it was a fat-headed joke, and couldn't see the point. The whole House knows about the war-profits!"

"That must be what Blake meant!" muttered Tom Merry, the incident of the Common-room coming into his mind.

"So it's out; and I'm going to be an outsider, pointed at and despised like Racke! I'd better chum up with Racke now; he's my sort. Birds of a feather!" said Lowther, with savage bitterness.

"Keep cool, Monty, old man," said Tom quietly. "Don't go for your pals for nothing. You know we haven't said anything. Somebody's found it out. Perhaps that copy of Selby's paper was seen, after all."

"Four or five days ago," said Lowther. "If that had been seen, it would have come out before."

"I—I suppose so."

"And I know it wasn't seen. I had it in Selby's study, and I shoved it in the fire, as I told you. Somebody's told. I suppose you don't suggest that the bank-manager at Wayland has been tattling in the Common-room here?" said Lowther, with bitter sarcasm.

"Mind what you're saying, Monty! We'd better look into this," said Tom, keeping his own temper well. He could make every allowance for Lowther at that moment, though his bitter words were not easy to bear patiently. "I think Blake knows—I'm sure he does, in fact—somebody has been spying, and Blake may be able to tell us who it was."

"What does it matter? It's out now."

"It matters this much. You think that Manners or I must have been talking. You ought to know us better, I think."

"I should jolly well think so!" growled Manners.

"Oh, I don't say you've given me away; I know you wouldn't!" said Lowther. "But you've been chattering about it, and somebody's heard you; some eavesdropping cad like Trimble of the Fourth."

"We haven't been chattering about it, Monty; and the subject's never been mentioned outside this study, and we know nobody's heard us."

"How did it get out, then?"

"That's what we're going to find out."

"I'm not specially keen on finding out," grunted Manners. "If Lowther thinks I'm a liar and a tattling fool, he can think so, and be hanged!"

"Oh, don't you begin!" said Tom sharply. "This isn't a time for us to begin to quarrel, is it? Let's find the cad who's been spying out what doesn't concern him, and clear that up, anyway."

Lowther gritted his teeth.

"Yes; let's find him. I'll make him sorry he's shoved his nose into my affairs! I dare say it was the same rotter who shoved that card on the door. Don't mind what I said. I know you wouldn't have given it away."

"All serene," said Manners, placated at once. "Let's go and see Blake. Tom thinks he knows something about the bizney."

And the Terrible Three hurried along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth passage, Lowther with a pale, set face and gleaming eyes, and his chums looking very worried and dismayed.

## CHAPTER 8.
### On the Track!

"TWOT in, deah boys! You are quite stwangahs, bai Jove!" Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake & Co. were at tea in Study No. 6 when the Terrible Three came in. They greeted the Shell fellows cordially—very cordially. So cordially, in fact, that the chums, now that their eyes were open, could see that the cordiality was a little strained. Study No. 6 had heard all about Grootz & Co., evidently, and wanted it to be seen that they didn't believe a word of it, and didn't think any the worse of Monty Lowther. But they could not seem just the same as ever.

"Just in time for tea," said Blake. "Gussy suggested a war tea; but we decided on a peace one, as we were jolly hungry. We've offered Gussy to let him have a war tea on his own, if he likes."

"Weally, Blake——"

"And Gussy hasn't played up," said Herries sorrowfully. "He's tucking into ham and beef just as if there wasn't a war on."

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"And Gussy knows that if the war lasts ninety-nine years, we may want the last slice of ham to secure victory," said Digby. "Of course, it would be rather high by that time. But there's such a thing as principle."

"Weally, Dig, you ass——"

The Terrible Three did not smile. They did not feel much like smiling. It was Tom Merry who plunged into the subject.

"Have you heard anything about Grootz & Co., Blake?" he asked abruptly.

The cheery smiles of Study No. 6 vanished, and they looked extremely uncomfortable.

"Yes," said Blake, after a pause.

"Is there a yarn going about among the fellows?"

"Yes."

"You might have told us!"

Blake reddened uncomfortably.

"Well, I thought of putting you up to it," he said. "But it's all rot, of course. Don't you fancy we believed a word of it. It was rather a rotten subject to mention. If anybody asked me whether my uncle was a war-profiteer, I'd knock him down for an answer; I know that!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should quite appwove of that, Blake, though I do not appwove of bein' wuff and wude as a wule," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Somebody started the yarn," said Lowther grimly. "I suppose it was nobody in this study?"

"I wegard that question as an insult, Lowthah. If you wegard this study as capable of tellin' wotten lies about a chap——"

"I haven't said it was lies," said Lowther grimly.

"Wha-a-at!"

Study No. 6 stared blankly at Lowther.

"But I suppose it is lies," said Blake, after a pause. "You don't mean to say that your uncle is really a—a—a——"

He broke off.

"I don't mean to say anything," said Lowther.

"Oh!"

The chums of the Fourth looked more uncomfortable than ever. Lowther's reply was as good as an admission that the charge was true. And, indeed, the look on Lowther's face was enough to tell them that it was true, and that it overwhelmed him with shame and humiliation.

"I—I suppose you've only just found it out, then, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus softly. "It must have been a vewy painful shock to you. Pway do not considah, Lowthah, that any fellow heah thinks any the worse of you. It is not your fault—you did not bring up your uncle. We know you are not like that wottah Wacke. You know that it is w'ong, and you would not be a partay to it."

Monty Lowther did not heed.

"Never mind whether it's true or not," he said. "That's my business! But whether it is true or not, nobody has a

right to spy out my private affairs and make them the talk of the House. I want to know who did that!"

"Blessed if I know!" said Blake. "I never heard a word of it till yesterday—some of the chaps were whispering about it."

"Then you got it from them?"

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

Blake reflected.

"Some of the Fourth," he said. "There were Julian, Kerruish, Clive, and some others; but you needn't start on them. "They were only saying that it was a rotten yarn, and they didn't believe a word of it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They can tell me where it started from, though," said Lowther, And he left the study at once, followed by his chums.

A dismayed silence reigned in Study No. 6 when the Terrible Three were gone.

"Well, this beats it!" said Herries at last. Fancy it being true!"

"It's awf'ly wotten for poor old Lowthah!"

"After all he's said about Racke, too," said Blake. "It's rotten! Of course, he didn't know it then; he's only found it out lately, you can see that."

"Yaas, wathah! I am suah of that, othahwise he could not have spoken to Wacke as he has done." Thus D'Arcy.

"The fellows mayn't think so," said Digby. "I'm afraid it's going to be pretty rotten for Lowther after this. He hasn't a thick hide like Racke, and the chaps will make him squirm about it."

"Well, if he fingers any of the plunder, he deserves it!" growled Herries. "If he does the same as Racke he must expect to be treated like Racke!"

"I am suah Lowthah would do nothin' of the sort, Hewwies! I am quite suah that he would wefuse to touch the dirtay money of a war-pwofiteeah!"

"I hope so," said Blake. And the subject dropped, and Study No. 6 went on with their tea in a somewhat thoughtful mood.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three dropped in at No. 5, where they found Julian & Co. at tea. The four Fourth-Formers looked as uncomfortable as Blake & Co. had looked when they saw Lowther. The Shell fellow's expression told them that the yarn had reached his ears at last.

"Blake got a yarn from you chaps about Grootz & Co.," said Lowther abruptly. "I want you to tell me where you got it from?"

"Sure, we don't believe a word of it!" said Reilly.

"Not a syllable!" said Hammond.

"Never mind that!" said Lowther wincing. "Who started it—can you tell me that?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

"It seems to be all over the place," said Dick Julian. "I was thinking of mentioning it to you, only—only——"

He paused and coloured. He well remembered his interview with Lowther, which had puzzled him a good deal at the time. This wretched story had let in a good deal of light on the matter. Julian, though he did not say so even to his chums, knew that the story was true, and that Lowther had just found it out that evening when he came to Study No. 5 to ask advice.

"You didn't start it, Julian?"

Julian crimsoned.

"No, I did not," he said quietly. "I knew nothing about it. I don't think you ought to ask me a question like that, Lowther."

"Draw it mild, Monty!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Well, you know whom you heard it from, at any rate," said Lowther.

"We heard it in the Common-room. Trimble was saying something——"

"Trimble? Thanks!"

Lowther strode away, and the Terrible Three proceeded to Trimble's study. Trimble and Levison, Mellish and Lumley Lumley, were at tea, as were most of the juniors at that hour. Trimble and Mellish grinned at the sight of Lowther. Their peculiar disposition caused the wretched scandal to afford them a pleasant entertainment.

"Trimble, I want to know who told you about Grootz & Co.," said Monty Lowther.

Trimble chuckled.

"So you've got on to it?" he said. "You didn't think anybody knew—he, he, he! Fancy you having war-profiteers in the family, after all you've said about Racke! He, he, he!"

"Pretty cool, the way you slanged Racke, I think," remarked Mellish. "Racke will be making limericks about you now, Lowther."

Lowther's eyes burned.

"Did you spy it out and start the yarn, Mellish?"

"Oh, no!" said Mellish hastily. "I just heard it from Trimble."

"Where did you hear it, Trimble?"

"Quite by chance," said Trimble. "Racke and Crooke were talking about it. Racke said it was like your cheek to talk about war-profiteers, when you had them in your own family. I happened to hear him. Of course, I never mentioned it to anybody—only to a few chaps in strict confidence."

"Racke!" said Lowther, between his teeth.

"Come on!" said Manners. "I think we've run the fox to earth at last!"

And the Terrible Three passed on to Racke's study in the Shell passage, where they found Racke and Crooke smoking. The two black sheep of the Shell rose hurriedly to their feet as the Terrible Three came in. Crooke looked a little alarmed; but Racke was cool and smiling—a malignant smile.

"Come in!" said Racke. "I've been trying your line, Lowther—making up limericks. Would you care to hear mine?"

"I want a word with you, Racke——"

"Oh, hear my limerick first!" said Racke coolly. "It goes like this——"

"Shut up, you cad!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

But Racke did not shut up. He went on, with the same malignant smile:

"There's a fellow who's really too good!
Who would hang profiteers if he could.
But the fellow's own tin,
And the clothes he stands in,
Come from war-profits made out of food!"

"Rather neat, don't you think?" said Racke blandly. "Of course, I don't imply that it fits any fellow here. No names mentioned, you know—you never mention names in your merry limericks, do you? It's a good system—never be personal.

Crooke chuckled.

Monty Lowther's face was livid. It was what he might have expected when Racke found out the miserable secret. Racke had as much right to be humorous on the subject as Lowther had, if it came to that.

Tom Merry and Manners were silent. It was Lowther's own joke over again turned against himself. They could not have expected Racke to miss an opportunity like that.

"I suppose you'll put that in the 'Weekly,' Merry?" smiled Racke. "It can go in side by side with Lowther's, you know. Little jokes against the war-profiteers always go down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Crooke.

Lowther made a stride towards Racke, his eyes burning.

"So it was you who started this yarn?" he said.

"My dear chap——"

"Now you're going to pay for it," said Lowther, between his teeth. "Put up your hands, you cad!"

## CHAPTER 9.
### A Split in the Co.

RACKE put his hands in his pockets. Even yet Racke had not quite got over the scrap in the Common-room, which was occasioned by Lowther's limerick. He was not looking for another.

"Keep your wool on!" he said. "Let's have this out! What have you got to complain of? Mustn't a chap make jokes about the war-profiteers, because you've got one in the family? I'm only following your own lead."

"Make all the jokes you like," said Lowther. "I'm going to hammer you for spying out what doesn't concern you, and spreading it about the House!"

"Oh! You're looking for the chap who started the yarn—the chap I got it from? Is it that?" said Racke.

"You started it, you cur!"

"Not at all. What the dickens did I know about your family concerns?" said Racke contemptuously. "How should I know that your uncle was a war-profiteer? You never told me, and I've never seen the old johnny—hardly heard of him."

Lowther paused.

"Do you mean to say that you got the story from somebody else?" he asked.

"Of course I did! How could I get it otherwise?"

"Well, I don't see how you could," said Lowther slowly.

"You say I spied it out," said Racke, with a sneer. "How could I spy it out? How the dickens could I know anything about your uncle? I'm not a magician, or a thought reader."

"Who told you, then?"

Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"A fellow who knew, mentioned it. Think over the fellows you told, yourself, and you'll get to the right party."

"I told no one but Tom Merry and Manners!" said Lowther between his teeth.

Racke shrugged his shoulders again.

"Tell me who it was!" exclaimed Lowther fiercely.

"By Jove!" said Manners, with a deep breath. "If you say I told you, Racke, you cad, I'll smash you!"

"Do you dare to say I told you?" almost shouted Tom Merry.

Racke sneered.

"So I'm to fight Lowther if I don't tell him who told me, and I'm to fight you two if I do tell him?" he asked. "Well, that's not good enough. I'm fed up with scrapping. And if you make a row here, I'll yell for a prefect!"

Monty Lowther's face quivered.

How did Racke know?

How could he know, unless he was told by someone who knew already? And no one knew already, excepting his own two chums.

The inference was unmistakable.

Monty Lowther stood for some moments, silent, and then turned and left the study, without another word to Racke. Tom Merry and Manners hesitated a few moments, and then followed him. Racke closed the door, and sat

down, and lighted a fresh cigarette, with a smile.

"Where did you get it from, Racke?" asked Crooke, eyeing his pal curiously.

Racke laughed.

"Where could I get it?" he said. "Lowther had confided it to those two fellows. Nobody else knew."

"They wouldn't have told you. You heard them talking, perhaps."

"Perhaps!" smiled Racke. "Either they told me, or they chattered about it carelessly when anybody could have heard them—eh? In either case, I fancy Lowther would be rather rusty about it; and I rather think there's going to be trouble in that giddy study. I told Lowther he would be sorry for giving me this eye!"

The Terrible Three had gone into their study. Monty Lowther's face was dark; his lips were tightly closed. His chums could see what was in his mind, and it made them angry enough.

"Look here, Monty, we'd better have this out!" said Tom Merry abruptly. "That cad Racke has tried to make you believe that we gave you away!"

Lowther gave him a look of concentrated bitterness.

"Who told Racke?" he asked.

"Neither Manners nor I, at any rate!"

"Then how did he know?"

"I can't say. He's a spying cad, and may have got on to it somehow."

"Nobody knew," said Lowther. "I told you two chaps—like a fool! Oh, don't glare at me! I don't say you broke your word, and went telling the affair up and down the House. I know you didn't do that. But you jawed where you could be heard. You let it out carelessly!"

"We did not!" said Manners firmly.

Lowther gave a shrug.

"How does Racke know, then?"

"It's a mystery," said Tom. "Every fellow you've asked says he got it from somebody else, till we come down to Racke. Racke says, or as good as says, that he got it from us. That's a lie!"

"Racke told me to think of the fellows I'd told," said Lowther. "I told only you two. Somehow, you've let it out—without meaning to, I dare say; but it comes to the same thing. I shall have a precious time in the school after this—if I stay. What I've had to-day is the beginning."

"You'll have two pals to stand by you, if you choose," said Manners quietly. "But I tell you plainly, Lowther, I don't like being called either a liar or a chatterbox. I expect you to take my word that I haven't uttered a syllable about the affair outside this study."

"I daresay you've forgotten!"

"I haven't forgotten. It's as I say."

"Oh, what's the good of jawing about it?" broke in Lowther irritably. "The harm's done now, and it can't be helped. I'm going to be an outcast—a fellow despised, like Racke. What's the good of telling me you haven't gassed, when it's perfectly plain you have?"

"It does look like it," said Tom Merry. "But you ought to know your own friends better than to think so, Monty."

"Can you tell me any way Racke could have got hold of it, unless he was told?" sneered Lowther. "Unless he heard it from you, anyway;"

"No, I can't. But——"

"Well, that settles it!"

And Lowther went out of the study to finish the discussion.

"Monty!" exclaimed Tom.

Monty Lowther strode away down the passage, unheeding. Tom Merry and Manners looked at one another. Manners' face was very grim.

"Precious kettle of fish, just when Monty's working for the exam, too," said Tom savagely.

"Lowther can suit himself," said Manners. "He's no right to think such a thing, and I'm not going to stand it, for one!"

"It's dashed queer how Racke got on to it! He couldn't have seen Selby's paper—Lowther burnt that. Besides, if he'd known last week, he would have gassed it out then, and it's only got out lately. How the thunder did he know, Manners?"

"Ask me another!"

Tom hesitated.

"Manners, old chap, you—you haven't said anything about it without thinking?"

"I was just going to ask you the same question!" said Manners grimly.

"Oh, were you!" exclaimed Tom, nettled.

"Yes, I was!"

"Look here, Manners——"

"I suppose I could ask you, if you could ask me?" grunted Manners, none too good-temperedly. "Have some sense, Tom!"

Tom drew a deep breath.

"You're right, old fellow. I beg your pardon for asking you. It wasn't either of us. But how did Racke know? No good trying to get the truth out of him. He would only lie!"

"He's accused us, and started a row between us and Lowther," said Manners. "I'm going to make him answer for that, anyway."

"It won't do much good."

"It will be some satisfaction, anyway, the smoky cad!"

Manners returned to Racke's study. There was a warm argument in that study for some minutes, followed by a scuffling and thumping, and Racke's voice yelling for help. Darrel of the Sixth came up with a cane, and both Racke and Manners were rubbing their hands for some time afterwards—which was all the satisfaction Manners got from his interview with Racke.

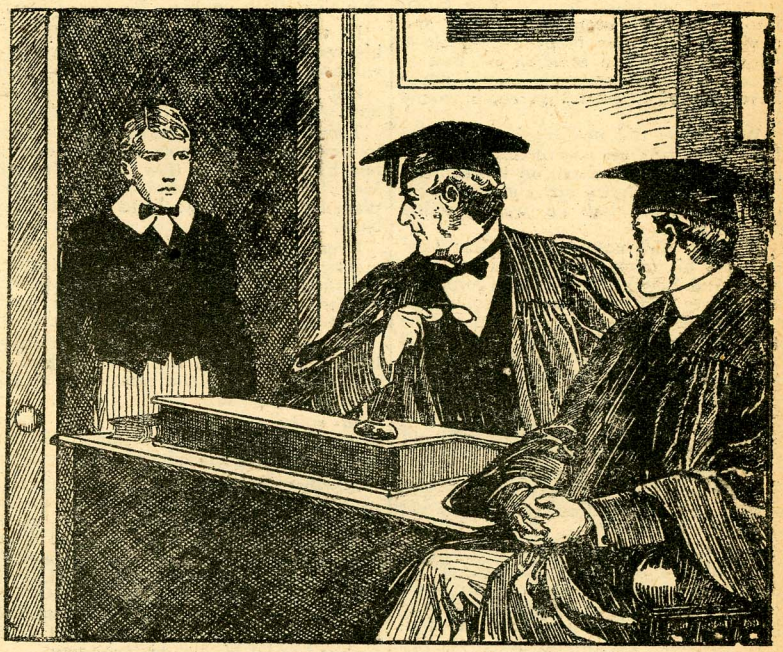
## CHAPTER 10.

### Down on His Luck!

MONTY LOWTHER was the cynosure of all eyes in the Lower School the next day.

The story, which had been whispered at first, was all over the school now, and discussed openly among the juniors.

New House as well as School House discussed it. Figgins & Co., of the New House, came over specially to assure Monty Lowther that they didn't believe a word of it, and to offer to help him find out who started it, and to rag the rotter whoever he was. Lowther's reception of their kind offer was ungracious enough. He merely said he had nothing to say on the subject one way or the other. Figgins & Co. retired, considerably taken aback, and no longer doubting that the story was true. If it wasn't true, Lowther could have denied it easily enough, and would certainly have done so.



**The Head gave the junior a kind glance as he came in.**
(See *Chapter* 12.)

Lowther's unfortunate quarrel with Racke the previous week helped to give prominence to the matter. Racke, naturally, made the most of the affair. And far better fellows than Racke remarked among themselves that Lowther might have gone easy on the subject of war profits, when his own uncle, upon whom he was dependent, was a member of a profiteering firm compared to whom Messrs. Racke & Hacke, the contractors, could really be called quite decent.

Fellows like Arthur Augustus, who took a high view of such matters, considered that Lowther, in common decency, couldn't touch his uncle's money again. But that he should throw himself on his own resources at fifteen was rather a large order. The alternative was to eat his own words, to confess that he was ready to profit by rascality he had gone out of his way to condemn; yet the alternative seemed inevitable for a fellow in Lowther's unfortunate position.

It was known, however, that Lowther was working with the view of getting, if he could, a scholarship that would support him at the school, and that prevented him from being regarded with the contempt that was felt for Racke.

His friends—and they were numerous—avoided the topic, as a matter of course; but there were plenty of fellows ready to make capital out of it—especially Racke & Co.

Allusions to war profits and food exploiters, and extortioners who bled the nation in war-time, were Racke's favourite topic when Lowther was within hearing.

Lowther could hardly complain. Racke had had a great deal of that from him.

He did not complain. He did not seem to hear. He was silent, and kept to himself. Lowther, who had always been cheery and sociable, and was never solitary if he could help it, had fallen into a way of keeping secluded and avoiding the other fellows, even those with whom he had been on the best of terms, and who certainly would never have uttered a word that could wound him.

What they did not say he could not help suspecting they were thinking, and he was acutely sensitive on the subject. He had never shown any signs of being morbid before, but he was growing morbid now.

If they did not despise him, they despised his uncle; they could not help that. And Lowther had always respected the crusty old gentleman. Even now that he knew him in his true colours, he could not banish the old feeling, and it was bitter to him to know that the old gentleman whom he had liked and respected was regarded by his schoolfellows as a grasping profiteer—a man who, in a better-organised state of Society, would have been sent to prison.

Old Mr. Lowther was on a par with Racke's father, and Monty writhed with shame and humiliation at the thought of it.

The miserable discovery seemed to have blotted all the light out of his boyish life. He worked feverishly now; his one thought was to be able to support himself and keep clear of the foul war profits. He would have thrown away his clothes if he could, because they had been bought out of the tainted money extorted from the poor by Grootz & Co. He had written to his uncle that he did not want any more pocket-money that term. The old gentleman had sent a surprised but approving reply, apparently supposing that his nephew was suddenly keen on "war economy."

Lowther was willing to let it go at that—for the present, at least. Some day there must come an explanation with his uncle, but he shrank from the thought of it.

He had turned it over in his mind whether he should, after all, give up all hopes of the Craven Scholarship and leave the school. But where was he to go? Not home, that was certain! How was he to live? Besides, why should he go? he asked himself passionately. Let the fellows think what they liked. He had not lost his self-respect. Nobody had a right to despise him, and he would stick it out. And so he worked on, in every leisure hour, with dogged determination to pull through by his own efforts.

In those dark days the friendship of his two old chums would have been invaluable to poor Lowther.

But that friendship was under a cloud now.

Tom Merry and Manners were ready to make every allowance for their chum, but his belief that they had betrayed him—for that was what it came to in plain language—was a little too much to bear.

Even so, the two juniors discussed the matter, and agreed that, in spite of Lowther's injustice, they would let matters go on the same as before, and give him all the help they could.

It was not easy to make such a resolution; it was still less easy to put it into practice. Without faith there could be little friendship.

In spite of themselves, looks were gloomy and answers were short. No. 10 Study was not a cheerful place just then.

Lowther had taken to having his tea in Hall, and the cheery old tea-party was no longer to be seen. After what had happened, after the distrust that had been sown, he would not "sponge," as he called it, on his friends. And Tom Merry, after one remonstrance, let the matter drop. He was bitterly wounded by Lowther's want of faith, and half inclined to let him go his own way.

Not that Lowther was so much to blame. The secret was out, and only Tom and Manners had known of it. What was Lowther to think?

Coaching in maths by Manners had dropped. Manners had asked, rather shortly, whether Lowther wanted it to go on. Lowther had replied, still more shortly, that it wasn't worth the trouble. So it dropped. But Lowther's struggle was harder after he had lost the assistance of his chums.

Poverty, too, was a new experience for him. No more tea in the study. No more visits to the tuckshop. No little excursions. He never had a coin in his pocket, and he could enter into nothing that cost money. It was a thing that might be got used to, but it came hard at first.

They were hard, dark days for Monty Lowther, once the brightest and cheeriest fellow in the School House; and his old chums' hearts ached sometimes when they saw his face grow grim and lined and troubled. But they could not help him, even by loyal faith and friendship. There was a grim bar of distrust between them, and half-suppressed resentment on both sides.

If Racke of the Shell wanted revenge, he had it now. The cad of the Shell saw it and rejoiced in it. And he took great care that the subject of Grootz & Co. never dropped. Most of the fellows would gladly have forgotten it, but Racke & Co. kept it very much alive.

Lowther had even given up footer now, in his hunger for work. Tom Merry had spoken on that subject, too, but only a snap from Lowther was the answer. Under the uncomfortable circumstances, Tom and Manners did not go to the study more than they could help. Lowther had it mostly to himself. And in the once cheerful study he swotted, and swotted as the most determined prize-hunter had seldom swotted before.

And, swot as he would, he had a miserable knowledge that he was not making the progress he had hoped for. The week had elapsed, but he had not decided yet to speak to the Head about entering for the Craven.

What was the use, when last year's examination paper still presented difficulties that made his head ache? He missed Manners' help sorely, but he gave no sign. He would keep on somehow; he would do it somehow, if grim determination and hard work went for anything.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Gussy Chips In.

"I'M goin' to chip in!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that statement in Study No. 6, with a serious face.

Blake and Herries and Digby yawned in concert.

"I wepeat," said Arthur Augustus firmly, "that I am goin' to chip in. I wegard it as too uttahly wotten!"

"What's biting you now?" inquired Blake.

"Nothin' whatevah is bitin' me, Blake. I wegard the question as widiculous. I am goin' to chip in. It's too wotten. Poor old Lowthah is lookin' like a weal ghost!"

"Poor beast!" said Herries sympathetically. "I don't believe he was keeping the war profits dark all the while, as Crooke says. He found it out all of a sudden, in my opinion."

"I agwee with you, Hewwies. He has been feahfully hard up lately; evewybody has noticed it. That looks as if he's done the wight thing, and wefused to touch any more of the wotten pwofits."

"I don't see what else he can do," remarked Digby. "It's rotten, but—but there you are, you know."

"You know how he's taken to swottin'," said D'Arcy. "Lowthah nevah was a swot. I think he's aftah a pwize or a scholahship."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Blake. "I don't know whether he's up to it, though. But what are you going to chip in for? Going to coach him in maths? I suppose you could give him some tips about the multiplication table."

"Wats! As a mattah of fact," said Arthur Augustus, "I asked him if he was workin' for an exam, and offahed to help him. He seemed to think it was a cheek for a chap in a lowah Form to make the offah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am suah I meant it in a vewy fwiendly spiwit. Howevah, he was vewy short, and I let the mattah dwop. I am goin' to chip in, Blake, and stop Wacke playin' his wotten game. I'm fed up on the subject."

Blake looked thoughtful.

"Well, Lowther rubbed it in pretty hard about Racke and Hacke," he said. "It's Racke's turn now. One good turn deserves another."

"The mattah is diffewent, Blake. Wacke glowies in his patah's wascality, and swanks about with filthy war pwofits bulgin' in his pockets. Lowthah's ashamed of it. He hardly speaks to a fellah now because he's so feahfully sensitive about it. He's gwoin' quite a Wobinson Cwusoe. He answahs a fellah vewy snappily when a fellah is bein' sympathetic."

"Been putting your foot in it as usual, Gussy?"

"Wats! I do not wesent Lowthah's wathah snappay wemarks, undah the circs. I sympathise with him, you know. And I am goin' to chip in an' stop Wacke's jaw about Gwootz & Co. It's time that mattah dwopped. I am goin' to thwash evewybody who makes wemarks about war pwofits."

"My hat! That's a big order! You'll have to thrash the whole British public from Land's End to John o' Groats!"

"I do not mean that, you ass. I mean wotten wemarks made heah to wowwy poor old Lowthah, and hit him when he is down. You fellahs come with me and back me up, and I will start with thwashin' Wacke."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "Racke may as well be thrashed. I dare say it will do him good. But what about your necktie?"

"Eh?"

"It might get disarranged, you know," said Blake solemnly.

"I will wisk that," said Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously. "Come on, deah boys!"

The dear boys came on, grinning, and Study No. 6 descended to the Common-room. Prep was over in most of the juniors' studies, and the Common-room was pretty full.

Monty Lowther was in an armchair by the fire, looking pale and tired, and very silent.

Study No. 6 had arrived at an opportune moment. Racke and Crooke and Mellish were standing in a group near the fire, carrying on a cheery conversation intended for Lowther's ears.

"Something about Grootz & Co. in the papers to-day," Racke remarked. "Rather interesting. Chap thinks they ought to be prosecuted."

"So they ought," said Mellish. "Why, I read somewhere that one of their own shareholders got up at a meeting of the company and denounced them. That shows how thick they are."

"I suppose they can't be sent to prison, can they?" said Crooke.

"Racke ought to know!" chuckled Mellish. "You can ask your pater, Racke, whether he's ever been to chokey!"

Racke scowled.

"I shouldn't wonder if there's a prosecution," he said. "Grootz & Co. have gone the whole hog, and no mistake. It's come right out that they had been holding back stocks of food to make prices rise. And they paid their last dividend on a scale to make Shylock's mouth water—sixty per cent."

"Nice for the shareholders!" grinned Crooke. "I dare say some of the shareholders have sons or nephews at expensive schools!"

Monty Lowther did not even look round. He knew that Racke & Co.'s remarks were meant for him—they were plain enough. But he was too worn out in body and spirit to care. The sneers and jeers of the cads of the School House passed by him unheeded.

But they did not pass Arthur Augustus unheeded. The swell of St. Jim's came up to Racke & Co., his eyeglass gleaming in his eye and his eye gleaming behind it.

"Wacke!"

"Hallo, D'Arcy!" said Racke.

"I wequest you to shut up, Wacke!"

"Gone off your rocker?" asked Racke pleasantly.

"I am wathah surpwised," said Arthur Augustus, with a glance towards Tom Merry and Manners, who were playing chess, "that Lowthah's fwiends have not shut you up!"

"We'll shut them up fast enough, if Lowther wants us to!" growled Manners. "Lowther's got a tongue in his head, I suppose?"

"Howevah, I am heah," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I am goin' to shut you up, Wacke, and you, Cwooke, and you, Mellish, and evewy othah cad who likes to hit a fellow when he is down! Fwom this moment, Wacke, I wefuse to allow you to uttah a word on the subject of Gwootz & Co.!"

"My hat!" said Racke. "Has Lord Eastwood got shares in the firm, D'Arcy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Crooke.

Arthur Augustus turned crimson with wrath. The bare suggestion that his noble pater might hold shares in Messrs. Grootz & Co. made him quiver with wrath.

"You howwid wottah!" he shouted. "How dare you suggest such a thing!"

"Well, some fellows here have relations in the firm, you know!"

"I wefuse to discuss that with you, Wacke! I am goin' to stop this cowardly persecution. You are not to uttah the word Gwootz again!"

"Have you become Kaiser, by any chance?" asked Racke.

"Certainly not! I am givin' you ordahs as a decent chap."

"Well, you can go on giving orders!" yawned Racke. "Speaking about Grootz & Co., Crooke, I was going to say—— Yarooogh!"

Racke broke off with a yell as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seized his prominent nose, and tweaked it severely.

"Grrurururur!" gasped Racke "Leggo!"

"Now, if you like to put up your hands, Wacke, I will deal with you!" said Arthur Augustus.

Racke clenched his hands, and rushed on the swell of the Fourth. He was so much bigger than D'Arcy that even Moneybags Minor did not funk the contest. But he met with a very hot reception.

Arthur Augustus' noble blood was up. He dropped his eyeglass, and met Racke's rush with a terrific onslaught. Right and left, his fists landed on Racke's furious face, and after two minutes—which were crammed with incident—Racke went sprawling on the floor with a crash.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "Up with you, you wottah!"

"Hang you! I'm done!" snarled Racke.

"Vewy good! Pway come on next, Cwooke!"

"Look here, I'm not going to fight you, you silly ass!" growled Crooke.

"Yaas, you are, deah boy! Othahwise, I shall pull your nose—like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Burrrrrrr!" mumbled Crooke.

And he came on, only to join Racke on the floor after a wild and whirling two minutes.

"Have you finished, Cwooke?" asked Arthur Augustus politely.

"Grooh! Yow! Hang you! Yow! Yes!" groaned Crooke.

"Your turn now, Mellish! Bai Jove! Where are you goin', Mellish?"

But Mellish was gone.

"Good old Gussy!" said Blake admiringly. "Veni, vidi, vici—I came, I jawed, I conquered! Bravo!"

"Wats! Pway wemembah, Wacke, that this is only a beginnin'! I am not goin' to have Lowthah wowwied by a set of wotten little busybodies!"

Lowther had neither moved nor spoken. Arthur Augustus turned to him with a gracious smile.

"It's all wight, Lowthah, deah boy! You wely on me!"

"Rats!"

"Eh?"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I must say that I wegard that wemark as wathah ungwacious, undah the circs!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Lowther picked himself out of the chair, and left the Common-room. Arthur Augustus gazed after him more in sorrow than in anger.

"Bai Jove! Lowthah's mannahs are suffewin'!" he remarked. "I cannot wegard his conduct as polite!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"However, I do not wegwet chippin' in. I wathah think Wacke & Co. will let poor old Lowthah alone aftah this."

And, indeed, that was the case. Arthur Augustus on the warpath was a fellow it was not safe to tackle, for funks like Racke & Co., at all events; and to a great extent Monty Lowther was free, after that evening, of the unpleasant attentions of the insignificant but

troublesome individuals whom Arthur Augustus disdainfully referred to as "busybodies."

## CHAPTER 12
### A Joyful Surprise.

MONTY LOWTHER tapped at the door of the Head's study.

He had made up his mind at last, after a few more days of grinding.

His heart was beating uncomfortably as he came to the dreaded apartment of the Head of St. Jim's. The request he was about to make was unusual; but it would be considered kindly, he knew, if he could give good reasons. The only reasons he could give consisted of the story that had made his life a misery for the past week—the story of his uncle's participation in the rascalities of Grootz & Co. He wondered whether the Head would understand. He shrank, too, from revealing the disgraceful story. But he had little choice. It was that or continuing to subsist upon the money that came from a foul and tainted source. And his mind was made up.

"Come in!"

Lowther entered the study. He was not pleased to see that Mr. Railton was with the Head; he had hoped to find Dr. Holmes alone. But it was too late to retreat. The two masters had been chatting upon the subject of Æschylus—a very interesting topic with Dr. Holmes, at least. But the Head gave the junior a kind glance as he came in.

"What is it, Lowther?"

"I—I—— Excuse me, sir!" Lowther's pale face became crimson. "I—I wanted to ask you something, sir, but—but if you're busy——"

"You may continue, Lowther," said the Head, with a curious glance at the junior's troubled, careworn face. Mr. Railton regarded him curiously, too. He had noticed Lowther's new aspect more than once of late. "You do not look very well, Lowther."

"Oh, I'm all right, sir!"

"You have been working unusually hard of late, I believe, Lowther," said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir," said Lowther. "I've been swotting. I—I wanted to ask, sir, if—if you could put my name down for the Craven, if it's not too late?"

"That is a very curious request, Lowther. The date is long past."

"I—I thought—perhaps——"

"If you have good and substantial reasons, Lowther, I might consider the matter. If you wished to enter, why did you not do so at the time when the usual notice was given?"

"I didn't know then that I should need it, sir."

"You mean that you need it now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Indeed! Does that mean that a change has taken place in your circumstances at home, my boy?"

"Yes, sir," said Lowther, with a scarlet face.

"I am sorry to hear it," said Dr. Holmes kindly. "You are aware, Lowther, that the Craven is reserved for boys whose parents are in moderate circumstances? Your uncle will, of course, be required to testify to that effect."

Lowther breathed quickly.

"I don't mean that, sir. I—I mean I can't take anything more from my uncle—I've got to look after myself in future!"

Mr. Railton started, and looked hard at him. The Head knitted his brows.

"Lowther, surely it is not possible that you are troubling me in this matter because you have had some foolish quarrel with your guardian?" he exclaimed severely.

"Oh, no, sir! Not that! I—I haven't spoken to my uncle."

"Surely you know that you are bound to consult him?"

"I—I can't, sir. If you'll let me explain——"

"I am waiting for you to explain, Lowther," said the Head sternly.

"You—you have heard of Grootz & Co., sir?"

"Everyone, I suppose, has heard of that notorious firm," said the Head. "Why do you mention them?"

"I—I've found out, sir, that—that my uncle is a shareholder, and—and the money he spends on me comes from—from—— You understand, sir?" Lowther's voice trembled. "You—you know what people say of them, sir; no more than they deserve, I know. They—they're awful rotters! I—I couldn't believe it at first, about my uncle; but I found out it's true. The money comes from those beasts! I—I can't touch it! I'd die first!" The words came in a passionate outburst, almost with tears. "I've been working hard for more than a week, sir, to see whether I was fit to go in for the exam. I think I've got a chance, if you'll put my name down. If I can't stay here on a scholarship, I can't stay at all. I—I don't want to leave if I can help it. I—I've nowhere to go."

"Lowther"—the Head's voice was very soft—"do you mean to tell me that, having made this discovery, you have resolved, at your early age, to throw up the protection of a rich guardian and depend on your own resources?"

"I can't do anything else, sir. It's hard enough, but—but I couldn't eat his bread now that I know. I think it would choke me!"

"I should hardly have expected to find so much strength of character in a lad of your years, Lowther. Certainly, if I agreed with your view, I should enter your name for the Craven prize and render you every assistance in my power. But you are labouring under a mistake."

"There's no mistake, sir," said the junior miserably. "I read it in a financial paper—Mr. Selby's paper."

"What did the paper say, Lowther?"

"It was a meeting of the shareholders of Grootz & Co., sir. The report said 'Mr. James Montague Lowther, J.P., also spoke.' That's my uncle, sir. I—I inquired, and found out for certain that it was my uncle."

"You did not read the 'Times' report of that meeting, Lowther?"

"The 'Times'! No; I never see the 'Times,' sir. I suppose it was the same?"

"My poor lad," said Mr. Railton kindly, "you are not aware of the practices of financial circles. If a speech made at a shareholders' meeting is not to the taste of the directors, there are means to secure its suppression in the reports with certain papers. Your uncle's speech at the meeting would have made you proud of him if you had read it."

Lowther staggered.

"I—I don't understand, sir," he gasped.

"I read the report in the 'Times,'" said the Head. "That great newspaper gave a full and fair account of the whole proceedings, Lowther. It was only in wretched sheets like the paper you saw that interested parties were able to secure suppression. The directors wished to minimise the matter as far as possible and prevent all the publicity they could. That is why it was said that 'Mr. Lowther also spoke,' and nothing more."

"But—but it makes no difference, sir."

"It makes a very great difference, Lowther. Your uncle was a shareholder on a large scale before the war. When war came, and these people began to exploit the needs of the people in an unscrupulous way, your uncle struggled against their action with all his power. He attended every meeting of the shareholders, to denounce the conduct of the directors. Unfortunately he could not secure a majority to support him—a large proportion of the shareholders being naturalised aliens. He was not, therefore, able to change the policy of the company; but his action drew public attention to it, and to the fact also, Lowther, that your uncle, at great loss to himself, devoted the whole proceeds of his holding in the company to the hospitals, refusing to touch one penny from the dividends of Grootz & Co. While doing so he set himself resolutely to oppose every measure of the company and to expose their unscrupulousness in the Press."

Monty Lowther pressed his hand to his throbbing brow.

He began to understand.

"Mr. Lowther has acted in every way as becomes an honourable and high-minded English gentleman," said the Head. "If you had communicated with him, Lowther, he would doubtless have told you the facts of the case. Naturally he cannot be aware that you, a mere schoolboy, have ever even heard of Grootz & Co."

"Oh!" muttered Lowther. "Oh, sir!"

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"So you see, my boy, that you have been under a very painful misapprehension. You should have had more faith in your uncle."

"I—I had, sir," stammered Lowther. "I—I couldn't believe it at first. I—I didn't know a thing could be suppressed like that in the papers."

"Only in some papers," said the Head, smiling. "Not in reputable papers. Messrs. Grootz did their best, but with little success, as it happens. My dear boy, I can only commend your decision, thinking as you did. But you see that you were wholly mistaken, and you have no cause to be uneasy."

"Oh, sir," said Lowther, "I—I've been a fool!"

"You have been a little hasty," said the Head, smiling. "The fault, however, is Mr. Racke's."

Lowther started.

"Mr. Racke?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; the managing director of Messrs. Grootz & Co., who was undoubtedly responsible for suppressing the reports of your uncle's speech so far as lay in his power."

"Racke's father, sir?"

"Ahem! Yes. Of course, you understand, Lowther, that Racke of the Shell has no knowledge of this in all probability, and you will not be injudicious enough, I am sure, to think worse of a schoolboy because of certain actions of his parents of which no one can approve." The Head coughed. "You may go, Lowther—I trust quite relieved in your mind."

"Yes, sir," said Lowther confusedly. "Oh, sir, I—I don't know how to thank you! If you knew what I've felt like—— And—and my uncle's a brick all the time! Oh, sir!"

Lowther fairly ran from the study.

Dr. Holmes glanced at the Housemaster, with a smile.

"A very fine lad, Mr. Railton!" he said.

"A splendid lad!" said Mr. Railton. "This curious affair seems to have brought out the most sterling qualities in his nature. Lowther is a credit to the school."

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### CHAPTER 13.
### The Clouds Roll By.

TOM MERRY was chatting with Manners in the Common-room, in rather a dismal mood. The break with his old chum weighed upon his mind—all the more because he knew that Monty Lowther needed his friendship more just then than he had ever needed it before.

He was interrupted by a slap on the shoulder, and spun round.

Monty Lowther had rushed in, with a glowing face that made every fellow in the room look at him in wonder.

"Tom," Lowther panted—"Tom, old chap——" He choked.

"What's the row?" asked Tom, his face brightening wonderfully as Lowther spoke in the old familiar way.

"Tom, I've been an ass! I beg your pardon, and Manners', too. I've been a silly ass! I—I must have been off my rocker a bit, I think!"

"All serene, old son," said Tom, and Manners grinned and nodded. "But what's the rumpus?"

"I know now how the yarn got out—at least, I can guess. I—I never knew before that Racke's father was in Grootz & Co."

"Is he?" ejaculated Manners.

"And—and there's more than that!" gasped Lowther. "About my uncle; he's a brick—a real Briton! It was all a mistake."

"Bai Jove, I'm awfully glad to heah that, Lowthah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Lowther turned and looked at the curious crowd of fellows, all eyeing him.

"I've got something to tell all you chaps," said Lowther, his face very bright. "You know some of it already, and I want you to know the rest. I found out by accident that my uncle was a shareholder in Grootz & Co., the rotten war profiteers. I was silly idiot enough to think he was one of the gang. I've just had the truth from the Head, who knows all about it. It's in the 'Times,' too, if you like to look it out. My uncle made a speech at that meeting denouncing the rotten money-grubbers, and going for the rotten directors, and he has always been against war profits——"

"And fingered them all the same!" sneered Racke.

"He has never touched them!" said Lowther.

Racked laughed.

"Doesn't he draw his dividends?" he sneered.

"His dividends are handed over to the hospitals, for the soldiers, and he never touches them," said Monty Lowther. "He wouldn't touch such dirty money! He couldn't help being in the company, as he held shares in it before the war. But he has set himself against their dirty tricks, and handed over the war profits, so far as he could, to the real owners. And you knew it, Racke!"

"How should I know it?" jeered Racke. "I don't believe it now."

"You do believe it!" said Lowther. "You know it, because your father is managing director of the gang!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "You never let that out, Racke."

"It—it—it's a lie!" panted Racke.

"It's the truth!" said Lowther scornfully. "Easy enough to prove it, if proof were wanted. Listen to me, you fellows! I thought I'd found my uncle was one of that gang, and it cut me up. You can guess that."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! It must have been a feahful shock."

"I told Tom and Manners, and they promised to keep it dark. Then it all came out, and I traced it to Racke, and he told me that they had given me away. I was a fool to believe him. I didn't half believe it, either, only there seemed no other way he could have known. Now that I know his father is really Grootz & Co., I know how he knew. He got it from his pater!"

Racke's face was pale now.

"I suppose he saw something in a paper, the same as I did," said Lowther. "I dare say he wrote to his father to ask him for the facts about it, so that he could use the yarn about me. Anyway, the cad got it from his father, and spread the yarn about the House, knowing all the time that my uncle wasn't what he represented—that I was making a horrible mistake about it. He left me making that mistake, when he could have put me right by a word."

Lowther's eyes were blazing.

Racke shrank back, biting his lips. It needed only a glance at his sallow, guilty face to see that Lowther's words were true.

"He made me quarrel with my best pals just when I was down on my luck," said Lowther. "And I've been chucking footer; and splitting my silly head, working for a dashed scholarship I don't want. That's the kind of worm he is!"

"By gad, that was rather thick, Racke!" muttered Crooke. Even Crooke of the Shell was disgusted.

"Bai Jove," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in measured tones, "Wacke, I should weccomend Lowthah to give you a feahful thwashin', but you are not fit for a decent chap to touch! I wegard you as a howwid weptile! Gentlemen, I suggest marchin' Wacke to the Head and wequestin' Dr. Holmes to expel him."

"You—you ass" stuttered Racke. "I—I—it was really a joke."

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry. "Don't touch him, Monty; he's too rotten to touch! He's as rotten as his own war profits! Get out of sight, Racke! You make me sick!"

Racke of the Shell was only too glad to get out of sight. He slunk from the Common-room, followed by glances of contempt and disgust, even from Mellish and Crooke. It was doubtful how even Racke, thick-skinned as he was, could ever hold up his head again at St. Jim's; and perhaps that was a sufficient punishment for his rascality.

The wretched, revengeful schemer was not given another thought by the Terrible Three. The clouds had rolled by; the old Co. were united once more, and all was forgotten and forgiven between them. And Talbot of the Shell suggested that the occasion could not pass without a just celebration; and the celebration took place in Tom Merry's study, cheery now as of old. And Monty Lowther started the proceedings by kicking his books across the study and lighting the fire with sheets and sheets of weary exercises upon which he had laboured of late.

Everything in the garden, as Tom Merry expressed it, was lovely now; and the next day Monty Lowther was so merry and bright that he seemed to have forgotten already the dark days when he was down on his luck.

THE END.

**(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"PARKER THE PRODIGAL!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)**

# THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

**For Next Wednesday:**
**"PARKER THE PRODIGAL!"**
**By Martin Clifford.**

Philip Ignatius Parker-Roberts, the journalist of thirty or thereabouts, with the chubby, boyish face, who has been figuring at St. Jim's as Parker of the Remove, is to the fore again in this story, which tells of his final days of impersonation. After a brief stay away, he returns to the school, intending to cultivate the acquaintance of some of the black sheep, get an insight into their little amusements, and generally play the role of the prodigal. He has no real taste for this role, and he does not enjoy it any more than he had expected to. The condescending patronage of Cutts of the Fifth fails to compensate for the quite plainly-expressed disapproval of the Terrible Three and other fellows he had grown to like. Nor do these fellows limit themselves to mere spoken disapproval. They make things warm for the Prodigal, in order to convince him of the error of his ways. But in the time of danger they stand by him again as loyally as ever, though now they know his secret. How it was discovered, and how Mellish, the tool of the Big Boss's emissaries, fared in the upshot, the story must be left to tell you.

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### MORE INFORMATION.

I was unable, owing to pressure on space, to give last week the whole of the study list with which Mr. Clifford has so kindly supplied me. But here is the rest of it.

### FOURTH FORM STUDIES.

No. 1.—Lorne; Jones minor.
No. 2.—Baggy Trimble; Percy Mellish.
No. 3.—Bates; Macdonald.
No. 4.—Mulvaney minor; Tompkins.
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No. 6.—Jack Blake; Robert Arthur Digby; George Herries; Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
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No. 9.—Ernest Levison; Sidney Clive.

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### CORRESPONDENCE WANTED.

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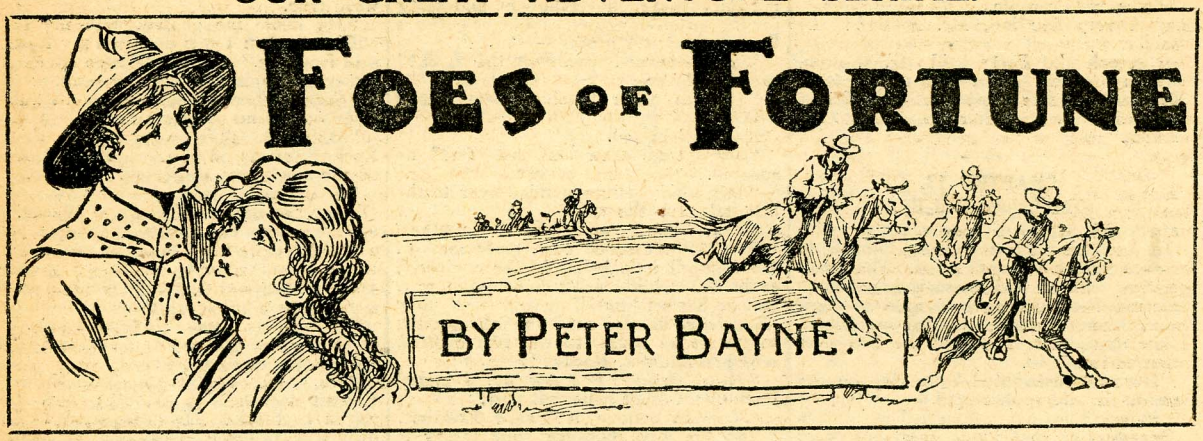
## OUR GREAT ADVENTURE SERIAL.




### THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS TOLD HOW

CARTON ROSS, a lonely and friendless youth, sole heir to a great fortune, though unaware of it, is hunted by a party of outlaws led by DIRK RALWIN. He is befriended by HARVEY MILBURNE and his daughter LORNA, who lose their home, and are separated in an attempt to defend him from his pursuers.

Ross is captured by the brigands, but, with Lorna's help, recovers his wallet—containing papers which prove his identity—and escapes. Later they fall in with RODDY GARRIN, an Englishman, and his companion, AH CHING, a Chinaman. The outlaws continue the chase, together with HUXTON FENNER, a Yankee, who had previously been a companion of Garrin and Ah Ching, but had deserted them.

They pass through many thrilling adventures, and, later, Harvey Milburne succumbs as a result of the privations he has suffered whilst a prisoner under Dirk Ralwin.

One night, while the four companions are asleep, Lorna and Ross are carried away by Huxton Fenner and a band of Dirk Ralwin's outlaws. Fenner has no intention of taking them to Ralwin, as he hopes to obtain Ross' papers and claim the fortune for himself. Ralwin is warned of the American's treachery by one of his spies, JAQUNY, an Indian. The outlaw, with a band of his men, hurries to San Ramo, where it is expected Fenner and his captives will board a steamer. Ralwin, by covering the captain of the vessel he is on with a revolver, forces him to pursue a smaller boat, which contains Fenner and his prisoners.

The launch runs aground on the bank, and Ross and Lorna contrive to escape. But the girl is soon recaptured, and, in order to force Ross into his hands again, Fenner threatens her.

Carton Ross surrenders himself to Fenner to save Lorna from death, and the two captives are carried farther into the forest. Fenner is surprised by Ayton Aylman and an armed band. The two outlaws come to an understanding, though each is resolved to obtain the fortune for himself. Roddy Garrin and Ah Ching push on through the jungle, to find at last they are close to the place where Dirk Ralwin is encamped.

They capture a waterplane, and discover the whereabouts of Carton Ross and Lorna. The fugitives are about to escape on the flying-machine when it breaks down.

(Now read on.)

### A Frustrated Attack—The Bent Screw—A Lucky Shot.

Instead of being a sure, swift instrument of flight and freedom, the waterplane had become a veritable prison-house.

It remained stationary on the dark, sluggish surface of the lake, a machine whose motive power would not respond to the vainly prompting efforts of its young pilot.

"It's no good," said Roddy Garrin helplessly. "I can't get it to move an inch. There must be a jam, or something of the sort, somewhere. If I only had a few minutes to spare I could find out what it is and put it right, but now——"

The report of a rifle-shot broke across his utterance, and a bullet struck the front part of the waterplane, denting the steel. Then a regular fusillade followed, the outlaws galloping their horses up and down the banks, and firing at the machine from every point of the compass, their object in doing so being obviously to terrify the comrades into speedy surrender.

"So that's their little game!" said Garrin, an angry light in his eyes. "They don't want to smash up the waterplane, thinking that it might come in useful to them, and they want to frighten us. Will they? I guess not! We're not the sort to shake and tremble at anything they may do."

As he spoke, Garrin continued his attempt to discover what was amiss with the machine. He believed that he had located the trouble in the engine itself, but to find out exactly where it was seemed an impossible task. Yet he worked on with grimly concentrated energy, while his companions kept watch on the movements of the enemy.

That the outlaws feared some such sudden turn in the situation as the one Roddy Garrin was striving to obtain was quickly proved, for, ceasing to fire their rifles, a dozen or more of them plunged into the lake and started swimming towards the waterplane.

"Ah!" said Carton Ross, snatching up a revolver that the former occupants of the flying-machine had left behind them. "Is this thing loaded? I hope so."

Taking quick aim, he pulled the trigger. There was a sharp report, and the discharged bullet struck the water close to the head of the foremost swimmer. Firing again and again, Ross dropped lead all round the outlaws, who, dismayed and alarmed, began returning to the shore in precipitate haste.

Some, bolder than the rest, swam doggedly on. Then it was that Ah Ching came forward as an invaluable reinforcement to his comrade.

"Lookee here!" he exclaimed, exhibiting a couple of revolvers and several clips of cartridges that he had found secreted in a panel-covered recess of the machine. "With these to fight with we shall drive them off in no time. You take one, Missee Lorna, and I'll use the other."

The accession to the armed strength of the comrades thus opportunely provided proved too much for the bandits. A continuous shower of bullets tore through the water. No injury was done, for it was not the object of Carton Ross and his friends to shoot their foes unless it became absolutely necessary to do so, but the fear and terror inspired by the display of marksmanship was speedily visible.

Scattering to right and left, the outlaws made haste to reach the banks of the lake again, where, concealing themselves in the dense grass and brushwood, they opened a furious rifle-fire at the flying-machine.

The comrades, in imminent danger of being killed, did not flinch from the fiery ordeal they were being subjected to. Fate was kind to them, for, light though it was, the protection afforded by the outer framework of the waterplane held true. Not one of them was hit by bullet, or splinter, and the machine itself received no serious damage.

This was due to the fact that both Huxton Fenner and Ayton Aylman, feverishly anxious to take Carton Ross alive, exercised a restraining influence over the vengeful fury of their discomfited followers. The order was given to fire only at the waterplane itself, and not at any of those on board it.

The two conspirators, chagrined though they were by the stout and unexpected resistance offered by the comrades, were as confident as ever of the ultimate issue of the struggle. They knew that in time their superior strength must tell in their favour. It was only a question of a few hours, at the most, before the stranded flying-machine and those aboard it fell into their possession.

Amidst the din and uproar, Roddy Garrin toiled on with undiminished energy. Yet he kept on telling himself that his task was an absolutely hopeless one. The prospect of discovering what it was that had gone wrong with the machine was farther away than ever. But the grim, stubborn doggedness of the lad would not permit him to give way to despair for a moment.

"Something can be done to put her right," he muttered, pausing to wipe the perspiration from his brow; "and something shall be done! I'm hanged if

I'm going to be beaten by perhaps no more than a piece of twisted metal. Eureka! What's this?"

His bright eyes gleaming with excitement, Roddy Garrin bent down to inspect the pin screw of a cylinder-cover that had caught his glance. The screw was bent, not badly, but enough to prevent the working of the cylinder, and it was this defect that had thrown the whole working part of the machinery out of gear.

"Golly!" the delighted youth exclaimed. "I was blind as a bat not to have seen it before. But better late than never. I'll soon put it right."

In less than three minutes he had straightened the screw and replaced it in position. Then, with scarcely controlled emotion, he started the engine. Instantly the machine moved forward with a whirring drone that rose above every other sound.

"Hurrah!" cried Roddy Garrin, almost leaping out of his seat with joy. "We're off at last!"

Speeding through the water at an ever-increasing pace, the flying-machine suddenly took an upward rise with the grace and swiftness of a mounting eagle. One moment she seemed to hang over the surface of the lake as if reluctant to leave it, the water falling from her sides in showers of pearly drops, and the next she was soaring high above the great trees of the mighty forest.

As the outlaws saw the waterplane ascend, a sensation of stupefied amazement seized upon them. Then their silence was ended by a loud yell of rage and alarm. Darting out from the cover of the jungle, they fired wildly up at the machine, and shouted wild threats and abuse at the escaping fugitives.

"Curse them!" cried Aylman, his face black with hate and fury. "They've got away, and we may as well own ourselves beaten!"

Huxton Fenner, calm and apparently unconcerned, smiled at his wildly perturbed associate.

"Don't lose your head," he said. "It's the worst thing in the world to do. The game isn't out of our hands yet. Watch!"

Raising his rifle to his shoulder, he took careful aim at the swiftly ascending waterplane. Twice he fired. The first shot produced no visible result. As the report of the second one died away, a thinh, dark line sprang from the machine high overhead, and, continuing its downward motion, splashed into the lake.

"Not at all bad shooting in the circumstances," said Fenner, in drawling accents. "That last shot bored a clean hole through the bottom of the petrol-tank. Our friends up yonder will soon be down again, I'm thinking, for, clever though they may be, they can't fly without the petrol that they're losing fast now."

A fierce, vindictive cheer arose from the outlaws as they grasped the meaning of what had taken place. Eagerly they watched the stream of petrol leaking from the waterplane's bullet-pierced tank and striking the dark surface of the lake with a hissing sound like that of escaping steam.

"Santissima!" said Aylman, moved to momentary enthusiasm by what had happened. "You've a cooler brain, Fenner, than mine."

Huxton Fenner laughed softly.

"Cooler, and quicker to act also," he said, more to himself than to his companion, "as you shall find out to your cost one day!"

Then, the tranquilly sinister smile that was there deepening on his lips, he once more directed his gaze to the flying-machine, whose motive power he had crippled with one surely-aimed shot of his rifle.

## To Earth Again—A Place of Refuge—The Sleeping Sentry.

To the comrades the piercing of the petrol-tank came as a cruel mockery of fate. Alarm and consternation swept away all their joy and hope in the twinkling of an eye.

Silently they stared at one another with the tragic looks of those who are suddenly and unexpectedly confronted with ruin and disaster.

"It's a knock-out, and no mistake about it!" declared Roddy Garrin, a comically glum look in his face. "Our flight, I'm afraid, is going to be short, but not a sweet one."

Every effort was made to effectively plug the hole in the tank; but to do this would have taken a few minutes at least, and the leakage of the petrol continued at so fast a rate, that in a very short space of time there was not a sufficiency of the precious fluid left to keep the waterplane moving on her lofty course.

Losing speed, she sank downwards, slowly at first, and then with increasing momentum. The comrades, gazing below, saw the earth apparently rushing up to meet them. They were threatened by a horrible death, yet none quailed or showed any sign of fear.

"We'll fall slap into the jungle," said Garrin. "Sit tight, and hold on! The crash won't be so bad as one might expect it to be."

Next moment the waterplane sharply tilted, and dived into the grass and bushes with a thundrous rattle and clang.

The comrades, flung from their seats by the vibrating force of the impact, were hurled in every direction. Bruised and bleeding they scrambled to their feet and forced a way to the sides of the flying-machine, which was now a complete wreck.

"She's done for this time," said Carton Ross regretfully. "To repair her properly would take a month. But we came out of that smash all right, so we mustn't grumble. Did you hurt yourself, Lorna?"

The beautiful girl smiled, and shook her head.

"Scarcely at all," she replied. "You see, when I was pitched from my seat I fell amongst the grass, and that saved me."

Ah Ching gave vent to a doleful sigh.

"Wishee my had tumbled in the grass instead of among those prickly bushes," he declared lamentingly. "Whee-jee! My face smartee too velly muchee! Them thorns prick into it so!"

"You're no worse off than myself, sonny," said Garrin, who had fallen close by the side of the little Chinaman. "We both had bad luck, which might have been a lot worse; but we'll pay out yonder chaps for it some day. And they'll be coming here directly," he continued; "we'll get a move on. There isn't much chance of escaping from them now, I'm afraid, but we'll give 'em another run for their money."

Leaving the battered and disabled waterplane where it had fallen, the comrades moved away from the spot.

Owing to the height of the jungle growth it was impossible for them to see anything of the lake, the distance to which they were consequently unable to estimate, and neither could they hear any sound of their enemies.

From this last fact, however, they drew no hopeful augury. Experience had taught them that the outlaws, like trappers and wild Indians, generally preserved silence when engaged in hunting down a quarry that they were sure was not far off them.

The revolvers that Carton Ross and Ah Ching had found on the wrecked waterplane they still retained, but most of the spare cartridges had been lost, there remaining only about a dozen for the two.

"And I don't see that it would benefit us in the least," remarked Roddy Garrin, "if we shot a dozen of the brutes!"

"Quite right!" Carton Ross agreed. "The remainder would only be furious and exact a stiff revenge. No; we'll elude them as long as possible, and strive our utmost to lose them. We can do no more."

Struggling onward through the jungle, that often rose high above the branches of the trees and hung there in festooned density, the youthful fugitives at last reached the crumbling ruins of what was at one time a forest temple.

The fallen masonry, of huge size and thickness, was overgrown by moss, and grass, and creeping plants, that had secured a tenacious hold upon the inanimate material. It was surprising, in fact, that all the vestige of the ruined pile had not long since vanished before the wonderfully luxuriant growth of the jungle, but it still remained as a silent yet eloquent witness to the skill and patience of the unknown mortals who had constructed it centuries before.

"We'll halt here," said Carton Ross, after a quick inspection of the place. "It's no use venturing farther with night coming on. We should only lose each other in the darkness. And here we can hide and yet watch our enemies, should they make an appearance, without being seen by them. That'll give us a big advantage."

Wearied as they were, the comrades were glad to break their journey. With the red glow of the setting sun shining all around them they looked for a spot where they might rest with some certainty of being secure against sudden surprise and attack.

Soon a place was found—a wide, lofty corridor, whose walls were mantled with green foliage and vaulted by a roof that nature herself had made. There was only one entrance to the passage—a way between the bushes that had grown up all around it—and it was so small that the comrades were scarcely able to squeeze in.

"We'll be safe as conies here," said Garrin, as he and his companions explored the corridor by the light of a flaming torch. "There's only one entrance to it. The far end is blocked up by that great mimosa-tree, which must have been standing there when the place was built. So long as we lie low and keep quiet, Huxton Fenner and his gang may hunt for us till Doomsday."

"One thing you forgot," remarked Ah Ching, with a dry lick at his lips, "wo no have eat any food for many hours. We must get some, my fancy, or makee starvee."

Carton Ross gave an amused, little laugh.

"Ah Ching talks like a sensible man," he declared. "We're all of us uncommonly hungry and thirsty. I know I am, and so I guess the rest of you must be. We'll have to do something to stay our appetites."

A beaming smile of delighted approval showed itself in Ah Ching's yellow face.

"You allee same me, Mista Ross," he declared. "You likee eat and drink. Any man who does that he makee fight well. My think more better me go and look for food chop-chop."

"That's the way to talk, Ah Ching!" laughingly answered Ross. "And I'll come with you, too. Then we shall all of us soon be enjoying a meal."

The two comrades took their departure, leaving Garrin and Lorna to make everything as snug and comfortable for the night as was possible in the circumstances.

It was now dark, but the tiny lamps of the fireflies provided a soft yet clear light, that had frequently acted as a sure guide to the young adventurers in the course of their nocturnal excursions.

Experience had taught them what were edible plants and what not, and in the course of an hour or so they returned to the camping-place in the ruined temple loaded with fruit and nuts of various kinds.

"We can make a fine meal off this stuff," said Ross, "although some roast venison would have been better, and we saw plenty of wild deer. But even if we'd been able to shoot any without Fenner and his crowd hearing the report, we should have had to light a fire, which would have given us away in no time."

"I'll be quite content with this little lot," Roddy Garrin remarked. "What say you, Lorna?"

"Yes," answered the girl smilingly. "There are many rich people sitting down to sumptuous dinners to-night in London restaurants who would gladly pay a lot of money to be served with such delicious food as this."

Over their meal the comrades chatted together with a feeling of confidence given to them by the peculiar novelty of their position rather than by anything else. The foliage-roofed corridor they occupied was warm and dry, and an ingeniously-shaded torch supplied them light.

It was arranged that while the others slept one should keep watch, each taking duty for two hours at a time. The first to act as guard was Carton Ross. He was succeeded by Ah Ching, who, sitting on his heels close to the entrance of the passage, with a loaded revolver by his side ready for instant use, looked fierce and resolute enough to fight and conquer a score of foes.

But the little Chinaman, true Oriental that he was, loved ease and peaceful calm, all the more so because for so long a time his life had been of so strenuous a description. As he sat there, staring out into the night, it seemed something like a crime to him for one to keep awake while there was no apparent reason to do so.

"Those robber men no come here in the dark," he murmured. "They no fools to wander round looking for us at this time of the night. All of them sleep sound. Vely wise men!"

He opened his lips, and yawned. Scarcely was he able to keep his eyes open. His head fell forward with a jerk. Instantly he sat up very upright, sternly upbraiding himself for his dereliction from duty, and for a few minutes he valiantly resisted every inclination to slumber.

Then once more his big head began to nod, and this time he made no attempt to shake himself back into vigilant alertness. Forgetfulness came to him, and he slept, snoring the while with a loud, bassonlike note that could be heard afar in the night stillness.

The sound reached the ears of three native hunters, who had been sent out to trap deer for the outlaws. They followed it up, and were quickly at the entrance to the corridor where the comrades were sheltering, and a moment later were staring down at Ah Ching in mystified amazement.

## Against Great Odds.

Whispering excitedly together, the natives gazed intently at Ah Ching, who snored on in blissful unconsciousness of what was happening. Suddenly one of the men perceived the loose end of the little Chinaman's pigtail, and, imagining it to be a rope of some kind, caught hold of it with his hand and gave it a sharp tug.

The pain at his scalp instantly awakened Ah Ching. With a snort and a long yawn he opened his eyes. For a moment or two he was bewildered by his quick return to sensibility, and the three dark faces above him seemed to his fancy to belong to the phantom figures of a dream.

"Velly funny," he murmured—"velly funny, indeed!"

Seeing him move and hearing him speak, the curious natives at once came closer to Ah Ching, who then realised that he was the victim of no nightmare. The figures were those of living men, who most assuredly could not be friends, and were in all likelihood dangerous foes.

"This too bad!" he groaned to himself. "My do wrong in going to sleep. These chaps have come in here for no good purpose. What thing can I do? My no savee!"

Nevertheless, he remembered his revolver, and his hand gripped it at once. Too hastily his finger pressed back the trigger. There was a flash, a report, and a scream from the man nearest to him. The bullet had merely grazed the fleshy part of the intruder's right arm, causing the sufferer more terror and surprise than anything else; but it effectively dispersed the enemy.

Chattering like angry monkeys, they all three bounded out of the corridor, through the bushes, and into the shadowy background of the forest.

Springing to his feet, Ah Ching fired after them, at the same time uttering warlike, challenging cries in the exuberance of his high spirits. He would have rushed out in pursuit of the retreating foe had not Ross and Garrin, awakened by the tumult, forcibly restrained him.

"Hold on, lunatic!" said Garrin, securing a double clutch on the little Chinaman's dangling queue, and hanging to it. "Where are you off to in such a hurry? And what's the meaning of all this racket and uproar? Explain yourself, my son, or I'll string you up to the nearest tree by this beautiful black pigtail!"

"Leggo! Leg-g-go!" expostulated Ah Ching. "One man have pulled my hair-plait quite enough to-night to please me! My no wantee too much of a good thing!"

Garrin, more amused than angry, released his comrade, and laughed and winked his eye at Carton Ross and Lorna.

"Now, then, Ah Ching," said Ross, "tell us just what you were shouting and firing your revolver at? You appeared to be nearly crazy with excitement. Did some jaguar make its appearance?"

Ah Ching shook his head.

"No," he replied; "but three men did, with black faces and big rings stuck in their ears. They came this side, and wake me up by pulling my hair-plait. Then I fire the revolver, by accident, though, and off they skip. That make me velly bold, so I let fly after them; but they wantee no more, and run on as if an army were at their heels. That is all my can tellee you."

"Who were the men?" inquired Ross.

"Natives," Ah Ching answered promptly. "My savee that when I saw them, and they spoke the native lingo. They no belong bandits."

"Perhaps not," said Ross, a look of serious thought in his eyes; "but they may be in the service of the bandits. If so, their finding us here is an extremely grave matter for us. How was it that you didn't give us warning of their approach when you heard them?"

Ah Ching looked as uncomfortable and conscience-stricken as it was possible for him to, and that was scarcely at all. His bright, beady eyes twinkled as he stared at the attentive faces of his comrades.

"My never hear them," he said. "They step so light and makee no sound. Suppose one of them no twitchee my hair decoration my no savee they were anywhere near me. What you think of that, Mista Ross?"

Carton Ross burst out laughing.

"I think you're a fraud!" he said. "You didn't hear them, simply because you were sound asleep. Then you wake up, when it's too late, and make as much row as a holiday crowd!"

Ah Ching raised his shoulders and spread out his hands with a gesture of protest.

"That quite true," he said; "but I drove them off, and so saved all our lives! You mustn't forget that, Mista Ross!"

"We couldn't forget it, if we wanted to!" laughed Roddy Garrin. "You acted the part of a hero, my son, especially the drowsy part, and we give you our warmest thanks. But as those fellows may take it into their heads to return, with a crowd of friends accompanying them, we ought to move somewhere else."

"Without a doubt," Ross agreed. "They may be spies of either Dirk Ralwin or Fenner. We can't afford to remain here, and take our chance of being attacked by overwhelming numbers."

It was resolved, after a brief discussion, that the best course would be for them to cross to the opposite side of the ruined temple, and take shelter there. Should the native hunters come back and find them gone from the corridor, they would naturally suppose that the fugitives had plunged into the fastnesses of the forest, being unable to grasp the fact that Carton Ross and his friends possessed a courage capable of calmly facing the greatest dangers and risks.

Where the fallen walls of the ancient edifice were piled up in fantastically-broken mounds of bush-covered masonry the comrades found the place of refuge and concealment for which they were searching. It was more open and exposed than the passage they had deserted, but they were well hidden there from the gaze of anyone who might approach the spot.

"It'll do nicely!" said Roddy Garrin. "And we sha'n't miss having a torch now the moon's coming up. In another twenty minutes it'll be quite light around here."

It was as Garrin declared, for the moon was already shining low in the sky, and soon her silvery beams were flung far and wide over the forest. In that great wilderness of Nature everything seemed to breathe peace and calm and beauty. There was no whisper, no hint of cruelty and craft and fierce human passion lurking in the night shadows.

"How grand and lovely it all is!" murmured Lorna, her dark eyes gazing dreamily across the moonlit scene. "I

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wonder if we are the first white people to be here?"

"I guess so," said Garrin, "although it's mighty unlikely that we shall be the last."

Ah Ching held up a warning hand.

"Hist!" he whispered. "Suppose my no hear those three fellows over yonder, my hear something now. You listen!"

Immediately the rest of the comrades were on the alert. At first they heard no warning sound, but after a few moments had elapsed, all of them were electrified by the voices of two men who were evidently engaged in a bitter dispute.

"Fenner and Aylman!" whispered Roddy Garrin. "They're quarrelling about something or other. Here they are!"

The two men in question appeared at that instant some ten or twelve yards away. Stepping out from behind the surrounding trees and bushes into a small open space that was bright with moonlight, they paused and glared at each other with flushed, angry faces that plainly told of the ferment of emotion working in their minds.

The comrades, burning with suddenly-awakened curiosity and excitement, leaned forward to watch and listen until their four heads almost touched one another.

"You lie when you tell me that Ross has got clear away," Aylman said fiercely, "and you know it. Your men captured him and his friends and took them off, acting on your secret instructions. But I'm not to be fooled, my designing, plotting friend, without making you pay dearly for it!"

Huxton Fenner's lips parted in a derisively-mocking smile.

"You talk without sense or reason," he answered. "For me to act as you suggest would be clumsy work, unworthy of any intelligent person. Do you really believe that I should, even if I had the chance to, send Carton Ross away on a long journey through a trackless forest, in charge of three savage natives, who would, as likely as not, kill him and his companions the moment they were out of my sight?"

Roddy Garrin nudged Ross's elbow.

"Hallo!" he whispered. "Those are the three chaps Ah Ching told us about!"

"Then where are the men?" inquired Aylman excitedly. "They're not to be found anywhere. But you know where they are, thief and liar!"

The smile vanished from Fenner's face. His eyes flashing like lightning, he raised his clenched fist and struck the other full in the face. The heavy force of the blow sent Ayton Aylman reeling backward into the bushes, where, losing his balance, he fell with a crash amongst the foliage.

"That will teach you," said Fenner, "not to call me a thief and liar again!"

Picking himself up, and with blood trickling from his cut lips, Aylman ran to Fenner, and stared at the other with a look of fiendishly malignant hate and fury.

"I call you a thief and a liar now!" he cried. "That is what you are and always have been, Huxton Fenner!"

Fenner instantly whipped a revolver from his belt, just a moment sooner than his antagonist did the same thing, and had the other promptly covered by the deadly weapon.

"I could shoot you dead now," he said, "and be justified in doing so. But you shall have your chance. Step back twenty paces, and keep your revolver lowered until you've covered the distance. Then we both fire at the same moment."

Keeping his venom-filled eyes fixed steadily on the other, Ayton Aylman retreated to the distance indicated. Then he paused. But even as he and Fenner raised their revolvers to fire, three men came racing to the spot, shouting and throwing up their arms.

"Jerusalem!" murmured Roddy Garrin. "It's Ah Ching's dusky chums!"

Both Fenner and Aylman, lowering their weapons, turned to the new-comers, who chattered volubly in their own tongue for several moments. Surprise and relief were expressed in the faces of the two outlaws as they listened to the men.

Driven away for the time being was their mutual hate and suspicion of one another. Greed and avarice had once more usurped all other emotions in their minds and hearts.

"The beggars are telling them where we are," said Garrin, as the natives pointed towards the walls of the ancient corridor. "They'll go there and look for us. Well, good luck to 'em! They'll be on a false scent this time!"

Hurrying across the temple enclosure, Fenner and Aylman, with their brown-skinned associates running ahead of them, darted eagerly into the dark passage where the comrades had sheltered not long before. Their search proving fruitless, they speedily emerged into the open. A whistle was blown repeatedly by Huxton Fenner, and, in response to its urgent summons, a crowd of his bandit followers, mounted and on foot, quickly arrived on the scene.

"They've been close by all the time," whispered Roddy Garrin. "We've been in luck to avoid them. It's a question how much longer, though, that luck's going to hold out, for we're in the very dickens of a tight fix!"

The comrades, hemmed in as they were on every side, had perforce to remain where they were. To attempt to regain the shelter of the forest would be to run straight into the arms of their foes, who were spreading out in all directions looking for them.

It was a trying ordeal to stay inactive and watch the gradual closing in of their foes upon them. Evidently Huxton Fenner was confident that the fugitives were still within the precincts of the old temple, for his men, acting on his orders, formed a complete ring round the place.

Every spot that had the appearance of being a possible hiding corner was subjected to a vigilant inspection. Nearer and nearer the outlaws drew towards the mound of stones amongst which Carton Ross and his friends were hidden.

"Put that down-" whispered Ross, as Ah Ching restlessly fingered his revolver. "It will be of no use to us now!"

The outlaws came on. Soon a little party of them were on the outskirts of the mound. The comrades could hear the men's hard breathing, and plainly see their bright eyes, and cruel, merciless faces.

"They'll be on us in another minute," murmured Carton Ross to Lorna. "Keep calm. Be brave, as you always are, and trust me to bring you safely out of this danger."

The girl smiled up into the eyes of her faithful comrade.

"With you and the others near me," she answered, "I fear nothing."

A stone, pushed aside by the united efforts of three men, crashed down into the grass. The hiding-place of the refugees was revealed. A shadow flitted across the opening made by the displacement of the masonry, and a man's head and face appeared in sight.

Then, as hope died in the hearts of the comrades, a sudden spluttering volley of rifle-fire broke out. Fierce cries of amazement, rage, and anguish filled the air. The outlaws fell back, running to and fro in wild confusion, or springing on the backs of their horses and riding off at a furious gallop.

"Dirk Ralwin!" said Roddy Garrin excitedly. "He and his men have come up and taken the other fellows by surprise! What a joke! Look at them!"

It was true. The famous chief of the outlaws had stolen a surprise march on those who had acted so treacherously by him, and was exacting a dire and deadly vengeance. Himself on horseback at the head of his followers, he galloped to and fro, firing his revolver again and again, and shouting out orders in a loud, stern voice that rose high above the tumultuous uproar of the struggle.

The comrades, thrilling with mingled emotion, watched the strife until it ended as suddenly as it had commenced by the disappearance of both vanquished and victors. The sounds of the engagement still continued, near and far, but those taking part in it were obscured from view by the forest trees and jungle, amongst which they had retreated, without a thought of Carton Ross, the prize for which they had all so fiercely contended, who was so near to them.

"To the river!" said Ross at last. "While our foes fight amongst themselves we will give them the slip. The best of luck to us!"

**(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Wednesday's issue of THE GEM LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)**

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## NOTICES.

### Correspondence, Etc., Wanted.

Arthur Bagnall, 25, Alexandra Road, Burton-on-Trent, will send a copy of his hectographed monthly magazine on receipt of 1½d. in stamps.

More members required for Correspondence Club—either sex. Agents wanted. Stamped and addressed envelope, please. The "Gem" and "Magnet" Correspondence Club, 8, Oakwell Terrace, Grove Hill, Middlesboro'.

Wanted contributors and subscribers for amateur magazine. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.—C. Butterwith, 42, Lorne Street, Fairfield, Liverpool.

J. McInnes, care of New Zealand Insurance Company, Limited, Box 19, P.O., Lismore, N.S.W., Australia—With readers in England.

F. C. Bint, care of Mr. S. C. McDonald, Avondale, Warwick, Queensland, Australia—With readers from 15-18.

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### Back Numbers, Etc., Wanted.

By H. Taylor, Dover House, Rossmore Road, Upper Parkstone, Dorset—"Gem," Nos. 1-40. Double price offered first twenty. Please write first.

By T. R. Jackson, Hamptons, Tonbridge—"Hero of the Hour," "Captain D'Arcy," "The King's Pardon," "Talbot's Triumph," and "Saving Talbot."

By Norman Dick, 48, Glantane Street, Antrim Road, Belfast—"Gem," Nos. 444-449 inclusive.

By E. Gooch, 37, Carlyle Avenue, Harlesden, N.W. — "Gem" and "Magnet," Nos. 1-200.

By David Macfarlane, 26, Albert Street, Dundee—"Foes of the Fourth," "Figgins' Folly," "The Race to the Tuckshop," "Billy Bunter's P.O."

By E. Bates, Waldorf Apartment, 1,253-1,255, King Street West, Toronto, Canada—Numbers of "Gem" before 240.

By L. Burton, 87, East Dulwich Grove, Dulwich, S.E.—"Gem" No. 325.

# BOB CHERRY—HERO!

## *A Splendid Little Complete Tale of the Greyfriars Chums.*

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were busily engaged in Study No. 1 in the preparation of the next issue of the "Greyfriars Herald."

The silence was only broken by the scratching of pens, with sundry mutterings from Bob Cherry, who was engaged on writing a poem.

Suddenly the door was thrust open, and Horace Coker of the Fifth stalked into the study.

Five pens ceased their scratching, and the owners looked up inquiringly.

"My hat, it's Coker!"

The juniors seized the nearest weapons at hand. Bob Cherry caught hold of the poker in a businesslike manner, Frank Nugent grabbed a cushion, whilst Harry Wharton picked up the inkpot.

"Hallo, you kids!" said Horace Coker condescendingly.

The five juniors glared at the mighty Horace. But glares never affected Coker.

"I've been thinking——" he began.

"Go hon!"

"That what your little rag wants is a first-class editor—someone like me, f'rinstance, who can write. I have come to make you an offer, Wharton. Mind, you needn't thank me! I like to help you fags occasionally," said Coker loftily. "I am willing to take over the editorship of your little paper for, say, about three months, just to show how a paper should be run. What do you say to the offer?"

"Rats!"

"Now, look here, you cheeky fags——"

Harry Wharton breathed hard through his nose, and his chums looked grim. At a sign from their leader they sprang to their feet, and, before the astonished Coker could grasp the situation, he was fairly thrown out of the study, landing with a bump that shook the corridor.

He sat up, with a gasp. Then, with a roar like a bull, he charged at the five, only to be whirled out again. And this time he landed with a bump even louder than the first.

"Y-you cheeky rotters! I—I—I'll pulverise you!"

"Look out, you ass, here's Prout!"

Mr. Prout, the Fifth Form-master, came along the passage, and Horace Coker beat a hasty retreat, muttering threats of vengeance on the heads of the devoted Co.

Harry Wharton and his chums sat down to their work, but not for long.

There came a tap at the door, and Alonzo Todd, the Duffer of the Remove, entered the study, with a bundle of manuscript under his arm.

"My dear Wharton," he began, "I have just finished my article on the urgent need of trousers and toasting-forks for the Gooby-Booby Islanders, and I hope to be able to raise quite a large subscription by my appeal, which I am sure you will publish with pleasure in your excellent paper. Let me read you a little that you may judge its quality. It is, I think, about thirty thousand words long, but I can easily make it longer, if you like."

"Hold me up, someone!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Only thir—thirty thousand words! Is that all, Lonzy?"

Alonzo beamed, and commenced to unroll the huge bundle of manuscript under his arm.

Once Alonzo got going there would be no stopping him. The Co. were not inclined to listen to Alonzo for about four hours. They promptly propelled him by his ears into the passage, and sat him gently down upon the floor. His valuable manuscript went scattering in all directions, and the Duffer spent quite half an hour in collecting and putting together his precious article, after which he sought consolation in a volume of Professor Potty's works on philanthropy.

Harry Wharton & Co., with grim faces, once more resumed their labours, and were left undisturbed for nearly ten minutes. Then there entered Fisher Tarleton Fish, the Yankee junior.

He advanced cautiously into the study. Fishy had been there before!

"Buzz off!"

"I guess——"

"Scat!"

But Fishy was not to be put off that way. He advanced still further into the room.

"Look hyer, you slabsided jays, what your little paper wants is hustling! I kinder guess and calculate that you're too slow over in this sleepy-headed little island of yours. I guess——"

He broke off abruptly as a cushion, hurled with unerring aim by Frank Nugent, smote him fairly in the face.

"Ow! You silly mugwumps!" he gasped.



The Fighting Editor rose to his feet. Then his feet arose—one at a time, of course—and he dribbled the irate Fishy out of the study. The Yankee junior departed in haste and pain.

"I'm fed-up with these constant interruptions!" said Harry Wharton.

"Same here!" agreed the others.

"We shall have to think of an idea to stop them. What price a booby-trap?"

"Jolly good wheeze, my son!" said Bob Cherry heartily. "The very thing!"

And the five juniors set to work on the device.

In less than ten minutes a first-class booby-trap had been made, and the five surveyed the horrible mixture with admiration.

"What about some more soot, Harry, old man," asked Frank Nugent, "and another jar of ink?"

"Sling it in, old scout!"

The soot and the ink were added, and the trap was then carefully adjusted over the door.

Our friends proceeded with their work, and were actually unmolested for about an hour, during which time they almost forgot about the booby-trap.

Footsteps sounded in the passage. They stopped outside the juniors' door. This time the Famous Five were really looking forward to their visitor with pleasure.

"Why, bless my soul, what are you listening at that keyhole for, Bunter?" came a voice which seemed unmistakably Mr. Quelch's.

"I—I—I—sir——"

"Great Scott!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Supposing Quelchy comes in, and——"

Bob did not finish the sentence. He did a noble deed. Like the famous Roman of old, who leaped into the gulf to save Rome, Bob sacrificed himself for the salvation of his chums. At all costs, Mr. Quelch must not get that booby-trap! So Bob rushed at the door, grabbed it open, and took it.

The beastly mess swished down. Bob howled; someone cackled "He, he, he!" And Mr. Quelch was not there, after all. It was Bunter—the unspeakable Bunter! He had imitated Mr. Quelch's voice; he had even "taken away his own character" to aid the ruse, and he had succeeded. But not for long did he chortle over his success. Bob went for him like an enraged lion.

Bob spent the rest of the evening getting clean. Bunter had not only to get clean—though he did not mind so much about being clean as Bob Cherry did—but also to caress, rub, anoint, foment, and groan over a choice assortment of bruises and bumps.

All of us laughed when we heard about it. No one laughed more than Wharton and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Inky. And yet, when you come to think about it, Bob did not deserve to be chipped by them.

Bob Cherry was a hero; only he was such a jolly sticky hero that he didn't get proper credit from anyone.

THE END.