FACING THE MUSIC!

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

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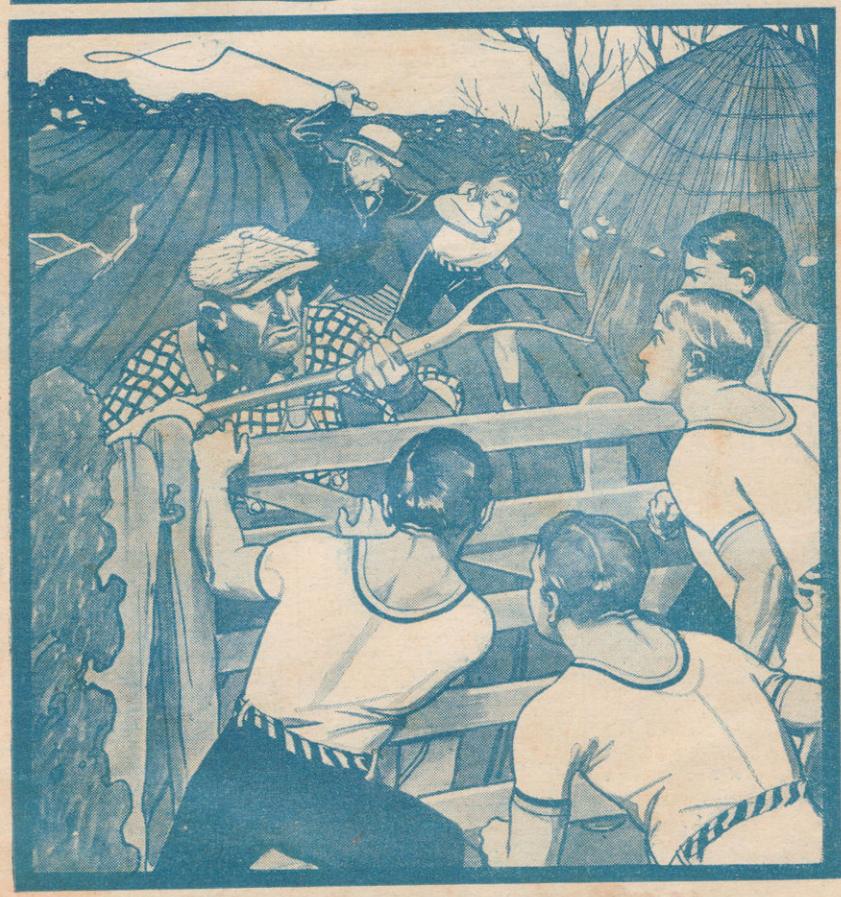


NOT THIS WAY!

FACING THE MUSIC!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Contributions Wanted.

TOM MERRY put his cheerful face in at the doorway of Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

"Gussy here?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the captain of the Shell.

"Good!" said Tom. "Have you written any articles lately for the 'Weekly'?"

"Yaas!"

"Several, I hope?"

Arthur Augustus nodded, looking rather flattered. It was but seldom that the chief editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly" showed such a keen interest in his contributions. As a rule, the editorial comments were not flattering. Gussy was often called upon to cut his articles down by half, and then sometimes the chief editor cut them down by the other half; with the result that they disappeared altogether.

"Good long ones, I hope?" said Tom.

"Yaas; sevewal of them are wathah long," said Arthur Augustus, looking both surprised and pleased. "I twust you have plenty of space this time, Tom Mewwy?"

"Heaps!" said Tom.

"Vewy good! Then you will want to have my wippin' article on economy in silk toppahs in war-time——"

"Certainly!"

"And the article on the war——"

"Yes."

"And the article on the situation in Greece——"

"Yes, rather! Have you any more?"

"Not at pwesent, deah boy, but I shall be vewy pleased to do any numbah if you weally have woom for them."

"Lots of room," said Tom. "The more the merrier."

"Wely on me, deah boy!"

Blake and Herries and Digby, the great Gussy's study-mates in No. 6, had listened to this dialogue in amazement. Blake interrupted it at this point.

"Look here, what are you driving at, you Shell bounder?" he demanded. "You told me there wasn't room for my serial in the 'Weekly,' now that it's cut down to a single page for the period of the war."

"Quite so," agreed Tom.

"And you're leaving out my article on dog-feeding," said Herries warmly.

"Can't be helped."

"And my war-story," said Digby.

"My dear chap, when a paper's cut down to a single page, it means no more than half a column for anybody," explained Tom Merry. "It's one of the sacrifices we have to make in war-time."

"But you said you've got heaps of room for a heap of Gussy's piffle!" exclaimed Blake.

"That's a different matter."

"Why, you ass——"

"Weally, Blake," said Arthur Augustus reprovingly. "Tom Mewwy is quite wight. As the papah is cut down owin' to the papah famine, it is weally a good ideah to fill it with the vewy best stuff obtainable——"

"Fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Blake! Wely on me to well up with my contwibutions, Tom Mewwy."

"Right you are," said Tom. "Bring them along to my study, Gussy."

"You're going to jam all that rot into the 'Weekly'?" roared Blake.

Tom Merry looked surprised.

"Eh? Who's talking about the 'Weekly'?" he inquired.

"You ass! You said you've got lots of room for Gussy's articles——"

"So I have," said Tom. "I wasn't talking about the 'Weekly,' though. I was referring to the bags."

"Bags!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Of course. It's a paper-chase to-morrow afternoon——"

"A—a—a papah-chase——"

"Exactly; and we've got to get two big bags of scent. So roll up with your articles for the 'Weekly'——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake and Herries and Dig.

"And when you've brought them to my study, Gussy, you can sit down and help to tear them up for scent."

Arthur Augustus' face was a study. The chief editor's desire to get a large number of contributions from him was not so very flattering, after all.

"You uttah ass!" he gasped.

"Bring any old newspapers, and things—anything that can be torn up—and don't forget your article on silk toppers, and your other articles——"

"You howlin' ass, I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort," shouted Arthur Augustus. "I was undah the impwession that you wequiahed them for the 'Weekly.'"

"What could have put that idea into your head?" asked Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at, Blake! I wegard Tom Mewwy as a howlin' ass! I considah——"

"Bring 'em to my study," said Tom, and he disappeared with a chuckle.

"I wefuse to bwing them, Tom Mewwy!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "I distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

But Tom Merry was gone.

The captain of the Shell looked into No. 5 next.

"Scent wanted for paper-chase to-morrow, Julian."

"Right-ho!" said Julian.

"I understand you've been doing a poem for the 'Weekly,' Reilly, about banshees, or leprachauns, or something?"

"Faith, and I have," said Reilly. "Kerrigh said there wouldn't be room for it."

"Lots of room," said Tom. "All's grist that comes to the mill, when we want scent for a paper-chase. Bring your poem along. Tear it up first——"

"Ye howlin' cuadhaun!" roared Reilly.

Tom Merry chuckled and went on. A quarter of an hour later there was a numerous party gathered in Tom Merry's study, tearing up paper for "scent." Study No. 6 had come along—though without Gussy's contributions for the "Weekly." Argument was wasted on Gussy; he distinctly refused to devote his brilliant literary efforts to the purposes of a paper-chase. Gore of the Shell had brought a good supply of paper, however—a speech of great length by Skimpole, who was an amateur Socialist, and hoped to deliver that speech some time to an audience in the Hobby Club-room. Skimpole's speech went quite a long way to filling one of the bags.

Figgins & Co. arrived from the New House with a bundle of old newspapers. Levison, Clive, and Cardew came along from No. 9, with a collection of old impots rescued from waste-paper baskets. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had a good supply of rejected contributions which certain ambitious authors were hoping to see in the columns of the "Weekly." The Terrible Three agreed that the manuscripts could not be devoted to a better purpose.

"Who's going to be hare?" asked Cardew of the Fourth, as he ripped up the old newspapers industriously. "I shouldn't mind, if you like."

Tom Merry smiled. Cardew was quite a new fellow, and the junior captain did not know whether he could run or not. In any case, he was not likely to pick out a "new kid" for the distinguished post.

"Bow-wow!" said Figgins. "Better select a couple of New House chaps, Tommy. You see, we want it to be a good run."

"One of each," said Tom Merry, laughing. "You, Figgy——"

"Oh, good!"

"And Blake."

"Couldn't be better," agreed Jack Blake heartily.

"Bai Jove! That means wathah a short wun," remarked Arthur Augustus. "I feah you will not have vewy much chance, Blake. What are you glawin' at, deah boy?"

"I'm glaring at a howling idiot!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove! That is wathah an uncomplimentawy way of alludin' to Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"You—you jabberwock!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Blake and Figgy will give us a good run," remarked Levison. "It's a good idea, now it will get us into form for the Rookwood match on Saturday. Where is it going to be?"

"Along the river to the wood, round by the old castle, then across the fields to Wayland Moor, and back by Rylcombe," said Tom. "That's a good run. There will be a good many lame ducks at the finish, I expect."

"Probably the hares will be caught before the run has gone vewy fah, Tom Mewwy," remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Probably you're a silly ass!" snapped Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, there's the bags," said Tom Merry. "Full up, thank goodness! I could still squeeze in your 'Weekly' articles, if you like, Gussy——"

"Wats!"

"Pity to waste them," urged Monty Lowther. "Remember war economy."

"As a matter of fact, Lowthah, it would be a vewy good ideah to use up your Comic Column, instead of puttin' it in the 'Weekly,'" said Arthur Augustus. "Then the hares could

wefwesh themselves with chestnuts on the woad!"

And with that Parthian shot Arthur Augustus retired in triumph from the study.

CHAPTER 2.
Hare and Hounds!

"RIPPING weather!" said Levison.

"Yaas, wathah! Toppin'!"

It was a keen, bright, frosty afternoon—ideal weather for a run across country. The juniors of St. Jim's turned out in great force in the quadrangle for the run.

Quite a hundred fellows were going to start at least, though it was pretty certain that the number would be considerably reduced before the chase was half over.

In spite of D'Arcy's doubts, the two fellows selected for hares were certain to give the pack a stern chase, and the run was a long one, crossing difficult country in some places.

Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three turned up first. Then came Kangaroo, Dane, and Glyn, and Julian, Kerruish, Reilly, and Hammond. Levison, Clive, and Cardew joined them. Figgins & Co., from the New House, came along, with Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence. Talbot of the Shell turned up with Gore and Skimpole, his study-mates. Skimpole having been urged to join by Talbot.

More fellows of the Fourth and the Shell crowded up, mostly in running costume. Wally of the Third came with Levison minor, Reggie Manners, Joe Frayne, and a crowd of others. There was an army of the Second; and some of the Fifth Form joined up.

Conspicuous among the juniors towered the broad shoulders of George Alfred Grundy of the Shell, who confided to Wilkins and Gunn that it wouldn't be much of a run, because he—George Alfred—fully intended to run the hares down at the end of the third or fourth field. Whether Grundy would carry out that simple programme remained to be seen, however.

"Three minues' start, Blake," said Tom Merry, who, as whipper-in of the pack, carried a bugle.

"Right-ho!" said Blake cheerily. "Ready, Figgins?"

"Waiting for you," said Figgins politely. "Put your best foot foremost, old scout! I don't want to get home alone!"

"You New House ass!" roared Blake.

"You School House fathead!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "Now, then, Darrel's going to start us. Ready, Darrel!"

Darrel of the Sixth nodded, with a smile, and took out his watch.

"Cut!" he said to the hares.

Blake and Figgins passed out of the gates. They gave one another a glare as they started. It was certain that there would be keen competition between the hares not to be left behind, for the honour of their respective Houses. The pack waited impatiently for the signal to follow.

Grundy of the Shell tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Better hand me the bugle," he remarked.

"Eh? Why?"

"Well, as I shall be in the lead all the time——"

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry politely.

"Look here, Merry, don't be an ass, you know——"

"Pway dwy up, Gwundy! You are a widiculous duffah!"

Grundy snorted, and dried up, as Darrel gave him a warning look. Grundy had been in two minds whether to mop up Tom Merry and D'Arcy before the run started, but the prefect's look caused him to decide against doing this. Which was, perhaps, fortunate for Grundy of the Shell.

"You can start!" said the Sixth-Former, at last.

"Tally-ho! Right away!"

And the pack started.

They came out of the gates with a rush. The hares had disappeared, but the trail of torn paper lay clear on the frosty road.

From the road it turned across the fields to the river, and then by the towing-path along to Rylcombe Wood.

The hares were running well, and were out of sight. The pack kept up a steady trot; but the diminutive heroes of the Second were already trailing off behind.

By the time the wood was reached most of the Third had followed their example, but D'Arcy minor & Co. still kept on the run. Wally was determined to show the juniors what the Third could do.

In the wood the paper trail wound among frozen underbrush, following a wild and zigzag course, the hares kindly giving the pack all the trouble they possibly could.

Through the wood, however, the hounds went in gallant style, and out upon the Wayland road, and up the hill to the old ruins of the castle. Then Tom Merry's bugle rang out a clear note.

On the old masses of masonry that crowned the rise two figures could be seen—those of Blake and Figgins. The hares were taking a rest there, in full view of the pack as they came sweeping up the road.

Blake stood up and kissed his hand to the distant pack ere he plunged in among the ruins and disappeared, followed by Figgins.

"Bai Jove! The cheekay ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Put it on!" said Herries. "Hallo, Grundy! Have you got bellows to mend?"

"Looks like it!" grinned Digby.

Grundy of the Shell gave them a glare. As a matter of fact, the Great George Alfred was getting winded. He slowed down.

"Dear me, I think I shall give it up now, Talbot!" gasped Skimpole, grabbing at his spectacles as they slid down his perspiring nose.

"Oh, stick it out, Skimmy!"

"Upon the whole, Talbot, I regard it as more judicious to partake of a brief respite," said Skimmy. "Perhaps you would care to relinquish this somewhat frivolous amusement, and remain with me. I will read aloud the latest chapters of my book on Socialism. I should really be gratified to hear your unbiassed opinion. My dear Talbot, are my remarks inaudible to you?"

Whether Skimmy's long-winded remarks were audible or not, Talbot did not turn his head. Perhaps, like the Dying Gladiator of old, he heard but heeded not. He ran lightly on, and Skimpole drifted to a fence by the road-side and sat on it.

"Buck up, Skimmay!" called out Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"My dear D'Arcy, upon reflection I have arrived at the decision to—— Dear me, he is gone!"

And Skimpole was left to the delights of his book on Socialism, while the pack streamed on to the old castle.

The rise of the hill thinned down the pack, and Wally & Co., though still sticking it, were hopelessly in the rear. George Alfred Grundy stopped before the ruins were reached.

"Chucking it?" asked Wilkins, looking back.

"Certainly not!" said Grundy. "I'm going a bit slower for a bit, that's all. You fellows go slow, too. It's really wiser in the long run. It saves you up for the finish, you know."

"Look here, I don't want to be left out!" said Gunn.

"Don't be an ass, Gunn! You need a breather more than I do!"

"I jolly well don't!" said Gunn warmly. "Why, you're pumped, and I'm not not!"

Grundy glared.

"As I'm a better runner than you, Gunn——"

"What?"

"It stands to reason that you need a rest more than I do. I'm not going to have you pumping yourself out from sheer swank! Chuck it for a bit!"

And Grundy caught Gunn by the collar, and Gunn had to stop. If Grundy had not been a tremendously powerful fellow, he would certainly have received the licking of his life at that moment. As it was, William Cuthbert Gunn gave him looks that would have done credit to a Prussian Hun. Grundy & Co. proceeded at a walk after that, and although George Alfred declared that it was wiser to save themselves for the finish, at least two members of the Co. were aware that they would not see the finish.

There were not more than twenty fellows with Tom Merry as the captain of the Shell came into the ruins.

The hares had long gone, but the trail of torn paper led on their track. Avoiding the town, they were cutting through the fields towards the moor.

The pack came swooping downhill on the trail. Tom Merry came to a sudden halt on the bank of the stream flowing through the meadows. On the other side fragments of the paper were fluttering in the rushes.

"They jumped this!" gasped Tom.

"Bai Jove! And we're goin' to jump it, too!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather!"

"About twelve feet," said Monty Lowther, eyeing the stream. "Come back and get a start."

"Not more than nine, ass!" said Kerr of the Fourth.

"I dare say it will seem like twelve in getting across," grinned Tom Merry. "There's a plank bridge about a quarter of a mile up, for anybody who wants it."

"Oh, wats!"

Some of the pack, however, were already dashing up the banks for an easier crossing.

Tom Merry & Co. walked back for a start, to jump it. Arthur Augustus took the lead, with the kind intention of showing the other fellows how easy it was.

"Keep your eyes on me, you fellows!" he called out.

"Better go along to the bridge, Gussy——"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"You can't jump it, you know!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus led off with a terrific dash, and sprang away over the stream that flowed deep down between heavy, clayey banks. He rose finely to the jump, and cleared the stream—just to the mud-bank on the other side. There his feet slid down through the mud, and there was a terrific splash as the swell of St. Jim's landed on his back in the water.

Splash!

And a yell burst from the whole pack.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 3.
A Hard Run!

"GWOOOGH! Yoooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus rose from the shallow stream, scrambling on to the muddy bank. He was barely recognisable.

Mud was plastered on his natty running clothes, mud spattered his aristocratic features, and water streamed out of his hair.

"Gurrrrrg!" was his remark, as he dragged himself out.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gewwoooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Clive. "We're keeping our eyes on you, Gussy. Is that how we're to do it?"

"Gwoogh!"

Tom Merry cleared the stream with a fine jump, and took up the trail again. After him came Kangaroo, who jumped with the activity of the animal from which he derived his nickname. Redfern was the next, and he cleared the stream. Clive followed in great style, and then Kerr, and then Cardew of the Fourth. But the rest of the hounds decided on expending the time necessary to reach the bridge. Cardew looked back. Talbot of the Shell cleared the jump like a deer.

"You're coming, Levison?" called out Cardew.

Levison hesitated.

"It's a bit too hefty for me," he called back.

"Oh, come on! Don't be a slacker!"

Levison frowned. He hesitated a moment, and then retired for a run, and made the jump. He just landed, and Cardew's grip caught him and saved him from falling back.

"Right as rain!" said Cardew. "Come on! Our study's got to be in at the finish."

Levison nodded and ran on.

Tom Merry was still in the lead, with Kangaroo and Clive close up. Redfern, Talbot, and Kerr came next, then Cardew and Levison. The numerous pack that had started out from St. Jim's was reduced to eight. A crowd of other fellows were coming on, but they had little chance of getting anywhere near the hares again. Arthur Augustus was on the right side of the stream, but he was too busy scraping off mud to think about running.

Eight fellows kept on steadily by a muddy footpath, where wet clay clogged their steps. Levison was keeping up well. His powers would have astonished the fellows who had known him as a slacker only a term before. But he was trailing off at last.

"Put it on, old scout!" urged Cardew. "Clive's keeping it up. No. 9 Study's not going to be beaten."

"I'm done!" said Levison. "I can't keep the pace to-day."

And he dropped behind. He had done well. But only the stoutest runners in the Lower School were likely to be anywhere near the finish. The pace was hot now, as the run grew older. Talbot of the Shell came to grief in clearing a stile, and hopped on with a bruised ankle. Tom Merry paused for a moment.

"Hurt, old chap?"

Talbot smiled cheerfully.

"Only a knock. But I'm afraid it puts me out. Keep on, Tom!"

Tom Merry nodded and ran on. In a cross-country run there was no stopping for lame ducks. Talbot dropped into a walk and joined Levison. Clive was the next to go, a tumble into a ditch putting him out of action.

Tom Merry sighted the hares once more, on a knoll far ahead, and he blew on his bugle.

But there were few now to answer the call.

The leaders of the pack were reduced to five, and the rest were so far behind that they were almost out of the running. Tom Merry, Kangaroo, Kerr, Redfern, and Cardew were the leaders. Tom glanced rather curiously at Cardew. He had not expected to see the new junior keeping it up like this. Cardew caught his eyes, and laughed.

"Study No. 9 won't be left out!" he said.

"I hope not," said Tom cheerily.

"Looks like a catch now," panted Redfern. "They're only just behind the knoll. It's a straight run up the lane, unless they take to the fields again, and that means trouble with old Grubb."

"Our win!" said Kangaroo breathlessly.

Five fleet runners went up the lane in great style, with a high wall on one side, and a wooden fence on the other. The fence bordered Mr. Grubb's farm, and Mr. Grubb was not a gentleman whose land could be intruded upon with impunity. Mr. Grubb had been known to keep fox-hunters at bay on his frontier, and as for a schoolboy paper-chase, he would have turned purple at the thought of it. Ahead of the diminished pack, the two hares were seen in the lane, running hard. It was sight now instead of scent, and Blake and Figgins were being gained upon.

They looked back as Tom Merry's bugle sounded again.

"Caught before the Moor!" chuckled Kangaroo. "They can't stick it out. Hooray for us!"

"They're dodging!" shouted Kerr.

The two hares had clambered over a low gate and plunged into Mr. Grubb's fields. It was their only chance, for the lane ran uphill, and a break away across the fields to the left gave them a chance on the level. The pack swooped breathlessly up to the gate, and halted there.

"Come on!" said Cardew. "What are you stopping for?"

"That's Grubb's farm," said Tom Merry. "If he's out——"

"There he is, by gum!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

The two hares were vanishing across the field. From a distant farmhouse a burly gentleman had emerged, with a purple face, and a big cart-whip in his hand. He glared at the hares, and then glared at the pack by the gate. He had no chance of getting near Blake and Figgins, who were already almost across the field. He came striding down to the gate.

"What rotten luck!" muttered Kerr. "We shall have to go round, and that means a quarter of an hour lost."

"Haven't we got to follow the trail, according to the rules?" asked Cardew.

"Yes, unless it's impossible."

"We're not goin' to be beaten. Come on!"

Cardew clambered over the gate.

Tom Merry knitted his brows. He was the leader of the pack, and he did not care to have his leadership taken out of his hands by a new fellow in this manner.

"Come back, Cardew!" he rapped out.

"You can't get past him."

"I'm goin' on!"

"Silly fool!" commented Kangaroo.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on. There was no chance whatever of getting past the burly farmer, and it was a waste of time to try. Cardew was running hard, but the angry Mr. Grubb cut across his path.

"Stop!" he roared.

Cardew had to stop. He eyed the farmer savagely.

"Pete!" yelled Mr. Grubb.

"'Ere you are, sir!"

A seedy-looking man came up, with a sulky face, and a pitchfork in his hands. He did not look much like a farm labourer, and was evidently a tramp to whom Mr. Grubb, in the scarcity of labour owing to the war, had given a job.

"See that them young rips don't get over the gate, Pete!" roared Mr. Grubb.

Pete came up to the gate, with an unpleasant leer on his beery face, and stared at the juniors across the gate, keeping his pitchfork well to the fore.

"You keep out!" he said.

"Anything to oblige, dear boy!" said Kangaroo politely.

Mr. Grubb had seized Cardew by the shoulder. Cardew promptly kicked his shins, and endeavoured to break away. Mr. Grubb gave a roar of pain. Cardew did not get loose. The big farmer twisted him over, held him fast, and lashed him with the whip. Cardew's yells rang across the field.

Lash! lash! lash! lash!

The juniors made a movement to go to the rescue, but Peter's pitchfork was thrust fairly into their faces, and they had to jump back.

"No, you don't!" grinned Peter.

"Keep them out, Peter!" roared Mr. Grubb, while he laid on the cart-whip. "There, you young 'ound, that'll teach you to kick a man's shins! Now, get off my land!"

He picked up Cardew bodily in his arms and slung him over the gate. The new junior sprawled in the road.

Mr. Grubb grinned at Tom Merry & Co. over the gate.

"You ain't coming across 'ere!" he said.

CHAPTER 4.
Straight from the Shoulder.

"N. G.!" said Tom Merry curtly.

"Come on, and let's get round!"

Cardew staggered up. His face was aflame with rage.

"Why didn't you back me up?" he shouted.

"We couldn't," said Tom quietly. "And we shouldn't, either. You shouldn't have gone on the land. I called you."

"You rotten funk!"

Tom clenched his hands, and stepped towards Cardew. Time had been wasted already by Cardew's folly, and this was a little too much. But Kerr tapped the captain of the Shell on the arm.

"No time for scrapping now. Let's get along."

Tom nodded, and unclenched his hands.

"Right you are, Kerr! Come on!"

Cardew was groping along the roadside. Mr. Grubb had turned back from the gate, grinning. Cardew rose, with a large, jagged stone in his hand and a savage gleam in his eyes. As he stepped towards the gate, Tom Merry ran in his path. He had seen the action.

"What are you going to do with that stone?" he demanded.

"Can't you see, you fool?"

"You're not going to throw it at Grubb, if that's what you mean, you spiteful, cowardly hound!" exclaimed Tom savagely.

"Let me pass!"

"Put that stone down!"

"I won't, confound you!"

"Then I'll jolly soon make you!" growled Tom, and he sprang at Cardew.

His anger was at white-heat now. The hurling of that jagged stone might have caused serious injury, and serious results to Cardew himself; but Ralph Reckness Cardew was in too great a rage to think of that. Tom thought of it, however.

He gripped Cardew's arm, and twisted it till he dropped the stone. Cardew,

with a howl of rage, drove his left fist full into the face of the Shell fellow.

Tom Merry staggered for a moment.

The next, he was upon the furious junior, hitting out.

His right caught Cardew in the eye, his left on the chin, and the Fourth-Former went down in the mud like a felled ox.

"Come on, Tom!" shouted Kerr.

Mr. Grubb had seen the incident of the stone, and he was coming over the gate, whip in hand, evidently to give Cardew some more.

"Come on, you fool!" muttered Tom, dragging the dazed Fourth-Former to his feet.

Cardew shook his hand off savagely.

Tom Merry ran on, and Cardew followed, just in time to escape the lash of Mr. Grubb's big whip.

Mr. Grubb was soon left behind, but Cardew was in no condition now for keeping up a hard run. He dropped behind the rest, and was soon out of sight.

On the further side of Mr. Grubb's land the hounds picked up the trail again, but Cardew was nowhere to be seen. Four juniors now were keeping up the chase, and it led them away across a corner of Wayland Moor, the hares now heading for home.

"Ta-ra-ra-ra!"

Blake and Figgins were in sight again, running well; but the remnant of the pack were gaining once more. But the hares reached Rylcombe Lane, and headed for the school, still well ahead.

The last lap was keen and hard. Redfern was left behind, but the three hounds drew closer and closer to the panting hares. St. Jim's was in sight, when Tom Merry's grasp closed on Blake's shoulder from behind.

"Caught!"

Blake slowed down, panting and streaming with perspiration.

"Bow-wow!" he grunted. "Never mind; it was a near thing! Lam it on, Figgy!"

Figgins was still lamming it on. Jack Blake, caught and vanquished, sauntered on behind with Redfern, while Tom Merry, Kerr, and Kangaroo rushed on after Figgins, right up to the gates of St. Jim's.

There was a crowd of juniors at the gates, and they cheered the surviving hare as he came panting on.

"Go it, Figgins!" roared Fatty Wynn. "Only another dozen yards! Buck up!"

"Go it, New House!"

Tom Merry had paused only a moment over Blake, but it was enough to leave him behind in the final spurt. Kangaroo and Kerr were ahead of him, and close behind Figgins.

Figgins was running as if for his life.

The crowd at the school gates watched the exciting finish breathlessly. The school gates were "home," and Figgins was very near.

"Bai Jove! Figgy will do it!" said Arthur Augustus. Arthur Augustus had walked home after his plunge, a change of clothes seeming to him the supreme necessity of the moment, and he was now as neat as a new pin—in all his glory, so to speak—at the gates. "Go it, Figgy, dear boy! Make room for him, you chaps!"

Kerr forged ahead of his comrade.

As Figgins came dashing up to the gates, Kerr's outstretched hand dropped on his shoulder from behind.

One final leap would have done it, but Figgins had no energy left for the final leap. He was caught.

"Bai Jove! Hard cheese!"

"Well done, Kerr!"

Figgins staggered breathlessly in the gateway, and looked round to see who his captor was. His Scottish chum grinned at him.

"Sorry old scout! All in the game!" Figgins grinned, too.

"All serene, fathead!"

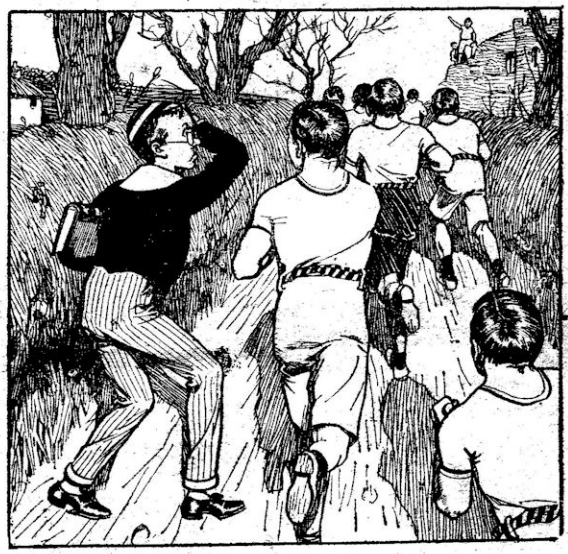
And Figgins leaned on the gate and pumped in breath.

"The pack wins!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think I wemarked to you, Tom Mewwy, that the hares would be capchahed, you know."

"You didn't capture them!" grunted Figgins.

"That is not the point, deah boy. I don't want to wemark that I told you so, Tom Mewwy, but if I had wun as hare it would not have ended like this," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

"No fear!" said Tom.



Skimmy Turns Aside.
(See Chapter 2.)

"You agwee with me, deah boy?"

"Yes, rather! It would have ended in the second field," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, you uttah ass——"

"Jolly near thing, though, Figgy," said Tom. "Well done, old scout!"

"Cardew's not with you?" asked Levison. He had rather expected Cardew to turn up at the finish.

"No," said Tom shortly.

"Where did you drop him?"

"Near Grubb's farm."

"With a dot on the nose," grinned Kangaroo.

"Oh!" said Levison.

Tom Merry & Co. went in to get a badly-needed rub down. But after a change in the dormitory, they came down fresh enough, even after that tough run. In twos and threes the belated members of the pack came streaming in now, muddy and tired, and in some cases cross; but they cheered up on hearing that the hares had been caught. Manners and Lowther were already in, and changed, and Tom Merry found tea ready for him in Study No. 10.

"See the conquering hero comes!" said Monty Lowther, as he came into the study. "What's this I hear about Cardew, Tommy? Did oo loose oo's ickle temper, then, and dot Cardew on the nose?"

Tom Merry frowned.

"I can't stand that chap!" he grunted.

"Same here, and many of them!" said Manners, with a grin. "He's got his good points, though. Plenty of pluck."

"Yes, I know that; but—br-r-r-r!" said Tom. "Shove the war bread this way, and the peace rashers! I'm hungry!"

"But what did you punch his nose for?"

Tom Merry explained, with his mouth full.

"Well, he asked for it, and no mistake," commented Lowther. "What a rotten trick—bunging a stone at a man's napper! Old Grubb's rather a Hun, but that's outside the limit, quite."

"I should jolly well think so," growled Tom. "If there's trouble when Cardew comes in, I sha'n't be sorry to step into the gym with him and give him a thumping good hiding."

But there was no trouble when Cardew came in. He did not visit Tom Merry's study, and the Terrible Three saw no more of him that evening.

CHAPTER 5.
A Reckless Expedition.

LEVISON and Clive were working at their prep in Study No. 9 when Cardew came in. Cardew had not been there to tea, and he had arrived at the School House only just in time for call-over. The new junior's handsome face was dark as he came into the study.

"Had your tea?" asked Levison, looking up.

"Yes. I went into Wayland, and had it at the bunshop," said Cardew. "I didn't get in at the finish, after all."

"Better luck next time," said Clive.

Both the juniors in No. 9 had heard of Cardew's trouble with Tom Merry at Mr. Grubb's gate, but they did not allude to it. There was a very visible mark on Cardew's nose, reminiscent of Tom Merry's knuckles. But the new junior did not avoid the subject.

"I suppose you've heard there was a row?" he asked.

"Yes. I heard Kangaroo talking," said Levison. "He was there."

"I don't mean about Tom Merry." Cardew's eyes glittered for a moment. "He punched my nose; but I punched his first, so we can call that square. I'm not worrying about that."

"No good keeping it up," agreed Levison. "Better get on with your prep, hadn't you? Feeling fagged?"

"Not at all. A cigarette or two doesn't knock me out for a run."

"I run better since I gave them up," said Levison quietly.

"Perhaps I shall turn over a new leaf some day, and become more worthy of the high moral atmosphere of this study. I don't smoke in here, so you needn't worry."

"I don't," said Levison coolly. "It's no business of mine, and I'm not going to give you advice. I know how I received good advice when I was a silly ass!"

Clive chuckled over his work, and Cardew frowned.

"Oh, hang all that!" said Cardew. "If you know what happened, you know that I'm not going to let the matter drop."

"But you just said——"

"I don't mean about Tom Merry. He can wait."

"Oh, only wait!" said Levison.

"Yes. I haven't forgotten what he did; but he can wait. I'm not worrying about him now, hang him! It's about Grubb."

"What did Grubb do? I understand that you had some trouble with him," said Levison.

"He laid into me with a cart-whip."

"Phew! That was rather thick!"

"A little too thick for me," said Cardew, between his teeth. "I'm not going to take it lyin' down. I'm goin' for the rotter!"

"Blessed if I see how you will manage that!" said Levison, with a stare. "You can't lick him, I suppose?"

"I'm goin' out to-night——"

"To-night!" echoed Clive, looking up.

"Yes, to Grubb's Farm."

"And what are you going to do there?" demanded Levison.

"I'm goin' to make him sit up! I'd like to lay a cricket-bat about him," said Cardew savagely. "I can't do that. But a big stone through his bed-room window about midnight will make him sit up a little, I fancy!"

"Why, you silly ass!" ejaculated Clive.

"And the Head would make you sit up afterwards, I fancy, when Grubby came along and complained," grinned Levison.

"Grubb won't know. He'll know that a rock comes through his window, and I hope that it may drop on his napper. Anyway, it will give him a jump. He won't know who did it. I sha'n't leave my visitin'-card. Are you fellows goin' to help me?"

"I'm not going to help you," said Clive coldly. "If you want my opinion, it's a rotten hooligan trick you're thinking of, and you'd better chuck the idea!"

Cardew sneered.

"If that means that you funk it——"

"It doesn't; it means that I'm not a hooligan," said Clive contemptuously. "Better not jaw to me, Cardew! I've asked you into the gym once, and you didn't get the best of it. Better let me alone."

And the South African junior returned to his work, and did not speak again.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders, and looked at Levison.

"You'll back me up?" he asked.

"Better let it drop," said Levison.

"That means that you won't come?"

"No, I won't come. I don't like the idea. Grubb's a bit of a Hun, but you might scare him into a fit with such a trick."

"All the better! Hang him!"

"Oh, rot!" said Levison.

He set to work; and Cardew, with a growl, followed his example. Nothing more was said in the study until prep was finished, and Sidney Clive went downstairs. Then Cardew called to Levison as he was about to follow.

"Just a word, Levison!"

"Go ahead," said Levison, turning back.

"You won't come with me?"

"No."

"I'm goin' all the same. You'll help me get out, at least, an' help me in again? You know I'd do as much for you."

Levison hesitated. The harebrained scheme might have appealed to him in his old wild days, but it did not appeal to him now.

"I'm goin', in any case," said Cardew between his teeth. "Do you think I'm goin' to be thrashed like a dog, an' take it lyin' down?"

"I heard that you kicked the old fellow's shins."

"Well, he had me by the neck. Look here, I'm goin'! Will you come out, and give me a hand over the wall? It'll make it less risky."

"I—I suppose I could do that," said Levison slowly. "I wish you'd give up the idea, though."

"Then I'll call you when I'm goin'," said Cardew, unheeding the latter part of Levison's remark. "Mum's the word! The less said about it the better. It may mean a row, if there's any jaw."

Levison nodded, and left the study. He was not feeling comfortable in his mind. The one-time black sheep of the School House had chummed with the new junior, and there were some things about Ralph Reckness Cardew that he liked. But it was being borne in upon Levison's mind that, unless he slid back into his old ways, Cardew's friendship was likely to be a thorn in his side. Levison was not of a very forgiving nature, but the rancour in Cardew's breast startled him. Yet he did not feel that he could refuse the aid Cardew asked of him. If the reckless fellow was determined to go, at least it was better for him to go in safety, or so it seemed to Levison.

Cardew was very quiet when the Fourth Form went to their dormitory. Some of the Fourth-Formers regarded him rather curiously. Cardew's passionate temper was well known, and it had been expected that he would ask Tom Merry into the gym that evening. It was not like Cardew to forget an injury, deserved or undeserved. Cardew had not forgotten, by any means; but Tom Merry, as he said in the study, could wait.

Kildare saw lights out for the Fourth, and the juniors settled down to sleep; but there was one who did not close his eyes.

Cardew was still awake when eleven o'clock sounded faintly through the night. The big, dusky dormitory was very silent.

Cardew slipped softly from his bed, and bent over Levison.

"Awake?"

There was no reply, and he shook the sleeping junior by the shoulder. Levison's eyes opened.

"Time!" said Cardew in a whisper.

"Get up!"

Levison gave an angry grunt.

"Better chuck it, Cardew!"

"Are you going to help me?"

"Oh, yes!"

Levison rose and the two juniors dressed quietly in the darkness. Levison was in a somewhat savage humour. There was always a possibility that absent fellows might be missed and Levison's old reputation would have stood him in ill stead if he had been discovered breaking bounds at night. But he had given Cardew his word, and Levison was a fellow of his word whatever he had once been.

They left the dormitory without a sound. Levison led the way to the lower box-room at the back of the house, a way that was familiar to him from of old. He seemed to know his way in the dark, like a cat. From the box-room window they reached the leads outside, and thence dropped to the ground. A few minutes later they were under the shadow of the trees by the wall.

"You're going to wait for me, Levison?"

"I suppose so," grunted Levison. "You couldn't get in without me. If you'd any sense, you'd chuck it, and go back to bed. I'm a fool to be here at all!"

"I'd do as much for you."

"I don't want you to do anything of the sort for me!" snapped Levison. "But enough jaw. Here you are!"

He helped Cardew up the wall.

"I'll whistle when I get back," whispered Cardew.

"All right."

The reckless junior dropped into the road. Levison heard soft footfalls for a moment or two, and then there was silence.

Levison waited within the wall.

He knew that he had more than an hour's vigil before him, at best, and he moved to and fro to keep himself warm. He could have kicked himself for being there at all.

Cardew had no right to ask such a service of him. He had said truly that he would do as much for Levison; but Levison was never likely to want him to do it. It was bitterly cold, and a keen wind sougfed in the branches of the old elms. Levison's face was dark and grim as he paced unrestingly to and fro. Midnight tolled out in muffled tones at last.

Midnight! Suppose some suspicious master or prefect should look into the Fourth-Form dormitory? Two empty beds would be discovered—and Levison knew what that would mean for him! Would Mr. Railton—would the Head believe that he had stolen out at such an hour simply to help in a hare-brained prank? They knew too much of his old ways. His reform had come only just in time to save him from being expelled from St. Jim's, and Levison knew it. If discovery came now, it might well mean that his uphill struggle to better ways would all go for nothing—that the severest punishment would fall upon him—undeserved in this instance, though he had deserved it often enough when it had not come.

The minutes dragged by on leaden wings. Where was Cardew all this time?

One!

Levison had waited two hours. His teeth were chattering with cold. What a fool he had been! His heart gave a sudden leap as he heard a soft whistle outside the wall.

He clambered up between the wall and the slanting oak, and looked down into the road. A dim figure was visible there.

"Is that you?"

"Yes. Help me in."

Levison bent down from the wall, seized Cardew's extended hand, and gave him help up the wall. Cardew scrambled up. They dropped on the inner side of the wall.

"You've been——" began Levison.

"Yes." Cardew's voice was husky. "Let's get in!"

"What have you done?"

"Nothing. Come on!"

"Were you spotted?"

"Spotted!" Cardew gave a low laugh. "Of—of course not! Why should I be? Let's get in, and don't jaw."

They scudded away in the darkness to the House. Ten minutes later they were in bed in the sleeping dormitory. Levison's eyes closed, and they did not reopen till the rising-bell clanged out in the frosty morning. Cardew had not slept so well.

Levison gave his study-mate a sharp look when he turned out in the morning. Ralph Cardew's eyes were heavy from loss of sleep, and Levison was feeling seedy. He did not speak, however, till they were out of the dormitory.

"What happened last night, Cardew?" he asked, as they went into the quadrangle.

"Nothing."

"You mean you chucked it up, after all?"

"I mean that the less jaw there is about it the better," said Cardew coolly. "No damage done, so you needn't worry. Don't ask me any questions, and I won't tell you any lies!"

"I was a fool to help you!" muttered Levison angrily.

Cardew nodded.

"You were; and I was a fool to go. Let it go at that!"

And Levison asked no more questions.

CHAPTER 6.

A Surprise for Tom Merry.

"HOW much?"

Manners and Lowther asked that question simultaneously.

Tom Merry was standing in the hall with a letter in his hand on Friday afternoon. The arrival of the letter had caused general satisfaction among the Terrible Three. Funds were low. And in the case of the chums of the Shell, a remittance for one was a remittance for three.

Tom Merry did not reply to the question.

He was staring blankly at the letter he had unfolded.

"Ten bobber?" asked Lowther. "Might have made it a quid, whoever it was. But ten bob is ten bob, in these hard times."

"Say it's a quid!" urged Manners. I must have some new films. I haven't been able to use my camera for days."

"Blow your old camera!" said Lowther warmly. "We're not going to waste hard cash on films! We'll go to the cinema——"

"Blow the cinema!" said Manners.

"Can't you speak, image?" demanded Lowther. "How much?"

"It isn't a remittance," said Tom Merry.

There was a groan from Manners and Lowther.

"Oh, rotten!"

"Let's bump him for raising our hopes and then dashing them," said Monty Lowther. "What does the silly ass mean by having a letter without a remittance in it? Collar him!"

"That's only fair," agreed Manners.

Tom Merry's brows were knitted.

"Don't play the giddy ox!" he said. "This is jolly queer. I suppose one of you duffers hasn't sent me this letter for a fatheaded joke?"

"Not guilty, my lord!" said Lowther. "What the dickens is in the letter, then?"

"Read it!" said Tom.

Manners and Lowther read the letter together, and blinked over it. It was a surprising letter. It was written in a cramped hand upon cheap, dirty paper, and it ran:

"Dear Master Merry,—Thank you for the ten shillings. I shall be obliged if you will send a Pownd to the same address to reach me to-morrow morning.—Yours truely,

P. S."

Manners and Lowther stared at their chum, and he stared at them.

"Is it a Chinese puzzle?" asked Manners.

"Tommy"—Monty Lowther wagged a reproachful forefinger at the captain of the Shell—"you know the whole study's stony, and you go and send ten shillings to this critter, whoever he is! How could you?"

"But I haven't!" exclaimed Tom.

"You haven't!"

"No."

"But he thanks you for it!"

"That's what beats me! I haven't sent anybody ten shillings that I know of," said Tom, in bewilderment. "And I don't even know who 'P. S.' is, and, what's more, I don't know where his address is. I don't know anything about him!"

"My hat!"

"P. S." said Manners. "That stands for postscript; only it can't in this case. It's the johnny's initials."

"But who is it, then?" asked Lowther.

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom.

"Some hard-up merchant who's asked you for money, and you've sent it and forgotten all about it!"

"I tell you I haven't! I've been nearly stony for days, same as you chaps. And I don't have so many ten-bobbers that I can give one away without missing it. I tell you I've not sent money to anybody."

"Then 'P. S.' must be a practical joker," said Lowther. "Bless his practical jokes! What are we going to do for tea?"

"It's awfully queer," said Tom, eyeing the curious letter. "It must be for me. There is my name on it. And there's my name on the envelope right enough—Master Tom Merry, St. James' School, Rylcombe. No mistake about that. If it isn't a silly joke, I can't make it out."

"Well, it must be!"

"But where does the joke come in, then? I can't see it, for one."

"Some jokes are too deep to be seen," grinned Lowther. "This may be one of them. Might be a New House bounder."

"Well, it beats me!" said Tom. "I've never seen the writing before. Hallo, Reddy, do you know anything about this?"

Redfern was crossing to the tuckshop from the New House, and he stopped as Tom Merry called.

"What's the rumpus?" he asked.

"Look at that! Is it a New House joke?" asked Tom.

The New House junior stared at the letter.

"No fear!" he said promptly. "That's School House spelling!"

"Why, you cheeky ass——"

Redfern dodged into the tuckshop in time, with a chuckle.

"Must be a silly joke," said Manners. "Tear it up, and let the merry letter-writer go and eat coke!"

Tom Merry tore up the mysterious missive into a dozen pieces, and threw the fragments into the fountain. The letter puzzled him utterly; but he could only conclude that it was sent to him as a joke, though where the joke came in was a deep mystery.

Redfern came out of the tuckshop with a big parcel. The Terrible Three eyed him in a warlike way. As the two Houses of St. Jim's were at war, raiding the enemy's supplies was quite permitted—and the Shell fellows had no tea in the study. But Redfern held up his hand.

"Pax, you Shell-fish——"

Monty Lowther shook his head decidedly.

"My dear chap, we don't take any notice of peace offers from the enemy," he explained. "We don't want a German peace. Collar him!"

"Hold on, fathead! I was going to ask you to tea!"

"Friend of my youth!" said Lowther affectionately. "That alters the case. Did a little bird whisper that we were stony?"

Redfern laughed.

"No; I heard a silly cuckoo warbling it as I came by—a cuckoo by the name of Lowther!"

"You cheeky chump——"

"Pax!" said Tom Merry. "Reddy, old son, you're my long-lost brother! Lead on, Macduff!"

Redfern grinned, and led the way to his study in the New House, where Lawrence and Owen had the kettle boiling and the table laid. They greeted the Terrible Three cheerily.

"What about Cardew?" asked Owen.

Redfern looked rather dubiously at the Terrible Three.

"I was going to ask Cardew," he said; "but——"

"Ahem! Don't mind us," said Tom. "I'll leave him over for another time," said Redfern. "I suppose you don't want tea with him after punching his nose on Wednesday? That's all right; Cardew will keep. I'm sorry he cut up the way he did at the paper-chase. He isn't really a bad sort in his way!"

"I know," said Tom cheerily. "He's got his good points; but slinging a big stone at a man's head is rather too thick for St. Jim's!"

Redfern nodded.

"I haven't forgotten what he did last week, though," he said. "You remember how I sooted Ratty in the dark, and he collared Cardew for it. The Head told Cardew plainly that if he hadn't been a new boy, he would have sacked him for it. That means that if Cardew had told on me I should have been sacked, and I should have lost my scholarship!"

"Well, he would have been a beast to sneak to tell on you," said Manners. "He couldn't do that, you know!"

"That's right, in a way; but a flogging from the Head is no joke," said Redfern. "Cardew took the flogging rather than give me away!"

"It was plucky of him," said Tom Merry. "He's a queer beggar—a decent chap one minute, and a howling cad the next. You seem to have got friendly with him."

"Well, in a way, we have," said Redfern. "We were all loggerheads, you know, at the time Cardew took that affair on his own shoulders, and kept me out of it. Of course, I'd have owned up like a shot if I'd known Ratty was accusing him; but I never knew anything about it till the next morning, and he'd had the flogging before then. I was an ass to handle Ratty, and so was Lawrence to help me!"

"Agreed!" said Lawrence. "Pair of silly asses, and we should have got it in the neck if Cardew hadn't fancied the flogging!"

"And that isn't all," said Redfern. "The Head believed he'd done it, and let him off the sack because he was a new kid; but he warned him that if he kicked over the traces again he would get it in the neck—not in those words, of course——"

"Ha, ha! I suppose not!"

"And Cardew's a queer customer," said Redfern. "He might jolly soon get into another row on his own, and then that would come up against him. So I can't help feeling rather obliged to the chap, though he did tread on my corns when he first came. It was decent of him to stick it out as he did!"

"It was jolly decent, and I told him so," said Tom Merry heartily. "Dash it all, ask him here now, and we'll make it up over tea! After all, a punch on the nose isn't a thing to grouse over! Why, I've punched your nose lots of times, Reddy, and you've punched mine, and no harm done!"

"Well, if you put it like that, I'll ask him," said Redfern brightly. "I'd like to see you on good terms again!"

"My dear chap, cut off and fetch him in, and we'll help get the tea while you're gone," said Tom.

"Good egg!"

Redfern hurried out of the study, and the Terrible Three piled in to help Owen and Lawrence. They had tea ready by the time Redfern returned; but Reddy came alone.

"Where's Cardew?" asked Lawrence.

Redfern coloured a little.

"He won't come. Never mind Cardew!"

Tom Merry frowned for a moment. He did not like sulkiness. It was evident that Cardew was still nursing resentment over the affair at Grubb's Farm.

But the juniors were soon discussing the Rookwood footer match, which was to come off on the morrow, and they forgot all about Cardew and his sulks.

CHAPTER 7.
The Plot Thickens.

"ROOKWOOD match to-day!" remarked Arthur Augustus the next morning.

"You'll have to put your best foot foremost, Gustavus," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "Talbot can't play, and we rely on you for goals!"

"That's all wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously. "You can wely on me. What are you cacklin' at, Blake? Oh, you are wottin', you wottah? I wegard you as a silly ass, Lowthah!"

The St. Jim's junior footballers were thinking a good deal of the Rookwood match that morning. Tom Merry, as football skipper, had plenty of food for thought, and perhaps it interfered with his lessons a little in the Form-room. Mr. Linton presented him with a hundred lines before the Shell were dismissed.

The Rookwood match was always a tough one at footer or cricket. Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, played a hard game.

And Tom Merry had been unlucky. Talbot of the Shell had not recovered from the damage to his ankle on the occasion of the paper-chase. It was not a very serious damage, but it made football impossible for some days to come, and Talbot was one of the best wingers in the school.

To make matters worse, Figgins of the Fourth had crocked his knee, and Figgins was always played in a match that meant a hard tussle. Figgy couldn't be played now. Two of Tom's best forwards had to be left behind.

But Tom had already decided on Levison for the match, and, instead of making room for him somewhere else, he put him into Figgy's place at inside-right. Monty Lowther, who usually played half, was a very good forward when he liked, and Tom put him in Talbot's place on the wing, and Sidney Clive took Lowther's post at half.

It was a good team, but it was not the very best that St. Jim's could have sent out, and Tom Merry looked forward to a tough struggle on the Rookwood ground.

The St. Jim's eleven was therefore composed of: Fatty Wynn; Herries, Lawrence; Redfern, Noble, Clive; Lowther, Levison, Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy. Kerr could have had a place, but as the place was well filled by Lowther, Kerr elected to remain at home with the disappointed Figgy.

Many fellows could have suggested improvements in the team—by the inclusion of their honourable selves—but it was agreed that Tom Merry's judgment was to be relied upon.

It went against the grain with Tom to leave his own chum Manners out; but football was football, and friendship was friendship; and Manners, though he had a show in the House matches, was not quite up to School form as a rule. Manners took it quite good-temperedly, however. His idea of friendship was not that a chum should give what he had no right to give.

Tom Merry was pretty well satisfied with his team, though he would have given half a term's pocket-money to be able to take Talbot over to Rookwood. But Levison, the newest recruit, had shown remarkable form lately, and Tom looked for a good game from him; and, at least, Fatty Wynn in goal was a tower of strength to any side.

A crowd of fellows saw the team off; but there were no followers, owing to war-time restrictions. It was a longish journey to Rookwood.

Cardew walked down to the station with them, chatting with Levison and Redfern.

He cast a curious glance several times at Tom Merry, who hardly noticed him. Cardew had said that Tom Merry could wait; but apparently the wait was to be for an indefinite time, for he had shown no sign of calling the captain of the Shell to account.

Racke of the Shell, who had heard the story of the quarrel, hinted that it was due to funk—a remark which was followed by Racke's head going into chancery, and Racke's wearing a swollen nose since—which was no more than he deserved, for Cardew, whatever his faults, certainly did not lack courage. Levison supposed that his study-mate had decided to let the matter drop, and he was glad of it.

Blagg, the postman, passed the juniors in the lane, and touched his old hat to the footballers. They stopped him.

"Any letters, Blaggy? Hand 'em over!"

"I got a letter for Master Merry," said Mr. Blagg, fumbling in his sack. "I s'pose I can 'and it over to you 'ere, Master Tom?"

"All serene, Blaggy! Chuck it over!"

Mr. Blagg handed over the letter, and stumped on his way. Tom slid it into his pocket to read in the train.

Cardew's eye was upon it, however.

"You're not reading your letter, Merry," he remarked.

Tom glanced at him. It was the first remark Cardew had addressed to him since the paperchase.

"No; lots of time in the train," he said, quite cheerily.

"Buck up! Only three minutes now!" said Blake.

The juniors hurried on to the station, where Cardew left them. They crammed into the local for Wayland, and changed at the junction into the express for Latcham.

The express was crowded, and the footballers had to separate into ones and twos and threes. Tom Merry and Lowther squeezed into a carriage together. When the express started on the long run, Tom Merry took the letter out of his pocket.

He had glanced at it carelessly when he took it from the postman, but now that he looked at it again he started a little.

"The remittance this time?" asked Lowther.

"No; it's that fist again!"

"P. S.?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"My hat! This is getting interesting."

Tom, with a rather grim brow, opened the letter. The two chums read it together. It was the same crabbed writing as the previous letter, and it was as follows:

"Master Merry.—I aye not eard from you, nor receeved the Pownd. I suppose you dont want me to cum up to the school and see you. If you don't, you better bring the Pownd this afternoon.

"P. S."

"The merry plot thickens!" said Lowther.

It was impossible to discuss the strange affair in the crowded carriage, puzzling as it was. The letter seemed to be that of a blackmailer; yet who "P. S." was, and on what grounds he was attempting to extort money from Tom Merry of St. Jim's was a mystery there was no solving. There was no address on the letter. The writer apparently supposed that Tom knew his address. Whether the writer was a blackmailer, a practical joker, or a lunatic, Tom could not decide. He tore the letter into pieces and dropped them from the carriage window, and gave no more thought to it. He had the Rookwood match to think of now, and no thoughts to waste upon his mysterious correspondent.

CHAPTER 8.
The Rookwood Match.

JIMMY SILVER & CO. greeted the St. Jim's footballers cordially when they arrived at Rookwood.

The Rookwood team looked in fine fettle. There had been some changes in Jimmy Silver's eleven since the last match with St. Jim's. It consisted now of Conroy; Raby, Van Ryn; Rawson, Jimmy Silver, Doyle; Oswald, Lovell, Tommy Dodd, Pons, and Cook. It was a first-rate team, as Tom Merry could see at a glance.

"We shall have to pull up our socks, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus remarked while they were changing. "We shall miss Talbot and old Figgay. I twust you will be careful, Blake."

"You bet!" said inside-left emphatically. "I sha'n't let the ball come near you if I can help it."

"I did not mean that, you ass!"

"I mean it!"

"I mean I twust you will not bump into me, as you did in the Gwammah School match some time ago."

"How did I bump into you?" asked Blake. "Like that?"

Bump!

"Yawoooh!"

Arthur Augustus sat on the floor with a roar.

"Order!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Bai Jove! Pway ask Jimmy Silvah to wait a few minutes, Tom Mewwy, while I give Blake a feahful thwashin'!"

gasped Arthur Augustus, as he scrambled up.

"Jimmy Silver would have to wait a few weeks for that," grinned Blake.

"Order!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"If you Fourth Form kids can't keep order, I shall play Shell chaps next time," said Tom Merry severely.

"I wefuse to be called a Fourth Form kid, Tom Mewwy! I wegard you——"

"Is this going to be a footer match, or a jawbone solo by Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

And he swallowed his wrath, and proceeded to change.

The St. Jim's team came out cheerily into the field. It was a fine, cold afternoon, with little wind and a bright sun. A crowd of Rookwooders had assembled to see the match, and there was a buzz when the ball was kicked off.

"Go it, Rookwood! On the ball!"

Rookwood went it. The home team were soon attacking hard, and in ten minutes there was a hot attack on the visitors' goal. But Fatty Wynn, calm and serene, fisted out the ball thrice in succession, and Lawrence cleared at last. The tussle went away to midfield, but it returned, and for some time the struggle was all in the visitors' half.

It was not till close on half-time that the Saints were able to get away, and then they found the Rookwood defence very strong. But the St. Jim's forwards got through at last, and came down the field, passing the ball in great style. Tom Merry drove it in, but it glanced from a goal-post and fell back into play, and Van Ryn drove it up the field, only to be trapped by Levison. Levison made a rush for goal, and the Rookwooders closed up for him, and as quick as lightning the St. Jim's forward shot the ball across to Blake, Tom Merry not being up to take a pass.

Jack Blake, for once, was not quick enough. But Arthur Augustus had his eyes wide open. Blake missed the pass, but D'Arcy rushed in and drove the ball into goal without a second's pause. There was only the goalie to beat, and Conroy was caught napping. There was a buzz from the Rookwood crowd as the leather went in.

"Goal!"

Goal it was!

"My hat!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

Tom Merry gave Arthur Augustus a sounding clap on the shoulder.

"Good man, Gussy!"

"Yawoooh!"

"Good for you, Levison, too! That was a ripping pass!"

Levison nodded and smiled.

The whistle went as Conroy turned the ball out. After all their hard luck through the first half, St. Jim's had scored first.

"Good luck for us!" remarked Lowther, as they rested. "But what I want to know is, who said the age of miracles was past? Gussy has taken a goal."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"And a jolly good one!" said Tom Merry heartily. "You ought to have taken that pass, Blake."

"I know that," grunted Blake. "Levison was a bit too hefty for me. You're in jolly good form, Levison."

"Yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact, Blake, pewwaps it was wathah lucky you fumbled——"

"I whatted?" roared Blake.

"Fumbled, deah boy! You see, it turned out a goal. If you had been in your wight place, you might have bumped into me as you did at the Gwammah School match——"

"Like that?" asked Blake.

Arthur Augustus jumped back just in time, while the footballers chuckled.

"You uttah ass, Blake, I wefuse to be the victim of your wotten pwactical jokes! If you want a thick ecah you had better say so."

"So!" said Blake cheerfully.

The whistle went before Arthur Augustus could reply. After the change of ends, the Rookwooders had the sun in their eyes. But they attacked steadily, and again Tom Merry & Co. found themselves penned in their own half. Rookwood seemed almost too much for them, and it was fortunate that Fatty Wynn was between the posts. Again and again the Welsh junior was called upon to save, and again and again he did it without turning a hair. When the game swayed down to the Rookwood end, Conroy put up a sound defence of his citadel, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were soon going again. The Rookwooders were at the top of their form, and the visitors were held almost all the time. But Fatty Wynn, like the Iron Duke of old, "stood four-square to all the winds that blew," and though the home team had most of the game, Fatty firmly declined to let the ball through.

As time grew closer, Jimmy Silver & Co. made desperate efforts. Again and again they came sweeping on goal—Oswald, Lovell, Tommy Dodd, Pons, and Cook going together like clockwork—and again and again the defence had to break before them. But the fat Fourth-Former between the posts seemed equal to any test, and the sharpest shot found a fat fist or an active head ready for it. And the Rookwood crowd, who had come there to cheer the home score, found themselves shouting:

"Well saved, Fatty!"

"Good man!"

"Well saved, sir!"

Pheep!

It was the whistle at last.

"Bai Jove! We've beaten the boundahs, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "Or, to be more cowwect, Fatty Wynn has beaten them."

"Good old Fatty!" said Tom Merry, thumping the Welsh junior on the back. "You're worth your weight in porkpies!"

"It's a New House win," grinned Redfern, "though Levison and Gussy did that goal very well between them. Better luck next time, Silver!"

Jimmy Silver nodded and grinned.

"You've got a ripping goalie there," he said. "We had most of the game, and you've got the goal. Never mind. We'll mop you up at cricket."

The St. Jim's footballers changed in a very cheery mood. Football is an uncertain game, and, with the play against them most of the time, they had been lucky to win. But a win was a win, anyway.

Jimmy Silver & Co. saw their visitors off at the station, and the train bore them homeward through the winter dusk. A dozen fellows were waiting for them at the gates of St. Jim's when they arrived at last.

"How did it go?" called out Talbot.

"A win for us, deah boy! We were wathah lucky; but owin' to Blake keepin' out of my way, it came off all wight—— Yawoooh! If you bump into me again, Blake, I shall punch your silly head."

"How many goals?" asked Figgins.

"Only one," said Tom Merry. "Gussy took it, but Levison gave him the chance—a ripping pass. Fatty Wynn saved about a dozen against us, though. We missed you and Talbot. But all's well that ends well."

"Yaas, wathah! And as Blake did not—— Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus did not escape this time. The footballers walked on, leaving him sitting on the ground. Manners met Tom and Lowther as they came in, with a rather curious expression on his face.

"Letter for you, Tom," he said.

Tom Merry started.

"Not from——"

"It's the same fist," said Manners.

"That's the second to-day, then," said Tom, as he took the letter from his chum.

With a knitted brow, he opened it in the hall, and the Terrible Three read it together. It ran:

"Master Merry,—I waited for you this afternoon, and you ain't come. I give you one more chance. If I don't get the Pownd Monday morning, look out!

"P. S."

CHAPTER 9.
A Strange Meeting.

TOM MERRY drew a deep breath.

"Well, that beats it!" he said.

"What on earth can it mean?" said Manners. "It's a blackmailer right enough, but why should he suppose you'd send him a pound?"

"Goodness knows!"

"And how could you send it, when you don't know his name or address?"

"Ask me another!" said Tom, quite bewildered. "I think it must be some lunatic. Bless him!"

"According to that letter, the chap'll come here on Monday unless you send him the quid," said Lowther.

Tom's eyes gleamed.

"Let him come!" he said. "I'll be glad to see him. There goes his letter!"

Tom Merry tore up the letter as the chums went upstairs, and threw the pieces into the study fire-grate.

The affair was utterly puzzling. The man had evidently expected his earlier letter to bring Tom Merry to him that afternoon, yet Tom had not the slightest idea of who he was or where he was to be found. Tom had already mentioned the matter to Redfern & Co.; but the Terrible Three decided to mention it to no one else. They did not want the mysterious affair to become the talk of the school; and fellows like Racke and Crooke and Mellish would certainly have made capital out of it. Indeed, others beside Racke & Co. might have suspected that there was something in it, for it was extraordinary that a man Tom Merry knew nothing of should write to him demanding money.

The Terrible Three thought the matter over a good deal during Sunday, but they could make nothing of it. They looked forward to Monday with some curiosity, but quite without uneasiness. And when Monday came, they were quite keen about the postman, though it was not a remittance they were expecting this time.

There was a letter for Tom Merry when old Blagg came along in the afternoon. Tom recognised the crabbed

hand on the envelope as he took it, and the three chums retired to the study to read it.

The letter was short, but to the point.

"Master Merry,—You ain't answered me. This is the finish. I'm comin' to see you at six o'clock. I'll wait for you at the stile in Rylcombe lain at six. If you come an' bring two Pownds all's well. If you don't, I come on and call on your 'edmaster.—P. S."

"The price has gone up!" grinned Monty Lowther. "It's two pounds now."

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Quarter-past five," he remarked.

"You're not going?" exclaimed Manners.

Tom nodded.

"I'm going, and you fellows are coming, too! We'll see Master P. S., and if he's a harmless lunatic, we can take him to the police-station. If he's a blackmailer, we can teach him a lesson about trying to scare St. Jim's chaps into giving him money!"

"Good egg!" said Lowther heartily. "We'll borrow Herries' dog-whip."

"That's a good idea! The rotter may have mistaken me for somebody else," said Tom. "Anyway, he's trying to extort money. He could be sent to prison for it. We don't want to worry about that, but we'll give him a lesson he'll remember. Why, some kids might have been scared into giving him money by letters like this! He's woke up the wrong passengers, as it happens."

"He has—he have!" grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry put the letter into his pocket, and a little later the chums of the Shell strolled out of the school gates to keep the appointment. Monty Lowther had borrowed the dog-whip from Study No. 6; he considered that it would come in very useful in dealing with "P. S."

Cardew of the Fourth was lounging in the gateway when they went out. He glanced at them, and seemed about to speak, but he did not. But he looked after them with a very curious expression on his face.

The chums of the Shell hardly noticed him, however. They sauntered down the lane, and came in sight of the stile, half-way to the village.

It was not yet six, but a man was seated on the stile, smoking a short black pipe. He was a rough-looking customer, and his looks struck Tom as familiar as they came up.

"Is that the johnny, I wonder?" said Manners.

"Looks like a farm-hand," said Monty Lowther. "Not the genuine article, but one of the tramps who get taken on nowadays."

Tom Merry scanned the man keenly.

"I've seen him before somewhere," he said. "My hat! I remember now! He belongs to Grubb's Farm."

"Oh! One of Grubby's hands?"

"Yes; he's the chap who kept us from the gate with a pitchfork that afternoon; you remember I told you. Cardew got over the gate, and old Grubb laid into him with a cart-whip, and his man kept us back with a pitchfork. That's the merchant."

"Then he can't be 'P. S.'" said Manners, puzzled.

"Blessed if I know! I don't see why he should expect me to send him money," said Tom. "I don't owe him anything for lunging at me with a pitchfork."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"By Jove! I remember now the THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 477.

farmer called him Peter," said Tom. "P's one of the initials on the letter."

"Well, we'll soon see."

The juniors arrived at the stile. The man took his black pipe from his mouth, and slid from the top bar, and scanned them.

"One of you Master Merry?" he asked.

"I'm Tom Merry."

"Then you're the young gent I want to see."

Tom Merry's lips set.

"Are you the man who's been writing to me?" he asked.

"You know I am."

"Well, I know it now," said Tom. "You signed yourself 'P. S.' What does 'P. S.' stand for?"

The man stared at him.

"You know wot it stands for! You know my name's Pete Snaggs."

"How the dickens should I know?"

"Because I told yer," said Mr. Snaggs. "Wot game are you playing now, I'd like to know? 'Ave you got the two pounds?"

Tom Merry looked at him steadily. The man had been working on Mr. Grubb's farm the previous week; but it was easy to see that he was not a regular labourer.

His face was almost copper-coloured with excessive drink, and his tone and manner were those of a tramp of the most unpleasant kind. Mr. Grubb had given him a job, owing to scarcity of labour; but it was doubtful if he had got much work out of Snaggs, who certainly did not look as if honest work agreed with him. Tom had never seen the fellow excepting on the occasion of the paper-chase, when he had kept the pack at bay with his pitchfork. Why the rascal supposed he had a hold on him was a mystery which Tom meant to solve.

"You say you told me your name?" he asked quietly.

"You knows I did!"

"I don't remember the occasion. When was it?"

Mr. Snaggs gave him another surly stare.

"Wot game is this 'ere?" he snarled. "You know well enough it was last Wednesday. P'r'aps you thought that ten bob would settle the matter?" the ruffian sneered. "I said ten bob at first, my buck, but I meant to 'ave more arter. You might 'ave knowed that."

"What ten bob?" asked Tom.

"You ain't forgotten you sent me ten bob?" sneered Mr. Snaggs. "You thought that would settle it, but you was mistook. You're a rich young gent, and you've got some dibs to spare for me."

"I did not send you ten shillings," said Tom Merry quietly, "and I intend to give you nothing now! Why should I give you money?"

"Because if you don't I'm going to your 'eadmaster," grinned Mr. Snaggs; "and if that don't mean the boot for you, I'm mistook!"

"You can go to my headmaster if you like."

"An' tell 'im wot I know?" grinned Mr. Snaggs.

"What do you know?" exclaimed Tom. "That we came by Mr. Grubb's farm last Wednesday? We did not trespass, and even if we had, it wouldn't be a matter I should be afraid to let Dr. Holmes know. I think you must be mad, or drunk!"

"You wouldn't mind 'im knowing what you did Wednesday night—eh?"

"Wednesday night!" exclaimed Tom, in amazement.

"Wotto!" chuckled Mr. Snaggs. "When I caught you red-handed, my young rip! It means the boot for you at your grand school, if it don't mean prison arter, and it might—an' you know it!"

"My hat!" said Lowther. "He must be potty, Tom!"

"Mad as the Kaiser!" said Manners.

Peter Snaggs glared at them savagely.

"P'r'aps the young gent means to deny that I caught 'im on Grubb's farm on Wednesday night!" he snarled.

"Certainly I should deny it," said Tom. "I was fast asleep in my dormitory at the school on Wednesday night. I haven't been near Grubb's farm since the paper-chase on Wednesday afternoon!"

"Then wot did you send me ten bob for at the Peal o' Bells?" sneered Mr. Snaggs.

"I did nothing of the kind."

"I see your game!" said Mr. Snaggs, with a nod. "You're goin' to deny the 'ole story! Well, we'll see wot your 'eadmaster says about that there, my pippin!"

"Wait a minute," said Tom, very quietly. "You say you caught me on Grubb's farm on Wednesday night last week?"

"You knows I did."

"What was I doing there?"

"Bashing a brick through Mr. Grubb's winder," grinned Mr. Snaggs, "and scaring 'im almost into a fit! The old cove thought the Zeppelins was come, and he yelled fire an' blue murder! And I caught you 'ookin' it, and you know it; and you begged me not to give you up, and me bein' a good-natered cove, I let you off arter you'd give me your name, an' promised me somethin' 'andsome!"

"It was very dark on Wednesday night, I believe?" said Tom.

"You know it was, you mean!"

"How could you be so sure of a chap in the dark?"

"You can't bamboozle me that way," smiled Mr. Snaggs. "You give me your name, and now you've hown-d up to your name. And you sent me ten bob to the Peal o' Bells, where I lodge. I knowed you was a kid from the school; I know the caps. And I wouldn't let you go till you give your name, an' well you knows it!"

The Terrible Three looked very hard at Mr. Snaggs. It was clear that the man believed that he was recounting the facts.

There was some strange mistake somewhere. But one thing was certain—the rascal believed that he knew enough to get Tom Merry into trouble at the school, and intended to extort money from him to keep it secret. It was not a safe game to play with the captain of the Shell.

"Now, wot about that two quids?" asked Mr. Snaggs.

"You wouldn't send me the one I asked for, and prices 'ave gone up. I don't say this is goin' to be the last, either. But you 'and me two quids now, and you don't 'ear from me ag'in for a week. 'Ow does that strike you, Master Merry?"

"I shall give you nothing," said Tom contemptuously. "You are either lying or you have made a mistake!"

"You won't give me two quids?"

"No; but I'll give you something else," said Tom Merry grimly. "You're a blackmailing scoundrel, and what you want is a thumping good hiding, and you're going to have it! Collar him!"

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Snaggs Receives His Due.

MR. SNAGGS jumped back, and grasped his stick savagely.

"'Ands off," he yelled, "or——"

Before he could get further Tom Merry's clenched fist smote him on his stubbly chin, and he staggered, the stick

fling from his grasp. The next moment he was pinned by the Terrible Three.

"Got the dear man!" grinned Monty Lowther. "How lucky I thought to bring the dog-whip!"

"Let me go!" roared Snaggs. "I'll go to your 'eadmaster, on my davy!"

"You're welcome," said Tom Merry. "Among other things, you can tell him that I gave you a good dog whipping!"

"Oh, my heye! Leggo!"

"Down with him!"

Mr. Snaggs struggled furiously. But the three juniors were in deadly earnest, and they did not deal gently with him.

The ruffian was pitched over in the grass, face down.

Monty Lowther sat on his head, driving Mr. Snaggs' stubbly face into the damp grass, and Manners stood on his legs.

Mr. Snaggs was then very favourably placed for a flogging, and Tom Merry handled the dog-whip with great vigour.

Lash—lash—lash—lash!

Tom's face was hard and set as he lashed. Whether the man was mistaken or lying he could not tell; but, at all events, the ruffian had sought to extort money with threats, and that was more than enough to merit a sound thrashing. Possibly the lesson might do Mr. Snaggs good in the future, when he was tempted to play the rascally game again. At any rate, he was going to get the lesson.

The dog-whip rose and fell with great force.

The ruffian squirmed and howled and yelled in the grass, but he could not escape from the infliction.

Tom lashed him till the dust rose from his dirty garments, and Mr. Snaggs' language would have done credit to the army in Flanders in the old days.

"Great pip! What are you up to?"

Two cyclists came along from the school —Levison and Clive. They were riding down to the village, but they halted at the sight of the amazing scene by the roadside.

"Yowowowow!" roared Mr. Snaggs.

"Elp! Perlice! Mercy!"

Whack—whack—whack!

"Tom Merry! What the dickens——" shouted Clive, in amazement.

Tom paused, panting.

"All serene!" he said. "This merchant has been trying to terrorise me into giving him money. I'm showing him how much his cheats are worth!"

"Oh!" said Levison. "More power to your elbow, then! Come on, Clive!"

"He looks as if he's had enough," remarked Clive.

"Well, I've finished now."

Lowther and Manners released the ruffian. He rolled over in the grass, wriggling with pain and fury.

"By gum, I'll make you suffer for this!" he howled. "You wait till I go to your 'eadmaster, Tom Merry!"

"Go as soon as you please," said Tom contemptuously.

Levison and Clive rode on again, grinning. Mr. Snaggs had woke up the wrong passenger in the captain of the Shell, that was evident. The unfortunate blackmailer sat in the grass, and howled with anguish.

"Come on!" said Tom.

"Oh, you young 'ound!" groaned Peter Snaggs. "You 'orrid young 'ound! You'll be sorry for this! Three to one ag'in a man!"

Tom Merry turned back at once.

"You're a man, and I'm a boy," he said coolly. "But if you want a fight single-handed, I'm ready for you! I've thrashed you because you're a blackmailing thief; but if you want to use your fists, get up and use them!"

The ruffian blinked at him, but he did not get up. The sturdy junior was smaller than he, but in fitness and courage he had every advantage, and Mr. Snaggs did not think it good enough.

"Well?" snapped Tom.

"'Ang yer!" groaned Mr. Snaggs. "You wait till I come to your 'eadmaster!"

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry turned on his heel, and the chums of the Shell walked away to the school, leaving the blackmailer groaning in the grass.

Monty Lowther glanced back as they reached the school gates, and gave a whistle.

"He's coming, Tom!"

"Let him come!" said Tom Merry, without looking back.

The juniors went in. Far down the road, Mr. Snaggs was following them towards St. Jim's. A severe thrashing instead of the expected two pounds had exasperated the blackmailer. There was no money for him, but revenge remained—at least, Mr. Snaggs appeared to believe so. He was evidently coming on to the school to carry out his threat.

Cardew was still in the gateway, lounging there with his hands in his pockets. His glance passed the Shell fellows to the seedy figure shambling up the road, and he started, and stepped back quickly within the gates.

"Who's that merchant?" he asked.

"Looks like a tramp," said Lowther calmly.

"Is he coming here?"

"Looks like it."

"Dashed queer!" said Cardew. "Have you fellows had anything to do with him?"

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions," said Lowther gravely; and the Terrible Three walked on, leaving Cardew biting his lip.

Cardew did not remain in the gateway, neither did he go back to his own House. He walked away hurriedly towards the New House, and went to Redfern's study to tea. Perhaps Ralph Reckness Cardew had his own reasons for not wishing to be upon the scene when Mr. Snaggs arrived.

CHAPTER 11.
Called Over the Coals.

KILDARE of the Sixth looked into Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three were having their tea rather late. Kildare's face was very grave.

"You're wanted, Merry!" he said curtly.

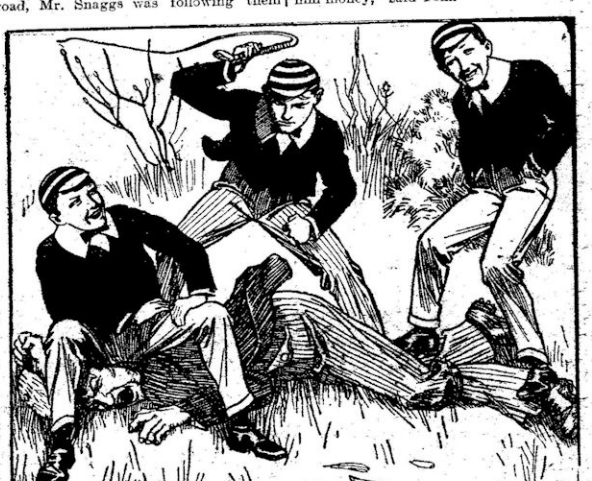
Tom Merry had more than half-expected it, and he rose at once.

"So that merchant's come?" he said.

Kildare gave him a sharp look.

"You know something about that man Snaggs?" he asked.

"Only that I licked him with a dog-whip for trying to scare me into giving him money," said Tom.



Tom Merry handled the dog-whip with great vigour. *(See Chapter 9.)*

"Oh! Well, he's in the Head's study, and I'm to take you there at once."

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

Tom Merry followed the captain of St. Jim's downstairs. He found a good many juniors in the hall, all looking curious. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped the captain of the Shell on the arm.

"Nothin' w'ong, I twust, deah boy?" he asked.

"Nothing at all, old scout," said Tom cheerily.

"A feahful-lookin' chawactah has just awwived," said Arthur Augustus. "He was howlin' out somethin' about you——"

"All serene," said Tom; and he followed Kildare to the Head's study. Kildare opened the door, and closed it again after the junior had gone in.

Mr. Railton was in the study with the Head, and both the masters looked very grave. Peter Snaggs stood with his ragged cap in his hand. Even the impudent wastrel was somewhat awed in the presence of the stately old doctor.

"Merry," said Dr. Holmes gravely, "this man has told me an extraordinary story. Were you out of school bounds after hours on Wednesday last week?"

"No, sir," said Tom steadily.

"That's a blinkin' lie!" said Snaggs.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed, but he was silent. He could not deal with the ruffian as he would have wished in the presence of the Head.

"It appears from this man's story, Merry, that there was some dispute at Mr. Grubb's farm during a paper-chase. Kindly tell me what happened."

Tom Merry succinctly described the incident at the gate of Mr. Grubb's farm. He did not mention the stone episode. There was no need to drag Cardew into the matter.

"You did not enter Mr. Grubb's land?"

"No, sir; only one chap, and he was pitched out again by Mr. Grubb."

"Did you return to Grubb's farm on Wednesday night, and hurl a large stone through the farmer's bed-room window?"

"No, sir."

"I could hardly think, Merry, that you would be guilty of such an action. But someone was certainly guilty of it. I have spoken to Mr. Grubb on the telephone, and learned that the outrage occurred exactly as this man has stated. Mr. Grubb was quite ill from shock to the nerves for some days, and he suspects that the outrage was committed by one of the boys he stopped from entering his grounds on the occasion of the paper-chase. This man positively declares that he caught you there on Wednesday night, and you pleaded with him to let you go."

"It is false, sir!"

"Why has the man kept silence so long, may I ask?" said Mr. Railton quietly.

Mr. Snaggs grunted.

"The young gent said he would make it worth my while to let 'im off," he said, "and I'm a pore man. He kep' 'is word, and sent me ten bob."

"Yet you have come here to betray him," said the Housemaster.

"I come 'ere to show 'im up," growled Mr. Snaggs.

"The man wrote to me demanding money, sir," said Tom Merry. "I refused to give him any. Manners and Lowther went with me to meet him, and we gave him a licking with a dog-whip for trying to extort money."

"Ah!" said the Head. "I understand now the man's motive in coming here. You say he wrote demanding money?"

"I have his last letter here, sir. I destroyed the rest."

"Give me the letter."

Tom Merry placed the letter on the Head's desk, and Dr. Holmes read it, and passed it to the Housemaster.

"You are probably aware, my man, that this letter is sufficient to earn you a term of imprisonment for attempted blackmail?" said Mr. Railton.

"I done my dooty in comin' 'ere to show that young scoundrel up," said Mr. Snaggs doggedly. "If it gets into the papers, it won't do this school no good!"

"That will do!" said the Head sharply. "Merry, you deny this man's story?"

"Every word, sir!"

"You did not leave your dormitory on Wednesday night?"

"No, sir; not from lights out till rising-bell."

The Head was clearly puzzled.

"Yet this man, Merry, clearly believed that he had a hold upon you."

"It seems so, sir."

"Why should he believe so without grounds?"

"I don't know, sir."

"It is possible that some other person committed the outrage, and gave Merry's name, sir," suggested Mr. Railton. "The man could scarcely have recognised him on so dark a night."

Peter Snaggs burst into a scoffing laugh.

"P'r'aps the person 'ad the same initials as Mister Tom Merry!" he sneered. "Anyways, he dropped his hanky under Mr. Grubb's winder, and Mr. Grubb's got it now, and there's 'T. M.' marked in the corner!"

Tom Merry started.

"Have you missed a handkerchief, Merry?" asked the Head, his voice growing grim.

"Yes, sir," said Tom slowly. "I—I lost one last week."

"Where did you lose it, Merry?"

"I—I don't know." Tom was breathing hard now. He realised what this might mean for him. "I suppose I must have dropped it in the paper-chase. I happened to miss it on Thursday."

There was a pause. Tom had owned up frankly on the point, but that did not tell in his favour, for, of course, the house-dame could have furnished the information, if required.

"You still deny this man's story, Merry?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then how do you account for your handkerchief being found under Mr. Grubb's window?"

"I don't believe it, sir. I think Snaggs is telling lies!"

A snort from Mr. Snaggs.

"That can soon be ascertained," said the Head. "Snaggs—if that is your name—you can hardly expect me to accept your word without proof. It was your duty to tell your employer what you knew at the time, as you know very well. You had better return to Mr. Grubb, and tell him what you choose, and if Mr. Grubb has any complaint to make he can come here and make it. You may go."

"Mr. Grubb ain't my employer now," growled Peter Snaggs. "But I'll tell 'im right enough, you bet! And you can bet your sweet life he'll come 'ere when he knows that young gent's name, and knows he belongs to this 'ere school. He's been fair raging ever since it 'appened!"

"You may go," repeated the Head.

And Mr. Snaggs went, with a leer at Tom Merry.

The junior stood silent.

"This is a very strange affair, Merry," said the Head. "I shall take no action on that man's word. But if Mr. Grubb calls upon me, as I expect, the matter will be gone into thoroughly. You may go."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry left the Head's study.

Manners and Lowther were waiting for him in the hall, with a dozen other fellows. Mr. Snaggs was gone.

"Well?" said Manners.

"What's the wow, deah boy?"

Tom Merry explained quietly. There was a buzz among the juniors, and a laugh from Racke of the Shell.

"You must have been an ass!" remarked Racke. "All very well to bash a brick through the old bounder's window. But dropping your hanky——"

"I was not there at all," said Tom quietly.

Racke grinned.

"Did your hanky walk there?" he asked humorously.

Tom Merry turned his back on the cad of the Shell. He went up to his study with his chums. The juniors were left in a buzz. In No. 10 Study the Terrible Three sat down to their unfinished tea.

But they were very grave now, and there was silence for some time. The matter had taken a serious turn, and they realised it.

"Somebody went to Grubb's farm that night, Tom," said Manners at last.

"Looks like it."

"And he had your hanky with him."

Tom nodded.

"Must have been a St. Jim's chap, then."

"Plain enough!"

"Tom"—Manners hesitated—"I know old Grubb's an irritating beast, but—but—but you didn't——" He broke off.

"I've said I didn't," said Tom, his face flushing.

"Sorry, old chap. Of course, I know you didn't, as you said you didn't," said Manners. "But—but—but it's awfully queer! If somebody took your hanky, he took it on purpose. It wasn't dropped there by accident. He meant it to be found. Who'd be such an awful rotter? Tom, old man, if Grubb comes along, and it turns out to be your hanky, you're in Queer Street!"

"I know," said Tom Merry quietly.

There was a dismal silence in the study till the sounds of wheels was heard in the quadrangle. The chums hurried to the window in time to see Mr. Grubb descend from his trap and pass into the house.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Now for it!" he muttered.

"The old Hun's as spiteful as a cat!" muttered Lowther. "Oh, Tom——"

The door opened, and Mr. Railton looked in and beckoned to Tom Merry. Tom followed him without a word. He followed the Housemaster into the Head's study. Mr. Grubb was there, and on the Head's desk lay a handkerchief.

"Is that your handkerchief, Merry?" asked Dr. Holmes, and his voice was hard as steel.

Tom looked at it.

"It is mine, sir!"

"It was found by Mr. Grubb under his window after the outrage that occurred on Wednesday night."

Tom was silent.

Mr. Grubb gave the junior a grim look. It was evident that the crusty old man had been nursing his injury, and was eager to see the culprit brought to book.

"I kep' that!" said Mr. Grubb savagely. "I 'oped it might lead to me findin' the 'ound wot sent that stone through my winder. I've a mind to go to the perlice about it, sir. But I leave it in your 'ands."

"You may safely leave it in my hands, Mr. Grubb," said the Head. "Merry will be flogged to-morrow morning in the presence of the whole school. His punishment will be the severest I can inflict."

"I knowed you would see justice done, sir," said Mr. Grubb, and he took his leave. There was silence in the study as the sound of Mr. Grubb's departing wheels echoed from the quad.

"I am sorry for this, Merry," said the Head at last. "I cannot understand a lad of your character yielding to a revengeful impulse of this kind. Mr. Grubb was perhaps disagreeable, but such an outrage——"

"I did nothing, sir! I was in the Shell dormitory all Wednesday night."

The Head made a gesture of dismissal, and Tom left the study. Five minutes later the school was agog with the news. Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, was to be flogged before morning school! And St. Jim's gasped—fairly gasped.

CHAPTER 12.
Levison Means Business.

LEVISON of the Fourth came into Study No. 9 with a pale face and gleaming eyes. He was looking for Cardew.

His minor was in the study, waiting for him, with his books. He started at the look on Ernest Levison's face.

"What's the row, Ernie?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Never-mind. Do you know where Cardew is?"

"No; he hasn't been here," said Frank, in wonder. "Not rowing with Cardew, are you, Ernie?"

Levison did not reply. He hurried out of the study, leaving Frank thunderstruck.

Clive met him in the passage and stopped him.

"Seen Cardew?" asked Levison hastily.

"No. But I want to speak to you——"

"Buck up, then!"

"You've heard this about Tom Merry?"

"Yes, yes!"

"You know what Cardew was saying the other day," said the South African junior. "I supposed he'd dropped the idea of going for old Grubb. But—but it seems that Tom Merry took up the idea, and did it. Only—only the fellows say Merry denies it. I don't feel satisfied about it, Levison. Do you know whether Cardew went, after all?"

"Tom Merry did not do it," said Levison, and he hurried on without another word. He inquired for Cardew up and down the House, but the new junior was not to be found. Levison hurried over to the New House at last, and learned from Figgins that Cardew was in Redfern's study. Levison ran there breathlessly.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were at work on their prep. Cardew had remained in the study after tea, however, and he was reading in Reddy's armchair. He laid down his book as Levison came in.

"Hallo, is it a fire, or Zeppelins?" asked Redfern.

"I want you, Cardew. Come!"

"In a hurry?" yawned Cardew.

"Yes."

"Right-ho! I'll come. Ta-ta, you chaps!"

Cardew sauntered coolly out of the study. He followed Levison down the stairs and out into the quadrangle. Levison did not speak till they were out of hearing of New House ears. Then he stopped.

"You know what's happened, Cardew?"

"Not at all! I've been with Redfern some time."

"Keeping out of sight, I suppose?"

"Perhaps. What's in the wind now?"

"Grubb and his man have been here. Somebody was caught bashing stones through Grubb's window last Wednesday night. The man swears it was Tom Merry, but——"

"Hard cheese on Merry!" yawned Cardew.

"Tom Merry's handkerchief was picked up there by old Grubb. He's brought it to the Head. Tom Merry's to be flogged to-morrow morning."

"Hard lines!"

Levison gave him a fierce look. Cardew was perfectly cool and unperturbed, though his eyes were gleaming.

"You know who went there on Wednesday night, Cardew!"

"Yes."

"You know Tom Merry was not there!"

"I don't know anythin' about him, of course."

"You asked me to help you!" muttered Levison. "Like a fool I did it. I didn't know you'd taken Tom Merry's handkerchief in your pocket, to fix it on him, like a sneaking, cowardly cad!"

"Draw it mild," said Cardew quietly. "I never intended to fix it on him. I intended that if anybody was caught, it should be him. That's all."

"And you were caught?"

"There was a sneaking, nosing rotter there——"

"And you gave Tom Merry's name!" Cardew laughed lightly.

"The rotter wouldn't let me go till I had given a name. I wasn't likely to give my own!"

"And in the dark he couldn't see you clearly enough to recognise you afterwards. He believes it was Tom Merry."

"Naturally."

"You left the handkerchief there——" Cardew yawned.

"And now the Head thinks it's proved against Tom Merry, and he's going to be flogged in the morning!"

"I told him he would be sorry for knockin' me down," said Cardew coolly.

"You hound!" shouted Levison.

"Oh, keep your wool on!" said Cardew contemptuously. "From what I've heard of you, it's exactly the little game you might play yourself. I never intended to fix it on Merry—the hanky wasn't enough for that. I only meant that if anybody was bowled out for it, it shouldn't be me. Self-preservation is the first law of Nature, you know."

Levison clenched his hands almost convulsively.

"Do you think I'm going to stand it?" he exclaimed.

"Why not?" Cardew shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose you're not goin' to sneak about a pal?"

"Do you think I should hold my tongue, and see Tom Merry flogged for what you did?" shouted Levison.

"Yes, I do! You can't give me away; you promised not to, for one thing. I know what the whole school would think of you if you broke your word, and gave me away to the Head! Liar and sneak!" sneered Cardew.

"You've got to go to the Head and own up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at, confound you?"

"Your little joke," said Cardew, still laughing. "I didn't know you were such a humorist, Levison. You should do somethin' for the 'Weekly.'"

Cardew turned away. Levison sprang after him and caught him by the shoulder.

"You cur!" he said thickly. "You plotting hound! You've got me in a cleft stick, but Clive knows!"

Cardew started.

"You've told him!" he muttered.

"I've told him nothing. But he hasn't forgotten your gas in the study. You asked us both to go with you!"

"But Clive never knew I went."

"Do you think he hasn't guessed? Clive made you no promises; and when he finds you're going to put it on Tom Merry——"

"He can't sneak about me!" muttered Cardew savagely. "He can't give away a chap in his own study."

He shook off Levison's hand, and strode away to the School House. There was a shout as he entered.

"Here he is, Clive!"

Sidney Clive came up to Cardew. A dozen pairs of eyes were fixed on the two. Clive's eyes were flashing.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Cardew, with deadly quietness.

"You were the chap who went to Grubb's farm on Wednesday night!" said the South African junior, between his teeth. "You're not going to put it on Tom Merry."

"Have you told the Head that?" sneered Cardew.

"No! You're going to tell him!"

"Your mistake. I'm not!"

"Do you deny it?" shouted Clive.

"Oh, yes! Every word of it. You've been dreaming," said Cardew pleasantly. "So far as I remember, I slept quite soundly last Wednesday night; never moved an eyelid."

Clive stared at him, utterly taken aback.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Are you suah you are not makin' a mistake, Clive, deah boy?"

"I only know what he said!" exclaimed Clive. "He told me he was going——"

"I was gassin'," said Cardew calmly. "You advised me to chuck the idea, an' I chucked it. Lucky I did, as it turns out."

"Well, my hat!" said Clive. "I—I thought——"

"You shouldn't, dear boy; your brain won't stand it," said Cardew, with a smile. "I take this opportunity of thankin' you for the good advice you gave me."

Levison had stepped in after Cardew. He listened to the new junior's mocking words, with a bitter smile. He came quietly forward.

"Listen to me, you fellows," he said. "Cardew went to Grubb's farm on Wednesday night. I helped him over the wall, and waited for him, and helped him in. I didn't know he had stolen Tom Merry's handkerchief to take with him. He told me nothing. I promised to keep it dark—from the masters. He's got me there. But if he lets Tom Merry get the flogging, you'll all know what to think of him!"

There was a yell from the juniors.

"Cardew, you hound! You've got to own up!"

"Own up, you rotter!"

"Yaas, wathah!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "You disgustin' wottah, if you do not own up, I shall pwoceed to the Head at once!"

Cardew stood with his hands in his pockets. He was pale now, but as cool as ever. He gave Levison a bitter look, which was answered by one of scorn and contempt.

"What are you going to do, Cardew?" said Jack Blake, with his hands clenched.

"Own up, you utter cad!" exclaimed Talbot.

Cardew laughed.

"It looks like a fair catch!" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "You needn't tell me you're goin' to rag me if I don't own up—I can see that. I'm goin' to the Head: the game's up! Any message for the old sport?"

And Cardew, with perfect coolness, sauntered down the passage to the Head's study, tapped, and went in.

"Well," said Blake, with a deep breath. "He's as big a rotter as ever rotted, but he's got nerve!"

CHAPTER 13.
Facing the Music.

TOM MERRY was in his study.

He was not working, and his chums were not. The Terrible Three did not feel in much of a humour for prep.

Tom Merry's sentence had almost overwhelmed him.

There was no appeal from it; there was no hope. He was adjudged guilty of a brutal and cowardly action; and punishment, in every circumstance of humiliation, was to follow. He could not even blame the Head, for the evidence was complete enough. And what was the use of accusing some person unknown of having planned deliberately to throw the guilt upon him, when he could not even guess who had done the cowardly trick? The thought of Cardew had crossed his mind vaguely; but even if the suspicion were well-founded, where was he to find proof?

The Terrible Three, usually the cheeriest juniors in the School House, sat in dismal silence. They hardly looked up as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass gleamed in at the door. The swell of St. Jim's was smiling.

"It's all sewene, deah boys!" he said.

Tom Merry started up, his face flushing.

"Gussy! You don't mean to say——"

"It's all wight!" trilled Arthur Augustus. "The wottah's owned up, and the Head wants you at once, Tom Mewwy. It was Cardew all the time, and Levison made him own up! Wun along, deah boy; the Head's waitin' for you."

Tom Merry was out of the study with a bound. Monty Lowther seized the swell of the Fourth, and waltzed him gleefully round the table, heedless of Arthur Augustus' frantic expostulations. Monty had to express his joy somehow.

Tom Merry almost rushed into the Head's study, breathless and excited. Cardew was there, and he gave the Shell fellow a cool nod and grin. The rascal of the Fourth was game to the last.

"My dear Merry," said Dr. Holmes, in a deeply moved voice. "I am more sorry than I can say. I could only come to the conclusion I did, on the evidence

before me; but it is a great satisfaction to me to learn that you are innocent. Cardew has admitted his guilt. He has admitted that he took your handkerchief with him to Mr. Grubb's farm, so that if a discovery was made, the wrong person should be implicated. Cardew leaves the school to-night!"

"I—I'm glad it's come out, sir!" gasped Tom Merry. "I—I couldn't have done such a rotten thing."

"I know that now, Merry. You are quite cleared." The Head turned to Cardew, with a thunderous frown. "As for you, Cardew, you know what to expect. You will be expelled from this school!"

"You couldn't let me off with a flogging, I suppose, sir?" asked Cardew calmly. "You were going to flog Merry——"

"Your conduct is far worse than Merry's was supposed to be. Last week," said the Head sternly, "you were brought before me charged with assaulting a master of this school. I flogged you then, and warned you that if there was another such outbreak on your part, you would be expelled. I shall keep my word. You leave the school to-night!"

A curious smile hovered about Cardew's lips. Tom Merry gave him a quick look. He wondered whether the rascal of the Fourth was about to betray Redfern, in order to mitigate his own sentence.

But Cardew did not speak.

"You may go!" said the Head.

The two juniors left the study. In the passage, Cardew gave the captain of the Shell a mocking look.

"Your luck's better than mine!" he said. "Keep your hands to yourself, dear boy; I've got it in the neck, you know."

"I'm not going to touch you," said Tom Merry quietly. "You are a treacherous hound, Cardew, and I'm not sorry you're sacked. But it's decent of you to keep quiet about Reddy. I don't quite understand a fellow of your sort."

Cardew laughed.

"You wouldn't!" he said.

And he walked away, whistling.

Tom Merry came down the passage with a bright face. He was surrounded by fellows to congratulate him at once. Cardew went his way unheeded. Redfern of the Fourth was waiting with Lawrence at the foot of the stairs. Cardew gave the New House juniors a nod, and was passing on, when Redfern caught his arm.

"I've heard all about it!" muttered Redfern.

"Then you don't want to touch me," grinned Cardew. "Ask any of the chaps; they'll tell you I'm not fit to be touched!"

Redfern did not heed.

"Is it the sack?" he asked.

Cardew nodded.

"The Head might have made it a flogging—you being a new fellow——"

"He hasn't!"

Redfern drew a deep breath.

"If—if he knew that it wasn't you, Cardew, who went for Ratty in the quad that time, he might. He's come down so heavy because this is the second time you've broken out, as he thinks——"

"Exactly!"

"But if he knew——"

"He doesn't know," said Cardew.

"Yet you played that dirty trick on Tom Merry," said Lawrence, in wonder; "and you haven't given us away to save your own neck?"

"Queer, isn't it?" said Cardew, unmoved. "I'm a queer fish. A chap may make a fellow sit up for knocking him down, without giving away another chap who hasn't hurt him. Good-bye! I've got to get my things packed."

"If the Head knew——" repeated Redfern, with a deep breath.

"He doesn't, and he won't!"

"He will!" said Redfern quickly. "Come on, Lawrence!"

"What about your scholarship?" said Cardew.

"Can't be helped."

"More fool you!" said Cardew, shrugging his shoulders.

But his face was lighter as he watched the two New House juniors go to the Head's study. He waited where he was, leaning on the banister, unmoved by the grim looks he received from the juniors in the hall. A few minutes later Lawrence came out and beckoned to him. Cardew followed him into the presence of the Head.

Dr. Holmes' eyes fixed upon him with a curious expression.

"It appears, Cardew, from Redfern's statement, that you were guiltless of the attack upon Mr. Ratcliff, a fortnight ago, for which you received a flogging," he said slowly.

"I told you so at the time, sir," said Cardew calmly.

"You knew that Redfern and Lawrence were the guilty parties?"

"Yes, sir."

"You should have told me, Cardew."

"I'm not a sneak, sir."

The Head coughed.

"As it appears, after all, that this is your first offence, Cardew—and as you have already received punishment under a mistake—I shall rescind my sentence. You will not be expelled from the school. You will be flogged instead, and I can only hope that it will be a warning to you."

"Thank you, sir!"

"As for you, Redfern and Lawrence, I hardly know how to deal with you! Had I known of your conduct at the time, I should certainly have expelled you both. But I am bound to take into consideration the fact that you have come here of your own accord to tell me the facts, for this boy's sake. I shall cane you both very severely."

Cardew left the study; but it was some minutes before Redfern and Lawrence left. When they came out, they were apparently trying to shut themselves up like pocket-knives. They limped away to their own House, in considerable pain, but upon the whole very well satisfied that the matter had turned out so well for them.

* * * * *

The next morning St. Jim's assembled after prayers to witness a public flogging. Cardew was the victim.

The punishment was severe. Cardew was looking very white in the Fourth Form-room that morning. Tom Merry had little cause to concern himself about the rascal of the Fourth; but he was glad that he had not been sacked. Ralph Reckness Cardew had another chance. It remained to be seen what he would make of it!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's —"ROUGH ON RAILTON!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

For Next Wednesday:

"ROUGH ON RAILTON!"

By Martin Clifford.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's, is a favourite character with all my readers, I know. And well he deserves to be, for he is an ideal of what a schoolmaster should be—generous and just, though quite able to be stern when necessary, with a keen eye for diversities of character, and no foolish expectation that all boys will conform to one type. He plays a prominent part in next week's grand story. Grundy of the Shell is also well in the limelight. Poor old Grundy! Things are certainly rough on Railton, but I am not sure that they are not rougher on Grundy, who, for all his swank, is really one of the best, and quite incapable of playing the dishonourable part which he is made to appear to have played. How it came about that he was charged with having given away Mr. Railton's secret, and what that secret was, you will read next week.

ANOTHER FRIENDLY READER.

I shall really have to start that Comic Column!

Here is another letter lately received:

"Sir,—I have read all the letters inserted in the GEM lately, and I quite agree with the Accuser. There has been a great deal of swindling on your part in that last competition business. 'Fraud' is a word that suits you down to the ground, without a doubt." (This correspondent does not spell it "fruad," so he will not find himself in complete harmony with the other quoted last week!) "You, judging by your impertinent replies to readers' letters, have too much of the rotten swanker about you—think you're archibald, and you're only archibald's dog, so to speak. I suppose you will look upon this note with dignity, contempt, or as a joke, the same as you did with the other reader's letter. But you will come down from your perch in time, when dealing with the public. If I chose, I could get a number of the GEM and 'Magnet' readers to boycott you or your firm, having a good influence.—Yours,

"ACCUSER No. 2."

Now, do you know, I should not call that a good influence. But the threat leaves me unmoved. The one thing I regret is that the only artist who could possibly illustrate this letter is unavailable at the moment—Hun-pushing over in France. Otherwise I should have got him to do me a sketch of "archibald's dog" (small "a," please, Mr. Printer!) on his perch, or coming off it at the sound of the trumpet of Accuser No. 2.

Yes, I regard this letter with dignity (I hope), contempt (I am sure), and as a joke (most certainly)!

Yours Editor

EXTRACTS FROM

"Tom Merry's Weekly" & "The Greyfriars Herald."

THE HAUNTED STUDY. By R. Talbot.

"YES," said Allenby, "there's a mystery about the end study. At least, you can't exactly call it a mystery, because we all know about it, more or less. It's more of a—a—what would you say, Scooter?"

"Tragedy, do you mean?" suggested Scotter—that was his real name.

"Well, call it that if you like," Allenby answered, as if it wasn't quite the word he wanted, but would serve. "You might say a tragedy; but, of course that isn't what matters now, because that's all over long ago. What matters to us is that the ghost still appears!"

One of the two new boys sat with round eyes and pale face in frightened astonishment. That was Elton.

The other, who was seated on a desk, swinging his legs in a very free-and-easy way for a fellow who had not been at Shilford more than three days, laughed the laugh of disbelief. That was Belton.

Belton and Elton had run against each other on the way to Shilford, had compared notes, discovered the curious similarity in their names, and struck up a friendship. Perhaps the friendship was all the more likely to last because they were as unlike—both in character and appearance—as their names were like.

"Yes, the ghost still appears," replied Allenby, watching Elton's frightened face with secret glee, and noting Belton's very evident disbelief with secret resentment.

"Ah!" said Belton. "Have you ever seen it yourself?"

"No. But I knew a chap who knew another fellow who had."

"Must have given you the cold shivers when you got so close as that to it," replied Belton, with the little touch of sarcasm that Shilford thought so improper in a new boy.

"Whose ghost is it?" asked Elton, scarcely above his breath.

The sunshine flooding the Lower Fourth class-room, the cheerful noises from the playground, the fresh air blowing in through the open window—these things might surely have strengthened him against ghostly fears.

But they did not. Elton was imaginative and highly strung.

"Do you want to hear the yarn?" asked Allenby.

"I don't," answered Belton, sticking his hands deep into his trousers' pockets. He said he didn't, but he did, because he was curious to learn "what sort of a whacker Allenby would cook up."

"I do," answered Elton. He said he did, but he didn't, because he hated tragedies and ghosts and all that kind of thing, yet felt unable to resist the temptation to listen to the story.

These four—Allenby, Scotter, Belton, and Elton—had been kept in owing to a disturbance in class, in which Elton had had no guilty complicity whatever, and Scotter very little.

Allenby and Belton were the prime offenders. But Scotter and Elton had been dragged in, and Mr. Wotherspoon was not in a temper to inquire into degrees of guilt. So he had given them a hundred lines each, and had told them they were not to leave their class-room till the lines were done, and he had inspected them. Then he had gone away, and had forgotten to come back.

Now the lines were all done, and time had begun to hang heavily on their hands.

"You can put your head in a bag, Bel," said Allenby. "El wants to hear, and he shall."

"Oh, I don't so much mind hearing! But you needn't think you'll pull my leg," Belton answered.

"Who wants to pull your leg? You think everybody's in a plot to do that. Some of you wideawake fellows get badly let down in the long run, let me tell you!"

"I'll let you tell me anything, Allenby, but I'll take my choice about believing it," answered Belton. "Cut away with your horrors!"

"This all happened ever so long ago," began Allenby, "before any of you fellows were born or thought of."

"The proper beginning for a back-number story like yours is 'Once upon a time,'" remarked Belton.

"Shut up! I can begin as I like, can't I?"

"Oh, certainly! Begin as you like, and finish as you've got to, because you can't invent a proper—what's the word, Scooter?"

"Climax," suggested Scotter, the clever boy of the Lower Fourth.

"That's it!"

"You'll get climax enough!" said Allenby grimly. "But see here: I don't want to frighten Elton. He's white about the gills already."

"I'm all right," Elton said, breathing hard. "Go on, Allenby!"

"All this happened ever so long ago ——"

"Before you were born, even?" put in the irrepressible Belton.

"Before any of us were—didn't I say say?"

"No; you only said 'you fellows,' meaning me and Elton and Scooter, I suppose."

"Shilford was a beastly rough school in those days——"

"What, before you came?" inquired Belton.

"There was no end of bullying," went on Allenby, disregarding the interruption. "And the chap who got the worst of it all was named—was named ——"

"Call him Adam, as it was so long ago." This was Belton again, of course.

"That's queer, because his name was Adams, so you got jolly near it by chance. Well, Adams——"

"Same Will Adams as in 'Robinson Crusoe'?"

"Oh, shut up, do! I didn't say Will Adams. This chap Adams fagged for a fellow named—named——"

"Allenby," suggested Belton slyly.

"No, he didn't. The fellow's name was Smith."

"Say that again! Sounds so uncommon. How do you spell it?"

"B-r-o-w-n," answered Allenby.

"Go up one place! That's quite smart for you, Allenby. I'll listen after that. I almost begin to believe this yarn about Will Adams and Man Friday and the chap who spelt his name B-e-a-u-c-h-a-m-p and pronounced it 'Chumley.'"

"You talk the worst silly rot I ever heard, Belton!"

"You don't, Allenby! Go on!"

"Smith——"

"'Chumley,'" murmured Belton.

"But don't mind me."

"Smith was an awful brute. He made Brown's—I mean, Adams'—life a perfect misery to him. Smith kept in the end study, and, of course, Adams had to be in there a good deal, and—and ——"

"Scooter," said Belton, in a quite audible aside, "if you weren't such a George Washington you could make up a no end better yarn than this. It's getting horribly dull."

"Smith used to knock Adams about frightfully. It got worse and worse——"

"What did?"

"Smith, of course!

"I don't see why 'of course.' You called him 'it.' I suppose that would be because he was such a brute."

"And Adams was nearly out of his mind."

"I should have been out of my job before that," remarked Belton. "I wouldn't have fagged for Smith."

"You'd have had to!"

"How could I, when I wasn't born at the time? Go on, Allenby; I like this yarn no end. But couldn't you bring a pirate in?"

"I won't tell you another word!"

"Because you can't think of the rest. Give him a leg up, Scooter!"

"I can, then! Besides, who needs to make up a true story? At last Smith—Adams, I mean—got desperate. He jumped out of the window one day, and broke his leg. And when he lay dying ——"

"Hold on! A broken leg doesn't kill anybody."

"It killed Smith—no, I mean, Adams. Because he had horrible injuries inside, too."

"Then it wasn't the broken leg that killed him?"

"Well, he died, anyway. You can't get away from that. It doesn't matter now exactly what killed him, because it must have been Smith's fault. And on his death-bed he said he'd haunt Smith."

"And did he?" asked Elton. The clumsy story had gripped him. He could picture it all—the daily persecutions, the desperate leap, the dying victim, were all real to him.

"Of course he did. He nearly drove Smith off his head."

"I say, did they let Smith stay here after that sort of thing?" asked Belton.

"No—yes, I mean. He had to leave at the end of the term."

"I should think he'd be glad to, haunted by a spook with a wooden leg."

"I didn't say the ghost had a wooden leg," protested Allenby ill-temperedly.

"Beg pardon! My mistake! I naturally thought so, that's all."

"Does the ghost still appear? Is that why the study isn't used?" asked Elton.

Belton flung an arm round him.

"Don't take any notice of his rotten

yarn, old man!" he cried. "There isn't any ghost. The whole story's a silly make-up!"

Elton shook his hand.

"It might happen," he said. "I—I—if I was treated so cruelly, I believe my ghost would walk—I'm sure it would! And Allenby wouldn't tell lies like that."

"Wouldn't he? He doesn't call them lies, that's all. He just reckons he's pulling our legs."

"Oh, do I? Well, see here, Belton, I'm jolly sure you daren't sleep a night in that end study!"

"Can't get in," remarked Scotter, not looking quite comfortable. "The door's locked."

"Bet you we can! The lock's one of those rotten things you can turn with a bit of wire. Now, Belton!"

If he expected Belton to show the white feather, he was disappointed.

"Oh, I'll sleep there all serene!" said the new boy coolly. "And if the ghost comes I'll give it toko. I promise you! Tell you what! If I stay till morning, I take your bat; and if I don't, I'll pay you ten bob!"

"I don't care about betting," answered Allenby. "It isn't reckoned the thing here, either."

"I didn't say anything about betting. I—just a bargain, that's all. Are you on?"

Allenby consented, but not willingly. That new bat was his most cherished possession. Its value might not be fully ten shillings; but he did not want Belton's money, and he would loathe parting with the bat.

"What did you tell those kids that rotten yarn for?" asked Scotter a few minutes later. Mr. Wotherspoon had been along meantime, and had released the quartette. "You made young Elton quite ill with funk."

"Silly kid!" replied Allenby. "All the same, I like him better than that swanky Belton. I was only pulling their legs, of course."

"You didn't pull Belton's, and you pulled Elton's a bit too hard. And you'll lose your bat, and then you'll be sorry."

"What an old croaker you are, Scooter! I don't mean to lose my bat, and I mean to show the bold Belton he isn't quite the hero he thinks himself."

"Don't ask me for any help if you're going to play the ghost dodge, that's all," said Scotter.

Allenby didn't. He took into counsel one, Barnwood, a youth of somewhat his own type, but craftier.

"It's a wheeze," said Barnwood—"that is, if it's properly worked. You need brains for that, so it's just as well you came to me. See here, you were going to choose a night, weren't you?"

"Yes. I thought to-night."

"Don't be such an ass! Let Belton choose his own night—see? He sleeps in my dormitory. He needn't know that I'm in the game at all. I'll come along to you when he clears out, and then——"

"But what odds is it?"

"You're as wooden-headed as they make 'em! Don't you see that if the night's arranged beforehand Belton will guess you'd be up to some dodge? But if he can choose his own night he'll be ever so much readier to believe in a spook. And he'll put it off, you see. The longer he puts it off the more funky he'll get, and the less he'll think that the ghost's you."

"But what about the door?"

"Show him how to get it open. Show him now. Try to persuade him to go to-night, but all the time tell him any night will do."

"But you said——"

"The more you try to get him to go, the more he won't go. You'll see!"

Now, whether Barnwood was right depended upon whether he had weighed up Belton accurately. As a matter of fact, he hadn't.

The new boy was a little beyond the measure of either Allenby or Barnwood. He had plenty of faults, but with them all he was utterly fearless, and knew it, and possibly was a bit inclined to plume himself upon it.

"All serene!" he said, when Allenby had instructed him as to the method of opening the door of the disused study. "I can do it. Let's have a peep inside."

They looked in. The place was quite empty, but clean, having evidently been swept and dusted regularly.

"That will do. 'Tisn't as bad as I expected," said Belton.

"Shall you come to-night?"

"I shall go when I like. That's the agreement."

"But how am I to know when, or whether you really have——"

"Do you think I tell such whackers as you do? Mention some chap in my dormitory, and I'll tell him when I go, and he can fix it up so that I can't slink back without being twigged. Not that I'm likely to."

"All right. Tell Wilson minor," said Allenby. He thought it better not to choose Barnwood.

"What's underneath?" asked Belton.

"Master's quarters. I don't know exactly whose room. We juniors never go there, you know."

Barnwood came creeping into D Dormitory, where Allenby slept, that night. He had to wake up his fellow-conspirator.

"The bounder's gone!" he whispered.

"I say, I never dreamed he'd go to-night! And you were sure he wouldn't, too."

"Didn't think he'd so much pluck. There's something in the chap."

"And we haven't got anything ready, either!" grumbled Allenby. He felt it as something like a personal grievance that Belton should have chosen that night.

"What's the odds? A sheet and a little of that phosphorus stuff will do the trick."

"Are you coming with me?"

"Oh, rather!" answered Barnwood.

Allenby seemed somewhat relieved. Barnwood wondered whether, after all, there wasn't a good deal more pluck in the new fellow than in Allenby.

Meanwhile, Belton had trekked to the empty study. He had made his preparations quite systematically. The mattress from his bed and a couple of blankets would be enough to keep him warm. He also took with him a limber ashplant, borrowed from the study of Marsh, for whom he fagged.

He was not in the very least afraid of ghosts, and not in much fear of masters or prefects. He told Wilson minor in a whisper what he meant to do, and was rude enough to reply "Rats!" when Wilson tried to dissuade him.

The empty study looked desolate enough in the partial darkness of a moonless summer night. Belton didn't care. He placed the mattress on the floor, rolled himself up in his blankets, with the ashplant ready to hand, and waited. He had no intention of sleeping just yet.

By and by he heard the sound of stealthy footsteps in the corridor. He sat up, stick in hand.

The handle of the door turned softly. Belton was just unrolling himself from the blankets, ready to jump up and fall upon the invader, when a quavering voice asked:

"Are you there, old m-m-man?"

It was Elton.

"Jee-rusalem!" said Belton.

"I—I couldn't leave you to—to face it all alone!" whispered Elton, catching him by the arm.

"My word, you've pluck, El!" said Belton, in honest admiration.

"Pluck! W-w-why, I'm so horribly af-afraid that——"

"Just it! You're afraid, and yet you came. That needs pluck. It's nothing at all to me, because I don't see anything to be funky about."

Belton had brains as well as pluck. Not every boy would have seen what courage underlay Elton's seeming cowardice.

"It's jolly good of you to say so, but ——"

"Roll up in this blanket, old chap, and snuggle up close to me. I'll put my arm round you. There, that's better, isn't it?"

It was certainly better, but it did not quite quell Elton's fears.

"It's horribly eerie in here, don't you think, Bel?" he whispered, after a pause.

"Not a bit!" answered Belton cheerfully. "Just the same as in the dormitory, if a fellow chose to keep his eyes open there."

"What's that?" quavered Elton.

"Something below, I think. The masters' quarters are there, Allenby says."

"It's a queer, ghostly sort of noise, don't you think? I don't believe it comes from underneath, Bel. It seems to be in the air all round us."

"Don't talk rot, old chap! More like a saw going than anything else, I reckon. Somebody at work on Smith's wooden leg, or Bill Adam's leg, or whoever it was, perhaps."

"Don't talk about that, Bel!"

"Why not? The whole yarn's just a thumper of Allenby's."

Silence followed. Belton, in spite of his resolve to keep awake, dozed a little, with his back up against the wall, and one arm round his chum. But Elton could not have slept, and only the nearness of Belton kept him from screaming aloud.

"What's that? Oh!"

He shrieked this time. He had not seen the door open, but now just inside it there stood an awful form in a white shroud, with a face that glimmered with phosphorescent light!

Belton sprang up and clutched the ashplant. Elton fell back on the mattress, gasping.

Belton struck hard and fast. There were two forms, one behind the other, and the rear one was not ghostly at all. But he also was in it, and he got his share of ashplant.

"Ow!" sounded a most unghostlike howl, and Belton laughed, and plied the ashplant vigorously.

The two intruders fled. But their flight was brief.

"Stop!" cried a stern voice.

Mr. Wotherspoon had arrived upon the scene

"What does this mean?" he demanded, striking a match, and lighting one of the gas-jets in the corridor. "I heard noises in the empty study. Barnwood, what are you doing out of your dormitory? Belton, explain at once! You in the sheet—oh, Allenby, is it You shall smart for this, Allenby! Are there any more mixed up in this absurd business?"

"Elton's in the study, sir, but he isn't to blame at all," answered Belton.

"Explain at once!" rapped out the master, leading the way to the study.

But the story was not told at once. Elton had fainted, and it was necessary to attend to him first.

When, after he had been put back to bed, and given a dose of some sedative, explanations were made, Mr. Wotherspoon was very indignant indeed.

"You, Allenby, deserve expulsion," he said sternly. "You have lied——"

"If you please, sir, it wasn't exactly that. I was only pulling Belton's leg," protested Allenby. "We don't call that lying, sir."

"I do. But I see the distinction that you make. Do you realise that the thing you did was a cowardly thing?"

"No, sir—I mean, yes, I do, sir, now. I'm awfully sorry about Elton! I never thought he would be in it."

"Elton," said Mr. Wotherspoon, "is the bravest of you all! I am not minimising Belton's courage. It may be of the foolhardy type, but it is there. I do not believe that either of you others is a coward in the ordinary way; but I am very sure that neither of you could have done what Elton did. He was in terrible fear, and yet he would not leave his chum alone. Barnwood, you are very nearly as bad as Allenby. I am going to cane all three of you, and Allenby and Barnwood will also be gated for a week. I shall not inflict that additional punishment upon Belton."

He caned them then and there.

Belton took his dose without a wince. Directly he had been dealt with he said:

"Oh, sir, would you mind telling me what's underneath the study?"

"My workshop," replied Mr. Wotherspoon. "That's why the study remains empty. I have an invention in hand, and I cannot put up with trampling above my head while engaged upon it."

"You were sawing something about an hour ago, weren't you, sir?" asked Belton.

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh, only that I told Elton the noise was sawing. I say, sir, I'm pretty handy with tools. I'll come and help you, if you like!"

The offer was not accepted. The other two told Belton it was "horrid cheek"; but, somehow, Mr. Wotherspoon did not appear to resent it. He never showed favouritism, yet, after that, various little signs showed that he liked both Belton and Elton.

The most curious thing of all was that this should be the beginning of an alliance of five—Scotter, Belton, Elton, Allenby, and Barnwood—that was to last as long as all the five were at Shilford together. They were the better for it every one of them. Elton grew to be less credulous and bolder, Scotter's common-sense kept Allenby and Belton out of many scrapes, and Barnwood, who had been developing unpleasant traits among fellows of the wrong sort, dropped his cunning ways in better company.

THE END.

THE LAST MATCH of the SEASON

By Ernest Levison.

Tom Merry and Talbot like heroes
Have fought for St. Jim's in the fray.
They set us a standard, and we rose
To the standard they set, lemme say!
"Time" nearing — score level — plot thickens—
Blake passes to Tom, who just taps
To Talbot—he shoots like the dickens—
A goal! Roar in triumph, you chaps!

Pheep, pheep! goes the whistle—it's ended,
And we've won by the odd goal in five
The last match of the season—oh, splendid!
What ass said that being alive
Was no catch? Why, it's giddy well glorious
To walk off Little Side all together,
Hungry, ruddy, and cheery—victorious!
Not worth living? Oh, stow all that blether!

WHAT I THINK OF THE FOOD REGULATIONS.

Dr. Holmes, Monty Lowther, and several people of less importance (from St. Jim's and Greyfriars) give their opinions on a most important subject.

DR. HOLMES
Sets a Splendid Example.

I strongly approve of the scheme. In this War we must all be prepared to make sacrifices, and it will hurt none of us to eat a little less food. To my mind, the limit of food per week which we are requested to keep under, is quite reasonable. For some time now, my family have not eaten more than the specified allowance, and I see no reason why any ordinary person should require more. I should not care very much for compulsory rations, but I quite see that if a section of the public refused to economise in food, a compulsory law will have to be passed.—(An admirable example, and we compliment our respected Head on his patriotism.—ED.)

BILLY BUNTER
Thinks Only of Himself.

I've never heard of such rot in all my life! The idea of telling us how much we ought to eat! Two loaves of bread a week! Why, it's utter rot! They expect us to fight for our country when we get old enough, and yet they cut down our food. How the dickens do they expect us to exist on two loaves a week? I can eat two a day. And the meat! What's two and a half pounds a week to a healthy growing boy? Nothing! I could eat that lot in two meals, and in one if I felt particularly hungry. I, for one, do not intend to eat any less. And I warn the johnny who has the fixing up of these things that if he ever makes it compulsory for us not to eat more than a certain amount every week, I won't be responsible for what happens. I shall die, I'm sure of that, and he'll be had up for murder.—(Let's hope the authorities will make the food rations compulsory; we should be glad to see what would happen to B. B.—ED.)

GERALD LODER
Shows His Ignorance.

I don't mind being rationed a bit, but what I say is this, why should practically grown-up fellows only be allowed as much as the kids in the Fourth and Third? It stands to reason that, being older and bigger, we Sixth-Formers require a good deal more to eat than do the fags, and yet they are allowed the same as us. It's an absolute injustice, and only encourages the beastly little pigs! I'm going to have a stop put to it. I shall write to our local M.P., and tell him that an alteration must be made at once.—(We've only one comment to make to Loder's remarks—Rats!—ED.)

HERBERT SKIMPOLE
Holds Out Hope.

I am not at all worried over the proposition to put us on food rations. Like all famous scientists and inventors, I find that I require very little to eat. From perusing the newspapers, I deduce that there is a serious shortage of food. But there is no need for alarm. We shall not starve in this country whilst we possess such an eminent scientist as Professor Notall There. Professor There has invented a new kind of food. It consists of little tablets, about an inch square in size. You place one of these tablets in your mouth in the morning and it lasts right through the day. All appetite is automatically removed by its action. The price is sixpence for a dozen.—(No more, thanks, Skimmy. Although we admire the professor's efforts to invent a new and cheap kind of food, we are afraid that if we adopted it as our daily subsistence in life, we should also be not all there!—ED).

FISHER T. FISH
Talks Through His Hat.

I guess I cannot fathom what's coming over this yere country. It appears to me as though it's going to the dogs, sure! Why don't they take a flit across the Herring Pond, and pick up jest a few tips from the States? Amurrica is some country, and I calculate they're not rationed over there, and never will be. My brother tells me they've got plenty of grub over there, so why should this yere cabbage-patch be short? Take it from me, it's through the want of hustle. Things'll never be any different until they have picked up some tips from the States.—(Talk sense, Fishy, do. Haven't you grasped the fact yet that we've been at war for over two-and-a-half years, and Americe's not yet in it? Stir your brains up a bit, will you? Thanks!—ED.)

MONTY LOWTHER
Makes a Novel Suggestion.

Never did eat much, and never mean to. Two loaves a week is quite enough for me, but I quite realise that there will always be some pigs whom will eat twenty two! I say make it compulsory for people not to eat more than a certain amount; then nobody will have any cause to complain. Of course, if things come to the worst, we can always boil Fatty Wynn down to make sausages for the poor. It would certainly be a bit rough on the poor; but there, any food's better than none at all.—(Thanks, Lowther, old scout. We must get Fatty Wynn's consent before this can be done.—ED.)

WUN LUNG
Proclaims the Value of Rice—He Calls It "Lice."

Me don'tee mind food lations at all. Me quite a smallee eater. Me babee a goodee idea. Why not feedee Englishmen on lice? Lice jollee goodee stuffee. All Chineemen eatee lice. Chineemen goodee and blainee, and livee to gleatee age. Englishmen do the samee if they eatee lice. Lice cheapee; blead velly dear. Englishmen livee on lice, and savee nuchee money. Jollee goodee idea. What you tinkee?—(Sorry, Wun Lung, but couldn't be did. Rice is all right for you Eastern chaps, but no good for us.—ED.)

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NOT BUNTER!

By OLIVER KIPPS.

(From the "Greyfriars Herald.")

IT was Bunter's own fault, really. Bunter said it was Bolsover's. It was all through Bunter's ventriloquism.

Bolsover major bought Snarley from a tramp. Where the tramp got him he didn't explain, and perhaps Bolsover didn't inquire. Anyway, Bolsover major brought him very cheap. Snarley was an Aberdeen terrier, a shaggy little beast, with fiery eyes, a set of teeth that looked positively dangerous, and the temper of a Hun.

Bolsover brought him into the Form-room to show him to us. There was a meeting in the Form-room before afternoon lessons, and most of the Remove were there. The first thing Snarley did was to make a bolt at Billy Bunter, and Bunter jumped on a desk and yelled with terror.

"Yow-ow! Keep him off!"

"What a dangerous-looking beast!" said Bob Cherry. "Does he bite?"

"I think so," said Bolsover. "Come and see!"

"Keep hold of the chain, you ass, or I'll brain him with an inkpot!" said Bob, as Snarley tried to get at him. "The brute isn't safe!"

"I don't think he's been well fed lately," said Bolsover. "He'll be all right when I've had him a bit. He's learned already not to bite me. He seems to want to have a go at Bunter. I dare say he takes him for an oyster!"

"Take him away!" yelled Bunter. "You'll get into a row if Quelchy comes and finds him here!"

"Quelchy's not due yet," said Bolsover. "I'm going to teach him to sit up and beg. Anybody got a biscuit?"

Nobody had a biscuit, but Bunter had a chunk of cake under his desk, and Bolsover took it.

"Beg!" he said to Snarley.

Snarley made a spring at the cake, and got it in his teeth, and very nearly got Bolsover major's hand as well. Bolsover turned quite pale.

"Nice kind of pet, I must say!" said Nugent. "My hat! What a growl! Sounds like a wild beast!"

"Take him away!" howled Bunter, who was still perched on his desk. "Quelchy will be here in a minute!"

"Bosh!" said Bolsover.

We all gathered round to look at Snarley, keeping out of reach of his teeth, however.

Fishy had an idea that he could quell him with his eye, and he tried it; but Snarley didn't look very quelled, and he snapped at Fishy in a way which made Fishy fairly hop. Then Ogilvy called out from the door that Quelchy was coming up the passage.

The chaps all bolted into their seats, excepting Bolsover. He had to dispose of Snarley.

Bolsover was in a fix. Of course, Mr. Quelch would have been waxy at his bringing a dog into the Form-room, and it was as likely as not that Snarley might go for him; for, of course, the terrier didn't know anything about Quelchy being a Form-master and a very special sort of person, and it was too late to get the beast away without Quelchy seeing him.

"Shove him in the cupboard!" said Skinner.

Bolsover major thought that a good idea. He opened the door of the big cupboard in the corner, where the easels were kept, and dragged Snarley in, and slammed the door on him. Then he bolted for his place.

Mr. Quelch came in just as Bolsover sat down, breathless.

"What are you doing on your desk, Bunter?" said Mr. Quelch, frowning. "Get into your seat at once! Not a word!"

We began afternoon lessons, wondering whether Snarley would stay quiet in the cupboard till half-past four. Bolsover major hadn't had time to think about that.

But there was no help for it now, and he could only sit tight and hope for the best. At the worst, he was prepared to disclaim all knowledge of Snarley, if he was discovered, as nobody outside the Remove knew that Snarley was his dog.

Mr. Quelch was giving us geography, when all of a sudden there was a deep growl in the Form-room.

Mr. Quelch started in surprise.

"Dear me! What is that?" he exclaimed, looking round.

The Remove sat as mum as oysters. Bolsover stared at his desk. Everybody knew very well what it was—Snarley beginning to talk. But Mr. Quelch didn't know about Snarley, and he was puzzled.

However, he went on again for a few minutes, and then there was another blood-curdling growl. Mr. Quelch jumped.

"Is there a dog in the room?" he exclaimed.

The juniors all looked round them.

"I can't see one, sir," said Skinner.

"There isn't one near me, sir," said Ogilvy.

"It is very odd! Surely I heard a dog growl? Wharton, kindly look about the room, and see whether there is a dog present!"

Henry Wharton rose up from his place, and searched about the room, and under the desks, and everywhere excepting in the cupboard.

"I can't see one, sir," he said at last.

"Very well! You may return to your place!"

Wharton sat down.

There was a steely gleam in Quelchy's eyes now, and we noticed that his look rested on Bunter. The lesson went on, but Mr. Quelch continued to watch Bunter, with that deadly gleam in his eyes.

Growl!

"Bunter!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter jumped.

"Ye-es, sir?"

"Come out before the class!"

Bunter went out, greatly surprised. Mr. Quelch took up a cane from his desk, and Bunter blinked at him as if his eyes would bulge through his spectacles.

"Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice, "you have on several occasions played ventriloquial tricks in the Form-room! I am quite aware of your powers in that direction. Until I discovered your somewhat troublesome gift, I was very much perplexed. I believe I punished you severely, Bunter, for those absurd tricks, so little worthy of the quiet and reposeful atmosphere which should appertain to a class-room!"

"Yo-o-es, sir!" stammered Bunter.

"But your misdirected sense of humour, Bunter, is apparently too strong for you! I shall endeavour to correct that misdirected sense of humour, Bunter!"

"If—if you please, sir——"

"You must learn, Bunter, that the Form-room is not the place for ventriloquial tricks, however clever they may be. I was under the impression for the moment, Bunter, that a dog was in this room. Hold out your hand!"

"B-b-b-but——"

"I warned you, Bunter, that in case of a repetition of your offence, you would be caned with severity. Hold out your hand!"

Growl!

Gr-r-r-r-r-r!

Mr. Quelch fairly jumped. Knowing all about Bunter's ventriloquism, and nothing about Snarley in the cupboard, he naturally put it down to Bunter.

"Bunter!" he roared. "Do you dare, sir, to repeat your tricks even while I am reprimanding you?"

"Nunno, sir!" gasped Bunter. "It wasn't me, sir! I—I can't really ventriloquise, sir—not a bit——"

Gr-r-r-r-r-r!

It was Snarley again.

"Very clever, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "If I were not aware that the sound proceeded from you, I should be convinced that it came from yonder cupboard! Very clever indeed! But the Form-room is not the place for such cleverness!"

Growl!

"I—I—I——" stuttered Bunter.

"You impudent boy!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

And he caught Bunter by the collar, and brought down the cane over his shoulders.

Billy Bunter's yell could have been heard as far as the Sixth-Form room. Bob Cherry jogged Bolsover's elbow.

"Better own up," he murmured.

But Bolsover major sat tight. His opinion was that it was Bunter's own fault for being a blessed ventriloquist.

"Now go back to your place, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, breathing hard. "And if there is another sound——"

Growl!

"Bless my soul!"

"It wasn't me!" shrieked Bunter, dodging Quelchy. "There's really a dog in the cupboard, sir!"

"Bunter, how dare you tell me such astounding falsehoods?"

Growl!

"Will you be silent, boy?" shrieked Mr. Quelch. "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

Growl!

Mr. Quelch gripped the cane and strode at Bunter. Bunter dodged round the desks, yelling.

"I wasn't me, sir! There's a dog——"

(Continued on the next page.)

NOT BUNTER!

(Continued from previous page.)

"Bunter!"

"A dog in the cupboard, sir!"

"Come here, Bunter!" roared Mr. Quelch. "How dare you make such an absurd statement? How could there be a dog in the cupboard?"

Billy Bunter couldn't give Bolsover away, but he did not want any more of the cane. He kept his distance, and blinked at Mr. Quelch.

"I haven't made a sound, sir," he gasped. "There must be a dog in the room. Perhaps—perhaps he got down the chimney, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, boys! Bunter——"

"Oh—or he may have walked in, sir, and—and put himself in the cupboard, sir. Dogs are awfully intelligent animals, sir!"

Growl!

Mr. Quelch was fairly crimson with rage as he heard the growl again. He took it for sheer insolence and defiance on Bunter's part.

"You—you wretched young rascal!" he gasped. "I command you to come here, Bunter, and receive your just punishment!"

"But I haven't done anything, sir," wailed Bunter. "I'm not really a ventriloquist—not in the very least, sir."

Growl!

Quelchy made a rush after Bunter, and Bunter dodged like an acrobat. The cane came down, but it caught Skinner instead of Bunter, and it was Skinner's turn to yell. Skinner said "Yarcooop!"

"I—I am sorry, Skinner," panted Mr. Quelch. "An unfortunate accident——"

"Yow-ow-ow-woop!"

"Cease that absurd noise, Skinner! Bunter, if you do not come here instantly I will ask the Head to deal with you."

"Twasn't me.

Growl—growl—growl!

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch, setting his teeth. "I will leave you for the Head to deal with, Bunter. I warn you that it will mean a flogging!"

Mr. Quelch strode to the door, his gown whisking after him, and fairly rushed to the Sixth Form room. Before we had time to think what was going to happen he came back with the Head. Dr. Locke was looking stern, and he had a cane in his hand.

Growl!

"Bunter!" said the Head in his deepest voice.

"There, sir!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "You are a witness to the effrontery of that wretched boy. Even in your presence——"

Growl! Gr-r-r-r-r!

"'Twasn't me!" shrieked Bunter.

"The boy is a ventriloquist, and has played such tricks before, though never to such an extent of incredible impertinence," said Mr. Quelch.

Growl!

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "If that is indeed ventriloquism, it is remarkably clever. I never heard a more lifelike sound, Bunter!"

"I didn't—I wasn't—I never!" shrieked Bunter.

Growl!

"Before punishing Bunter, Mr. Quelch, I will look in the cupboard," said the Head. "I have not the slightest doubt that it is a trick, but it is well to make absolutely certain."

And the Head went to the cupboard.

The Remove sat simply frozen. They knew by that growling that Snarley was in a fearful temper, and there was nobody holding his chain now. Every eye was fixed on Dr. Locke.

He threw open the cupboard door, and peered in over his glasses.

The next moment he gave a terrific yell, and jumped back. Snarley was springing straight at him, with his eyes fairly flaming.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. "It's a—a—a dog!"

The Head hadn't time to say anything. He ran for his life.

Snarley looked dangerous, and there was no doubt he was dangerous. We had never seen the Head sprint before, but he sprinted now. He made a terrific rush to the door, with his gown flying behind him, and after him went Snarley. The Head went through the doorway, with Snarley clinging to his gown and worrying it. Mr. Quech stared after him, transfixed.

"Bless my soul! A dog—a savage dog! A-d-d-dog! Boys, help your Headmaster!"

There was a rush of the Remove to the rescue. Fellows caught up books and rulers, and dashed out into the passage. Snarley had made a wreck of the Head's gown, and he would certainly have made a wreck of the Head, if he had been given time. But books and rulers fairly rained on him, and the beast let go and ran, and went buzzing into the quadrangle. He disappeared out of gates at a record speed, and Greyfriars never saw him again. Bolsover major had lost the two bob he had given the tramp for Snarley, but he was jolly glad to see the last of him.

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Mr. Prout took the Sixth for the rest of that afternoon. The Head was feeling too upset. Billy Bunter expected an apology from Mr. Quelch, now that the mistake had come out; but he didn't get one. Instead of that, Quelchy began asking question as to how the dog had got in the Form-room cupboard. But nobody seemed to know anything about that, and Mr. Quelch had to give it up. Billy Bunter was simply bursting with indignation at getting a licking he hadn't deserved. But, as Bob Cherry said, he deserved it for something else. So that was all right!

THE END.

Answers to Correspondents.

(From that great organ of public opinion, "Tom Merry's Weekly." These replies are given under the heading of "Our Comic Column," a feature conducted by Monty Lowther, and readers of the GEM are hereby warned that they may possibly be intended as jokes.)

"Fair Inquirer."—Yes, it would be quite possible for me to tell you who is the handsomest, the cleverest, and the nicest fellow, and who is the best all-round athlete in the Shell; but modesty forbids. You sign yourself "Fair Inquirer," but yours is hardly a fair inquiry. Like the famous G. W., I cannot tell that which is not in accordance with verity; but to answer without terminological inexactitude might lay me open to a charge of swank.

"Antiquarian."—Your query, relating to the sandwiches provided as traps for the unwary in railway refreshment-rooms, is scarcely a truly antiquarian one. I should advise your consulting a geologist, who may be able to give you information as to the true nature of the various strata in such formations.

"Anxious One."—It depends upon the sausage-roll. The crust, being made of flour, must of course be considered in working out the food ration for the week. As for the sausage, if chiefly composed of bread, as is so frequently the case, that should also be included; but when it defies analysis, I think you are justified in giving yourself the benefit of the doubt.

B. T.—I agree with you that Lord Devonport does not appear to have considered cases like yours in thinking out his food scheme. He was legislating for human beings.

W. G. B. (Greyfriars).—See reply to B. T. above.

F. T. F. (Greyfriars).—Why should not the new Food Ration scheme apply to neutrals? Do you suggest that in times like these there is no necessity for allowing neutrals any grub at all? If so, I am inclined to agree with you; but your letter is written in some barbarous dialect that is rather beyond me.

W. D'A.—You ask: "If the Russian 'p' is the same letter as the English 'r,' does a Russian mean he is pushing when he says he is rushing (Russian)?" The answer seems to be that one rode a horse and the other rhododendron.

P. M. (Fourth Form).—It is not true that the absence of H. M. from the Shell Form-room, the Common-room, the dining-hall, and Study No. 10 lately was due to his having been caught photographing in a prohibited area, and remanded for trial under the Defence of the Realm Act. He had a bad cold, and was in sanny. But nobody minds your believing anything you choose to believe.

T. M. (Shell).—If you mean to stop the "Comic Column"—out and away the brightest thing in your paper—you will have to take far more drastic measures than handing me a note to that effect. Do you think that you could get a military guard for the printer's office? This appears to me the most likely way of keeping it out.

H. S. (Shell).—To your inquiry as to which is preferable, the perusal of sound, valuable, illuminating, scientific works like those of Professor Balmycrumpet, or that of light, frothy, ephemeral narratives such as those published in the "Magnet," I can only say that the reply is in the negative.

G. G. C. (Shell).—You inquire what is wrong with war-time profits? Why should a millionaire who becomes such as a result of making them, have the finger of scorn pointed at him, while other millionaires are honoured? Can't say I honour any of them myself; and as for the war specimens—great Scott, man, look at them! That ought to be enough!

D. W. (New House).—I regret that I cannot print your very long and rather violent letter. I regret, also, that the Devonport Dumplings, the recipe for which I gave in some "Hints for Young Housewives" a short time ago, should have disagreed so much with you and the other gentlemen in your study that at one time a fatal result was more than half expected in the case of G——e F——s, who was rendered worse than yourself and K——r, owing to the fact that he had a cold, could not taste what he was eating, and swallowed as many as three mouthfuls. It was really not my fault. I indicated a soupcon of Worcester Sauce. The printer made it "a soupcan." I altered the word in proof. The printer does not know French, it would seem; but he knows best, and the alteration was not made in type. The exact measure indicated by a soupcan I do not know; but I strongly suspect that it must be a quantity that would be easily too, too much in the case of anything so pungent as sauce.