THE CHUMS OF STUDY No. 9!

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

AN OLD SOLDIER.

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Too Much Coventry?

"I'M gettin' fed-up!"

Cardew of the Fourth snapped out that remark, in No. 9 Study.

He was standing with his hands in his pockets and a dark frown on his face, staring grimly at his study-mates, Levison and Clive.

Clive looked uncomfortable, and Levison gave a slight shrug of the shoulders. Neither replied.

"I suppose you two are not sendin' me to Coventry, as well as the rest?" said Cardew sarcastically.

"I'm not, and you know it," said Levison.

There was a pause before Clive replied. Finally he said:

"No."

"After all, what's all the dashed fuss about?" growled Cardew. "All through a chap breakin' bounds, and cheekin' the Head!"

"Cheeking the Head's bad form," said Clive. "The fellows are down on it, naturally. If I weren't your study-mate, I should send you to Coventry, like the rest. It's only for a week, anyway."

"Might have been for the whole term!" said Levison. "Grin and bear it!"

"I'm not goin' to grin and bear it! That ass D'Arcy passed me a few minutes ago with his nose in the air, and didn't seem to hear when I spoke to him!"

"You shouldn't have spoken, then."

"Oh, rats!"

"It's the sentence of the House," said Clive. "You've simply got to toe the line!"

"Well, I'm not goin' to toe the line!"

"I don't quite see what else you'll do," said Levison, with a grin. "You can't make the fellows speak to you."

"I can punch a fellow's nose, if he won't!"

"You'll have a good many noses to punch, then. What about your own nose, by the time you've finished?"

"I'm not going to stand much more of it, anyway!"

And, with that, Ralph Reckness Cardew quitted the study, and closed the door after him with a slam that rang the whole length of the Fourth Form passage.

There was no doubt that Cardew of the Fourth was getting fed-up. The grandson of Lord Reckness had an excellent opinion of himself, and he expected rather to be sought after than avoided.

To be cut, not only by fellows like Tom Merry & Co., but by insignificant persons like Trimble and Mellish, was humiliating and exasperating to him. And he was liable to forget that he was in Coventry, and to address a remark carelessly to a fellow—generally to receive a stony stare in response.

Cardew's passionate temper had been on the point of breaking out more than once; and now it was at a dangerous pitch.

As he came swinging down the Fourth Form passage, with his hands in his pockets, his eyes were gleaming, and he looked like a fellow who was hunting for trouble.

Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy were chatting in and around the doorway of Study No. 6, as he came by. They did not seem to be aware of his existence, though he stopped and stared at them.

"How long are you goin' to keep up this rot?" snapped Cardew.

"Talkin' about the cwicket, deah boys, it's about time I was ovahhaulin' my bat," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully.

"Good idea!" agreed Blake.

"Gettin' deaf?" asked Cardew.

"Looks as if the weather's going to mend, too," remarked Digby.

Cardew quivered with anger.

"You silly chumps!" he exclaimed. "Can't you speak?"

"I wefuse to speak to you, Cardew, as you are in Coventwy——"

"Shurrup, ass!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, I was only explainin' to Cardew that I wefuse to addwess any wemark to him undah any cires whatevah!"

"Cheese it!" said Blake. "Come and get your bat!"

"Yaas, deah boy."

The chums of No. 6 went into their study. Cardew's eyes glinted, and he looked for a moment as though he would rush in after them. But that would not have been of much use.

He restrained himself, and went sullenly downstairs.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—were coming in as Cardew went out. He stopped on the steps, right in their path.

The Terrible Three had to halt.

Tom Merry opened his lips, but closed them again. He walked round Cardew, and went in. Manners walked round him, and Lowther circumnavigated him, so to speak, on the other side.

Cardew was left standing on the steps, pale with anger.

He strode out into the quadrangle, where he found Julian and Reilly and Kerruish chatting together. He came up to them with lowering brows, and they turned away at once—Kerruish indulging in a sniff as he did so.

That was too much for Cardew. He reached out, and grasped the Manx junior's collar, and spun him round.

"Now, you sniffin' idiot—— Oh!"

Without a word the three juniors closed in on Cardew, grasped him, and lifted him off his feet. They sat him down in the quad with a heavy bump, and left him there, grinning as they walked away.

Cardew sat for some moments, gasping, before he scrambled to his feet. His brow was black as he rose at last.

His efforts at breaking the icy circle of Coventry had not been very successful, so far. Three juniors at a little distance were grinning—they were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, of the New House.

Cardew gave them a savage look.

"Well, what's the snigger about?" he demanded.

Figgins & Co. grinned again, without replying by words.

"Can't you talk, you New House dummies?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Keep off the grass!" he said. "You're in Coventry in your own House, and we know you've asked for it. It's nothing to do with us, of course, but we're not going to interfere with the sentence of your House. So buzz off!"

"You silly fatheads!"

Figgins & Co. sauntered away.

Cardew drove his hands deep into his pockets, his scowl growing darker. The sentence of his House was just, and the New House fellows knew it. Cardew knew it, too, for that matter; but that knowledge did not make it easier to bear.

The sight of Tom Merry, a little later, crossing the quad towards the school shop, caused a gleam to dart into his eyes.

The captain of the Shell was alone now, and Cardew, who was ripe for a row, hurried towards him, and planted himself directly in Tom's path.

The Shell fellow made a gesture to him to stand aside.

"You can't speak?" sneered Cardew.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Well, if you want me shifted, you can shift me! I'm waitin'!"

Tom Merry pushed back his cuffs, quite prepared to take the Fourth-Former at his word. Then he paused. Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, was coming from the direction of the gates, and he had an eye on them.

The New House master had nothing to do with the School House fellows; but "Ratty" was much given to interference.

Cardew had his back to the Housemaster, and did not see him. His lip curled as Tom paused.

"Thinkin' better of it?" he asked sarcastically.

Tom's eyes gleamed, and he clenched his fists, and came on. If Cardew did not choose to step aside, that was his look-out.

Cardew did not step aside.

He stood his ground, and struck out as the Shell fellow came on. Tom Merry hit out heartily in return, and in a moment the two juniors were fighting.

There was a terrific thumping and trampling and gasping as they closed in combat and struggled.

"Cardew! Merry!" It was Mr. Ratcliff's acid voice. "Cease this at once! How dare you!"

Crash!

Cardew was down, gasping, on his back. As he leaped up, his eyes flaming, the New House master rustled up, his hand raised commandingly.

"Stop!" he thundered.

Cardew dropped his hands, with a savage scowl. Tom Merry stood quietly. The New House master frowned at both of them.

"How dare you fight in the quad-

rangle!" he exclaimed. "What is the cause of this dispute?"

Tom Merry did not reply.

"You hear me, Merry?"

"You are not my Housemaster, sir," said Tom quietly. "I will explain to Mr. Railton, if he asks me."

Mr. Ratcliff compressed his lips. He might have expected that rebuff, but apparently he did not expect it.

"I shall report your impertinence to your Housemaster, Merry. Cardew, you will answer me!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sent to Coventry, and I was punchin' that silly fool for not speakin' to me," he said. "That's all!"

"Indeed! Why is Cardew sent to Coventry, Merry?"

No reply.

"Follow me at once, both of you!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

He whisked away towards the School House, and the two juniors followed him in silence. Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming with anger. Mr. Ratcliff had a craze for interference, and he was evidently about to interfere in a way that the School House master would find it difficult to resent. But there was no help for it, and Tom followed Mr. Ratcliff into the School House master's study.

CHAPTER 2.

Ratty Does Not Prosper.

MR. RAILTON laid down his book as his colleague entered, with the two juniors at his heels. He compressed his lips a little, though his manner was quite courteous. He found his colleague a little hard to bear at times.

"I have to report to you a somewhat serious matter, which appears to have escaped your observation, Railton," began the New House master.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! You are aware that there is a form of persecution among schoolboys known as 'Coventry.' I find that this boy, Cardew, is being made a victim of that form of persecution, and I feel it my duty to bring the matter to your notice."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Ratcliff." Mr. Railton did not look very much obliged, however. "You may leave the matter in my hands."

Mr. Ratcliff hesitated. He did not feel inclined to be dismissed so summarily. He felt that he had an advantage over Mr. Railton, and he did not want to relinquish it.

"Quite so," he agreed. "But there is another matter I have to discuss with you, Mr. Railton. I will remain till these juniors are dismissed."

The School House master nodded. He could not actually turn his colleague out of his study.

"Well, Cardew," he said, "it would seem that you have some cause of complaint, which you have stated to Mr. Ratcliff instead of to your own Housemaster?"

"Not at all, sir," said Cardew.

Tom Merry glanced curiously at him. He had expected the whole matter to come out. But Cardew, with all his faults, was loyal to his House, and he did not in the least intend to be used as a means of helping Mr. Ratcliff to score over his own Housemaster.

"But Mr. Ratcliff says——"

"I am not responsible for what Mr. Ratcliff says, sir," replied Cardew calmly.

Tom Merry suppressed a grin as he noted Mr. Ratcliff's expression. He almost liked Cardew at that moment.

"Cardew," gasped Mr. Ratcliff, "you distinctly stated to me that you had been sent to Coventry by the other juniors."

"I made no complaint, sir."

"If the boy does not complain, I can scarcely take notice of the matter," said Mr. Railton, inclined to smile himself. "However, I must ask you some questions, Cardew. You have been sent to Coventry by your schoolfellows?"

"Yes, sir. Coventry for a week is the sentence."

"You do not complain of this?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"For what cause are you sent to Coventry?"

"The fellows considered that I was lackin' in respect to the Head, sir," said Cardew.

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton, taken aback, and the New House master stared. "If that is the case, Cardew, my boys are very right to express their disapproval. Am I to understand that you admit the justice of your sentence?"

"Certainly, sir! I fairly asked for it, and I got it. I'm not complainin' in the least."

"I am glad that you can see the matter so sensibly, Cardew. You may both go."

Mr. Ratcliff's face was a study. Cardew's answers had quite taken the wind out of his sails. Evidently he was not going to make out his case of persecution in the School House, going on under Mr. Railton's nose, unnoticed.

"But—but" broke out Mr. Ratcliff. "this boy confesses that he has been guilty of disrespect to the Head! Surely ——"

"Quite unintentionally, sir," said Cardew. "The other fellows and I took a different view of a certain matter, and I was in the wrong, and I own it. That is all."

"And that is enough," said Mr. Railton. "You may go, Cardew and Merry."

The two juniors left the study.

The door closed on them. In the passage Cardew grinned.

"Rather a facer for the old sport—what?" he chuckled. "He thought he was going to make old Railton sit up."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Good for you!" he said. "Look here, Cardew, it was jolly decent of you to speak up like that, and, as far as I'm concerned, the Coventry's done with. I'll speak to the other fellows."

"Oh, rats!" said Cardew. "I don't care a twopenny rap either way!"

"I think you do," said Tom, "and I mean it."

Cardew shrugged his shoulders and walked away; and Tom Merry, with a smile on his face, made his way to the school shop again.

Meanwhile Mr. Ratcliff remained in the School House master's study. His disappointment made the acid gentleman compress his lips. His case of "persecution" had vanished into thin air, and nobody was to be punished or called over the coals, which was a very severe disappointment for Ratty. Mr. Railton understood perfectly his colleague's thoughts, and a smile hovered over his lips.

"You had some other matter to speak to me about, I think you said?" he remarked, when the juniors were gone. "Pray take a chair, Mr. Ratcliff."

Mr. Ratcliff remained standing.

"Yes, concerning the food restrictions," he said.

The School House master raised his eyebrows.

"I am quite aware of the new regulations," he said. "They are, of course, enforced in my House, as, I suppose, they are in yours."

"Quite so. But there is a detail that has perhaps escaped your attention—the keeping of animals by the juniors."

"Animals?" repeated Mr. Railton.

"Exactly. Dogs, to be particular. I understand that several of the boys in your House possess dogs."

"That is so."

"At this time, Mr. Railton, food should not be wasted upon dogs."

"It should not be wasted, certainly," agreed Mr. Railton drily.

"You may be aware that many persons have suggested, and are in favour of, the slaughter of dogs, in order to save food."

"The war has produced many cranks, Mr. Ratcliff—the pacifist, the conscientious objector, the enemy of dogs, and other peculiar characters. We must expect that."

"Mr. Railton!"

"Something, no doubt, could be said for the slaughter of hunting-packs," said the School House master. "They serve no useful purpose, and, indeed, are pernicious to agriculture. But that is not at all likely to come to pass."

"I am not referring to hounds, but to pet dogs. There is only one boy in my House, as it happens, who keeps a dog, and I am about to give him instructions to have it killed forthwith."

The School House master looked very grave.

"That is a very serious step to take," he said. "If the boy is fond of his dog, it will be a heavy blow to him. So long, at least, as foodstuffs are used for the manufacture of intoxicating liquor, we may well spare the little our dogs require."

"That is not my view, Mr. Railton," said the New House master stiffly. "I had every expectation that you would follow my example."

"I am afraid I cannot do so. If I kept a dog, I would share my last meal with him, and I am sure my boys feel the same."

"That is mere sentimentality, sir."

"I do not agree with you. Kindness and unselfishness are qualities worth cultivating in a boy."

"Then there is nothing more to be said!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "I am surprised and disappointed. I cannot in the least understand this regard for mere animals. I shall, however, carry out my decision so far as my own House is concerned, and Figgins will be ordered to have his dog destroyed at once."

And Mr. Ratcliff left the study hastily.

The School House master returned to his book; but his thoughts wandered. He could not help thinking of Figgins of the Fourth, when that cheery youth received the order to destroy his dog. He could picture the horror and dismay that would dawn upon poor Figgy's face. Mr. Railton had no power to interfere in Mr. Ratcliff's House, and he could do nothing to avert the catastrophe; but he could not help thinking of it, with a clouded brow.

CHAPTER 3.

Good News for Racke!

"GOOD-EVENIN', deah boy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that greeting as Cardew of the Fourth came into the Common-room.

There was really no reason why Arthur Augustus should bid Cardew good-evening, such greetings not being at all customary in the Common-room. But the swell of St. Jim's desired to make it known that he gave Cardew his gracious approbation. Tom Merry had told how Cardew had shut up the New House master in Mr. Railton's study, and the juniors had chuckled over it, and agreed that Cardew had earned his exemption from Coventry. And Arthur

Augustus proceeded to mark the difference at once.

"Hallo!" said Cardew, with a grin. "Found your voice at last?"

"Yaas, deah boy. I have no objection to speakin' to you," Arthur Augustus assured him graciously.

"Neither have I, so long as you don't overdo it," said Cardew calmly.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus; and there was a chuckle from the other fellows.

Racke of the Shell looked round sharply.

"You're speaking to Cardew, D'Arcy!" he exclaimed.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Aubrey Racke.

"Yaas, you are quite wight," he replied.

"What do you mean by it? Cardew's in Coventry."

"I wegard you as a cheekay ass, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Racke's right," said Crooke of the Shell. "You're breaking the rule, D'Arcy, and you'll get sent to Coventry yourself."

"I should be vewy pleased to be sent to Coventwy by you, Cwooke! I do not wegard you as a desiwable acquaintance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all very well!" exclaimed Racke. "But you've got to chuck it."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus gave Racke a glance of sovereign disdain.

But Racke felt that he had an advantage, and he meant to pursue it. Racke & Co. had been delighted to see Levison and Cardew in the black books of the School House fellows. Levison, their old associate, had turned his back upon them and their shady ways. Cardew, in spite of the most polite attentions from the black sheep, had disdainfully declined to be drawn into their select circle. More than once Racke & Co. had striven to sow trouble between Levison of the Fourth and his new friends: but they had always failed. So they had entered into the Coventry sentence with keenness, and were prepared to keep it up most rigidly. Racke felt now that, for once, he would have a backing among the School House fellows, and he stuck to his point.

"You know the rule!" he exclaimed. "Cardew's in Coventry by sentence of the House. Any fellow who speaks to him goes to Coventry, too. Isn't that so, Tom Merry?"

"That's so," said Tom. But——"

"There isn't any buts," said Racke. "That's the rule."

"Racke knows the rules of Coventry," said Levison, with a grin. "He's been there himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind that," said Racke, scowling. "I call on all the fellows to enforce the rule."

"Yes, rather!" said Crooke emphatically.

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Mellish.

"There are extenuating circumstances in this case," explained Tom Merry. "We've decided to let Cardew off."

"You've no business to decide anything of the kind, without a meeting of the House," said Racke.

"Why, you cheeky ass——"

"Oh, cheese it, Racke!" said Jack Blake. "You're off-side. Keep to subjects you understand—such as war-profits."

"Yaas, wathah! I wefuse to listen to your wot, Wacke!"

"So you're all speaking to that outsider?" exclaimed Racke savagely. It was evident that he was not going to get any backing, after all.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But don't you do it," suggested Monty Lowther. "Keep him without the delights of your conversation, Racke. And gloat over his sufferings!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I don't agree to this," said Crooke.

"You needn't trouble," said Tom Merry drily.

"I sha'n't speak to the fellow, or to anybody else who speaks to him," said Racke, with a glare round at the grinning faces.

"Bai Jove! Then you will be sendin' yourself to Coventwy, Wacke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better chuck it, Racke," said Clive, laughing. "It's all over now, you know. And you don't even know what the trouble was about, either. You're talking out of your hat, you know."

Racke scowled, and left the Common-room with Crooke. The two Shell fellows went up to their study, Racke with a scowling face, Crooke grinning a little.

"So that's over!" said Racke, as he threw himself into a chair, and lighted a cigarette.

"Give us a light," said Crooke. "Yes, No. 9 Study seems to be in favour again. It wouldn't have lasted, anyway. Levison has squeezed himself into favour; he's quite popular now. Cardew seems to be able to do as he likes. Hang them both!"

Racke bit through his cigarette in his anger.

"Levison's keeping it up!" he said. "I don't believe it's genuine, but he's keeping it up. I hear that he's going to have quite a show at cricket, too. And we've never made him sit up for throwing us over!"

"I fancy his giddy reform is genuine," said Crooke. "He found out that it didn't pay, I suppose. After all, he's too poverty-stricken to have much of a good time; he was always getting into debt, and had to squeeze out of it somehow."

"He used to make a good thing out of me at nap," growled Racke. "I can't understand his keeping up this game. He's a loser by it."

"He always was an obstinate rotter! He likes to put our backs up."

"It's only spoof!" said Racke fiercely. "By gad, I'd like to get the truth out about him some day, and show him up!"

Crooke shrugged his shoulders. He was as annoyed as his chum by Levison's defection from the shady set, but he did not take the same view. His belief was that Levison had done with his old ways, and that his reform was not merely an elaborate piece of spoof, as Racke supposed.

The study door opened, and Mellish of the Fourth came in. The two Shell fellows looked at him rather grimly. Mellish was a member of their set, but he was poor, and generally trying to borrow money. Mellish's friendship was founded chiefly upon a desire to share the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

"Give us a fag!" said Mellish cheerily.

Racke grunted, and shoved his case across the table. The Fourth-Former lighted a cigarette.

"All serene now in No. 9," he remarked.

Racke grunted again.

"I don't think the fellows would be so willing to give them the glad eye if they knew all I knew," said Mellish, with a grin.

Racke started.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "You don't mean that you've bowled Levison out?"

"I fancy so!" said Mellish complacently.

"By gad!" Racke drew a deep breath. "I'd give a tenner to show him up, if he's really at his old games—I believe he is. What have you nosed out?"

"A mare's nest, most likely," remarked Crooke.

"You can judge for yourselves," said Mellish. "Where do those three buzz off to together so often?"

"Do they?" asked Racke.

"Yes, they do. I noticed it first last week, and Trimble mentioned it to me the other day, too; Trimble notices everything. Nearly every day after lessons they come out together, get their bikes, and simply disappear. They went again this afternoon, and I trotted along, and saw them bike off along the towing-path. You know where that leads."

"The Green Man!" said Crooke.

"They don't go to the Green Man," said Racke decidedly. "We should have heard of it from Joliffe or Lodgey. But they go somewhere. You're sure about it, Mellish?"

"I've watched them start half a dozen times," said Mellish. "I asked Clive where they'd been when he came in to-day."

"And what did he say?"

"Told me to find out!"

"Then it's a secret, anyway," said Racke, his eyes gleaming.

"Yes, rather! I've noticed that Clive hasn't said a word about it to Blake or his pals, though he's very friendly with them. They buzz off together like that nearly every day, and they never say a word about where they've been or what they're up to. Looks fishy!"

"By Jove, it does look fishy!" said Crooke. "But—— Levison or Cardew might be up to anything, but Clive, he's not that sort."

"You never know," said Racke eagerly. "There's a merry old proverb that says that evil communications corrupt good manners. Clive's Levison's study-mate, and he's sure to get tarred with the same brush in the long run. We're jolly well going to look into that little secret, anyway!"

"Good egg!" said Mellish. "I say, Racke, can you lend me a quid?"

"No!" snapped Racke. "I can't!"

"I owe Lodgey a quid," said Mellish. "He's worrying me for it. Dash it all, you're loaded up with tin!"

"Well, it's my tin, not yours!" said Racke coolly.

"Is it yours?" asked Mellish, with a sneer. "I understand that your pater made it in war-profits. That doesn't make it yours—only legally."

And with that Parthian shot Mellish strolled out of the study.

Racke scowled at Crooke, who was grinning.

"I'm fed-up with that worm's spongin'!" growled Racke. "He owes me several quids already. But I say, Crooke, this is worth lookin' into! We'll keep our eye on No. 9 Study after this, and if we can catch them trippin'——" Aubrey Racke's eyes gleamed. "My hat! That would be a surprise for Tom Merry & Co.! And it looks fishy—jolly fishy!"

And Racke lighted another cigarette, and smoked it with great satisfaction. It really looked as if he had a chance at last of repaying his ancient grudge.

CHAPTER 4.
Figgins's Awful Fix!

FIGGINS of the Fourth came into his study in the New House, his rugged face quite pale, and his eyes gleaming.

Kerr and Wynn stared at him. They had never seen George Figgins look quite like that before.

Fatty Wynn was busy cooking. Fatty was a great chef, and the new food regulations gave him a chance of exercising all his skill.

The war had come home to the school at last. Food allowances were severely limited—only specified amounts could be purchased at the tuckshop for the meal taken in the study.

That dreadful prospect almost made Fatty Wynn inclined to join the Pacifists. But everything, after all, was not allowanced, and, by careful management, fairly satisfactory meals could still be arranged. Though, if a still more severe pinch came later, Fatty felt sometimes that he really would have to join the Stop-the-War party.

But the expression on Figgy's rugged face made his fat chum forget even the problem of tea in the study.

"What's happened, Figgy?" asked Kerr.

"They—they haven't cut down the allowance, further?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, in alarm. "They—they couldn't be such beasts! Look here, you chaps, I think it's about time we let the Huns off! After all, they're beaten, and they've been howling for peace. I really don't hold in hitting a man when he's down, even if he's a Hun! I really think—that is, if they're cutting the grub allowance down—that——"

"Shut up, Fatty!" said Kerr. "What is it, Figgins?"

"Ratty!" said Figgins, between his teeth.

"Not the food allowance?" exclaimed Fatty.

"No, you ass!"

"Then, it's all right!" said Wynn confidently. "A fellow can stand anything but that! What did Ratty want you for, Figgy?"

"The cad!" muttered Figgins.

"Who? Ratty?"

"The filthy Hun!"

"Who?"

"The skinny reptile!"

Figgins sparred in the air with his clenched fists. He had to relieve his feelings somehow. His look showed that he would have liked Mr. Ratcliff's acid countenance to be within hitting distance just then.

"But what has he done?" asked Kerr, in wonder.

"The rotten Hun!" hissed Figgins. "You'll hardly believe it. You know my dog—old Spot?"

"Ratty can't have been ragging about him. We never have him in the study now," said Kerr.

"He wants him killed!" yelled Figgins.

"Killed?"

"Yes."

"But, why? There's nothing the matter with Spot."

"Food economy!" snorted Figgins.

"What rot!" said Fatty Wynn. "We haven't come to eating dogs yet. They're doing it in Germany, but we——"

"Fathead! Even Ratty isn't such a ghastly Hun as that! Though he might as well!" said Figgins bitterly. "The old scoundrel——"

"Draw it mild!" murmured Kerr.

"Well, the rotter wants Spot killed—destroyed, he calls it—to save food—a biscuit or two a day, you know," said Figgins. "I don't buy beef-steaks and chump-chops for him. I don't feed him like a guzzling Cabinet Minister at the Lord Mayor's Banquet. I don't give him caviare, and oysters, and champagne. Do I?" roared Figgins.

"No, old scout," grinned Kerr, "you don't. Has the Food Controller started on dog-biscuits? If he has——"

"Of course he hasn't!" howled Figgins. "But Ratty is one of those clever rotters who know better than the Food Controller. Poor old Spot gets a biscuit or two, and a bone now and then. He's on war-rations all the time, for that matter. And Ratty says he's to be taken down to the chemist's, and what he calls destroyed. That means murdered!"

"Hard cheese, old chap!"

Figgins glared.

"Do you think I'm going to do it?" he hooted. "I'll see Ratty blowed first! I'll be sacked from the school first! If Ratty wants to save food, he can go and hang himself—he wouldn't be missed as much as my dog, I know that! Let me catch anybody laying a paw on my dog! I'll brain him with a cricket-bat!"

"I don't quite see what you can do, old fellow," said Kerr. "If you don't get it done, Ratty will order Taggles to take him away."

"Let Taggles touch him, that's all!" said Figgins ferociously. "There'll be a new porter wanted at this school afterwards!"

"But you can't——"

"Whether I can or not, I'm going to!" said Figgins. "Spot isn't going to be hurt, poor old fellow! The question is, how are we going to get out of it? That's what we've got to consider. It sha'n't be done—that's flat! Look here, you Scotch fathead! It's up to you to think it out—set your blessed Scotch brain to work on it!"

Kerr grinned. The Scottish junior, as a matter of fact, did most of the thinking that was done in Figgins' study, and Figgy had absolute faith in his sagacity. But this was a knotty problem for Kerr.

A Housemaster's order could not be disobeyed without serious consequences. Even if those consequences were braved, the result would be the same—Taggles would be ordered to make away with the poor little animal. Figgins might talk of braining Taggles with a cricket-bat; but that was not really a feasible proposition. Much less drastic measures would have to be adopted.

Kerr wrinkled his brows in thought.

"What about asking a School House chap to mind him?" asked Fatty Wynn.

Figgins snorted.

"Ratty's thought of that. No dog belonging to a chap in this House is to be kept at all. That's the merry order."

Figgins eyed Kerr anxiously. Figgy was feeling inclined to take the most desperate measures to preserve his dumb pal, but it was really upon Kerr's sagacity that he relied.

A grin broke over Kerr's thoughtful face at last, and Figgins' face brightened as if by the reflection.

"Got it?" he asked eagerly.

"I think so," said Kerr. "You'll have to sell him."

Figgy's face fell.

"Sell him? Fathead!"

"That's it! You see——"

"Fathead!" repeated Figgins witheringly. "I can't sell him. A dog's a pal, not a slave! A chap can't sell a pal!"

"You don't catch on, old scout. You've got to sell him to a School House chap—that'll save his life. But if you sell him, say, for a ha'penny——"

"A ha'penny?" said Figgins, with a stare.

"Yes, that will make it a sale, you see. No law against taking as little as you like for a dog. And Tom Merry or Blake or Gussy would buy him like a shot, and agree not to exercise any rights of ownership, and to sell him back to you for the same sum when desired. You could trust them."

"Oh!" ejaculated Figgins.

He understood now.

"That sees you clear," said Kerr. "You sell him, and he belongs to Tom Merry, say, and Ratty won't be able to touch him. The new ownership will only be nominal. But you needn't explain that to Ratty."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

He gave his chum a terrific slap on the shoulder to show his appreciation, and Kerr gave a yell.

"Yow-ow! You ass!"

Figgins rushed out of the study. He crossed the dusty quadrangle like the wind, and sped into the School House. There was a sharp exclamation as he ran into Kildare of the Sixth in the Hall.

"You young ass!"

"Ow! Sorry! Yow!"

The captain of St. Jim's steadied Figgins with an iron grasp on his ear, and the Fourth-Former wriggled.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo, Kildare!"

"Mind where you're running, then!" said Kildare.

And he released the junior, and Figgins went on his way, rubbing his ear, with a little less impetuosity. But he came up the stairs three at a time, and broke into a run in the junior passage, till he was suddenly seized by three pairs of hands and stopped.

"New House bounder! Bump him!"

Bump!

And Figgins sat on the passage floor, and Cardew, Clive, and Levison grinned down at him.

"No dogs or Huns or New House bounders admitted!" said Cardew.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins sat and gasped.

"Give him another!" chuckled Clive.

"You—you silly asses!" roared Figgins.

He scrambled to his feet, and backed away from the grinning trio. As a rule, Figgy was quite ready for a House row, and he was not apt to count odds. But there was no time for House rows now. The life of his shaggy little mongrel, Spot, was at stake. And if Spot had been a hound of the purest pedigree Figgy could not have attached more importance to his doggy existence.

"Pax, you duffers!" gasped Figgins.

He held up his hand in sign of peace. No. 9 Study graciously forbore to pursue hostilities.

"Anything the matter?" asked Levison, noting for the first time the signs of disturbance in Figgins' face.

"Yes! You'll do, Clive!" said Figgins.

"Eh! I'll do for what?" asked the South African junior in surprise.

"To buy my dog."

"My hat! I don't want to buy a dog!"

Figgins hastily explained. Then Sidney Clive nodded at once.

"I'll do it like a shot!" he said. "No danger of Railton starting any knavish tricks like that in this House! I suppose it had better be a genuine sale. I'd better hand you a tanner——"

"A ha'penny will do," grinned Figgins "and another ha'penny for the kennel I keep him in. I know you're as straight as a string, Clive. You don't mind taking the trouble to call my dog your dog. Though, of course, it would be your dog, so far as that goes. Of course, I'll look after him, and feed him, and clean him, and look after the kennel, and take him out for walks. You needn't bother about him at all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I understand," said Clive. "He's

going to be my dog, but you'll take all the trouble of him—eh? And I sha'n't claim him, of course. I'm much obliged to you, Figgy, for offering to take care of my dog like this, especially after we've just given you a bumping."

Figgins chuckled.

"You're a good sort!" he said. "Hand over the cash!"

Clive extracted a penny from his pocket and handed it over to the New House junior.

"Thanks!" said Figgins. "Now, as a separate transaction entirely, I'll lend you this penny till your hundredth birthday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins handed the penny back, and Clive chortled, and slipped it into his pocket again.

"Now you'll be able to explain that Spot's your dog if required," said Figgins. "You fellows are witnesses."

"Yes, rather!" Levison said.

And Cardew nodded.

And Figgins, having found so suitable a purchaser for his dog, returned to his own House in cheerful spirits. His cheery face as he came into his study showed his chums that the matter was settled satisfactorily.

"All serene?" asked Kerr.

"Right as rain!" said Figgins. "I've sold him to Clive. He's a real, decent chap, you know!"

"First chop!" agreed Kerr.

"And now we'll have tea," said Fatty Wynn. "I've made a pie, old scout, and it's a corker. Lucky for you fellows you've got me in this study."

And Figgins & Co., in great spirits, sampled the pie, and the whole study agreed that it really was a corker.

CHAPTER 5.
Uphill Work!

"YOU fellows coming?"

Tom Merry asked the question the following afternoon.

The Terrible Three came out of the School House in Norfolk jackets, and Study No. 6 followed them similarly attired. Julian and Reilly and Kangaroo joined them on the steps. Levison, Clive, and Cardew were chatting in the doorway, and it was to them Tom addressed his remark. The three juniors were in Norfolk jackets and knickers, too.

"That depends," said Levison. "Where are you off to?"

"Abbotsford," said Tom. "We're going to see the soldiers. You fellows coming along?"

"Not this time. We're going for a spin."

"Righto! Come on, Talbot!"

Talbot of the Shell came out and joined Tom Merry & Co. The crowd of juniors wheeled their machines out cheerily. It was a half-holiday that afternoon, and fine spring weather, and Tom Merry & Co. were going to enjoy a long spin. Mellish of the Fourth was lounging on the steps, and he glanced curiously at Levison & Co. as the rest of the juniors departed. Mellish had once been Levison's chum, in a way, but they seldom exchanged words now.

"So you're not going, Levison?" said Mellish.

"Eh? No."

"But you're going biking?" said Mellish.

"Oh, yes!"

"Like a fellow to come along?"

Levison stared at him.

"You don't want to come," he said. "A ride without a smoke at the end isn't in your line. What are you driving at?"

"Isn't there a smoke at the end?" grunned Mellish.

"Oh, rats!"

Mellish went into the house. Ralph Reckness Cardew glanced at his watch and yawned.

"About time we were off," he remarked.

"May as well get the machines out," said Clive, with a nod.

"Better give those chaps time to clear, though," Levison remarked. "We don't want to run into them!"

"Yes, That's so."

Mellish, in the Hall, heard those remarks, and he grinned. He hurried up the stairs to Racke's study. Racke and Crooke were there. The bright spring weather had not tempted the two slackers out of doors.

"They're just off," said Mellish. "If you want to run them down you've only got to get your bikes out and wait at the gates for them."

"Rotten fag!" yawned Crooke.

But Racke started to his feet, and threw his cigarette away.

"Come on, Crooke!" he said. "We don't want to lose a chance like this!"

"Oh, all right!"

Crooke followed Aubrey Racke from the study. They passed the chums of No. 9 on the steps of the School House, and went round to the shed for their machines. They wheeled their bicycles down to the gates, and there they stopped, leaning on the machines and chatting.

Tom Merry & Co. had disappeared from sight down the road. About ten minutes later Levison, Clive, and Cardew came out with their bicycles, and mounted them in the road. Clive glanced at the two slackers in the gateway and smiled.

"Waiting to get steam up?" he said.

"Oh, rats!" said Racke politely.

The three juniors rode off in the direction of Rylcombe, and Racke and Crooke mounted at once and pedalled after them.

"Easy enough," Racke remarked. "We've only got to keep them in sight. Hallo! Levison's looking round. He's spotted us!"

"Let him!" grinned Crooke. "He can't prevent us riding where we like."

"No fear!"

Levison had lost none of his old keenness in his new way of life. That one glance behind was enough to tell him that Racke and Crooke were shadowing the party.

"Look back!" he said. Clive and Cardew glanced back. "They're following us."

Cardew frowned.

"Cheeky cads! We'll jolly soon stop that. Halt!"

"Inquisitive asses!" growled Clive. "Hold on, though; don't get down. Let's give them a run. They'll crack up in ten minutes if we put on speed."

Cardew burst into a laugh.

"Good egg!" he said.

And they rode on.

Wherever it was that the three Fourth-Formers were going, they evidently did not want to disclose their destination to Racke and Crooke. They rode on, and turned into another lane, which led up the steep slope of a hill. It was not their intended direction; but Levison's idea was that by the time the two weedy slackers behind reached the top of that hill they would be sorry that they had started.

The three plodded their way steadily up the rise on their lowest gear. Behind they came Racke and Crooke.

"They must be goin' to Woodhill, this way," Racke remarked. "What's goin' on at Woodhill, I wonder?"

"There's a place there with a bowling-alley and a billiard-room," said Crooke.

"Keep on! This is pretty steep."

"Yes, hang it!"

The three riders in advance were keeping on steadily, and did not seem to feel the hill. But the pursuers laboured painfully over their handle-bars. Too many cigarettes in the study had told upon their wind. They were soon gasping like landed fishes, and riding in spasmodic jerks.

"My hat! I—I can't stand much more of this!" panted Crooke. "Those beasts don't seem to mind it. Grooh!"

Racke was panting, too.

"Hang it! Hallo! They're gettin' down!" he exclaimed. "We can walk the rest."

On the top of the rise in the road, half a mile ahead, but plain to see against the clear sky, they could discern the dismounted cyclists. For reasons best known to themselves, Cardew and his companions had halted to rest on the top of the hill. Crooke and Racke jumped down, and wheeled their machines on and upward. They expected the cyclists ahead to disappear every moment.

But the trio stood there, apparently admiring the scenery.

Wheeling the machines up was easier than pedalling them up, but Racke and Crooke had bellows to mend, with a vengeance, by the time they reached the top of the slope. They halted there, gasping and gasping as if they would never leave off gasping.

"Hallo!" said Clive cheerily. "You coming our way?"

"Looks like it!" panted Crooke.

"Bellows to mend, dear boy?" chuckled Cardew.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Levison put his leg over his machine.

"You fellows ready?" he asked. "Lovely bit here for free-wheeling."

"Ha, ha! We're coming!"

To the amazement of Racke and Crooke, the three juniors remounted their machines, and shot away down the same slope up which they had toiled. The Shell fellows watched them in wonder.

"They—they—they're going back!" stuttered Crooke.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Down the steep slope, free-wheeling, the three riders went at a fine speed. They vanished from the eyes of the fagged and perspiring slackers of the Shell. Racke ground his teeth.

"Oh, the rotters! Oh, hang them! They're not going to Woodhill at all. Hang them! They've spoofed us into climbing this rotten hill for nothin'!"

"Oh, confound them!" mumbled Crooke.

The two spies looked at one another in utter disgust. It was only too clear that they had been spoofed.

As for keeping up the pursuit, that was out of the question. Cardew & Co. were almost in Rylcombe Lane again by this time, and Racke and Crooke did not possess quite the nerve to go down the hill at such terrific speed. And they could foresee that if they did get on the track again, they would be given another hill to climb.

"What a rotten sell!" groaned Crooke. "You were a silly ass to come, Racke! You might have known they'd spot you. Oh, dear!"

"Oh, don't jaw!" snarled Racke. "Let's get home."

"I'm jolly well going to have a rest before I get on that dashed jigger again," growled Crooke. "My legs ain't made of iron."

It was half an hour before the two slackers mounted their machines again. And it was nearly another hour before they pedalled wearily up to St. Jim's. Where Levison & Co. were by that time they could not even guess. Evidently their little expedition had been a frost.

CHAPTER 6.
Something Like a Mystery!

"BAI Jove! That's Cardew's jiggah!"

Tom Merry & Co. were riding homeward in the late spring afternoon. They wanted to get in before dark, for locking up, and they had turned from the Abbotsford road, and taken a short cut. It saved a couple of miles on the ride, but it led over the hill, and on the steep road the juniors were wheeling their machines. The road was dusty, and the cyclists were thirsty, and they paused at the garden-gate of a cottage standing back from the road, with the idea of asking the cottager for water.

The road was bordered by fields and woods, and the cottage was a very lonely one. As the juniors glanced towards it, they observed three bicycles in the garden, leaning against a fence. And then Arthur Augustus uttered that remark. Cardew's handsome, expensive jigger was easily recognisable. The grandson of Lord Reckness had the best of everything that money could buy, and his handsome bicycle was well known.

"By Jove! That's Cardew's machine right enough!" said Talbot. "The others must be Levison's and Clive's. They're here."

"Gone in for a booze," said Monty Lowther. "Let's go and do likewise."

"Hallo! There's Cardew!" said Julian.

In the doorway of the cottage a slim and shapely figure appeared in view for a moment. It was Cardew of the Fourth. His glance turned towards the road, and then, to the astonishment of the juniors, he darted back into the cottage, out of sight.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"What's the name of that game, I wonder?" said Manners. "What has Cardew done the vanishing trick like that for?"

"Goodness knows!"

Tom Merry looked perplexed.

"Did he see us?" asked Reilly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But he didn't know we saw him, and he scooted," grinned Lowther. "Gentlemen, I think we'd better get on."

"Weally, Lowthah, we stopped heah to ask for a dwink of watah."

"We seem to have stumbled on something," said Lowther drily. "If Cardew doesn't want us to know he's here, we don't want to rout him out."

"Wats! Why shouldn't we?"

"My estimable Adolphus, I don't know the answer to that one. But when a fellow jumps out of sight like a giddy kangaroo, the inference is that he doesn't want to be seen."

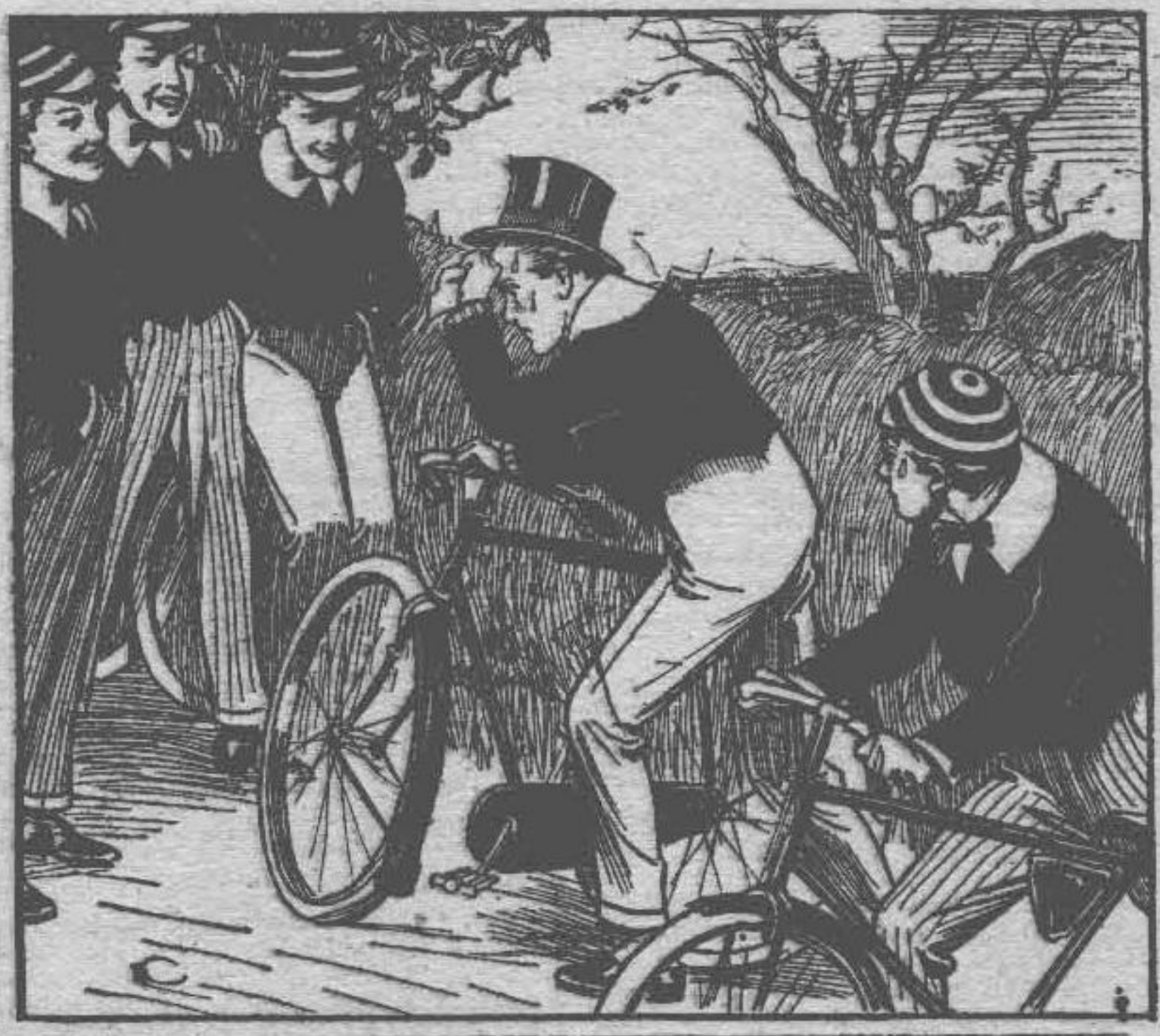
Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Wubbish, deah boy! If it were Wacke or Cwooke or Scwope, I should think the wottahs came here to gamble or smoke or somethin'. I don't know about Cardew, but Clive isn't that sort of wottah, and we know Levison's given it up. I wefuse to entahtain any suspish on the subject. I'm goin' in."

And Arthur Augustus leaned his machine on the gatepost, and went into the garden, and walked up to the cottage.

The other juniors remained in the road. Cardew's action had been so pointed, his desire to hide his presence in the lonely cottage so evident, that they did not feel inclined to "rout him out," as Lowther expressed it.

Arthur Augustus, determined not to allow unworthy suspicions to enter his noble mind, marched on. But before he reached the little porch, the door, which had been open, was suddenly closed in his face.



Uphill Work!
(See Chapter 5.)

Even Arthur Augustus halted then.

"Gweat Scott!" he murmured.

The juniors in the road exchanged queer glances. They had seen the closing of the door, fairly in the aristocratic face of the Honourable Arthur Augustus. What did it mean? What could it mean?

Arthur Augustus remained for some moments quite still, as if rooted to the garden-path. Then, without approaching the door, he turned back, and came quietly to the gate.

"Undah the circs, deah boys, I don't think I shall go in there," he said. "We can do without the dwink."

"There's somebody watching us from the window, keeping behind the curtain!" said Blake.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry abruptly.

"I say, this is dashed queer!" said Kangaroo. "Is Levison up to his old games, and has he drawn Clive and Cardew into it?"

"Cardew wouldn't want much drawing, for one!" said Blake. "He goes to Racke's study to play nap—or he did, anyway. I'm surprised at Clive, though!"

"It can't be as you think," said Talbot. "Cardew certainly seems to be keeping a secret, but I know Levison is dead straight now. There's nothing going on here that we mightn't see."

"What did Cardew dodge out of sight for, then?" grunted Herries.

"I don't know."

"And why did he close the door nearly on Gussy's nose?"

Talbot shook his head. It was too deep a problem for him, and he gave it up.

"He's still watching us!" said Blake, with a curling lip. "Let's get off. We don't want to be mixed up in their blessed secret, whatever it is!"

The juniors wheeled on their bikes up the hill, silent and thoughtful. They mounted at the top, and rode on to the school. They reached St. Jim's as dusk was gathering, and found Figgins & Co. waiting at the gate. Figgins was looking anxious.

"Clive with you?" he asked, as the crowd of School House fellows wheeled their machines in.

"No," said Tom Merry, somewhat drily.

"Oh, blow!" said Figgins. "I want him. Cardew or Levison, then?"

"Neither of them."

"Do you know where they are?"

"Can't say exactly," said Tom. "What the dickens do you want them for, Figgy? Have you chummed up with Cardew?"

"Fathead! I've sold Clive my dog," said Figgins. "Ratty's told me to come to his study at six, and I know what it's for. He'll want to ask Clive about it."

"I dare say he'll be along soon," said Tom.

"Sold your dog!" exclaimed Herries. "I thought you were fond of him, Figgins."

Herries indulged in a slight sniff. Untold gold would not have purchased Towser, Herries' ferocious favourite.

"It's a little game!" explained Figgins. "Ratty's ordered him to be destroyed, so I've sold him to Clive!"

Herries drew a deep breath.

"Lucky I'm not a New House chap!" he remarked.

"Yes, rather! He'd have ordered you to have poor old Towser done in!"

"I don't mean that! I mean I should brain him with a ruler!" said Herries. "A Housemaster like that ought to be in Prussia. What's he doing in a civilised country, I'd like to know? B-r-r-r-r-r!"

And, with a growl that was not unlike Towser's own, Herries tramped on.

Figgins & Co. remained at the gates, watching the road in the thickening dusk. Taggles had come out of his lodge jingling a bunch of keys, when three cyclists, riding hard, came whizzing into sight at last.

They jumped down, and rushed their

machines in before Taggles had time to shut the gates.

"Just done it!" exclaimed Clive breathlessly.

"Good luck!" said Levison. "Sorry, Taggles! You won't have to report us this time. I sympathise with you!"

Taggles grunted, and slammed the gate. Figgins stopped Sidney Clive as he came in.

"You'll be wanted soon!" he said. "I've got to go in to Ratty now. Keep yourself handy in case you're wanted as a witness!"

"Right you are!" said Clive, laughing.

Six o'clock was tolling out from the old clock-tower. Figgins & Co. hurried back to their House, where Figgy made his way at once to his Housemaster's study.

CHAPTER 7.
A Dog's Chance.

MR. RATCLIFF gave George Figgins a severe glance as he presented himself. It was one minute past six o'clock.

"I told you to come here at six precisely, Figgins!" he said acidly.

"Yes, sir."

"You will take fifty lines!"

"Yes, sir," said Figgins, suppressing his feelings.

"You are probably aware of the reason I sent for you," said Mr. Ratcliff. "Have my instructions been carried out?"

"Ahem!"

"I commanded you, Figgins, to get rid of the useless animal you have been keeping. Have you done so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good!" said Mr. Ratcliff suspiciously. "Has the dog been destroyed?"

"N-n-ot exactly destroyed, sir!" stammered Figgins. "I—I've got rid of him another way. Ahem! I've sold him!"

Mr. Ratcliff frowned.

"You should not have done so, Figgins! My object was to destroy a useless animal that consumes food. However, if you have actually sold him outside the school—have you done so?"

"Nunno, sir! A School House chap ——"

"Figgins!"

"C-C-Clive's very fond of dogs, sir!" said Figgins. "I've sold him to Clive of the Fourth."

Mr. Ratcliff compressed his lips.

"This is mere subterfuge, Figgins! You mean that you have nominally handed your dog over to a School House boy in order to evade my instructions?"

Figgins was silent. As a matter of fact, that was what the transaction did amount to.

"I shall not allow this!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "I refuse to take any notice of this pretended sale. I shall myself take the dog to the chemist's to be destroyed as you have not done so!"

"Clive would object, sir!" gasped Figgins. "It's his dog!"

"I shall not allow him to object!" said Mr. Ratcliff icily.

"He—he will complain to his Housemaster, sir!"

"Boy," thundered Mr. Ratcliff, "take a hundred lines, and leave my study at once!"

Figgins, with gleaming eyes, quitted the study. Kerr and Wynn were waiting for him in the passage, but he did not stop. He ran out into the quad and across to the School House. He rushed into No. 9 study like a cyclone.

"Clive!" he gasped.

"Hallo!" said the South African junior coolly. "Don't knock the tea-table over, my son! What's the row?"

"Ratty—the beast—the rotter—the cad—the Hun—the pig——" Figgins stuttered incoherently.

"Go it!" said Cardew.

"He's going to take my dog to be killed!" gasped Figgins. "It's your dog now, Clive. Have you got nerve enough to go to your Housemaster about it? Railton wouldn't let him!"

"You bet!" exclaimed Clive, jumping up.

"He's going down to the kennels now, I believe!" groaned Figgins. "I can't stop the brute, Clive, but you could——"

"Leave it to me, old chap!"

Sidney Clive dashed out of the study. He did not stay for his cap. Levison and Cardew, a little alarmed, followed him. Figgins remained in the study, at the window. He was keeping an eye on the gates. If Mr. Ratcliff went out with his dog, Figgins was going to stop him, if he was expelled from St. Jim's within ten minutes afterwards.

Clive arrived breathless at the kennels. His comrades were at his heels. But Spot was blinking peacefully on his chain, and the New House master was not to be seen.

"Not here yet, anyway!" panted Clive.

"Here he comes!"

Mr. Ratcliff came round the buildings with a frowning brow. He glanced at the juniors in the yard, and walked towards Spot's kennel. Clive planted himself in front of it.

"Stand aside, boy!" rapped out the surprised Housemaster.

"That's my dog, sir!" said the Colonial junior quietly.

"Stand aside! I intend to take that animal away at once to be destroyed!" said the New-House master angrily.

"I shall not allow it, sir!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"You have no right to touch my dog, and I shall appeal to Mr. Railton!" said Clive steadily.

"Will you stand aside, Clive?"

Clive set his teeth.

"No," he said, "I won't!"

Levison and Cardew drew nearer to Clive. They were prepared to stand by their chum, whatever happened. Mr. Ratcliff blinked at them. Unheard-of, unnerving as it was, it could not be doubted the three Fourth-Formers meant to stop him if he attempted to touch the dog. The New House master gasped with rage.

"Clive," he said, in a choking voice, "you will follow me to your Housemaster at once!"

"I'm ready to do so, sir!"

Mr. Ratcliff stalked furiously away, and Clive paused a moment to whisper to his friends.

"I don't know how it's going to turn out with Railton. Take care of the bow-wow, you chaps!"

Cardew chuckled softly.

"Leave it to us, old chap."

Clive followed the Housemaster to Mr. Railton's study. Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom were both there, and they glanced in surprise at the New House master's furious face. In almost gasping accents Mr. Ratcliff poured out his grievance. Mr. Lathom looked at the School House master oddly. It was not an easy problem for that gentleman to settle.

"If the dog is really Clive's, I cannot allow it to be interfered with, Mr. Ratcliff," said the School House master firmly.

"It is a trick, a pretence, for the purpose of disregarding my authority in my own House!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Let the boy answer me! Clive, did Figgins give up all rights over the dog when he sold him to you?"

"He sold him," said Clive.

"Is it actually your dog, and are you at liberty to sell him to another person?"

"He's my dog."

"That is not a direct answer, Clive," said Mr. Railton gently "You must answer Mr. Ratcliff."

"Well, I shouldn't sell him to anybody else, of course!" admitted Clive.

"In point of fact, you are simply keeping him for Figgins?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

Clive was silent.

"Will you give your word of honour that this is a genuine sale, and not a trick designed to save the dog?" rasped Mr. Ratcliff.

No reply.

"You see for yourself, Mr. Railton! It is a trick!"

"I am afraid, Clive, I must take Mr. Ratcliff's view," said the School House master reluctantly. "I do not blame you, my boy, but I cannot recognise this transaction. You must give up the dog."

Mr. Ratcliff strode from the study at that. Clive made a movement to follow, but his Housemaster detained him, gently enough.

"Remain here," he said

Clive, with burning cheeks, remained.

Mr. Ratcliff rustled out of the School House and hurried down to the yard. He reached the kennel, and stooped to release Spot's chain to take him away. Then he gave a jump. The chain was gone, and the dog! The kennel was empty!

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

He glared round the yard, but there was no sign of Spot. Figgins' dog had vanished. Like the Boojum in the story, he had "suddenly, silently vanished away," and Mr. Ratcliff was left to cast Hunnish glares at the empty kennel.

CHAPTER 8.
The Life-Savers.

FIGGINS looked round eagerly as there was a footstep in the doorway. It was Tom Merry who came into the study.

The captain of the shell was smiling.

"I've got a message for you, Figgy," he said.

"From Clive?"

"Never mind whom it's from," said Tom. "You'd better know nothing about the matter, so that you can tell Ratty so if he asks you. Spot is as safe as houses, and you can rely on that. Are you willing to let it go at that?"

Figgins drew a deep breath.

"You're sure of that?" he asked.

"Quite sure. If anything else should turn up, you'll be told at once. But at present it would be safer for you not to know details. You're bound to answer your Housemaster if he questions you, you know. He might even take you to the Head. If you don't know what's become of the dog, you can say so. Of course, if you'd rather know——"

"No fear!" said Figgins. "I catch on. You're quite sure the poor old chap will be safe?"

"Honour bright!"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins gratefully. "It's awfully good of you chaps to take all this trouble!"

"All serene!" said Tom. "It's everybody's business to be up against the Huns, even the native variety."

Figgins grinned and quitted the study. He could guess that Clive and his friends had formed some scheme to secure Mr. Ratcliff's victim, and confided it to Tom Merry, and, so long as he could rely upon them, it was certainly safer for Figgy to know nothing.

Figgins returned to his own House

relieved in his mind. He joined Kerr and Wynn at tea; but the three juniors had scarcely started when the door was thrown open and Mr. Ratcliff whisked in.

"Figgins!" thundered the Housemaster, "Where have you placed your dog?"

"In the kennel, sir."

"The dog is not in the kennel now!"

"Isn't he, sir?"

"You know he is not, Figgins!"

"I know now you've told me, sir."

"Do not bandy words with me, boy! I am perfectly well aware that while I was with Mr. Railton you removed the dog!"

"I did not, sir!"

"Where were you at the time"

"In the School House, sir."

"Can you prove that?"

"I spoke to Tom Merry, sir, if it's necessary to prove it," said Figgins quietly.

"Do you not know where the dog is now?"

"I do not, sir, unless he's in his kennel."

"He has been taken away!" said Mr. Ratcliff, breathing hard through his long, thin nose.

"Indeed, sir?"

"Did you request another boy to remove him, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"Kerr and Wynn, do you know where the dog is?"

"No, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Ratcliff, compressing his lips, "I must accept your statement, Figgins, but the matter will not rest here. I do not intend to pander to the inconsiderate selfishness of an unpatriotic boy!"

And Mr. Ratcliff whisked out again.

"Unpatriotic!" said Figgins, between his teeth. "I like that from Ratty! You fellows remember that it came out that he's got gold tucked away—chaps have spotted him counting it—instead of handing it over as he ought. And he hasn't subscribed twopence to the War Loan, though he could afford a lot. We know Railton put every penny of his savings in it. Unpatriotic—from Ratty! That's rich!"

And Figgins snorted contemptuously.

"But what's become of the merry bow-wow?" asked Kerr.

"Goodness knows!" said Figgins. "I've got reason to believe that he's safe somewhere, but I don't know where. And I sha'n't know till this has blown over. Perhaps Ratty will get another bee in his bonnet later on, and let my dog alone!"

And Figgins & Co. returned to their tea.

Meanwhile, a number of School House juniors were gathered in No. 9 Study in the other House. Levison and Clive and Cardew were there, with Tom Merry. The four were smiling cheerfully. On the armchair reposed a diminutive canine form—that of Spot. He was blinking at the juniors, quite unaware of the deadly peril that menaced his doggy existence.

"Well, here he is!" remarked Cardew. "Now the question is, what's going to be done with him? I suppose we can't keep him in the study?"

"Not without being spotted," said Tom Merry. "But you can't take him back to the kennels. Ratty will nose him out there."

"He'll have to be got out of the School," said Clive.

"But at present——"

"There's the box-room," said Levison. "We can stow him away there in an empty box, and put on a cord instead of a chain, so that there won't be any noise to give him away. And the sooner the quicker. Ratty might come here."

"Yes, rather," said Tom. "I'll take him, if you like, and if Ratty should come in you fellows can be doing your prep."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Spot was persuaded into a bag, and the captain of the shell left the study with him. He carried him to the upper box room, a corner where he was not likely to be found or suspected. There Spot was made comfortable, with an old coat for a bed, in a trunk belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, which was very roomy. There was no opportunity of asking Gussy's permission; that had to be taken for granted.

Tom Merry came back to his own study, and he heard voices in No. 9. He smiled as he recognised Mr. Ratcliff's voice. The hunted animal had been taken away only just in time. The Shell fellow went into his own study; he did not want to see Mr. Ratcliff.

In No. 9 Study, Levison and Clive and Cardew had risen respectfully as the New House master came in. The Housemaster eyed them sharply and suspiciously.

"I have reason to believe that Figgins' dog is hidden in this study!" he said angrily.

"Figgins' dog!" repeated Cardew.

"Yes. Is he here?"

"No, sir."

"I shall search the study!" said Mr. Ratcliff.

"Shall we turn out our pockets, sir?" asked Cardew meekly.

Mr. Ratcliff did not reply to that question. He proceeded to make a thorough examination of the study, the three juniors standing and watching him with twinkling eyes.

The search did not reveal anything of a canine nature, and the New House master quitted the study at last, with lowering brows.

"Looks like a reverse for Ratty, this time," remarked Cardew. "Cheery old sport, isn't he?"

"Blessed if I know what he's doing outside Prussia!" growled Clive.

It certainly was a reverse for Mr. Ratcliff. His next step was to visit Mr. Railton, and demand a search of the School House for the missing dog.

The School House master, who was not at all sorry to hear that the dog was missing, declined to allow anything of the sort, and hinted very plainly that he considered that his colleague was making a very absurd fuss about nothing.

So the defeated Ratty returned to his own House, and found what satisfaction he could in caning Figgins.

Figgins took his caning philosophically. He did not mind a caning or two, so long as Ratty's Hunnish designs upon his dog were frustrated.

CHAPTER 9.
Under a Cloud!

"THERE seems to be something on among the fellows."

Levison made that remark as he came out of the School House with his study-mates, a couple of days later, after lessons.

Clive and Cardew nodded.

They had noticed it.

Racke and Crooke and Mellish and Trimble were in the porch, and they grinned as the three came out.

"Put a bob on for me," said Racke.

"And spare a few of the smokes for me," chuckled Mellish.

"What does that mean?" asked Levison quietly.

"Why don't you ask a chap to join your little party?" grinned Trimble.

"It's greedy keeping it all to yourselves. And we're all sports here, you know."

"You silly, fat duffer!" exclaimed Clive. "What do you mean?"

"*He, he, he!*" *cackled Trimble.*

The three juniors went out, and, a few minutes later, were seen wheeling their machines down to the gates. Quite a large number of eyes followed them.

Racke & Co. had been talking.

The mysterious expeditions of No. 9 Study were noted by all the juniors now, and Cardew's reckless character and Levison's old reputation gave some weight to Racke's insinuations.

Racke's version was that the three were going out to "play the giddy ox," in the old style of Ernest Levison. The Green Man, so near the school, was no longer safe, and they were going farther afield—that was Racke's view. And the fact that the trio never explained where they went, or what they did, gave colour to it.

If it was all above-board, what did they want to keep it a secret for?

It was nobody's business, perhaps, but fellows were curious about it, and Racke's story grew. On the occasion when he had spied on the chums, Racke had had nothing but an uphill ride for his pains; but that did not prevent him from spreading his suspicions. Racke took a virtuously indignant attitude. He was a "bit of a sport," and fellows looked down on him for it; but at least there was no humbug about him. It was time the humbugs of No. 9 Study were shown up, Racke asserted. And he was doing his best to show them up.

Tom Merry & Co. had heard the yarn, without comment. Tom would have spoken to the three about it at once, but for the fact that he had seen Cardew at the lonely cottage on the hill.

Cardew's conduct on that occasion had been secretive and suspicious, and Tom could not help recognising that fact; and Clive and Levison were in the same boat. Tom decided that it was no business of his, and when he heard the whispers and rumours, he kept his own counsel. His chums followed his example.

But, naturally, under the peculiar circumstances, No. 9 Study received the cold shoulder to some extent.

That afternoon they returned to the school just in time for calling-over. When the fellows came out of Hall, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped the three in the passage. There was an expression of portentous gravity on Gussy's noble face.

"I wish to speak to you on a wathah sewious subject, deah boys," he said. "Shall I come to your study?"

"Oh, go ahead!" said Cardew. "If it's a sermon we can hear it here. Chuck it at sixthly; life's short, you know!"

"Pway be sewious! I am goin' to tell you what some of the fellows are sayin'. You are pwobably awaah that the whole House has noticed how you wun off aftah lessons neahly evewy day now."

"Awfully kind of them to interest themselves in us, I must say!"

"Some fellows are sayin' that you go out blaggin'."

Clive flushed.

"Who says that?" he exclaimed.

"Nevah mind who says it, deah boy. But it is spweadin' ovah the place. Of course, your pwivate affaihs do not mattah to anybody but yourselves, but, as a fellow of tact and judgment, I wecommend you to explain, if there is weally nothin' in the yarn."

"If!" exclaimed Levison.

"Yaas, Levison."

"So you really think there is something?" exclaimed Clive.

"Weally, Clive, I have not formed an opinion. I sincerely twust that your visits to that lonely cottage on Abbots-

ford Hill are quite wight and above-board."

"What on earth do you know about the cottage?" exclaimed Cardew. "Have you been watchin' us, like Racke and Crooke?"

D'Arcy's face became crimson.

"You uttah wottah! How dare you insinuate anythin' of the kind?" he exclaimed. "If you are askin' for a feahful thwashin'——"

"How do you know anything about it, then?"

"You know vewy well we saw you there, Cardew, the day we were widin' home fwom Abbotsford," said Arthur Augustus icily.

"Oh! you did see me, then?" said Cardew.

"Yaas."

"I wasn't aware of it. You haven't mentioned it."

"It was not my bizney, deah boy, and I have not weferred to it to anybody, of course——"

"You silly ass, you're doing it now!" growled Cardew. "There's Mellish listening to every word."

"Oh, rats!" said Mellish, walking away.

"Bai Jove! I did not see Mellish there! Howevah, if there is nothin' to be ashamed of in the mattah, there is no weason why Mellish should not heah, or anybody else, for that!"

"Oh, go an' eat coke!" said Cardew gruffly, and he walked away.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon Clive and Levison.

"I have spoken to you as a fwiend," he said. "I shall not wefer to the mattah again. But I wecommend you to be fwank in the mattah; othahwise the fellows will only be able to form one opinion!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away in a very dignified manner.

Clive and Levison followed Cardew. They understood now.

But, whatever their reason was, they did not make the explanation Arthur Augustus had recommended. No. 9 Study continued to keep their own counsel.

Percy Mellish had gone up to Racke's study, with a gleam in his eyes. He found Racke and Crooke there, both engaged upon lines Mr. Linton had given them for slackness in class.

Mellish helped himself to a cigarette from Racke's case, and the heir of Messrs. Racke & Hacke gave a grunt.

"What about that quid, Racke?" asked Mellish.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Racke. "You're not gettin' a quid from me! Try somebody else."

"Lodgey's been dunning me."

"Let him!"

"I have found out something," said Mellish. "I know where Cardew and that lot go on their giddy expeditions, and I could run them down and find out the whole game to-morrow, if I liked."

Racke laid down his pen.

"I'll stand a quid for that," he said. "Willingly, too!"

"It's a go, then?" asked Mellish eagerly.

"Honest Injun!"

"Right!" said Mellish. "If they go to-morrow, rely on me."

"How did you spot anything about it?" asked Crooke.

"Never mind that," said Mellish coolly. "I've my own ways, you know. You'll have the whole story to-morrow, Racke. And, more than that, I fancy Tom Merry knows all about it, and you can call him as a witness."

"By gum! I've noticed he's not said a word on the subject, and he was rather chummy with Clive, too. Good egg!" said Racke, rubbing his hands. "He knows, and he's keeping it dark, I suppose. By Jove, it will be a show-up all round!"

And that happy prospect quite consoled Aubrey Racke for the two hundred lines he had to do for the master of the Shell.

CHAPTER 10.
An Amazing Discovery.

AFTER lessons on Saturday Percy Mellish was on the watch. Immediately dinner was over he strolled down to the school gates, and waited there. It was about half an hour later that he spotted Cardew, Levison, and Clive crossing the quad towards the gates. They were on foot this time, and Cardew carried a large closed basket. That big basket somewhat puzzled Mellish. It was a fine spring afternoon, but scarcely warm enough for an outdoor picnic. The cad of the Fourth wondered what was in that carefully-closed basket.

Tom Merry bore down on the three in the quadrangle.

"Hold on a minute, you fellows!" he called out.

"Hold on's the word!" said Levison cheerily.

"You're going out?"

"Yes."

Tom's lips set a little.

"We're beginning cricket practice," he said. "If you want a show at cricket this season, Levison, you can't cut the practice. Same to you, Clive."

"Oh!" said Levison. "Well, there's no terrific hurry, I suppose? We've arranged to go out this afternoon."

"You seem to arrange to go out every half-holiday, and nearly every day after lessons," said Tom Merry drily. "I believe D'Arcy's told you what is being said about it, so I needn't mention that. You'd do better, in my opinion, to begin cricket practice with the other chaps."

Tom Merry walked away without waiting for a reply. Cardew laughed, and Clive and Levison looked uncomfortable.

"This is a bit rotten," said Clive, in a low voice. "I suppose it's all due to Racke; but——"

"Oh, rot!" said Cardew. "Let 'em think what they like. Come on!"

The three Fourth-Formers went out of the gates, Cardew smiling, and his two companions with somewhat clouded faces. They glanced at Mellish, who nodded, and strolled away in the opposite direction. Mellish did not need to follow on the track of the three. From what he had heard Arthur Augustus say, he knew what their destination was.

He waited till Levison & Co. were out of sight before he followed them. The three juniors walked on briskly, carrying the heavy basket in turn. Percy Mellish would have found it difficult to keep pace with them, in any case; he was no great pedestrian. But he had been over Abbotford Hill often enough, and he knew the only building to which D'Arcy's reference could apply. It was more than an hour later when Mellish, breathless from his tramp up the hill, came in sight of the lonely cottage by the roadside.

Keeping in cover of the trees that grew along the fence, Mellish surveyed the cottage.

He was quite sure that the three juniors were there by this time, and he had proof of it in a few minutes. Cardew came out of the cottage, carrying a large wicker chair. Mellish squeezed himself behind a trunk, and watched the garden through the privet hedge.

Cardew placed the big chair in a sunny spot by a tree. He placed a footstool before it, and a cushion on the back. Then he returned into the cottage.

Mellish continued to watch in a very puzzled mood.

He had not the slightest doubt that the three juniors came to that lonely spot to meet such characters as Mr. Lodgey or Mr. Banks, of the Green Man—to smoke, and perhaps drink and gamble in the company of questionable characters. That had been Levison's old game, and he knew that that kind of thing was not quite unknown to Cardew, so he had no doubts whatever on the point. But Cardew's preparations certainly did not look like it. It looked as if he had been arranging a comfortable chair for an invalid.

"My hat!" murmured Mellish suddenly, under his breath.

Clive and Levison came in sight in the cottage porch. They were not alone, however. They were assisting an old man, who walked between them. One glance at his face was sufficient to show his affliction. He was blind.

Mellish stared blankly through the hedge.

What did it mean?

The two juniors led the old gentleman to the chair, and he sat down. Cardew came out with a rug, and placed it over the old fellow's knees.

After him a dog came frisking, and Mellish recognised Figgins' dog Spot. He could guess now what had been in the big basket.

"My hat!" murmured Mellish.

"That all right, sergeant?"

Mellish could hear what was said in the garden. It was Levison who spoke, and Mellish would never have dreamed that Levison's somewhat hard and cynical voice could become so kind in tone.

"Must be some giddy relation of Levison's!" murmured the astounded spy. "This beats the whole band, by gum."

Yes, thank you, Master Levison." The old gentleman's voice was still strong and hearty. "Where's the dog?"

"Here he is, sir!" said Cardew.

Cardew, the grandson of Lord Reckness, the dandy of the Fourth, the supercilious nut, was addressing that shabby old man as "Sir." Mellish rubbed his eyes. He almost gave up trying to understand it.

Spot rubbed his black muzzle on the old gentleman's leg, and the sergeant, as Levison called him, bent and stroked the dog.

"You'll like him, sergeant?' said Clive cheerily.

"I'm glad to have him, sir," said the sergeant. "I've been offered a dog, but it ain't so easy to keep the licence paid. But if the young gentleman would like me to give him a home for a bit, why, I'll be glad. He'll get on with me, you can rely on that. Dogs know who like 'em and who don't."

"Then we'll leave him with you," said Levison. "Of course, we're going to make the arrangements about his grub, and Figgins will see to the licence when it's due again, if he hasn't had him back by then."

"Spot looks pretty cheery here, too," said Clive. "Figgy can come out here on his bike and see him, too. You won't mind our friend coming along sometimes, Sergeant Brockway?".

"I'll be pleased and honoured, sir. I'm sure it's very kind of you young gentlemen to come as you do. Neighbours are very good, but it's a bit lonely till my boy comes home."

"But he's coming?" asked Levison.

The old gentleman's face brightened up.

"Oh, yes, he's coming! He's been invalided out, and he may be home any day. He's left a leg in Flanders, poor Dick! But that's not so bad as leaving your sight in South Africa. Dick will get about all right, and what between his pension and mine, and the garden, we shall get along comfortable. And he won't find his old father useless lumber, either. It's amazing how you can get used even to bein' blind. I'm as good a gardener as ever I was, when the rheumatiz will let me. Dick and me'll be all right when Dick comes home, and, thank Heaven, he's been spared to me! There's thousands that have lost their sons."

"We shall be jolly glad to see Dick!" said Clive, smiling. "What would you like to hear, sergeant—war news?"

"Let's hear how they're getting on at the Front," said the sergeant. "Anything about the Tanks?"

"Yes, rather; there's a description of them in my paper," said Cardew.

"That's it, then! How things change!" said the sergeant. "We hadn't any Tanks in South Africa. And the Boers, that were fighting us then, are fighting for us now. Things have changed a lot since I was knocked over at Ladysmith. Now read me that bit about the Tanks."

Cardew opened his paper, and sat down on a stool, and began to read. His low, clear voice was the only sound heard in the garden then, save a clink or two from a hoe Levison was using. Levison was weeding the garden.

Mellish stepped quietly away.

He was utterly disgusted at the discovery he had made—not at all the kind of discovery he had expected to make. But even his hard face was a little softened as he stole silently away.

The bronzed veteran, blinded in the service of his country, subsisting upon the meagre pension allowed him by the great Empire he had fought for, and yet not hesitating to send his only son to fight for the old flag. The sight of him touched even Mellish's heart. That was the secret, after all—that was the mysterious business that drew Study No. 9 away from the school day after day. Cardew, the reckless scapegrace; Levison, the reformed blackguard, were devoting their leisure to comforting a blind old soldier till his son came home to care for him!

"By gad!" murmured Mellish a dozen times, as he tramped homeward. "By gad! What will Racke say?"

Mellish was amazed, and he knew how amazed Racke would be, and it soon occurred to him that Racke would be incredulous, too. The black sheep of the Shell simply would not believe such a story. And by the time he reached the school it also occurred to Mellish that, even if he could convince Racke, that shady youth certainly would not part with a quid for such information. That was not at all the kind of information Racke was expecting, and undoubtedly it was not worth the quid Mellish needed so badly.

Mellish was looking very thoughtful as he went into the School House. Racke of the Shell met him in the passage. He had been waiting for the Fourth-Former to come in.

"Well?" he said.

"All serene," said Mellish. "Come up to the study."

Racke followed him eagerly. By the time they reached Racke's study, Mellish had quite made up his mind as to the story he was to tell. Racke closed the door, and regarded him inquiringly.

"You've seen them?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Where, then?"

"At the cottage on Abbotsford Hill."

"And what were they up to?"

Mellish held out his hand.

"You owe me a quid first," he said laconically.

Racke sneered.

"Let's hear first whether it's worth it," he said. "If you haven't found anything out, you can whistle for your quid!"

Mellish's eyes glittered.

"I watched them in the garden," he said calmly. "There was a regular gang of them—boozy bounders, worse than Lodgey at the Green Man. They were playing nap, and Levison was winning hands down."

"Just his style!" grinned Racke. "He used to win from me, lots of tin. I wondered what he was doing without it. He's found somebody else to pluck. I might have guessed that."

"What about Cardew and Clive?" asked Racke.

"They were in it, of course. Cardew was keen as mustard. Clive did not seem so jolly keen about it, though."

Racke nodded. He would have expected to hear that. As a matter of fact, that was why Mellish had put his story in that form.

"And Levison was drinking, as well as smoking," pursued Mellish. "I dare say he will be smelling of it when he comes home."

"He did once before," chuckled Racke. "My hat! What a show-up!"

"Look here, don't mention my name, you know," said Mellish anxiously.

"That chap Clive is rather too handy with his fists!"

"You needn't be afraid," said Racke contemptuously. "But I'm not afraid of him, and I'll show the whole set of them up before all the Common-room."

"What about that quid?" smiled Mellish.

"You're always sponging on me," growled Racke. "Look here, when are you going to settle up what you owe me already?"

Mellish's eyes glittered. It suited Mellish to be a hanger-on on the rich heir of the war-profiteers, but this purse-proud bounder's manner was hard to bear. Probably Mellish felt a more intense dislike for Aubrey Racke, at heart, than he did for any other fellow at St. Jim's.

Clive planted himself in front of the kennel.
(See Chapter 7.)

"Never mind that," he said sullenly. "Are you going to lend me the quid or not? You promised you would."

"Oh, there you are, said Racke, scornfully. And he flung a currency note on the table.

Mellish picked it up, and left the study without another word. But his eyes were glittering. If he had had any compunction about the deception he had practised, Racke's manner quite dispelled it. Racke was about to bring an unfounded charge against the chums of Study No. 9, and if it resulted in the defeat and humiliation of Aubrey Racke it would leave Percy Mellish quite dry-eyed.

CHAPTER 11.
Nothing for Baggy!

TOM MERRY & Co. were coming in from cricket practice when Levison and his companions returned. The three looked a little tired and dusty after their walk. They

noted that some of the cricketers gave them curious glances, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy carefully avoided looking in their direction. Figgins of the Fourth, however, joined them. Figgins had not liked Ralph Reckness Cardew, but he felt quite friendly to him now. The protection Spot had found in Study No. 9 made all the difference.

"You fellows missed the cricket," remarked Figgins.

"Other fish to fry," yawned Cardew.

"I've heard there's a yarn going round about you chaps," said Figgins, in his frank way. "Of course, it's all piffle. But if I were you, I'd find out who started it, and punch his head."

Cardew laughed.

"That's a tip," he remarked. "Too much fag, though."

"Well, I'll do it. But about my dog—I mean your dog, Clive?" said Figgins. "Old Ratty isn't letting that drop. He's got the idea fixed in his head that Spot is hidden in the school, and he's been jawing to me over it again. I believe he wanted the School House searched, only Railton won't hear of it. He's spoken to Kildare, and Kildare let him see that he wasn't taking any."

"Good old Kildare!" said Clive.

"But that isn't all," continued Figgins. "He had Knox over to see him this afternoon, and you know what Knox is—a beastly bully! He gets on with Ratty, as they're two of the same kidney. Well, Knox is a School House prefect, you know, and if Ratty gets him to chip in——"

"All serene," said Levison reassuringly. "Knox can search the School House from cellar to roof, if he likes."

"Then old Spot!"

"We've found a man to mind him, outside the school. You needn't be alarmed about him, Spot's all right. All you'll do is to pay for his keep, and if you'd like to go and see the dog, you can, any time you like," said Levison. "Of course, you can't keep him in the school any longer."

"Sure the man's all right who's minding him?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Right as rain! He's an old soldier, and fond of dogs, only he can't afford to keep one himself. He's jolly glad to have Spot, and Spot's taken to him like a duck to water."

"Good egg!" said Figgins. "Of course, I'd like to have him about; but so long as he's happy and comfy, that doesn't matter much. When can I go and see him?"

"To-morrow, if you like. Take your Sunday walk along with us, and we'll take you there."

"You're a good chap, Levison!" said Figgins gratefully. "I'm awfully obliged to you fellows. I might have got sacked over it, if I'd dealt with Ratty my way."

Figgins went off to the New House in great spirits. He had spotted Mr. Ratcliff's conference with Knox, the bully of the Sixth, and it had made him anxious. Mr. Ratcliff was a gentleman who never knew when to let a subject drop, and he was accustomed to cherishing a bitter animosity under the name of a sense of duty. Nothing would satisfy the New House master but the destruction of Figgy's unfortunate pet—fortunately now out of his power.

Cardew was looking a little restive as he went to his study to tea with his comrades.

"Blessed if I half like this!" he grunted. "This means Figgins getting to know the whole yarn."

"Well, that won't hurt," remarked Clive.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"We weren't goin' to say a word about it. Dashed fools to be playin' such a mug's game, if you ask me!"

"Oh, bosh!" said Clive. "Why, it was you first dropped on old Brockway, and took us there."

"I was an ass for my pains."

"Bow-wow!" said Levison. "Never mind Figgins knowing. He won't jaw, if we ask him not to. But it's a bit rotten the fellows getting suspicious about our kicking off every other day. We can't very well explain."

Cardew uttered a sharp exclamation.

"For goodness' sake, no! Do you want to be paraded round the school as a Good Little Georgie, who does kind actions! Keep your mouth shut, whatever they say!"

"I mean to. But it's rotten, all the same. All the fault of that spying cad, Racke!"

The three juniors had finished their tea when there was a tap at the door, and Baggy Trimble came in. The fat Fourth Former gave them a genial grin.

"You fellows have been having a high old time, I hear," he remarked.

"Oh, toppin'," said Cardew.

"How much did you win?"

"Eh?"

"Didn't you win, Cardew?"

Cardew stared at Trimble, and then he burst into a laugh.

"Yes, I won," he said coolly. "What do you think of a hundred pounds Trimble?"

Baggy Trimble's eyes opened wide.

"A hundred pounds!" he gasped.

"Rippin', wasn't it?" said Cardew, while Clive and Levison chuckled.

Baggy was evidently persuaded that No. 9 Study had been on the razzle that afternoon, and Cardew was cheerfully pulling his fat leg.

"Oh, my hat!" said Trimble. "You have all the luck, Cardew!"

"Yes, I'm considered rather a lucky chap!"

"You could lend a chap a quid or two out of that?" hinted Trimble.

"Now, that's exactly what I can't do!"

"I say, Levison, you won a lot, too! You could lend a chap ten bob——"

"I'll lend you a thick ear if you don't buzz off!" growled Levison.

"Did you have any luck, Clive?"

"What on earth do you mean?" exclaimed the South African junior angrily. "Do you think I've been gambling, you fat duffer?"

Baggy gave him a fat wink.

"Oh, don't you try to spoof me!" he said. "I know all about it. Look here!

I think you might lend me ten bob among you. You know the price tuck is now, and I'm rather short of money. Can you make it ten?"

"There's the door!" grunted Levison.

"Look here," said Baggy Trimble, his manner growing threatening, "you wouldn't like me to mention what I know to Kildare or Darrel!"

Cardew rose to his feet.

"You can mention what you like to Kildare and Darrel," he remarked. "While you're about it, mention to Kildare that I pulled your fat ear."

"Yarooh!" yelled Trimble. "Leggo! Ow!"

And mention to Darrel that I kicked you out of the study!"

Bump!

"Yow-ow-wow!"

Baggy Trimble fled along the passage, and Cardew closed the door after him, chuckling.

"That fat idiot will spread over the house what you've stuffed into him, Cardew!" said Clive.

"Let him!" said Cardew.

And he returned to his tea.

CHAPTER 12.
Shown Up!

LEVISON minor of the Third Form tapped at the door of No. 9 Study, and looked in. The fag's face was troubled and clouded.

"Trot in, kid!" said Levison major cheerily. "What's the merry problem to grind out now? Got old Eutropius with you?"

"It isn't lessons," said Frank, coming into the study. "I—I say, Ernie, don't you know what's going on?"

"Germans landed?" grinned Levison.

"Or the Foreign Office woke up?" asked Cardew.

But the fag did not smile.

"I—I heard them in the Common-room," he said. "Racke's there, and Crooke, and—and all the fellows. And—and they're saying——"

"Talking about us?" asked Cardew airily.

"Yes, and where you've been this afternoon," said Levison minor. "Ernie, I—I know you haven't been doing anything of the sort, but—but they're saying——"

Levison compressed his lips.

"It's all right, Frank. Only a mistake—or, rather, a lie! It all comes from Racke."

"I knew it wasn't true!" said Frank eagerly. "But—but you'll be able to prove that it isn't, Ernie?"

"I don't know about that," said Levison glumly. "Don't you worry, Frank!"

"We might as well go down," said Cardew, with a smile. "This is rather entertaining!"

Clive nodded, and the three juniors left the study, Frank Levison following them. Levison and Clive both looked and felt troubled, but Cardew seemed to enjoy the situation. His manner was quite airy and nonchalant as he sauntered into the junior Common-room with his hands in his pockets.

Most of the School House juniors were there, and there was a buzz of talk. And the glances that were cast upon the trio as they entered showed that they were the subject of it.

"Here they come!" giggled Trimble. "Here come the merry blades!"

And there was a laugh.

"What's the latest Newmarket odds?" sang out Scrope.

"Sorry I can't tell you," said Cardew politely. "Ask Racke. He knows all about these things."

Racke came forward, his eyes gleaming under his bent brows. The cad of the Shell had been waiting, and he was ready.

"Listen to me, you fellows!" he began.

"Pway, dwy up, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You are weally a fealhful bore, Wacke!"

"Listen to me!" repeated Racke fiercely. "I've got something to say for you all to hear. I'm going to show up a set of dashed hypocrites—fellows who joined in the chorus about me, while they're playing a worse game themselves on the quiet. And there's fellows here who know it as well as I do, and D'Arcy's one of them!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And Tom Merry's another!"

"Leave me out of the silly rot!" snapped the captain of the Shell.

"But I won't leave you out," sneered Racke. "Why have you kept me out of the footer, and told me it's going to be the same at cricket? You don't want 'smoky sports,' so you said. Well, if you don't want 'smoky sports' on the playing-fields, there's three more you can cut out!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Clive, clenching his hands.

"Let him run on," said Cardew. "This is gettin' interestin'. You're quite an entertainin' chap, Racke!"

"What are you going to accuse us of, then?" asked Levison.

"You've been sneaking out secretly every day nearly," said Racke. "You went as usual this afternoon. You go to a cottage on Abbotsford Hill. And Tom Merry and half a dozen other fellows have seen you there, and never said a word about it!"

There was a buzz. All the juniors were interested now.

"Is that so, Tom Merry?" asked Gore of the Shell.

"He can't deny it!" sneered Racke.

"I've seen Cardew at the place Racke mentions," said Tom shortly. "I believe Levison and Clive were with him. It was by chance. I've said nothing about it, because it isn't my bizney. It isn't Racke's, for that matter, and I can't guess how he knows anything about it."

"They make keyholes to doors, you know," remarked Monty Lowther.

And there was a general laugh.

"But there's no great crime in going to a cottage!" said Bernard Glyn. "A chap may go to a cottage and yet be honest, Racke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They go there to gamble, smoke, and booze!" said Racke deliberately.

"Rats!"

"I cannot cwedit that, Wacke!"

Clive flushed crimson, and made a stride towards Racke.

Cardew laughed.

"Hold on, Clive! I told you Racke was goin' to be entertainin'. Any more counts in the indictment, Racke?"

"That's all," said Racke. "You dare not deny it. It's proved by an eye-witness."

"An eye-witness!" ejaculated Clive.

"Yes. You're clean bowled out!" said Racke contemptuously. "I made up my mind to show you up, and I've done it!"

"I suppose it isn't true?" said Tom Merry, looking at the three.

"True!" exclaimed Clive fiercely. "Do you suppose it is, then?"

"I don't suppose anything. But you've been acting very queerly, and if you choose to be mysterious, that's your fault. What are you making a mystery about it for?" said Tom Merry tartly.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway, explain to the fellows, Clive. Everybody heah will take your word."

Clive hesitated.

"I can't very well explain," he said at last. "But it's nothing of the kind that Racke supposes."

"It's not exactly a secret, either," said Levison. "But we don't want to talk about it."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, you know your own business best," said Tom Merry. "You know what conclusions the fellows will draw."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let 'em draw any giddy conclusions they like," drawled Cardew. "I'm not goin' to be put on my defence by a fellow like Racke. I know that!"

"You spoke of an eye-witness, Racke," said Levison. "If an eye-witness saw us at the cottage he saw that there was nothing shady going on. Trot out your eye-witness!"

"Yes, I should really like to see that merry eye-witness," remarked Cardew.

"It's Mellish," said Racke. "He saw them at it this afternoon."

"He saw us?" exclaimed Cardew.

"Yes. Gambling, drinking, and smoking in the garden of the cottage on Abbotsford Hill!" said Racke venomously.

"By gad," exclaimed a voice at the door, "that's a pretty story!" Knox of the Sixth strode into the Common-room. "What have you young rascals got to say?"

CHAPTER 13.
A Reverse for Racke.

THERE was a sudden hush in the Common-room.

No one had seen the prefect at the door. He had heard every one of Racke's vicious words, and the matter was out now. Racke, to do him justice, had not intended that; but it was done. No prefect was likely to let such a matter drop.

"I came here to see you, Clive," said Knox, with a grin. "I've got to ask you about a dog you're hiding in the house—against the rules. I seem to have stumbled on something a bit more serious."

"Yes, on a merry mare's-nest," said Cardew coolly.

"You'll have to prove that," said the prefect. "Now, what's this about a cottage, and gambling and smoking? Where were you three kids this afternoon?"

Levison & Co. were silent.

"Well, it's out now," said Racke. "It's not my fault. I didn't know Knox was there."

"If it's true, it serves them jolly well right!" growled Jack Blake. "But I don't believe it, for one."

"Wathah not! Speak up, Clive!"

"You can answer me, or you can answer the Head," said Knox. "Now, then, are you going to speak up? Tell me where you were this afternoon, Cardew, and what you were doing there?"

Cardew hesitated a moment.

"We went for a little walk," he drawled at last.

"Where to?"

"Abbotsford Hill."

"To a cottage there?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To take a dog," said Cardew calmly. "The cheery canine you're inquirin' after, Knox. You can tell Mr. Ratcliff that he's three miles away, quite safe, and in good company. I'm sure Ratty will like to hear that, he's so kind-hearted and fond of dogs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox looked sharply at the three. Knox was not always able to carry out to the full his duties as a prefect, because, being a good deal of a blackguard himself, he found it best to keep on good terms with fellows like Crooke and Racke and Scrope, who knew some of his little secrets. But he was quite

prepared to do his duty thoroughly in this case. He disliked all No. 9 Study, and especially Levison, who since his reform had refused to perform any of the old shady services for him.

But Knox realised that it was necessary to be sure of the facts before he reported the matter to the Head. He did not want to put his foot in it.

The juniors were grinning now. Although it was plain that Racke of the Shell believed his accusation, it was quite probable that, judging others by himself, he had made a mistake.

But for the secretiveness the three juniors had shown on the subject of their visits to the lonely cottage, Racke's accusation would have been regarded with contempt at once.

"You went there to take Figgins' dog?" asked Knox at last, taken quite aback by Cardew's statement.

"Not Figgins' dog—Clive's. Figgins sold him to Clive."

"Yes, I know all about that," growled Knox. "If the dog is really out of the school, never mind him."

"You can go and see him, if you like," smiled Cardew.

"What else were you doing this afternoon?"

"Readin'," Cardew said.

"Anything else?"

"Yes, talkin'. I'm rather a good conversationalist, you know, and I entertain people that way sometimes."

Knox frowned. The juniors grinned as they listened to Cardew's replies.

Knox turned to Racke of the Shell.

"I heard what you said, Racke. It is a serious matter. You will have to prove it!"

"I don't want to sneak about them," muttered Racke.

"Don't mind us, dear boy," said Cardew. "I wouldn't deprive you of the pleasure of sneakin' for anythin'. Go ahead!"

"He can't prove a lie," said Clive scornfully.

"Well, if you put it like that, I will go ahead!" exclaimed Racke savagely. "Mellish saw them at it, and he'll swear to it."

"Where's Mellish?"

The spy of the Fourth was not present.

"Go and find Mellish, some of you, and bring him here," commanded Knox.

Two or three of the juniors went in search of Percy Mellish. They came back with him in a few minutes.

Mellish gave Racke a very uneasy look. But a grin was lurking about his cunning face. He certainly did not intend to swear to an accusation that could easily be disproved, and he was not at all sorry for the coming downfall of the reckless accuser. Racke's overbearing insolence did not cause devoted attachment among his friends.

"Mellish," rapped out Knox, "you seem to have been an eye-witness of what was going on this afternoon. Did you see Cardew, Levison, and Clive at the cottage on Abbotsford Hill"

"Yes. Quite by chance, of course. I happened to be passing——"

"You happened to be spying, you mean!" growled Tom Merry.

"What did you see?" asked Knox. "The truth, mind!"

"The question is, can Mellish tell the truth?" remarked Monty Lowther musingly. "The age of miracles is past, you know."

"Silence! Answer me at once, Mellish."

"I—I saw them in the garden," said Mellish at last.

"Were they alone?"

"No. There was a man there—the man that lives at the cottage, I suppose."

"Who was he?"

"An old soldier, blind," said Mellish.

"What!"

Knox stared blankly, and there was a general exclamation from the juniors. Cardew bit his lips hard.

"Oh, you rotter!" he muttered. "You've been spyin', you sneakin' worm!"

"And what were they all doing?" gasped the prefect at last.

"Cardew had taken a dog to give the old chap—the dog that used to belong to Figgins," said Mellish.

"Is that all?"

"No. Cardew was reading to him—something from the newspaper about the Tanks."

"Tanks!" yelled Racke.

"Yes, Tanks. The old chap was a soldier, and he was interested in Tanks," said Mellish calmly.

"Did you see anything else?" asked Knox.

"No."

Racke's face was a study. He strode towards Mellish, his eyes blazing.

"He's lying!" exclaimed Racke thickly. "He told me he'd seen them smoking, playing cards, boozing——"

"Did you tell Racke that, Mellish?" asked the prefect.

Mellish nodded.

"Yes. I was stuffing him up," he said coolly. "Racke was so awfully keen on finding those chaps out blagging, that I thought it was a pity he should be disappointed; so I made up a yarn to amuse him!"

There was a yell of laughter in the common-room. The expression on Aubrey Racke's face was really extraordinary. Knox himself grinned, though he was annoyed to see that serious accusation fade away into thin air in this manner.

"You—you——" stuttered Racke.

"Bai Jove! What a wotten twick!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "I must wemark that it serves Wacke wight."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you fellows have been going over there to look after a blind old soldier!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Well, yes," said Levison, colouring. "The poor old chap lost his sight in the South African War, and his only son's been at the Front. His neighbour's look after him a lot, and—and we helped. His son's coming home in a day or two, though, invalided out. There was no need to say anything about it."

Racke stood overwhelmed with confusion. That was the end of his spying and accusing; he had succeeded in clearing No. 9 Study of every shadow of suspicion, and in acquainting the whole House with the fact that they had given up their half-holidays to perform a deed of generous kindness to a blind old soldier! Knox was glad that he had not taken that precious accusation before the Head.

"So that's the whole yarn?" snapped the prefect.

"That's all," said Mellish.

"Got anything more to say, Racke?"

Racke hadn't anything more to say. He made a furious rush at Percy Mellish. That youth promptly dodged behind Clive.

"I'm your man, Racke!" said Clive.

Knox of the Sixth walked out of the Common-room. Blake promptly shut the door after him.

"Go it, ye cripples!" he sang out cheerily.

"Yaas, wathah! Give the howlin' wottah a fearful thwashin', deah boy!"

Clive was doing that.

In about three minutes Racke of the Shell was on the floor, gasping and holding his nose, and not in need of any more. A hiss followed him as he limped out of the Common-room.

Levison minor pressed his major's arm, his face very bright.

"Ernie, you bounder," he whispered, "you never told me!"

Levison laughed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy mounted upon a chair, and waved his eyeglass to draw attention.

"Gentlemen——"

"Bow-wow!"

"Gentlemen, I call for thwee cheeahs for No. 9 Study. I wegard them as havin' played the game in wescuin' Figgay's poor old dog fwom the fewocious Watty——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And in helpin' to look aftah a wippin' old Tommy who has had bad luck. Gentlemen, thwee cheeahs!"

And the cheers were given with a will, and they sounded pleasantly enough in the ears of the trio of No. 9 Study.

THE END.

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

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"TRIMBLE'S TRIUMPH!"

By Martin Clifford.

But that triumph did not last long, for, as you will readily guess, it was an undeserved one, and Nemesis followed. Can you imagine Baggy setting an example to the whole of the Shell and Fourth, and having the example followed, too? Not easy, is it? But you will read next week how it happened, and the part played in the affair by Cutts of the Fifth, and how Ernest Levison surprised Cutts, together with lots of other interesting and funny things. This is a more distinctly humorous story than most of those which have appeared lately, and I know that there is always a strong demand for humorous yarns. But the Levison and Cardew series has fairly caught on, and those who are intensely interested in the wayward new fellow, and in the further ups and downs of Levison, need not fear that those two are to retire into the background.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 480.

TO LOYAL READERS.

A week or two ago I gave you a warning as to the necessity of ordering the GEM in advance. I cannot yet tell, of course, whether you have taken it. But I hope you have, for the matter is a very serious and urgent one.

The problem that we have to solve is that of keeping our readers and yet saving as much paper as possible. And it can only be solved in this one way!

Your Editor

EXTRACTS FROM

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

THE KAISER'S DOUBLE.

A Story of the Greyfriars Juniors. :: Told by MARK LINLEY.

I.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

It was Bob Cherry who said that, of course.

"What are you halloing about now?" asked Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five were standing together at the gates.

"I believe that chap's a merry spy!" said Bob.

This was earlier in the war, when there really were plenty of spies about—not that they are all shut up or shot yet, I fancy.

Johnny sniffed the sniff of disbelief; he has rather a way of doing that.

"You're always imagining something!" he growled.

"What makes you think so, Bob?" asked Harry Wharton.

"He's foreign-looking, and he's continually prowling about. I've seen him no end of times—twice, anyway!"

"He's after the plans of the tuckshop fortifications, that my minor keeps in his locker in the Second Form class-room, I expect!" gibed Frank Nugent.

"Don't you be too funny, my son, or there will be trouble in the family!"

"Here, what are you going to do, Johnny?" asked Harry.

For Johnny Bull was going towards the stranger.

"Ask him!" growled Johnny.

"Here, I say, you idiot—— Oh, crumbs! That ain't the way to find out anything!" gasped Bob. "Anyway, don't say I said he was—— Oh, the utter ass!"

But there is not much of the ass about Johnny—except, perhaps, in the matter of obstinacy.

He went straight up to the suspected man, but he did not open a conversation by accusing him of being a spy.

Nobody heard what he said; but he and the fellow talked for a minute or two, the other doing most of the talking. And then the fellows at the gate saw Johnny put half-a-crown in the stranger's hand.

He sauntered back.

"Ass, Bob!" he said.

"Who was—I mean, what is he?"

"Just what I thought—a Belgian. Haven't you heard that there are some of them in the village?"

They had, of course; but Bob had not thought of that.

"We must put off going to the tuckshop now," said Frank. "Not that I grudge it. But that was our last coin—till someone gets a remittance!"

"Can't be helped," answered Johnny. "It was—oh, well, Belguim stood up to those brutes like a good 'un, you know!"

"Has he seen any massacres?" asked Bob.

"How should I know, chump? You don't begin by inquiring of a chap about that sort of thing—at least, I don't!"

"The inquirefulness of the esteemed and ludicrous Bob——"

"Oh, dry up, Inky! Is he coming again?"

"Who?"

"The Belgian, of course, fathead!"

"Coming where?"

"Here, you ass!"

"How should I know?"

But, as a matter of fact, Johnny did know. He had hinted to the Belgian that it might be worth his while to come again.

The chap wasn't a sponger, mind you. Johnny says he had to be persuaded to take the half-crown.

But he was cast adrift in a strange land, with a wife, seven children, and about twopence-halfpenny in his pocket, and he was almost dazed by what he had gone through over there.

It was as natural that he should accept help as it was that we should want to help him. And it wasn't only Johnny who wanted to do that.

Others were keen when they heard. The Famous Five were hard up; but Inky and Bull were both expecting remittances, and the other three, who don't have as much pocket-money as they do, did not think there could be any harm in borrowing a bit for a cause like this.

They went to Vernon-Smith, who lent readily enough, and insisted on contributing a quid. Mauly chucked in a fiver; he would not let them take less. Ever so many others contributed—Squiff and Tom Brown and Bulstrode and Hazeldene and Ogilvy and Russell and Desmond, and mode besides.

We got enough to hire a cottage for those unlucky refugees, and to make sure that they should not want for a bit.

When the Belgian was seen again, I was there. Bob and Johnny and I were going to Pegg together when we met him.

He was in a state of tremendous excitement.

"I haf heem seen—wiz my own eyes I haf heem seen!" he kept saying.

"Good for you!" said Bob. "It would have been a trifle more remarkable, though, if you'd seen him with someone else's!"

"Shurrup!" growled Johnny. "Who is it you have seen, M. Leclos?"

That was the Belgian's name—Pierre Leclos—though we did not know it till then.

"The chap's in a terrific stew about something," said Bob.

"I haf heem seen!" repeated Leclos. "Ze bad one—ze vorst zat ees on ze earth!"

"Must mean the Kaiser, I should think," I said.

The Belgian caught at the word.

"Oui—oui!" he cried. "Zat is heem! I haf heem seen!"

"The poor chap's off his rocker, Marky," Bob whispered.

But I did not think so. Leclos had made a mistake, of course, but he was not mad.

"Where was it?" asked Johnny.

"Ovair zere—in ze hills. I went for to find myself—how ees eet you call zem?—room-mushes, ees eet not? An' zere I saw him!"

He nodded towards Black Pike.

"Are you quite sure?" I asked, for it seemed best to listen to him civilly, anyway. "Did you ever see him before?"

"Non, non! But I know heem—oh, I know heem! He did leemp wiz ze lef' leg, an' ze lef' arm of heem hangs by hees side, an' he haf ze oopturn moustache an' ze face so cruel! Oui, oui! I know heem!"

We looked at one another. Leclos had seen somebody on Black Pike, that was certain. That he had not seen Wilhelm the War Lord we were sure. But we felt very curious, all the same. There was a mystery in it. Most likely it would all fizzle out, but we wanted to know more.

There were caves on Black Pike, and the Belgian went on to tell us that "the Kaiser" had disappeared into a cave. Asked what he did then, he answered simply:

"I roon avay; I vos ver' mooch afraid. Where he ees, more Germans—oh, certainement! He vould not be alone!"

"No; and he wouldn't be in England," said Bob.

"It ain't a bit likely; and yet—I say, old scout, could you take some of us to the place, and show us the brute?" asked Johnny.

"Ze brute! Who ees heem?"

"The Kaiser, of course!"

"Oui, oui! I wiz you go! I would not be afraid wiz ze brave garcons Anglais! I vould not be afraid eef I a goon had. But ze Germans—zey kill all ze more zese zat to fight cannot!"

II.

WE went towards Black Pike, and Leclos went with us. It seemed to be quite true that he had no fear while in our company, though we should not have been a lot of protection against armed Germans.

He told us as we walked on about the things he had seen when the Boches had trampled down his own fair, busy land—things that made our blood boil. There they were, ever so thick on the ground, like Lancashire in parts, and even in the country with a lot more folks than we see here—there they were, working away, with no ill-will against anybody; and then came the Huns, and—ugh! it is awful to think of! And here was a man who had seen it—that brought it home to us.

We came to the foot of Black Pike.

"Eet vos up zere," said Leclos.

He pointed towards a part of the hill where we knew there was a cave. We did not know there were any mushrooms up there, and I don't believe there ever were. Perhaps someone had been pulling his leg.

"It will be dark soon," said Bob, "and we've got to get back before calling-over. But we can do that by a sprint if we wait half an hour. I don't know about the sprint, though; Leclos might think we were bunking."

But we did not have to wait half an hour.

Hardly had Bob spoken when we saw a figure on the slope of the hill, coming

towards us. It was too far away yet to see what it was like. We dodged under cover, and waited for it to come nearer.

"Somebody from the village, ten to one!" growled Johnny.

Friardale folk don't come up here much," I reminded him.

The figure came nearer. Before it was near enough for us to see its face we could see plainly enough that it was not exactly in full Kaiser dress-kit. Baggy-kneed breeks and a slouchy coat are not much in the line of the "All-Highest," I should say.

He was coming right past us, though, of course, we were hidden, and he could not see us.

It really was—well, for a moment we really thought it must be the Kaiser!

It was Wilhelm's face. There were the slight limp of the left leg, the left arm hanging by the side, the familiar upturned moustache.

"Shall we rush him?" asked Bob, in breathless excitement.

"No," I said. "If he is—but he can't be! Anyway, he'd have a revolver."

"Of course he can't be!" said Johnny. "It's too beastly absurd for anything, and yet——"

Well, I don't mind owning for all three of us, that we more than half believed it was. Fellows have chipped us about it, but I really think they might have felt as we did in our places.

The figure passed on, and was swallowed up in the dusk.

We went then. But Pierre stayed. It was his own notion; and, seeing what he believed, I think it shows he had the pluck of his race, though he did admit being afraid.

III.

THE other fellows laughed at us, of course.

If Johnny Bull hadn't been one of us, I rather fancy we should have been laughed out of it altogether.

But Johnny is an uncommonly solid, obstinate sort of chap. He did not say he believed the man we had seen was the Kaiser. But he stuck to one thing—he was going to find out who the fellow was!

Harry agreed at once to join us. Frank and Inky were not so keen. They don't quite cotton to being laughed down. But when they heard that Vernon-Smith and Squiff were both keen on coming, they said they didn't mean to be left out of it.

"We may find out something," the Bounder said. "All sorts of things are being found out—gun foundations, concrete, and that sort of thing; stores of petrol—or, anyway, places where it might be stored——"

"Lots of places where petrol might be stored, Smithy," said Peter Todd.

Skinner and Stott and the rest of them cackled at that. This talk took place in the dorm, and they all heard. Bob had let the thing out. He is not the best chap in the world to keep a secret, though he is in most other ways.

"I don't see what all that guff's got to do with it," said Bolsover. "If the chap these chaps saw was the Kaiser—I'll go twenty to one he wasn't, though!—I can't see how the gun foundations or the petrol stores come in."

Which was quite sound sense, though it was Bolsover. But we were not to be choked off. And, after all, Peter Todd insisted on coming—to take care of us, he said—and Tom Brown would come, too—he said he was needed to take care of Peter.

So there were ten of us—the Famous Five, Smithy, Toddy, Squiff, Brown, and myself. And we could have had more.

"Tell you what. Let's borrow old Prout's rifle!" said Bob.

That was like him. We were in for a big enough row, anyway, if we were found out, and I suppose there was not one of us who had less fear of anything we might meet than Bob had. But it made the thing more sporting to take a rifle along—even though it was a back number like Prout's—so Bob was on it.

I did not think the rest would be, but they were. Old Prout was a good sport, in his queer way, they said, and they were sure he would not mind. But no one suggested asking him for the rifle. It was agreed that the only way to borrow it was to wait until he had gone to bed.

We made up our minds to go that night. It seemed like missing a chance to leave it. But we waited till quite late—nearer twelve than eleven.

Then Bob slipped down to Mr. Prout's study, and came back with not only the rifle, but also a brand-new revolver and a lot of cartridges!

Most of the chaps wanted that revolver. Johnny was sure he was the proper person to have it, and Bob offered to give up the rifle for it. How it was that Smithy was allowed to take it, after all, I don't remember; but I do not think the fact that he was a good shot with the revolver—though he was—had much to do with it.

Bolsover had not gone to sleep when we went. He said again that it was all rot, and then wanted to come. But he was not dressed, and we could not wait for him.

The night was chilly and misty. I am not sure that some of us did not wish ourselves in bed again before we got to the foot of Black Pike, which is not exactly next door to Greyfriars. We had bicycle-lamps, but we did not light them until then.

"These lamps are all very well," said Smithy; "but they won't make us safer if there really is anybody in the cave."

"You're all right. You've got a revolver," replied Johnny, who was still feeling a bit disgruntled about not having it himself.

"Look here, old scout, I'll let you have the rifle," said Bob.

He admitted to me afterwards that he had got fed up with carrying it, and was feeling very sure just then that we should not find anything.

Johnny took it, of course.

It was a bit more trouble than we had expected, finding that cave in the dark. We got above it on the hillside, and had to work downwards, after all. But we hit it at last.

The mouth of it was partly screened by bushes. But we could all see that someone had entered it lately. There were broken twigs, and on the soft earth near were the tracks of feet.

"Somebody inside; that's pretty near a cert," said Peter Todd.

"Dunno," said Squiff. "There are footsteps both ways."

"Well, are we going to stand here, or are we going in?" asked Smithy.

At that Harry led the way in. Not that Smithy or Johnny was not ready enough to go first. But Harry, without shoving himself forward, has a kind of natural way of taking the lead.

The Bounder kept his hand in the pocket where the revolver was. Johnny Bull lowered the rifle, and gave Toddy a dig in the back with it that made him groan.

"Be quiet, you ass!" growled Johnny.

The cave did not go very deep into the hill. There was a natural passage about ten yards long; then it widened out.

In this, on a heap of dry grass, lay the man we had seen, sleeping hard—at least, it must have been pretty hard, to judge by the noise he made about it.

"Hanged if it isn't!" said Frank.

"Well, it's a bit like him, certainly," admitted Tom Brown.

"For an emperor," said Peter Todd, "I must say he wears shocking bad boots! And he ain't exactly a swell otherwise."

Squiff produced a rope.

"When you fellows have made up your mighty minds that this is the Black Pot of Potsdam, we'll truss him up," he said.

"What do you think about it?" asked Smithy.

"Me! Oh, I think he won't take much harm through being tied up, anyway. He may not be a giddy emperor, but he's some other kind of giddy lunatic, I reckon."

"What's that row?" asked Harry.

"Only a train on the line, I think," said Toddy. "The wind's just right to carry the sound."

"To be, or not to be—tied?" asked Squiff. "Time and tide—ahem!—wait for no man.

IV.

WE swarmed all over him, and tied him up. It was a pretty arbitrary sort of thing to do, as I see now; but we were all rather excited, and it turned out all right in the long run.

He did not like it a bit, though. He woke up, and said things.

"Ach! Vot you do?" he roared. "Donnerwetter! If you not stop it, I will haf you all kill, everyone!"

Johnny clapped a hand over his mouth to stop his raving. The chap tried to bite it.

"Never heard that the Kaiser spoke broken English," said Squiff.

"Ass! It must be the Kaiser! He's jolly near bitten a finger off me!" howled Johnny.

"The Potsdam Pet would naturally try that sort of thing with John Bull," Smithy said.

But I could see that Smithy did not think it was, or Harry, or Tom Brown, or Toddy, or Squiff. I did not, either. I am not sure about the rest, except that Bob did. He owned up to that later.

"Who dares dispute that I am der Kaiser? Donnerwetter, but who otterwise says, him I vill haf killed!"

He talked enough about killing to be the real article, I must say.

But we had got him fixed. He could only talk, and we let him have all the satisfaction he could get out of that.

"I guess he isn't going to get out of that in a hurry," said Squiff, tying the last knot in the most scientific manner. "Prop him up against the wall, and we'll have a yarn with him. He's a Hun of sorts, even if he ain't the Head Hun."

So we propped him up, and Peter Todd said:

"Now, old bird, if you are the Wilhelm specimen, what are you doing in England, anyway? It ain't the thing, you know. If I was in your boots—shocking bad boots, and I wouldn't be a Hun for anything—but if I was in your boots, I wouldn't skulk here while my Hunnies were fighting!"

"Foolish boy! You haf no understanding."

"Your own ain't first-class," said Peter, looking at those boots.

Harry drew Smithy and me aside.

"See here, you chaps," he said, "that fellow isn't the Kaiser, that's a dead sure thing. But if he thinks he is, then he must be——"

He never got a chance to finish, for at that moment three men bolted into the cave, and stared aghast as they saw the crowd there.

They were splashed with mud, and

they panted as if they had been running hard.

"Der teufel! We are betrayed!" roared one.

He caught Bob by the throat.

Bob hit out. Everyone knows how jolly hard Bob can hit. He put all his beef into that blow. The fellow was a heavy beast, but he nearly went down, and he let go of Bob.

Then began a scrimmage that I don't know how to describe so that you can tell just how things happened.

There were only three of the Germans, all big, fair men of the Prussian type. There were nine of us; but they were just about as much as we had half a chance with, armed as they were.

Four of us were down at once, I know. Toddy's head was in my waistcoat; and Inky and Johnny and the rifle were all mixed up on the floor together—pretty unsafe for Inky!

I saw one of the brutes stab at Harry with a long knife, and I saw Squiff clutch at his wrist and drag it down. Then the next thing I knew was that Toddy and Browney and I were piling on to another of the Huns, and getting him down by sheer weight, while he dragged at his pocket, trying to get a revolver out.

He never got it out. We had him down. But a revolver went off, and there stood the Bounder, with the thing in his hand, and a German staggered back, moaning and cursing. Smithy had shot him through the arm. That was like the Bounder, keeping cool, and aiming to disable. We all reckon that he saved Squiff's life, for the point of the German's knife grazed Squiff's face as it came down.

There came another shot. It was not Smithy this time. The bullet sang past his head. Then the man we had tied up let out a yell.

"Vot you do? You haf me shot! Donner und blitzen, you shall all die for this!"

He was hit, but the bullet had only chipped a knuckle. And, anyway, we had no time to attend to him just then. Our hands were full.

Everybody did his share, I think. I know we all fought hard, but we were not all so cool as the Bounder and Squiff. When at last we had got the three under, Inky lay insensible across Tom Brown, who was more than half-dazed by a whack on the head; Peter Todd was standing on one leg, nursing the other, which had got a kick nearly hard enough to break it; Smithy and Squiff and Harry and I all had scratches more or less deep from the brutes' knives; and Tom and Johnny had received their full share of bruises.

We sat on them to keep them down. Peter left off nursing his leg, and sat down hard on the chap who had kicked him.

"Got any more rope, Squiff?" asked Harry.

"No."

"Then I guess we shall have to sit on the animals for all we are worth while two of us go for help. Can't spare more than two; they want quite a lot of sitting on."

"The Kaiser" kept on jabbering.

"Oh, hold your silly row!" snarled one man, with scarcely any German accent at all. We learned afterwards that he had been a waiter in a London hotel for twenty years.

"I'll go alone," said Bob. "I don't mind."

And off he went.

"Who's this chap?" Smithy asked the man he was sitting on—the waiter fellow.

"How should I know?" he returned sullenly.

"Well, he looks like a friend of yours."

The fellow screwed his neck round to look.

"Ach, himmel!" he cried. "Fritz, Hermann, if—but that is too foolish! It cannot be!"

And yet they all seemed more than half to think it was! And the chap we had tied up kept on saying that he was, and threatening blue murder—just like the real Kaiser!

V.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

It was Bob come back with reinforcements. An inspector of police and two constables, and the station-master from Courtfield.

He had met them before he reached the foot of the hill. They had got on the track of the Germans, and had pursued them in a motor-car. The beggars had two motor-cycles, with a side-car to one. But they had left these and made for the cave, known to them beforehand. There they had hoped to be able to lie low till they had rested. Both of the cycles had punctured tyres, and perhaps they hoped to get repairs made while the men in pursuit chased them where they had not gone.

We could not know for certain how that stood, but we learned why they had been chased. The scoundrels had tried to wreck a troop-train.

"Why, I do declare, if here isn't another wanted man, inspector!" cried the station-master, staring at our first prisoner.

"It is, by George! The lunatic," said the inspector.

Squiff had guessed first, though he had only half meant it, I daresay. But Harry had got on to it all right.

"You'll have to go back to Doctor Bealby's, my friend," said the inspector.

"Donnerwetter! I will not go back mit meinself. I am der Kaiser, and I vill haf everypoty killed—everypoty!"

"So you shall," the inspector said soothingly. "It's only what you've got a right to, of course, being a Kaiser. But we can't have it done this minute."

It seemed that the poor fellow, who had always prided himself on his likeness to the Kaiser, but had been a harmless enough creature apart from that, had gone quite off his rocker when war was declared, and had had to be taken to an asylum. He had escaped, and had come by chance to the neighbourhood, and there our Belgian had seen him.

There was a lot more chance in it besides that. It was a chance that we captured the lunatic, and quite a lucky one; for he might have killed somebody; he was so sure about being the Kaiser that it seems a pretty sure thing he would have done.

But getting those beastly train-wreckers—they had not quite managed their job, though—was a bigger haul—and a bigger chance, too. The Belgian put us on to the Kaiser's double, and through him we got the rest, who didn't know anything about him—or he of them.

The inspector and the station-master were no end complimentary to us. The Head was not quite so complimentary, I must own. We got a lecture and a heavy impot each before he said anything at all nice. But it really was nice when it came. He even told us that he was proud of us; after some of the things he had said we certainly had not expected that!

Mr. Prout fairly raved at first at our cheek, but he forgave us later on; and the other fellows were no end envious—especially Bunter, who considered it a miracle that we had come through all right without his mighty brain to command, and his lion-like courage to support us at the crisis!

THE END.

My Comic Column.

By MONTY LOWTHER.

The rumoured appointment of a gas controller has caused widespread alarm in the New House. We understand that patriotic New House fellows are prepared to submit to the strictest restrictions of soap and water. But if they are not allowed to gas, it is feared that Figgins & Co. will join the Pacifists.

Owing to the door of their cage being left unfastened, one of Smith minor's white rabbits bolted yesterday. Now the door is bolted.

A German paper complains that the British have lost their old common-sense. The substitutes for petrol, however, have provided us with some new uncommon scents.

The advance on Bagdad was carried out through a dust-storm. A slangy acquaintance tells us, however, that the performance, taken as a whole, was not so dusty.

It would appear that the destruction of caterpillars is now illegal, as strict orders have been issued that no kind of grub is to be destroyed.

A great statesman has warned us that drink is a more dangerous enemy than the Huns. The St. Jim's fellows are quite willing to give up their porter. Taggles, please note.

The supply of wood is running short. We suggest that the members of the House of Commons put their heads together and solve this question.

The Germans being out of leather, are trying to make footgear of leather-substitutes. A bootless task!

It is stated that in a few weeks there will be no pigs left in Germany. It is sad to think of a country being totally depopulated in this way.

If the pig shortage is really so serious, we cannot see how the Kaiser can expect to save his bacon.

An Amsterdam telegram announces that the German efforts in the present campaign will be tireless. This is probably on account of the shortage of rubber.

Query: Is the rise in the price of margarine due to the blockade of Grease?

If butter, Danish and Dutch, cannot be imported, we shall have to be satisfied with butter-scotch. After all, 'tis butter trifle.

Hares are to be destroyed on account of damage to crops. After the war there will be a big demand for Thatcho for use as a hare-restorer. At least, so it Sims.

We understand that there is no truth in the report that Bunter of Greyfriars will in future wear the plaid, in order to put a check on his growing rotundity. ("Plaid"—"check"—see? You don't see? Oh, Great Scott! Is it any use at all being funny for the benefit of you follows?)

DARK NIGHTS IN TOWN.

By DICK BROOKE.

Darkness as of the nether pit
  Falls on a lightless town.
Along its streets, like Tanks gone mad,
  The 'busses thunder down.
And while they lumber through the mud,
  With crash and groan and roar,
You've got to leap like any goat,
  Then skid, then leap once more!

And if your leap falls somewhat short,
  The drivers know it's true,
As you're the lighter article,
  Not they'll be hurt, but you!
Pray, do you say a Kultured word
  To testify your pain?
Or do you say: "Aw, blimey, Bill,
  'Ere comes a hairyplane?"

And stumbling on the slippery kerbs
  While all is dark as sin,
One wonders if it's just like this
  In the Huns' own dear Berlin.
And whether Wilhelm rushes out,
  All heedless of the guns,
And makes his squeal heard o'er their noise:
  "Strafe all things! Gott mitt uns!"

THE PEACE-MAKER

By JONES MINOR,

Of the St. Jim's Fourth Form.

I.

IT was Lorne of our Form who put me up to this writing dodge. Lorne's a very decent kid, though he's always awfully hard up, especially when he knows the mater has sent me a tuck-basket or a postal-order.

Lorne said to me one day:

"I say, old man, I wish I could write letters like you. You can lick all the other fellows hollow at spouting in ink. My mater never takes any notice of my letters like yours does."

He had his mouth stuffed with one of my jam-tarts. Our cook makes 'em prime when she knows they're for me.

"It's an art, my son," I told him.

"And you know more japes than any fellow at St. Jim's," he went on. "Why don't you make up a book about 'em? Everybody who knows you would buy 'em, and heaps more besides. The chaps who make up stories get no end of money. Think of the tuck-baskets——"

"There won't be much left of this one the way you're wolfing 'em," I told him, as I shut down the lid and sat on it.

I didn't think much of the idea at the time, but at last I decided to have a shot at it.

And that's why you're reading this, and I'm telling you how Lorne and I got good old Captain Marlowe, V.C., married to my sister Marjorie.

It was a topholo jape, too. The only drawback was pater. He never can see the funny side of anything, especially if I'm mixed up in it.

It was getting towards the end of the Easter holidays, and Lorne was spending a few days at Barncombe, our place, when pater came hurrying in to brekker.

"Heard the news?" he called to mater. "Young Marlowe, who used to be so—so attached to Marjorie, has been awarded the V.C. He was at Buckingham Palace yesterday, so apparently he's home on leave."

"A nice boy," sighed mater. "I rather liked him. Sensitive and rather easily rebuffed, though."

"It's a pity he and Marjorie couldn't see eye to eye together," said pater. "Fine old family, the Marlowes. Marlowe's Brewery'll last as long as the Bank of England. Charlie'll be worth a mint of money when his guv'nor dies."

"I can't understand how the foolish child allowed sentiment to spoil her opportunity," declared mater. "It was only the most foolish of tiffs that parted them."

Pater coughed, and shook a shoulder in Lorne's direction. It didn't matter. Lorne was too busy with the preserved peaches to take any notice.

It set me wondering. Charlie Marlowe had been very decent to me. Reg, my big brother, who's now in the Navy, had been in the same Form at St. Jim's with Charlie. He brought him home once for the shooting, and after that he was always at our place.

Well, I started thinking, and when that begins something usually happens.

Just as we left the breakfast-room we met Marjorie coming downstairs. Marj's all right. You'd like her no end if you knew her. No fellow in our Form's got a prettier sister. We decided that long ago, though I did get a black eye from one of the fellows.

"Jolly fine news about good old Charlie, isn't it?" I said. "Heard he's got the V.C.?"

"Got the V.C.?" said Marj. She clasped her hands, and her face went white. "Vincent, you're not——"

"Honest Injun, old girl!" I said. "It's in the paper. You ask pater!"

Girls are funny. She skipped down the stairs, and put her arms round my neck. Her face was hot against mine.

"Oh, you dear!" she said, laughing. "I'm so glad! How brave he must have been!"

"You bet!" I agreed. "He had to go before the King yesterday. Wouldn't it be topholo to see him with his medal on?"

"I—I should——" She froze up all of a sudden, and frowned at me and Lorne. "It wouldn't be anything of the kind," she said; and went off with her head up, as proud as any peacock.

I could see through her, though. I knew she was fairly dying to see Charlie again. She'd hardly been out anywhere since he'd gone back to the Front.

"What's the matter?" said Lorne suddenly. "Lost anything?"

Lorne never can understand that a fellow can't make up japes without thinking.

"You'll find something, probably a thick ear," I told the silly young ass.

Then I told him to go on and get the terriers out, because we were going rabbiting in the woods, while I did a little bit of private business.

Before I went to the telephone in the hall I had a peep in the breakfast-room. Pater and mater were having a jolly serious talk with Marjorie, to judge by the look on her face.

II.

IT wants a bit of nerve, I can tell you, to ring up a chap who might cut you dead directly he knows who you are.

I knew good old Marlowe's number. He only lives a few miles from our place. By good luck it was Charlie himself who answered the 'phone.

"Is that Captain Marlowe, V.C.?" I asked. "I—I'm Jones minor of St. Jim's."

"Oh, you mean you're my old friend, Vincent?" I could hear him laughing at the other end. "How are you, old fellow?"

"Topholo!" I said. "You all right?"

"Topholo, too!" he replied; and we both waited a bit.

"I—I'm just going rabbiting," I said, in a hurry, for it sounded as if he was putting up the receiver.

"Wish you luck!" he said. "Is—— Never mind. By-bye, old fellow!"

"Wait a minute!" I called out. "I—I've got something important to say. It's about your V.C. I'm jolly glad; we all are! The old school will be awfully bucked about it. It's simply great! But—er—I've never seen a V.C.—never."

"Oh, there's nothing much to see, old chap!" he replied. "It's just a bit of ribbon and a little bronze cross."

"I've never seen one," I said; "not even in the picture-papers. And I know we shall have an essay to do about it one of these days. I sha'n't be able to write a line."

You twig my game, of course? You have to be jolly artful to get what you want sometimes.

"If you'll come over to the Towers one day, I'll show it to you," he said.

"Sorry, I can't," I said. "You see, I've got young Lorne from my Form here. He's sure to get into some frightful scrape if I'm not on hand to look after him. But, I say, couldn't you pop over here some time and show me?"

"I'd like to—can I?" he almost shouted.

"Of course," I said. "There'll be nobody here. Why don't you come over this morning? I might not be at home to-morrow."

He was a long time making up his mind.

"All right," he said at last. "I'll be over on my motor-bike about twelve."

Marjorie came into the hall as I hung up the receiver.

"Who were you talking to, Vin?" she asked.

"Oh, only a friend of mine!" I said. "He—he's going to give me a look-up about twelve. If I'm not back, you might be decent to him, old girl, till I come in."

"Oh, certainly!" laughed Marjorie, trying to be smart. "We'll suck bulls-eyes till you favour us with your presence."

"Perhaps he's not such a little kid as you imagine," I said, as I hurried out after Lorne.

It wanted a few minutes to twelve, and we were just coming back from the woods when we heard a motor-bike.

"That's him!" I called to Lorne. "Drop the rabbits and bunk for all you're worth!"

III.

IT was good old Marlowe. We saw him pushing his bike along the drive as we hurried through the gates.

Before we could reach him Marjorie came out on the steps.

She stopped suddenly at sight of Charlie, and her face went white as a piece of marble. Charlie pulled up, too, and saluted her. But Marj, would you believe it, didn't take the slightest notice and stared beyond him to me and Lorne.

"Oh, there you are, Vincent, dear," she called to me, smiling as if I were a prince. And I knew all the while she thought me an impertinent little wretch.

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"I've been waiting for your friend; but he hasn't come yet."

It fair knocked me off my pins for a tick. And that doesn't happen often, I can tell you.

"Oh, yes, he has," I shouted. "He's here now. He's——"

But it was no good. Marj had skedaddled.

"Oh, hang!" I heard Charlie say. "That's absolutely put the tin lid on it!"

He wheeled his bike round and glared at Lorne and me as if we were Huns. If I hadn't jumped back he'd have pushed his jigger clean into me. I was sick, you bet, at my dodge fizzling out like that.

"Here, I say," I called after Charlie. "Don't go yet, old fellow! You—you haven't shown me your V.C. yet!"

"I'm sorry, old man," Charlie stooped and turned round. He smiled as he held out his hand, but he looked as if he'd got a pain somewhere. "It isn't your fault, anyhow. You only acted for the best. And I'm awfully glad I've seen you."

After he'd shown us his Cross, we got him yarning about his adventures at the Front. And in the middle of it, out comes the pater. You bet I was bucked then.

"Hallo, Marlowe, my dear fellow!" pater said, letting himself go, like he does when we have a lot of company johnnies down to dinner. "This is indeed a surprise, and a most pleasant surprise! We were awfully delighted to hear that the King had honoured you with the highest reward the country can bestow on its brave sons. We were all thinking of you this morning, and longing to see you again. Of course, you'll stay to lunch with us?"

Charlie seemed pleased. But he muttered something about being expected home again.

"My dear fellow, it's not to be thought of," declared pater, putting his hand through Charlie's arm. "I'm most anxious to hear about your famous exploit. Vincent, my boy, take Captain Marlowe's motor-bicycle to the garage."

We stowed it in the end shed. Lorne locked the door, and gave me the key.

"Now, he can't get away until you part up," he grinned.

"What's the good?" I said. "Marj's knocked the lid off. She's absolutely spoiled everything. What can a fellow do when his sister cuts up rough, like that?"

IV.

I WENT indoors to have it out with Marj, but I couldn't find her anywhere. When I joined Lorne again in the grounds, pater was faking Charlie Marlowe through the hothouses. We messed about for a bit till they went indoors. And lunch was nearly ready.

Then, all of a sudden, out of the servants' door, pops Marjorie. She didn't seem to notice us, and went skipping through the orchard towards the big meadow.

I twigged her little game at once. There was a summer-house at the end of the orchard. Marj wasn't coming in to lunch. She was going to stop there until Charlie had gone home.

"Lorne, my son, I've got the pip!" I told him. "It's enough to make a fellow stop jape-making and go in for marbles."

"Let's go in for lunch," said Lorne. "I'm jolly hungry!"

"You'll have to die of starvation," I told him. "I'm going to get this off my chest first. Follow me, and for goodness' sake, stalk—stalk like a bally Red Indian treading on red-hot needles!"

We crossed the garden, and went through the orchard on tip-toe until we came to the summer-house. I peeped in. Marj was sitting in the hammock, with a book in her lap. She was staring out over the meadow.

Lorne, like a silly young ass, trod on a dry twig, and it made a noise like a pistol-shot. But, would you believe it, Marj never even moved.

We'd had some gipsies camping out on the meadow a few nights before, and pater had had no end of a trouble getting rid of them.

I was just making up my mind to get Lorne to hide with me in the bushes, and to yell like mad, so as to frighten her back to the house, when I thought of something better.

"Wait here," I whispered, "and don't you utter a sound, not even if you hear frightful shrieks and screaming."

I crept up behind the summer-house door. Marj was still staring in front of her. All of a sudden I banged the door to, and fixed it with the iron bar. I'd captured Marj as neat as anything. I was a bit sorry for her, though, of course, it was for her good.

I heard her book go down with a bang as she sprang to her feet. Next moment she was beating on the locked door.

"Who's that out there?" she called. "Let me out, Vincent. Oh, I know it's you, you wretched young imp! Let me out or pater shall know all about this wretched business."

I couldn't help grinning. I crept away and dragged Lorne out of the currant-bushes. The silly kid was shivering like a lump of jelly.

We got to the house, where I carried out the next part of the jape. After a search, Lorne found a scrap of paper in an old pocket-book. It wasn't very clean. Things in Lorne's pockets never are; but it made it all the better. Then I borrowed his copying-pencil.

"If your pater ever gets to find out there'll be an awful row!" blubbered the silly ass as he read what I had written.

I shut him up. Lorne's like a lot of other kids, they've got no nerve for seeing a jape right through.

The lunch-gong had sounded before I'd finished writing. There was nobody in the hall, so I dropped the paper on the mat, as we came in.

"Oh, I say," groaned the silly kid again, "you mustn't leave it there. Your pater's bound to see it's copying-pencil, and——"

I had to wither the young ass with a look, for mater came into the hall then.

"Oh, come along, you boys," she said. "I was just going to look for you. Seen anything of Marjorie, Vincent?"

"Y-yes," stammered Lorne, before I could kick him. "She's in——"

"Isn't she here?" I asked, looking up and down the hall and into the dining-room.

"S-shall I go and f-find her?" stammered Lorne.

"Never mind, dear," mater answered, smiling. "It's awfully kind of you. Marjorie's sure to come along presently."

V.

WE took our seats. Pater was talking to Charlie Marlowe nineteen to the dozen. He looked up suddenly.

"Marjorie not here!" he said, frowning. "It's too bad, my dear. It's not fair to our guest. I'm surprised—— What's that, Binks?"

Binks is our butler. He's a big chap with a fat, white, sleepy face like an owl's. When he talks to pater, he usually keeps one eye on me.

"Hexcuse me, sir," said Binks. "I found this note in the 'all, sir. Being addressed to no partic'lar pusson, sir, I took the liberty of hopening it, sir. It happears to refer to Miss Marjorie, sir."

Lorne swallowed his soup the wrong way when he saw the pater looking at the scrap of paper.

Pater's eyebrows got lower and lower as he read the note.

"Good heavens!" he cried suddenly. "I might have suspected those rascally gipsies were hanging about for no good purpose. It's monstrous! They've kidnapped Marjorie!"

Mater let out a scream, which fairly knocked the wind out of me, and flopped back in her chair.

"Listen, my dear fellow," said pater, turning to Charlie. And, with a stumble here and there, he read the wretched note.

This is what I had written:

"Dere ser,—This is to giv notis that weve kidnapt your dorter and unless yu leve £100 by the narled oak near your medo to-nite you'll never se her agin.—THE GIPSY KING."

"I'll get the police on their track," cried pater, putting his fingers through his hair and forgetting his bald patch. "I'll have them hounded out of the country. Hang it all, they'll frighten the poor child out of her wits."

Mater had already left the room when pater dashed into the hall. I felt a bit queer, I can tell you, as I heard him asking for the police over the 'phone. They were making a jolly sight more fuss about it than I thought they would.

And then, all of a sudden, Charlie Marlowe got a grip on my ear.

"You young rip!" he snapped. "What do you know about this?"

"Leggo!" I cried.

"Not a bit of it," he said, looking black as thunder. I know now why the Huns bunked from Charlie and his men. I've been watching you. You're responsible for this little game. Is Marjorie in it, too?"

"No-no, no," stammered Lorne, before I could get a word in. "She doesn't know. "She's l-locked in the s-summer-house."

Charlie let me go then. By Jove, how my ear tingled!

"If—if you don't tell pater," I managed to say at last. "We'll help you to find her."

I winked, and Charlie laughed. Good old Charlie. He's a sport!

"Come on, then," he said.

And we just had time to get into the garden through the French door before pater came back.

Charlie made me tell him all about it as we made our way towards the orchard.

"A jolly smart jape, old man," Charlie said. "But you're too daring, old chap, and you don't look ahead enough."

I didn't know what he meant till afterwards, when pater got down the cane and asked me to go into his study.

It was not until we got near the summer-house that Marjorie heard us. Then she started banging like mad on the door. We let Charlie go on alone then.

We saw him take down the iron bar, and throw the door open. We saw Marjorie dash out, all white and frightened. She seemed to jump straight into good old Charlie's arms.

Then I gave old Lorne a thump on the back that nearly knocked his front teeth out.

Would you believe it, directly we got to the house, the silly young ass blabbed the whole show away, and though Charlie and Marj came back together as pleased as Punch, after a time, pater wasn't satisfied until it hurt me to sit down properly

That's the worst of pater. He never can see the funny side of things like I can.

THE END.

BUNTER'S BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

By JOHNNY BULL.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry's cheery yell rang out loud and clear as we entered No. 1 Study, to find Billy Bunter standing by the cupboard, and devouring jam-tarts at express speed.

"What's the game, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Really, Wharton, I——"

"What are you doing at that cupboard?"

"Nothing! I——"

"Yes, you are. You're boning our tarts!"

"Oh, Wharton, I——"

"Come out of it!" snapped Bob Cherry.

Bunter was dragged away from the cupboard, and flung across the room with a bump.

"What do you mean by it?" cried Harry.

"I—I—I——"

"You've been pinching our tarts!"

"Only one, Wharton," pleaded Bunter. "I was so hungry that——"

"You prevaricator!" exclaimed Nugent, who had been examining the contents of the cupboard. "You've taken the doughnuts, and——"

"Only two," said Bunter.

"And the veal-and-ham-pie, and the sardines, and—— You blessed gourmand, you've wolfed all the grub we'd got in for our tea"

"Really, I wish you'd be a little more polite, Nugent," said Bunter. "You chaps haven't got any sympathy with a fellow who has a healthy appetite!"

"No, we haven't," said Frank, "though your appetite's beastly unhealthy! Come on, you fellows, out with him!"

"The outfulness will be terrific!" purred Inky.

And it was, too. We picked up the Owl in our arms, and hurled him out into the passage, where he came to earth with a terrific bump that shook the whole floor.

"Ow! Yow! You beasts!" yelled Bunter.

Bang!

The door of Study No. 1 was kicked to, and Billy Bunter's remarks were lost on us.

"I say, that's a bit thick!" said Nugent. "What are we going to do about tea?"

"It's all right," said Bob cheerfully. "I've just had a tip from my governor, and I can afford another spread."

"But what about——".

"Cheer up!" said Bob. "It's no good crying over spilt milk. We'll have a good spread, after all, and Bunter shall be invited as a special guest."

"Invite Bunter!"

"Yes," said Bob. "And I bet you he won't accept another invitation!"

"Why not?"

Bob explained, and we roared until our sides ached with laughter at his scheme.

Directly after afternoon classes Bob ran Bunter to earth.

"I say, Billy," he said, "we're no end sorry we were so rough on you this morning. I suppose you do get hungry this weather?"

"I should rather say I do," said Bunter. "I——"

"Well, look here, would you care to have tea with us this afternoon?" asked Bob. "I've just received a tip from my governor, and we're laying in a fresh stock of grub."

Bunter beamed.

"You're a sport, Cherry!" he said. "I'll come with pleasure!"

"Good!"

"Shall I come along and give you a hand with laying the table?" inquired Bunter.

"Oh, do!" said Bob.

Bunter, with a look of smug self-satisfaction on his face, followed Bob to Study No. 1. Harry Wharton and Nugent were already there, and had almost finished putting the cups and saucers on the table.

"Just too late to be of any assistance," said Bob. "Never mind, Billy; sit down in the easy-chair, and make yourself at home!"

Bunter sat down.

"I wonder where Inky's got to with that grub?" asked Bob. "Hallo! Here he comes!"

Inky came struggling in with a cricket bag, and banged it on a chair.

"Heavy?" asked Bob.

"The heavyfulness is terrific, my worthy chum," replied the Nabob. "I am sorryfully to say that I've forgotten the tea!"

"Never mind," said Harry. "Nugent and I will go and get some. Come on, Nugent."

Wharton and Nugent left the study, and Bob Cherry commenced to lay the supplies on the table.

Then Inky went out for a wash.

"Let me give you a hand, Bob, old pal," said Billy Bunter, rising from his chair.

"Don't trouble, Billy," said Bob smilingly. "I can manage, thanks!"

"But I——"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Bob. "Inky's forgotten to bring any bread!"

"I'll get you some," offered Bunter.

"No," said Bob; "you go on with laying the table. I'll fetch the bread."

Bob darted off.

Bunter's face was wreathed in fat smiles. His mouth watered as he gazed at a dish of rosy apples. The study was empty, and there was no one to observe him if he had an apple or two. After all, there were plenty of them.

He picked out a particularly rosy apple and took a bite at it.

"Ow! Yow!" he spluttered. "Yarooooh! Groooogh!"

Five heads suddenly popped round the doorway—our heads. We fairly yelled with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooogh!" grunted Bunter. "It's bitter! It's been faked! It's not a real apple at all! Gurrrrrgh!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Bob. "Ever been had?"

"Groooogh! Yow! Ugh!" spluttered Bunter.

"Perhaps that'll teach you a lesson, porpoise!" said Bob Cherry.

"You beasts!" raved Billy Bunter. "Fancy playing such a rotten trick upon a fellow! Ugh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I refuse to accept your invitation to tea now," said the Owl of the Remove, making towards the door.

"Don't say that!" said Bob pathetically. "Try another apple, Billy. Have a——"

Billy Bunter had gone. At that moment he was greatly in need of some water to wash out his mouth. Bob Cherry's dummy apples were certainly very different in taste from the real thing.

THE END.

"T. M. W." CORRESPONDENCE COLUMN.

"Slanderer."—I am going to nail this lie to the counter once for all, and if it raises its hydra head again I shall take prompt measures to nip it in the bud by taking the wind out of its sails. The statement that my jokes are cribbed from "Chuckles" is un-Washingtonian, as the following authentic certificate from the editor of that paper will prove: "It is certainly not the case, as far as I am in a position to judge, that you have ever lifted jokes from my columns. No joke of yours that has ever come under my notice would have been allowed to appear there." Isn't that clear and definite enough?

G. F. (New House).—Your exceedingly violent communication to hand. What have I done? I am quite unconscious of any offence. You speak of criticisms of your literary work. My dear fellow, I have never seen anything of yours that could begin to be called literary work; and as for criticising such tripe as you have sent us, I must, in all politeness, beg to be excused. Your threats have so alarmed me that henceforth I shall not move abroad without a bodyguard. My learned friend Skimpole has volunteered for the post. Mellish approached me on the subject; but, on finding that he desired to be a mere base mercenary—he stipulated for five shillings a week and the run of the cupboard—I turned down his offer.

A. R. (Shell).—Go and eat coke! Lord Devonport will not mind that.

G. A. G.—My only reason for objecting to the Nu Speling is that I am able to spell in the old ordinary way. It is, no doubt, a good wheeze for those who are quite incapable of doing so.

"Subscriber From the First and Even Before That."—You say that you are not grumbling. All you desire is to give the candid criticism which, you understand, all editors yearn for. You then proceed to say that my column is the most utter piffle, and the paper altogether the dreariest wash-out you ever ran against. Um, yes, dear boy! That is just what we yearn for, of course! Thanks, no end! Don't mind T. M. if he happens to discover your identity and proceeds to bestow a thick ear or two! It's only his way of being kind, not to say candid.

"Subscriber from the Last Number."—You threaten to discontinue your patronage unless I am squashed and my column abolished? Discontinue as soon as you like, old top! The thing can't be done. Tommy knows—he has tried it.

"A North Briton."—You hold that my reply in a recent issue about oatmeal was intended as an insult to Scotland. Wrong! You further think—wrong again, ma freen'—you have not begun to think yet! Have another try—if the apparatus is there. But I hae ma doots!

"Another North Briton."—This Caledonian demands to know whether I really believe that Harry Lauder lives upon porridge? Let me ask him one. Is Mr. Lauder a Scotsman? And what does he do for a living?

"A Son of the Green Isle."—That is all I can read of his letter. His emotions seem to have run away with him so badly while he was writing the rest that it is quite illegible.

"Anxious."—I am not a convinced Pacifist. Please do not make inferences. It is a fair question whether your mental development has yet progressed far enough to justify your attempt to draw inferences at all. Try drawing an elephant, or a frying-pan, or a broomstick—all easier!