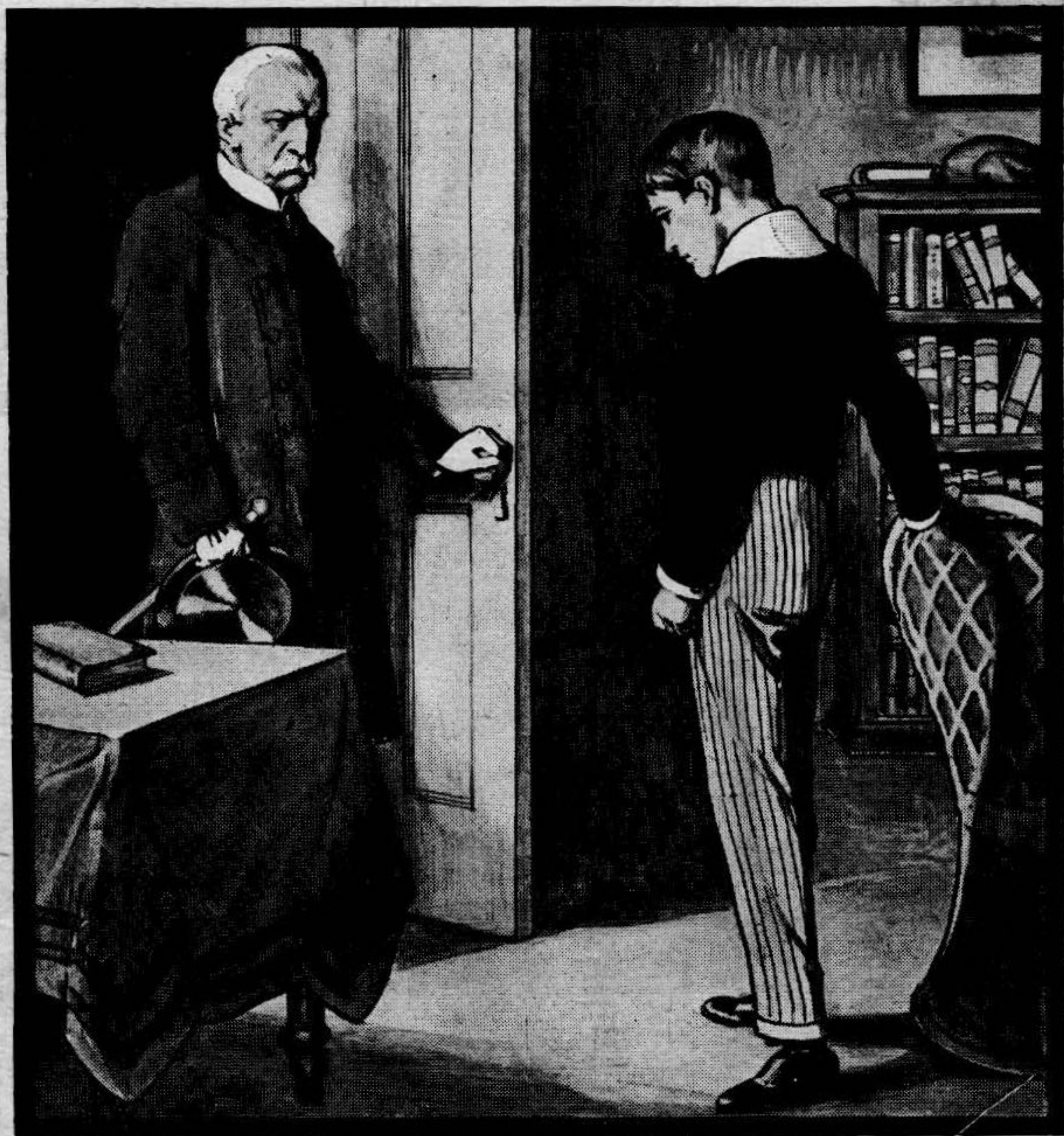


A SON'S SACRIFICE!

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



FACE TO FACE WITH HIS FATHER!

A SON'S

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

BY
Martin Clifford.

SACRIFICE!

CHAPTER 1. Chucked Out!

"**G**REAT pip!" Grundy of the Shell uttered that ejaculation suddenly in startled tones.

Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn were reclining on the grassy bank, by the towing-path along the shining Ryll. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and Grundy and Co. were taking it easy.

Not that Grundy, at least, wanted to take it easy. For a steady half-hour Grundy had been talking on the subject of the junior House match, then proceeding on Little Side at St. Jim's, and explaining to his chums at great length the many and various reasons why he, George Alfred Grundy, ought to have been playing in the School House team.

Grundy was full of energy, even on that warm summer's afternoon. He dwelt bitterly on the crass stupidity of Tom Merry in leaving him out of the House match, and demanded whether the School House wasn't in need of a new junior skipper. He bored Wilkins and Gunn almost to tears. In fact, they were nearly dozing off in the grass, while Grundy ran on tirelessly.

But Grundy's chums were patient with him. Grundy was a good fellow in the main, though he had a decidedly exaggerated idea of the importance of George Alfred Grundy of the Shell. And Grundy had a five-pound note in his pocket, a tip from his celebrated Uncle Grundy. Grub rules notwithstanding, a fiver was a fiver.

So Grundy ran on without interruption—until he interrupted himself, by suddenly sitting up in the grass, and ejaculating "Great pip!"

From where he sat Grundy could see the gate under the trees which gave admittance to the garden of the Green Man Inn, further along the towing-path.

The Green Man was a pub with a very unenviable reputation. Such a place was, of course, strictly out of bounds for any St. Jim's fellow. It was rumoured that Racke and Crooke and other black sheep sometimes dropped in there, strictly under the rose, for a game of billiards with Mr. Lodgey or Mr. Banks. Grundy's eyes were fixed upon a youth in Etons and a straw hat, who had stopped at the gate, and was looking suspiciously up and down the towing-path, evidently preparatory to entering the forbidden precincts. And it was not one of the black sheep of the Shell. It was a fag of the Third Form—a mere kid—and Grundy recognised Manners minor.

Then Grundy sat up.

He was astonished, and he was shocked. As he gazed at the fag, Manners minor opened the gate, disappeared among the trees within, and the gate clicked shut.

"My hat!" said Grundy.

"Hallo!" said Wilkins, waking up. "Lemme see, you were saying—"

"Something about cricket, wasn't it?" yawned Gunn. "I quite agree with you, Grundy. It beats me how Tom Merry could play Manners major, and leave you out, when you've got a five-pound note

—I mean when you're such a ripping cricketer—"

Grundy jumped up.

"I'm jolly well going to see into this!" he exclaimed.

"Eh? Into which?"

"There's a St. Jim's kid just gone into the Green Man."

"You don't say so!"

"It's Manners minor of the Third."

"Little beast!"

"Manners' young brother, you know," said Grundy. "Horrid little rotter! Now, Manners has got the place I ought to have in the School House eleven—"

"Yaw-aw-aw-aw!" yawned Wilkins and Gunn together, fearing that Grundy was just going to begin again. But Grundy wasn't.

"But I'm going to chip in," said Grundy. "I believe Racke goes to the Green Man on the sly sometimes, but fancy a kid in the Third Form! I'm going to have him out!"

"Here, I say, where are you going?" exclaimed Gunn in alarm.

"I'm going in after him."

"It's out of bounds, fathead!"

"That's why I'm going to yank that young blackguard out by his neck," explained Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn, quite roused now, jumped up and grabbed Grundy.

"Chuck it!" exclaimed Wilkins. "It's not your business, I suppose. Manners hasn't asked you to play kind uncle to his minor, has he?"

"I'm not going to allow a St. Jim's kid to disgrace his school—my school!" said Grundy loftily. "I look on this as a duty. I'm going to fetch that little beast out by his neck. You fellows come along, in case there's a row. I may have to whop some of them if they interfere."

"Look here," roared Wilkins, "we're not going to get into a fight with a gang of boozy hooligans in a pub!"

"And you're not going to, Grundy," said Gunn. "That den's out of bounds, and you can't go in. Bless Manners minor!"

"You shut up, and follow your leader!" said Grundy autocratically.

And he jerked his arms away, and strode up to the gate of the inn garden and kicked it open. Wilkins and Gunn looked at one another in utter dismay. They were as disgusted as Grundy at Manners minor's conduct, certainly. But the idea of a pitched battle with the rowdy, boozy habitues of the Green Man did not appeal to them in the least.

"The silly ass!" ejaculated Wilkins. "I'm not going in. Why, a chap might be sacked for being seen there!"

"Flogged, at least," said Gunn. "Lot of good telling the Head we were only going in because we were interfering asses!"

And Wilkins and Gunn stayed on the towing-path. But such considerations did not worry George Alfred Grundy. He felt it incumbent upon him to chip in, and he was going to chip in. And he strode up the weedy, neglected garden-path with a very warlike air. He looked about him for the fag who had entered

a few minutes before. The French windows of the billiard-room were open on the garden, and Grundy strode up to them. He caught a glimpse of a fag in Etons in the room, and would have marched right in, but a fat and greasy-looking man stepped out at the same moment. It was Mr. Lodgey, the billiard-sharper, who made the Green Man his headquarters.

"Hallo!" said Mr. Lodgey.

"Let me pass, you boozy rotter!" said Grundy, who had no politeness to waste upon Mr. Lodgey. "There's a kid belonging to my school here, and I'm going to take him away."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Mr. Lodgey. "You're trespassing 'ere, young gentleman. You clear off!"

"Are you going to let me pass?" roared Grundy.

"No, I ain't."

"Then I'll jolly soon shift you."

"My 'at! 'Elp!" shouted Mr. Lodgey, as the truculent Shell fellow rushed right at him.

Mr. Lodgey staggered back under the burly Shell fellow's attack. But Grundy did not get in. The marker ran out at Mr. Lodgey's call, and a beery-looking stableman came running round from the yard. Three pairs of hands grasped George Alfred Grundy at once.

Grundy was a great fighting man, and he was justly proud of what he called his four-point-seven punch. But even Grundy was not of much use against three grown men. He landed two or three doughty blows, and then he was swept off his feet, and rushed away down the inn-garden, with his arms and legs wildly flying in the air, and his voice making itself heard like unto the voice of a bull of Bashan.

"Yaroo! Leggo! I'll smash you! Yoop! Yah! Ah! Grrrrr! Gug-gug!"

Crash!

Over the gate went Grundy, flying, and he landed on the towing-path and rolled over to the feet of Wilkins and Gunn. Three beery faces grinned over the gate as Grundy sat up, gasping.

"Gerrroogh!"

"You come back, an' I'll 'ave you locked up!" said Mr. Lodgey impressively. "You ain't allowed trespassin' 'ere."

"Gurrergg!"

"Oh, come away!" said Wilkins, dragging Grundy to his feet.

"Grooogh!"

"Yes, take him away," said the marker. "My belief is that the young gent's been drinkin', and he'd better go 'ome an' sleep it ort."

That was too much for Grundy. He wrenched himself away from Wilkins, and charged at the gate. Another stable hand and a grinning pot-boy had joined the group at the gate, and Grundy had five foes to tackle. He tackled them valiantly, and in three seconds was lying on his back on the towing-path again.

This time Wilkins and Gunn dragged him up and marched him away, willy-nilly. They were followed by a yell of raucous laughter from Lodgey & Co.

"Why didn't you back me up?" roared Grundy, when his chums released him at last, at a safe distance from the inn-garden. "We could have mopped up that measly crowd, the three of us."

"And have got run in by the police, along with them, perhaps," said Wilkins tartly.

"Blow the police!"

"The police won't let you blow 'em, old chap," grinned Gunn. "You see, they can't be blowed! Let's get in to tea."

"That young rotter, Manners, is still there!"

"Let him rip!"

"It's a disgrace to the school."

"Not so much as us getting run in for a row in a pub," chuckled Wilkins. "You're well out of it! Let's get in to tea."

Grundy snorted; but he went in to tea. He had a large and varied assortment of bruises upon his burly person, and, upon consideration, he did not want to add to the number.

CHAPTER 2.

News for Manners Major!

"**B**AI Jove, we've beaten them!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form made that remark, as Tom Merry & Co. came off the cricket-field.

School House juniors had beaten Figgins & Co. of the New House, by a dozen runs. Tom Merry & Co. were very well satisfied. Figgins & Co. weren't so well satisfied; and they had various explanations as to why they hadn't "mopped up" the School House.

"Well, didn't you expect to beat them, fathead?" asked Jack Blake.

"Undah the circs, Blake, it was not a suah thing," said Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy has been playin' seven Shell fellows this time, and only four of the Fourth, and undah the circs I had my doubts."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Levison, who was one of the Fourth Form members of the School House team.

"Well, there's something in that," admitted Blake. "I must say that Manners has played like a one-eyed rabbit."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

"Fathead!" said Monty Lowther.

Manners' chums were not slow to speak up. Manners himself was silent. He was not looking so cheery as the rest of the cricketers.

"Well, I don't quite see why Manners was played," said Blake, with an air of friendly candour. "It wasn't for his cricket, anyway!"

"Ass!"

"And I say he played like a one-eyed rabbit!" said Blake positively. "A duck's-egg! What do you call that?"

"Yaas, wathah! I endorse Blake's wemarks. I have nevah seen a one-eyed wabbit play cwicket, but if a one-eyed wabbit did play cwicket, I am suah he would play cwicket just like Mannahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bow-wow!" said Talbot of the Shell. "Manners was a bit off form. Might happen to anybody."

"To anybody in the Shell!" conceded Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.

And the Terrible Three of the Shell walked away together, leaving Blake & Co. still discussing Manners' form in the match.

Tom Merry was a little troubled about the matter, too, truth to tell.

As a rule, Manners did not play in House matches, Tom being too dutiful a cricket skipper to put in his own chum if a better player was available, and was

needed. Tom had stretched a point on this occasion, hoping for the best. Not that Manners had been keen to play. He seemed to have lost his keenness for most things of late.

"Don't mind those Fourth Form kids' gas, old scout," said Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three sauntered across to the tuckshop for ginger-beer. "Fags will gas, you know!"

Manners smiled faintly.

"You oughtn't to have played me, Tom," he said.

"Well," said Tom, and paused, "after all, you must have a show in a House match sometimes, Manners, and you've been sticking - so hard to practice lately—"

"You've been making me, you mean."

"Well, you've done it, anyway!"

"You're an ass, Tom," said Manners.

exasperated Reggie, and embittered him against his elder brother. He could no longer go to Racke's study for a smoke or a game of cards, and he had informed Manners that he would look elsewhere. Outside St. Jim's Manners had no control over him. He could not play the spy upon his minor on a half-holiday. But he was haunted by the thought of the trouble the reckless, wilful fag might land himself in.

Reggie was a good enough youth in the main, but petting and spoiling at home had made him wilful and a little selfish. A hint of interference aroused all the obstinate opposition in his nature. He was bent upon keeping on as he had started, if only to show his major that he was not to be controlled.

Which was hard upon Manners, who had already been called over the coals by



Grundy is Put Out!

(See Chapter 1.)

"You stretched a point, and put me in, and I couldn't put my mind into the game. I suppose you thought I should be mooching about in the blues, while you and Monty were playing."

Tom Merry coloured. Manners had read his thoughts quite correctly. The captain of the Shell was quite justified in giving Manners a turn in a House match; but it was not wholly for that reason that he had fairly driven him into the team that afternoon.

Poor old Manners was down on his luck, and his chums were concerned about him.

Not that there was anything wrong with Manners himself.

It was his minor who was at the bottom of the trouble.

Manners was a fellow with a strong sense of duty, and since Reggie Manners had developed sporting proclivities under the guidance of Racke of the Shell, Manners had been troubled about him.

Reggie's intimacy with the blackguard of the Shell had been stopped. Manners had stopped it. Racke did not dare even to speak to Reggie now. But that interference, as he called it, had bitterly

his father for his supposed neglect of Reggie at school.

During a holiday at home Reggie had shown the cloven foot, and the result had been a long letter to Manners from his father, the injustice of which stung the junior to the quick.

Between Mr. Manners' expectation that he should bring Reggie up in the way he should go, and Reggie's determination not to be interfered with in the slightest degree, Manners was in a difficult position; to say nothing of his own brotherly concern for the reckless little rascal.

It was no wonder that Manners had been moody and depressed and worried.

Hence Tom Merry's determination to keep him hard at cricket, to drive troubles from his mind, a chummy determination which had been partially successful. But the show Manners had put up in the House match proved that even cricket was not quite a panacea for worry.

The Terrible Three walked on in silence, their thoughts not very agreeable on that sunny summer's afternoon.

Manners had made heroic efforts to be cheerful, realising that he was depressing his chums, who could not be expected to be so concerned about Reggie as he was. But it was in vain. Even while he was battling for the School House, he could not help wondering where Reggie was that afternoon. He knew that the fag was on ill terms with his former friends in the Third. D'Arcy minor and Levi-son minor and the rest had no use for a sporting blade in their select circle.

He knew that Reggie had gone out alone and that it was very unlikely that the fag intended to spend his half-holiday alone. He had, in fact, gone out looking for trouble, and he was very likely to find it.

"Look here, I wish you fellows would give me a wide berth for a bit," said Manners restlessly. "I've no right to plague you with my family troubles. I can't help being a bit in the blues. You'd better let me alone."

To which Tom Merry and Monty Lowther replied cheerily:

"Rats!"

"I can't help it, you know," said Manners forlornly. "Reggie's booked for trouble, I know that. And if it comes along, the pater will put it all down to me. He'll think I ought to have looked after Reggie better."

"You couldn't!" growled Lowther.

"I don't see how I could," muttered Manners. "I've made him jolly nearly hate me by stopping his friendship with that beast Racke. I know he's met that billiard sharper in Rylcombe—Lodgey. How can I help it? He won't listen to what I say. The pater wouldn't expect me to report him to the Head and get him flogged. I've done my best, and may have made matters worse. I shouldn't wonder if he's gone out playing the fool this afternoon. He may get kicked out of the school in the long run. And the pater will think—"

He broke off abruptly. He would not seem to be criticising his father, even to his best chums.

There was a glum silence. Monty Lowther broke it with the remark:

"Hallo, here's Grundy!"

Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn had come in at the gates. Grundy looked very dusty, and limped a little. Evidently he had been in the wars. Wilkins and Gunn seemed to be chiefly occupied in suppressing their smiles.

"Hallo! Been on the war-path, Grundy?" asked Lowther.

Grundy snorted.

"I've been chucked out of a pub!"

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"You've been what?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Chucked out of a pub!" growled Grundy.

"Great Scott! You'd better not let Railton hear you talking about it!" exclaimed Tom. "I didn't know you'd taken to pub-haunting, Grundy!"

"You silly ass, I haven't! I went in there to fetch Manners minor out!"

"What!" exclaimed Manners.

Grundy glared at him. Grundy was indignant.

"Your dashed minor!" he said.

"Think I was going to let the little beast disgrace the school like that? I went in after him to yank him out! Then a gang of hooligans started on me, and I was chucked out—me, you know!—chucked out on my neck!"

Manners' face was a study.

"Is that true, Wilkins?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wilkins reluctantly.

"Your minor certainly went into the Green Man—into the garden, anyway! Grundy saw him go in, and went after him, like a silly ass!"

"Like a what?" roared Grundy.

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"Ahem! I mean, from a sense of duty," said Wilkins. "Grundy always feels it his duty to shove his oar in, don't you, Grundy?"

"Yes, I did, and it was my duty," said Grundy firmly. "If Manners can't look after his minor, it's a fellow's duty to see that the shady little rotter don't disgrace the school! If he were my minor, I'd scalp him!"

And Grundy snorted, and strode on with his chums, leaving the Terrible Three with clouded faces.

"So it's come to that!" said Manners, his face pale. "Reggie's mixing with that gang of rascals! That's because I stopped him with Racke! I've only made matters worse!"

"Speak to him when he comes in," said Tom.

"What's the good of speaking to him? He won't take any notice of what I say! It only makes him more obstinate!"

"You can't let him keep on like that," said Tom quietly. "Unless he chucks it, you'll have to let your father know, or the Head. Tell Reggie that, and he may have sense enough to chuck it!"

"Right!" said Lowther. "You can't do anything else, Manners!"

Manners nodded, without speaking. To speak to the Head was impossible. It meant a flogging, at least, for the wilful fag. His father was his only resource, and his duty was clear. But it was bitter; for Manners knew only too well the painful shock it would be to his father, and he could foresee only too clearly that the blame would not be laid upon the darling Reggie, but upon him.

It would be said—or, at least, supposed—that he had failed in his duty to his young brother—that Reggie had drifted into evil companionship for want of a kind and guiding hand in the big school. Manners knew it. There was a feeling of bitterness in his breast that almost amounted to despair.

CHAPTER 3.

A Debt of "Honour."

"REGGIE! Come in!"

Tom Merry spoke as cordially as he could, but it was not easy to be cordial to the reckless young rascal who was causing his brother so much trouble.

The Terrible Three had had tea—not at all the cheery meal that was usual in No. 10 Study. Manners had not spoken a word, and his depression of spirits had naturally affected his chums.

Manners couldn't help it. He had warned his chums to give him a wide berth while he was in the blues, and he couldn't do more than that. And his friends were not likely to take him at his word. Poor old Manners was in need of true and steady and patient friendship just then.

Both Tom Merry and Monty Lowther looked grimly at Reggie Manners as the fag stood in the study doorway. But for the fact that it would have worried Manners all the more, they would have given him what he had long needed—a good licking. But as they looked at him their expression became a little less hard. The fag's face was full of trouble.

Apparently Reggie's roystering had not agreed with him. He was pale, and his eyes had a hunted look.

He came timidly into the study.

"I—I want to speak to you, Harry," he said hesitatingly.

"Speak away!" growled Manners.

Tom Merry glanced at Lowther, and rose. The fag evidently wanted to be alone with his brother. Tom hoped that it was a sign of a tardy repentance.

They quitted the study.

Manners fixed his eyes upon the fag. Reggie was not in his usual defiant mood,

and the Shell fellows could not quite make him out.

"Well," said Manners at last, "have you come to tell me you've had a ripping time at the Green Man? Grundy saw you there!"

"I know he did, the meddling fool!" said Reggie, his brow darkening. "He came in after me, and Lodgey and the rest chucked him out! Serve him right! I'll make him smart for interfering with me, too! Lodgey was very crusty about it! It's that that's made him such a beast, I believe!"

"Oh, Lodgey's a beast, is he?" said Manners.

"Well, he's rather a beast!"

"He's a beast you'd better stop knowing!" said Manners.

"I shall please myself about that!" said the fag, in quite his old tone. "Don't you begin interfering with me again, I warn you!"

"Unless you give me your word to keep clear of that place and that set, Reggie, I'm going to write to father about it to-night," said Manners quietly.

Reggie started.

"You—you couldn't!" he panted. "You'd never give me away to the pater!"

"It's the only thing I can do."

Reggie sneered.

"More fool you!" he said. "The pater will put it down to you. He'll say you ought to have looked after me better!"

"Perhaps he will," said Manners, with a bitter smile. "But that's what I'm going to do, all the same!"

"It's all your fault," said the fag.

"My fault?"

"Yes. You kept on interfering. I should have dropped Racke, only I wouldn't because you interfered. I shouldn't have gone to the Green Man at all, only—only I was going to be my own master, see? And you're responsible for what's happened!" broke out Reggie passionately. "Now you've caused it all, you can help me out of the fix I've got into!"

"So you've got into a fix?"

"Not exactly a fix. I—I'm in debt!" Manners laughed harshly. That news did not surprise him.

"You can cackle!" said Reggie fiercely. "You did it all, with your bullying and interfering. I wish I'd never gone there; I didn't really want to. I don't care for billiards, and Lodgey's a beery rotter, anyway; so are they all—a rotten, shady gang! I can't make out what Racke sees in a set like that. I'm going to pay Lodgey, and keep clear of him—if I can. Look here, I want some money!"

"You owe Lodgey money?"

"Yes."

"I'll help you pay him if I can, if you promise to keep clear of him afterwards. I'd rather do that than write to the pater!"

"It won't be nice for you if you write to the pater!" said Reggie bitterly. "The pater wouldn't forgive you in a hurry if I got into trouble. A chap at a public school ought to look after his minor a bit—without keeping on interfering with him, I mean. The pater knows that!"

"How much do you owe Lodgey?" asked Manners, without taking heed of the fag's words.

"Five pounds."

"Five pounds!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Reggie sullenly. "Don't yell it out, you ass! Five pounds! And—and I've got to settle! It's a debt of honour!"

"Don't talk rot, you young fool!" said Manners savagely. "You can leave honour out of it! What do you owe Lodgey five pounds for?"

"I—I lost it!"

"You've been gambling with him?"

"No, I haven't! We—we had a quid on the game—it was billiards—and I—I won," muttered Reggie. "Then—then—"

"You won! You beat Lodgey at billiards, you silly young idiot! Do you think any handicap could let you beat that sharper at billiards unless he chose?"

"Well, I beat him, and I won a pound. Then I played a game with Banks, and lost the quid," said Reggie sullenly. "Then—then Lodgey said he'd make me a sporting offer, though I'd beaten him so easily, and we had five pounds on the next game. I—I beat him quite easy at first. He was only eighteen when I ran out at fifty, and he played rottenly. I—I thought I could beat him a second time just as easily, and—and I got ahead at first. But he got a good break, and ran out ahead!"

"And you couldn't see that he was spoofing you all the time?" growled Manners.

"He wasn't. It was just luck. He—he was very angry when I—I couldn't pay up, but he said it would be all right if I sent the money," said Reggie. "He was a bit crusty, because of that fool Grundy handling him! He said I should hear from him if I didn't send the money. I suppose he meant that as a threat. I'm going to pay him, anyway!"

"How are you going to pay him, you young ass? Where are you going to get five pounds from?"

"Can't you lend it to me?"

"No, I can't!"

"You've got some money in the bank," said Reggie.

Manners' lip curled.

"I've got a few pounds in the savings-bank," he assented. "You want me to draw it out, and give it to you for that swindling rascal? I've got other uses for money. I thought you meant a few shillings."

"You won't lend it to me?"

"No, I won't—not for that!" growled Manners. "I haven't five pounds, anyway—only about three-ten."

"You could borrow the rest from Lowther and Tom Merry. I could get it out of the pater sooner or later, and settle up."

"Yes, I'm likely to clear my pals out of money to give it to you to hand to a swindling billiard-sharper!" growled Manners. "You're not going to pay him. He cheated you, anyway; and he ought to be put in prison for gambling with a schoolboy."

Reggie's teeth came together.

"You won't help me?" he asked.

"I can't to that extent. Don't talk rot!" Manners compressed his lips. "You needn't be afraid of that black-guard, Reggie. There's nothing he can do. Can't you see that he let you win first, so as to egg you on?"

"Nothing of the sort! I beat him fair and square, and I could again!" said the fag. "I'm going to pay him somehow—it's a debt of honour. You're not going to make me into a swindler, Harry?"

Manners drew a deep, hard breath.

"That'll do!" he muttered. "You'd better clear out, Reggie. I can't and I won't give you five pounds to hand to that thief! That settles that!"

Manners minor gave his brother an angry, defiant look.

"I'll find the money somewhere," he said. "I'm going to pay him. And I'll go there again, too. And if you tell the pater, I'll tell him you're telling lies. So there!"

Manners made a step towards the fag, his fists clenched, and his eyes blazing. But he controlled himself. He pointed to the door, and the fag, with a sneer,

went out, and slammed the door after him.

CHAPTER 4.

Caught!

"HALLO, you young scamp! What are you doing here?" exclaimed Wilkins.

Wilkins had just come into his study—No 3 in the Shell passage, which he shared with Gunn and Grundy. As he entered, Manners minor swung round, and faced him, with a startled look.

Wilkins looked at the fag suspiciously. It was very unusual for a Third-Former to be found in a Shell study at all, and Manners minor could not be supposed to have any business in Grundy's quarters. Considering what had happened that afternoon, Wilkins suspected that Reggie was there to get even in some way with George Alfred for his interference that afternoon.

"What are you up to?" Wilkins demanded.

"Find out!" retorted Reggie.

"Some of your fag tricks—what?" asked Wilkins.

"Go and eat coke!"

George Wilkins was a good-tempered fellow, but he was not disposed to take too liberal an allowance of cheek from a fag. Reggie wasn't his minor. Indeed, if he had been, Wilkins' methods with him would have been a good deal more drastic than Manners'.

Wilkins looked round the study for a cricket-stump.

Reggie dodged to the door.

A hand on his collar stopped him, and swung him back. Then Wilkins picked up a stump, and proceeded to lay it about Reggie.

"I'll give you some of what your major ought to give you, you shady little ead!" Wilkins remarked.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh! Ah! Yah!!" roared Reggie.

"You rotter! Yah! Oh!" There was a step in the passage, and Manners of the Shell looked in. He had heard his minor's yells from No. 10.

"What the dickens—" he began.

"All serene!" said Wilkins. "I found this cheeky young beggar nosing about my study, and he was up to no good. I'm really doing your job for you, Manners."

Whack, whack!

"Yow!" roared Wilkins suddenly.

Reggie had back-heeled, and the Shell fellow received a terrific hack on the shin. He released the fag, with a howl of agony, and Reggie dodged past his major and ran out of the study. Wilkins reeled, and held on to the table, quite pale with pain for a moment.

"Oh!" he gasped. "The young scoundrel! I'll skin him! I'll—"

He rushed past Manners, and half ran, half limped down the passage in pursuit of Reggie, who was fleeing for the staircase. There was a sudden roar in the passage, as Reggie fairly bolted into an elegant junior who was coming along from the stairs.

"Yawooh! Oh, cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spun round and bumped on the wall. Reggie reeled from the shock, and ere he could recover himself, the enraged Wilkins had overtaken him and grasped him.

"Now, you young hooligan!" panted Wilkins.

"Leggo!" yelled Reggie. "I'll kick your shins again, you bully!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Manners, coming up.

"Do you think I'm going to let the little beast hack my shins?" bellowed Wilkins.

"Pway don't waise your voice like

that, Wilkins, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, detaching himself from the wall. "You thwow me into quite a fluttah when you I wear like that, and I am howwibly out of I bweath already."

"I'll smash him!"

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" demanded Grundy's powerful voice as he came along from the stairs with Gunn. "Here, don't pitch into the kid, Wilkins!"

"He's hacked my shin!" howled Wilkins. "I shall have a bump as big as a dashed egg!"

"Well, you were laying into him with a cricket-stump!" said Manners, dragging his breathless junior away from Wilkins. "Let him go!"

"Look here, Manners—"

"Peace, my infants—peace!" Tom Merry hurried on the scene. "Now then, Wilkins, you don't want to fight Manners—"

"Let not your angry passions rise!" said Monty Lowther chidingly. "Let dogs delight to scrap and fight—"

"Look at my shin!" roared Wilkins.

He dragged up his trouser-leg, and pulled down the sock, and revealed a black bruise that was forming on his shin. It was a cruel hack. Reggie had been quite reckless. Tom Merry's brow darkened as he saw it.

"You cowardly little beast, Reggie!" he broke out, forgetting Manners for the moment.

"He was whaling me with a stump!" growled Reggie sullenly.

"Because you were playing tricks in my study, you little rotter!" said Wilkins. "All right, Manners, you can keep your paws down. I'm not going to fight you. If you feel proud of a minor like that you're welcome to. Keep him out of my study, though. I'll smash him if I find him there again!"

And Wilkins limped painfully away to his study. Grundy gave the fag a dark look, and seemed inclined for a moment to commence operations upon him, but instead he followed Wilkins with Gunn. Reggie remained with the Terrible Three, his face dark and sullen. As a matter of fact, he was sorry he had hurt Wilkins so much, but nothing would have constrained him to admit it.

"What were you doing in Wilkins' study, Reggie?" asked Manners very quietly.

"Find out!" growled Reggie.

Monty Lowther took him by the shoulder, and turned him towards the stairs.

"Cut off!" he said briefly.

And Reggie, with a dark look at the Shell fellows, cut off, and disappeared down the staircase.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard Weggie as a howwid little wascal! I fear, Mannahs, that you are not so careful with your minah as I am with my minah."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Manners. He was not in a humour for a lecture from Arthur Augustus.

D'Arcy extracted his celebrated monocle from his waistcoat-pocket, jammed it into his eye, and surveyed Manners, with a crushing look.

"What were you pleased to wemark, Mannahs?" he asked, with chilly dignity.

"I said shut up!"

"I wegard that wemark as uttably wude and Hunnish, Mannahs!"

"Well, ring off, then!" snapped Manners. "You talk too much!"

"Bai Jove! Will you hold my jacket, Tom Mewwy, while I give Mannahs a feahful thwashin'?"

"No. I'll hold your neck, while I jam your head on the wall!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Take his ears, Lowther!"

"Bai Jove. You uttah wuffians!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hastily retired from the scene. The Terrible Three went downstairs together, and Tom Merry skilfully inveigled Manners into a game of chess in the Common-room. When he was at the chess-table Manners could dismiss his troublesome minor from his mind, at least.

CHAPTER 5.

A Startling Discovery!

THERE was a strong odour of embrocation in Grundy's study. Wilkins, with his trouser-leg rolled back, was seated in the armchair attending to his shin. He grunted as he rubbed the darkening bruise. Grundy and Gunn were both looking grim.

"The little beast ought to be scragged!" said Gunn. "I've a jolly good mind to go after him with a cricket-stump this moment!"

"Yow-ow!" was Wilkins' reply.

"What was the cheeky little rotter doing in our study, anyway?" asked Grundy.

Wilkins snorted.

"Your fault, Grundy, you ass! Of course, he'd come to play some trick! It was because you interfered with him this afternoon."

"I didn't exactly interfere with him. I was going to, but those boozy hooligans stopped me. I was doing my duty," said Grundy. "Manners major's duty, at least. I expected him to thank me for it, but he hasn't!"

Grunt!

"But I'm not going to have fags playing japes in my study," said Grundy, in great wrath. "I never heard of such cheek! He doesn't seem to have done any damage, though."

"I interrupted him!" grunted Wilkins. "I wish I hadn't! Yow! I shall be limping with this! Ow!"

"You'll feel better after tea," said Gunn comfortingly. "About time we had tea. Did you say you wanted me to cut down to the tuckshop and change your fiver, Grundy?"

"No; I don't remember saying so, Gunn."

William Cuthbert Gunn coughed. He had given Grundy a hint, but Grundy was deaf and blind to hints.

"Well, I'll change it for you, if you like!" he said.

"That's all right; I'll change it!" said Grundy. "I've got some shopping to do. Can't have much of a spread, with those blessed food regulations! Still, there's some things a chap can buy. I'll get the fiver!"

Grundy opened the table-drawer. Then he gave a howl of wrath.

"Look here!"

The drawer was in a parlous state.

It was pretty full of odds and ends—lesson-books, impot-paper, exercises, and other things. And everything in the drawer was drenched with ink. It looked as if all the ink in Grundy's study had been used for the purpose. The drawer and everything it contained reeked with ink.

"That's what that young villain was here for!" roared Grundy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'll smash him! I'll spifficate him! I'll—I'll—"

Words failed Grundy.

"Lucky Wilkins interrupted him before he got any further, if he started like that!" remarked Gunn. "I say, is the fiver damaged? Was it there?"

"Yes; I put it in here when I came in, before I went up to the dorm to change. I dare say it's soaked with ink!" said Grundy, breathing hard. "Mrs. Taggles may refuse to change it if it is!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Gunn dismally. "Then we sha'n't have any tea! I'm stony!"

"I'll soon see!"

Grundy turned out the inky papers and books.

"Where the thunder has it got to?" he exclaimed crossly.

"Well, it must be there, if you put it there!" said Gunn, coming to his aid.

"I hope you haven't lost it!"

"I put it in here!" growled Grundy.

"I shoved it under a book for safety. I'd have locked the drawer, only one of you asses has lost the key!"

"You mean, you lost it!" said Gunn.

"You remember you lost it, and we had to open the drawer with a chisel."

"Oh, don't jaw, Gunny! What a chap you are for jawing!"

Grundy turned out the things right and left, his fingers becoming inky in the process. But the five-pound note did not come to light. Gunn, seriously alarmed as to the prospects of tea in the study, helped him, separating the papers and shaking the books. But the banknote did not materialise.

"You must have put it somewhere else, Grundy," Gunn said. "Left it in your pocket, very likely!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Grundy, in great exasperation. "I suppose I ought to know whether I put it in the drawer or not. I shoved it under my Latin grammar. That was moved. It must be here somewhere!"

"I—I say!" Gunn started, as a sudden thought came into his mind. "I—I say, Grundy, I suppose Manners minor—"

He broke off.

"Blow Manners minor!"

"I mean, I suppose he hasn't taken it?"

Grundy jumped.

"Oh!" he said.

"It doesn't seem to be here!" observed Gunn. "You say you're certain you put it in the drawer?"

"I know I did!"

"Then it looks as if that little beast may have boned it!"

"I shouldn't have thought he was a thief!" said Grundy, shaking his head.

"A cheeky little cad, of course, but not—What do you think, Wilkins?"

"A thief, as likely as not!" growled Wilkins. "You say the banknote's gone? Well, if it's gone, it's been taken. Ask Manners minor for it!"

Probably the severe twinges in his damaged shin led Wilkins to take a darker view than he might otherwise have taken. At present he was quite prepared to believe anything of the fag who had hacked his shin so savagely.

"Might be part of his rotten japing," said Grundy. "He must have seen it here, and he may have hidden it. I shall certainly ask him for it. Come on, Gunny! The sooner the better!"

Grundy and Gunn left the study, leaving Wilkins still busy with his bruise. They hurried down to the Third-Form quarters at once. It was close on time for prep in the Third, and they were pretty certain to find the fags in the Form-room.

Grundy was exasperated at Reggie Manners' cheek in daring to rag his study. But he did not yet suspect the fag of stealing the banknote. He was more inclined to believe that Reggie had hidden it about the study somewhere to cause him further trouble.

Most of the Third were in the Form-room when the two Shell fellows arrived there. Reggie Manners, with a sullen face, had already taken his place at his desk. D'Arcy minor and Joe Frayne and Levison minor were chatting in a cheery group, taking no notice of Reggie. Reggie was in bad odour in his Form at present, and his old friends gave him

the cold shoulder. Wally & Co. did not approve of his newly-developed sporting proclivities.

Wally D'Arcy looked round in warlike fashion as Grundy and Gunn came in. The fags had had many a rub with the high-handed George Alfred.

"Hallo!" said Wally. "What are you bringing a face like that into our Form-room for, Grundy?"

"Why don't you wear a mask, Grundy?" inquired Curly Gibson.

"Perhaps he is!" suggested Frank Levison. "A Guy Fawkes mask! I must say he looks like it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy gave the humorous fag a glare, and strode over towards Manners minor's desk.

Reggie gave a scowl.

"Where's my banknote?" demanded Grundy.

"Go and eat coke!"

"I want my fiver."

"Oh, don't be a silly idiot! What do I know about your fiver, if you've got one?" growled Reggie.

"You went to the table-drawer in my study, and you must have seen the banknote there. You turned everything upside down!" said Grundy. "If you've hidden it for a silly trick, tell me where it is, and I'll give you a licking and let the matter drop!"

"Rats!"

"Have you hidden my fiver?" roared Grundy.

"No, I haven't, you silly idiot!"

"Then you've stolen it, and if you don't hand it back at once I'll take you by the neck and march you in to the Housemaster!"

All the fags were listening now, and looking on with great interest. All eyes were on Grundy and Manners minor.

Reggie's face was scarlet. He jumped up from the form, and glared about him as if for a weapon.

"You liar!" he shouted. "You rotter!"

He snatched up a ruler.

Grundy grasped him by the collar and fairly dragged him over the desk. The ruler crashed to the floor.

"Give me the banknote, you young thief!" Grundy shouted, shaking Reggie like a rat. "Now, then, hand it over, or you go to Railton!"

"Here, chuck that!" exclaimed Wally, and the fags crowded forward. "Hands off, Grundy!"

"Keep off, you cheeky little scoundrels! Manners minor has stolen a banknote from my study."

"Rot!" said Levison minor. "You've lost it, you mean."

"I'm going to take him to the Housemaster. Keep back!"

"Rescue!" yelled Reggie, struggling furiously, and kicking, as the burly Shell fellow dragged him towards the door.

Reggie was in Coventry in the Third Form. But the fags of the Third forgot all about that now. The prestige of the Third would have suffered too severely if a Shell fellow had been allowed to carry matters with a high hand in their very stronghold.

"Down him!" roared Wally.

And there was a terrific rush.

Grundy was simply overwhelmed by the swarm of fags. Gunn rushed gallantly to his aid, but he was swept aside and sent spinning in a second. Grundy had to release Reggie, as he rolled over with excited fags sprawling over him.

"Down with him!"

"Bump him!"

"Chuck him out!"

Hurray!

"Yaroooh, grooh, yoop!" came in suffocated accents from Grundy. By his arms and legs, in the grasp of a dozen fags, he was dragged towards the door.

Wally & Co. were not standing on ceremony.

The excited, whooping crowd had just reached the door when it opened.

Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, stepped in.

There was a gasp of dismay from the Third. They had forgotten their Form-master's very existence for the moment. Mr. Selby had arrived to take the Form in evening preparation, as usual. His eyes almost started from his head at the sight of the riot in the Form-room.

The fags dropped Grundy as if he had suddenly become red-hot, and bolted for their desks like rabbits. Grundy, gasping, rolled at the feet of the Third Form master.

CHAPTER 6.

Before the Head!

MR. SELBY glared at Grundy, and at Gunn, and at the dismayed fags. He could not find his voice for a moment, so great was his wrath.

"What is this?" he gasped at last.

"Groogh!" came from Grundy.

"Grundy! Get up at once! How dare you sprawl upon the floor in that ridiculous manner in my presence?"

"Gurrrrgg!"

Gunn came to lend a hand, and jerked George Alfred Grundy to his feet. The burly Shell fellow stood leaning on Gunn, gasping for breath, and blinking at Mr. Selby.

"Now, explain your presence here, Grundy and Gunn!" rapped out the master of the Third.

"Groogh! I—I——"

"You seem to have come here to cause a riot. Grundy, I shall take you immediately to Dr. Holmes——"

"G-r-r-r!" Grundy got his breath at last. "I came here to get my banknote back, sir."

"What?"

"Manners minor has taken a five-pound note from my study, and he refuses to give it up!" gasped Grundy.

"Are you serious, Grundy?"

"Of course I am, sir. Gunn knows."

"It's true, sir," said Gunn.

"Oh! That alters the case," said Mr. Selby, compressing his thin lips. "Manners minor, come here."

Reggie, with a scarlet face, came out from the form. He gave Grundy a bitter look.

"You hear what Grundy says, Manners minor?"

"He's lying, sir!"

"What?" yelled Grundy.

"Silence, Grundy! Manners minor, do you deny having taken the banknote Grundy speaks of from his study?"

"Yes, sir. It's false."

"Have you been to Grundy's study at all?"

Reggie hesitated.

"Wilkins caught him there!" shouted Grundy. "Half-a-dozen fellows saw him. Tom Merry, and D'Arcy, and——"

"That will do. Answer me, Manners minor!"

"I did go there, sir," admitted Reggie.

"Indeed! For what purpose?"

"To—to play a trick on Grundy," stammered Reggie. There was no help for it now. That much had to be admitted. "Grundy's a beastly bully, and I—I can't lick him, so I went there to rag his study. I never saw any banknote there. I don't believe there was one. Grundy's telling lies."

"Kindly measure your words!" snapped Mr. Selby, not at all favourably impressed by this language. "Grundy may be mistaken."

As a matter of fact, it was quite clear that Grundy was not telling lies, as the sullen fag expressed it. It was likely

enough that a duffer like Grundy might be mistaken, but lying was not in his line, and Reggie knew it as well as anyone else. Grundy's rugged face was purple with wrath, and Gunn had to hold him back from rushing on the fag, even in Mr. Selby's presence.

"This is a matter for the Headmaster to deal with," went on Mr. Selby. "Grundy and Manners minor, you will follow me at once to Dr. Holmes." Mr. Selby glanced at the scared and silent Third. "If there is a sound in this room during my absence I shall administer a very severe punishment when I return."

Mr. Selby left the Form-room, and Grundy and Manners minor followed him. Gunn followed as far as the Head's study, and waited in the passage.

In the Third Form-room there was a buzz of excitement, in spite of Mr. Selby's prohibition of a sound during his absence.

"Lagged at last!" Piggott remarked. "Fancy Manners minor coming to that!"

"I don't believe a word of it!" exclaimed Levison minor hotly. "Grundy's making an idiotic mistake."

"We all know Grundy's a silly idiot," remarked Wally. "But—but Reggie has been playing the giddy ox—we've cut him for it. He may have got into debt."

"You don't believe it, Wally?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Wally candidly. "If the fiver's gone, and Reggie was there when it went, why——" He did not finish.

"Looks a bad case!" commented Jameson. "Just like a School House chap to bag a fellow's banknotes." Jameson belonged to the New House.

Jameson's remark led to a fiery argument, which became extremely personal, and Reggie was quite forgotten.

Meanwhile, Mr. Selby had marched Grundy and Manners minor into the Head's study. Dr. Holmes was chatting with Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, when they arrived. Their chat came to a sudden end at the sight of the angry Shell fellow, the sullen fag, and Mr. Selby.

"Is anything wrong, Mr. Selby?" asked the Head mildly.

"I fear so, sir. Grundy accuses Manners minor of theft. With your permission, I will leave the matter in your hands, and return to my Form."

"Certainly, Mr Selby."

The Third Form master returned to the Third, just in time to prevent a battle-royal between School House and New House fags.

Dr. Holmes, shocked and startled by the Form-master's statement, fixed a very severe glance upon Grundy of the Shell.

"I trust, Grundy, that you have weighed your words before bringing such a very serious accusation against Manners minor?" he said.

"I know he did it, sir."

"It's a lie!" said Reggie.

"Kindly refrain from using such expressions in my presence, Manners minor! Tell me the whole circumstances at once, Grundy!"

Grundy explained at full length. The Head waited patiently until he had finished.

"Now, what have you to say, Manners minor?"

"I ragged the study," said Reggie sulkily. "Grundy knows why—he's a bully——"

"Never mind that. The damage done in the study can pass. You admit that you were there?"

"Yes, sir."

"You turned out the things in the drawer where, as Grundy states, the banknote was placed?"

"I mucked up the table-drawer, sir," confessed Reggie. "I turned the things upside down, and spilt ink over them."

"Did you take the banknote?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see it?"

"No, sir. I never knew it was there."

"Very good. Grundy, are you absolutely certain that you placed the banknote in the drawer?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Are you sure that it is missing?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Before an accusation of theft can be entertained for one moment, it must be ascertained beyond doubt that the banknote is missing," said the Head. "Mr. Railton, might I ask you to accompany Grundy to his study, and place this point beyond doubt?"

"Certainly, sir," said the School House master.

"Manners minor, you may return to your Form-room. Grundy, you will go with Mr. Railton."

"Very well, sir."

And the Head, for the present, dismissed the matter. Grundy followed Mr. Railton to the Shell passage. Reggie, with a sullen, sulky brow, made his way to the Third Form-room.

Serious as the matter was, the fag seemed hardly to realise it, and what it might mean for him. His chief feeling was one of sulky annoyance and anger and resentment.

The Third gave him curious looks as he came in. Reggie gave them a glare of defiance in return. Mr. Selby glanced at him icily.

"You may go to your place, Manners minor!" he snapped.

Reggie went to his place. All through evening prep there was an under-current of excitement in the Third, and Mr. Selby brought the pointer into play even more liberally than usual.

Reggie's face remained sulky and resentful; but of fear and uneasiness there was no trace in his looks.

CHAPTER 7.

Manners Receives a Shock.

"**H**E, he, he!"

With that unmusical cachination Baggy Trimble of the Fourth announced his arrival in the junior Common-room in the School House.

The fat Fourth-Former seemed to be enjoying some item of news which appealed to his peculiar sense of humour.

Glances were turned upon him. Baggy Trimble was the Peeping Tom and general news-carrier in the School House at St. Jim's. He prided himself upon getting to know things before other fellows.

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy.

"Well, what is it this time?" asked Levison of the Fourth. "Got another scheme for dodging the grub rules, you fat fraud?"

"He, he, he!"

"Has the Soap Controller issued an order for chaps to stop washin' their necks?" inquired Cardew. "Is that the cause of your satisfaction, Baggy?"

"Look here, Cardew——"

"Stop cackling, anyway," said Clive. "It sounds like a cheap American alarm-clock. Dry up for once!"

"He, he, he!"

"Bai Jove, there he goes again!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Is there anythin' w'ong with your inside, Twimble?"

"He, he, he!"

"He's wound up!" remarked Monty Lowther, staring at the fat junior. "I'll unwind him with this cushion——"

"Here, you keep off!" exclaimed Baggy, dodging round the chess-table where Tom Merry and Manners were playing chess. "He, he, he!"

"Shut up, you cackling ass!" growled

Manners. "Don't guggle like that in my ear!"

"He, he, he! You'd like to know the news, Manners!" chortled Trimble.

"Shut up, Trimble!" said Gunn, with an angry glance at him.

Gunn could guess what Trimble's news was, and how little Manners of the Shell would be pleased to hear it.

"I don't want to hear your silly news, you fat duffer!" growled Manners, without looking up from the chessboard. "Dry up, can't you?"

"He, he, he!"

"About time we got on with our prep, I think," Jack Blake remarked. "Let's get away from that cackle, for goodness' sake."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I say, you know, don't go!" exclaimed Trimble. "You haven't heard the news yet. He's going to be sacked, you know."

The chums of Study No. 6 stopped at once.

"Sacked?" ejaculated Blake.

"Who's going to be sacked?" exclaimed Herries and Digby together.

"He, he, he! Manners minor, you know."

"You uttah young ass—"

Manners of the Shell jumped up from the chess-table so suddenly that the table rocked, and the pieces and pawns flew far and wide. That game of chess was hopelessly wrecked.

Manners eyes flamed as he spun round on Baggy Trimble. The look on his face made Trimble jump back with a yelp of alarm.

"Here, I say— Look here, you know— Yaroooooh!"

Trimble was in the Shell fellow's grasp. He was shaken like a rat in the teeth of a terrier. He stuttered and gasped and spluttered wildly.

"That's wight—shake him!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wecommand you to give the fat wottah a feahful thwashin', Mannaha, deah boy!"

"Grooh-hooh—gurrrg!" spluttered Trimble. "Help! Yah! Rescue! Yurrrg!"

"You fat rotter!" panted Manners, still shaking. "You scoundrel! Take that, and that, and that, and—"

Tom Merry caught his chum's arm.

"Hold on, Manners, old ecout—"

"Let me alone, Tom! I'll—"

Lowther caught Manners by the other arm. Baggy Trimble was released, and he collapsed on the floor, roaring. Manners glared at his chums.

"Let me go! I'll smash the cad—"

"Mustn't kill him," said Monty Lowther soothingly. "Mustn't kill pigs in the Common-room! Waste of pork in war-time, too."

"Groogh! Help! Yawp! Yah! Oh!"

"Shut up, you duffer!" growled Tom Merry. "You ought to have the licking of your life!"

"Yah!" Baggy got his second wind. "It's true! Manners minor is going to be sacked! He's been taken to the Head to be sacked! Yah! He's robbed Grundy, and he's gone to the Head to be sacked! Yah!" And Trimble dodged out of the Common-room and fled for his life, as Manners broke from his chums and rushed at him.

But Manners had stopped suddenly, as if shot, at Trimble's last words. For the first time he realised that it was not some more of "Trimble's rot." He understood that there must be at least an accusation against Reggie.

His face changed.

"Robbed Grundy!" he repeated.

"Don't mind what the fat fool says, Manners," said Tom Merry uneasily. "It's only his rot."

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Manners, unheeding, turned to Gunn, who was looking very uneasy.

"Do you know anything about this, Gunn?" he asked, with a strange quietness.

Gunn flushed red. He did not answer.

"Speak up!" said Tom Merry sharply. "I suppose you know whether Grundy's been idiot enough to accuse Manners minor of anything of the kind."

"I don't know about his being an idiot," said Gunn, rather surlily. "If you want to know, Grundy has accused him."

"He's accused my minor of theft?" said Manners, in the same strangely quiet voice. His heart was like lead.

Well he remembered Reggie's demand to him for money—five pounds—only a short time before, that day. It seemed to Manners that a hand of iron was gripping his heart.

Had it come to this? Was this the end of the minor's blagging? If it was, was there any occasion for surprise? From gambling and gambling debts it was not a long step to stealing.

His face was so white that Tom Merry and Lowther drew nearer to him, in alarm. Manners waved them back, his eyes fixed on Gunn.

"What does Grundy accuse my minor of exactly, Gunn?" he asked.

"Taking a fiver from his study," said Gunn. "I'm sorry, Manners; but I suppose it's got to come out. They're in the Head's study now."

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

"It's all rot, of course," said Manners, looking round with a haggard face. "My minor is a reckless little scamp; but he'd cut his hand off rather than steal! It's one of Grundy's idiotic mistakes."

"Of course it is!" said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We all know what a silly fool Grundy is," said Tom Merry loyally. "Of course, he's made a mistake."

"Utter rot!" said Levison, chiding in to comfort the unhappy Manners. "I don't suppose Reggie's been to his study at all. What should a fag be doing there, anyway? And how could he know anything about a banknote of Grundy's?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, remembering the scene in the Shell passage.

"Manners minor was there," said Gunn quietly.

"Oh!" said Levison, taken aback.

"What was the young rascal doin' there, then?" asked Cardew, with a very peculiar look.

Manners panted.

"I know he was there." His voice was husky now. "That much is true. He went there to play a trick on Grundy. Grundy interfered with him this afternoon. He—he meant well, but Reggie didn't like it."

"Like Gwunday's check, I dare say," commented Arthur Augustus. "He's always chippin' in somewhere!"

"He played his trick right enough," said Gunn. "He smothered everything in the table-drawer with ink—books and exercises and things—all mucked up. The banknote was in the drawer, under Grundy's Latin grammar. I don't suppose Manners minor knew it when he went there. But he must have seen it when he routed out the drawer."

"He wouldn't take it," said Levison. "Grundy's lost it, more likely. Grundy's the biggest idiot in the school."

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo of the Shell. "Passed unanimously."

"Oh, let Grundy alone!" snapped Gunn. "Grundy hasn't made a mistake this time. As a matter of fact, I'm not surprised. The young cad hacked Wilkins' shin when he caught him in the study! Blessed little hooligan! And we jolly well knew how Manners minor has been going on lately. He was playing

billiards in the Green Man this afternoon."

"Bai Jove!"

"That's where Grundy interfered with him," said Gunn. "He went in to yank him out of the place. Nice place for a St. Jim's fag to visit!"

"Dry up!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Well, I don't want to rub it in," said Gunn, glancing rather remorsefully at Manners. "But there's no need to be down on Grundy because this has happened. It's not Grundy's fault."

"You say he's with the Head now?" asked Manners.

"Mr. Selby took them to the Head."

Manners moved to the door. Crooke of the Shell came in at the same moment, with Racke, and both of them were grinning.

"Something on in your study, Gunny," said Crooke. "What's Railton turning your study out for?"

"Been hoarding grub?" grinned Racke.

"No," growled Gunn. "Railton's not looking for grub, if he's looking for anything!"

"Well, he's looking for something. They're having a regular search all through the study, and he's jolly solemn, too. What's on?" asked Racke, glancing round at the silent juniors.

"Manners minor's been pinching a fiver out of Grundy's drawer," said Mellish of the Fourth.

"Oh, my hat!"

Manners left the Common-room, his two chums following him. They made their way to the Shell passage in silence. Tom Merry and Lowther felt their hearts heavy for their chum. Manners was stricken to the very soul. For he could not hurl back that terrible accusation against his minor, with scorn and indignation. He knew, only too well, to what Reggie's steps were likely to lead him in the long run; and in Manners' heart was a deadly, chilling fear that his minor was guilty!

CHAPTER 8.

A Heavy Blow.

"NOT here, sir!" said Grundy.

Mr. Railton stood silent, in Grundy's study. The search had been thorough. Under the Housemaster's eyes, Grundy had turned out every recess where the banknote might possibly have been. He had turned out his pockets, too. Grundy went through it all with patience. He had not the slightest doubt that Reggie Manners had taken the note; but he realised that it was impossible to make too sure in such a serious matter.

They had made sure enough. The banknote was not about Grundy, and it was not in the study. There was no doubt of that.

The Housemaster's brow was gloomy. Such a happening in his House was a blow to him. It was a stain upon the honour of the House.

"The banknote certainly doesn't seem to be here," said Mr. Railton, at last. "I suppose you can prove, Grundy, that you had a five-pound note in your possession to-day?"

"I showed it to Wilkins and Gunn when I took it out of my uncle's letter, sir."

"That's so, sir," said Wilkins.

"I've got my uncle's letter, too, sir. He mentions it."

Mr. Railton glanced at the letter Grundy held out for his inspection. He nodded. That point was clear, if there had been any doubt. Grundy had had a five-pound note.

The Terrible Three showed up in the doorway. Mr. Railton gave Manners a very kind glance.



Manners Goes for Baggy.
(See Chapter 7.)

Poor Manners' face showed that he had heard; and the Housemaster could understand how terrible a shock it had been to him.

"Has the—the note been found, sir?" faltered Manners.

"No, my boy," said Mr. Railton reluctantly. "It is not, however, proved that your brother has taken it. The affair will be very strictly investigated. You need not fear, Manners, that your minor will not have every chance of proving his innocence."

"I know, sir. But—but Reggie couldn't have done it, sir. He couldn't—" Manners' voice broke.

"I hope not, Manners," said Mr. Railton. "You must not give up hope, by any means, that your brother will succeed in clearing himself of this charge."

Mr. Railton passed the Terrible Three, and went downstairs. Grundy looked very sheepishly at Manners.

"I'm sorry for this, Manners," he said awkwardly. "I—I wish I hadn't made a fuss about it. But—but I went to see your brother, thinking that he'd hidden the fiver for a joke, or something of the sort. I didn't think he'd stolen it till he refused to give it up. I—I dare say he's been put up to it by those rotters at the Green Man—that rotten Lodgey, perhaps."

Manners did not seem to hear. He turned away almost blindly, and Tom Merry and Lowther took him into their study. Manners sank down in a chair, his face white and drawn.

"Cheer up, old chap," said Tom, not very cheerfully, however. "It may all come right, you know. You can depend on Railton to see justice done."

Manners smiled bitterly.

"That mayn't be what I want—for Reggie," he muttered.

"Manners!"

"I don't know whether he's guilty or not," groaned Manners. "I know he

came to me this afternoon for five pounds, saying he owed it to Lodgey."

"Good heavens!" muttered Lowther, aghast.

"That's what he wanted, then?" said Tom.

"Yes."

"You didn't give him the money?"

"I told him I couldn't, and I wouldn't. I told him the man had swindled him, and he ought not to pay him."

"That's right enough."

"And—and he said he'd pay him somehow," muttered Manners hoarsely. "And—and then just afterwards—he must have gone to Grundy's study after he left me, immediately—"

"He couldn't have known Grundy had a fiver."

Manners made a hopeless gesture.

"He knows Grundy has plenty of money. Grundy's always swanking about his cash. If he wanted to steal Grundy's study is just the place where he'd look for money."

Manners' chums were silent. They could not help admitting the force of that argument. Grundy had plenty of money, and was very careless with it. His study would have been a happy hunting-ground for a thief at any time.

"Even if Reggie's cleared of this, the rest will come out," said Manners, in a strained voice. "It must come out now. The Head will root out everything. He'll want to know whether Reggie was under any temptation to steal. Whether he was in debt of any kind!" He caught his breath. "Most likely he'll ask me."

"You won't tell him anything?"

"Of course I won't! I can't give my brother away. But—but if I don't answer, that's as bad as telling him. And I can't tell him dashed lies to his face, he would see through them like a shot if I did. It isn't only me, either. He'll ask questions in the Third—about Reggie's ways. The fags will let it all out, even if they don't mean to. They

sent him to Coventry for his rotten ways. It will all come out."

"That means a flogging for Reggie," said Lowther. "But that won't hurt him, Manners. It won't be the sack for a kid in the Third—not if he can clear himself of this charge."

"But he can't—it will tell against him," groaned Manners. "It will be part of the proof. If the Head finds that he's been to that horrible pub, gambling with a filthy outsider like Lodgey, and owing him money, then what can he think? The banknote's missing. Somebody's taken it, I suppose. He'll think Reggie took it, to settle his debt. What else can he think? I'm Reggie's brother, and I couldn't say for certain that he didn't do it."

"Oh, it's rotten!"

"And the pater!" muttered Manners huskily. "The pater! What a blow it will be for him! It'll cut him up. Reggie's his favourite. It'll fairly knock the poor old pater over!"

Manners' face dropped into his hands, and the tears of utter misery ran through his fingers.

It was not with any jealous resentment that he said that Reggie was his father's favourite. He was only thinking of the terrible blow it would be to his father because of that.

"Manners!" muttered Tom wretchedly.

"I—I can't help it, Tom!" Manners' voice was broken, and his tears ran unchecked. "You—you don't know how the pater's wrapped up in Reggie! This will fairly knock him over! Sacked for theft! That's what it will be; and—and the pater will think it's all my fault very likely. Perhaps it is, too. I might have looked after him better. I might—"

"Don't be an ass, Manners!" said Tom Merry, almost roughly. "You did your best—more than most fellows would have done!"

"I daren't face the pater when he knows! It wouldn't hurt him so much if it was me—he could stand that better—but Reggie—"

Manners choked.

Talbot of the Shell looked into the study, and coughed. Manners, flushing, turned his face away.

"The Head wants to see Manners in his study," said Talbot.

And he turned away, apparently having noticed nothing.

It was some minutes before Manners obeyed the Head's summons. He went to the Head's study at last, looking neither to the right nor the left as he went, unseeing the compassionate glances of the fellows he passed.

CHAPTER 9.

The Investigation.

"COME in, Manners!"

Dr. Holmes' voice was kind and gentle. The sight of Manners' stricken face would have moved a harder heart than the kind old Head's.

Manners came in with unsteady steps. Mr. Railton, who was with the Head, gave him a kind look. His heart was heavy for the unhappy junior.

"You know what has happened, my dear boy," said the Head kindly. "You must not give way, Manners. The matter is not yet proved by any means. The evidence against your brother is strong, but not conclusive. Very much depends upon what transpires concerning your brother's habits and character. Are you aware whether Manners' minor was in any difficulties for money?"

Manners was silent.

"It is scarcely likely that a boy in the Third Form can have contracted debts," went on the Head. "But I should be

very slow to believe that a boy could be guilty of theft, unless driven to it by the pressure of some strong necessity. You will materially assist your brother, Manners, if you can assure me that, to your knowledge, he was not entangled in any money difficulties!"

Manners could not speak.

He could not betray Reggie's disgraceful debt, and he knew that if he did it would be the finishing-stroke for the fag. But to deny that Reggie was in such difficulties!

It was not only that his whole, honest nature shrank from falsehood, but he knew it was useless. He knew that if he lied under the Head's keen eyes the lie would be detected. Even were it not so, he knew that much must come out now—that Reggie in all probability would be frightened, and would blurt out the whole miserable story.

And then the lie would be known for a lie, and it would amount to a confession that Manners believed his brother guilty, for if he did not believe that there would be no occasion for a lie.

It was a terrible position for the junior.

The Head had questioned him, expecting and hoping that he could speak in his brother's favour; but it was only in Reggie's condemnation that he could speak, if he spoke at all.

His silence caused the two masters to exchange significant glances.

"I shall not insist upon your replying, Manners, if you do not wish to do so," said Dr. Holmes, after a long pause.

"I—I've nothing to say, sir."

"Very well, Manners; you may go!"

Manners cleared his throat. He felt that he must say something, if it was only an appeal for mercy for the wretched fag.

"He didn't do it, sir—he can't have done it! Reggie's got his faults, but he isn't a thief—he couldn't be a thief! If he's sent away, it—it will break my father's heart, sir!"

"You may be sure, Manners, that your brother will not be condemned unless the matter is perfectly clear," said the Head. "Go now, my boy!"

Manners tottered from the study.

"The matter appears serious, Mr. Railton," the Head said, when the junior was gone. "Manners clearly knows something that would tell in his minor's disfavour. It would be cruel to insist upon his speaking against his brother; but there are other means of arriving at the truth. I will send for Manners minor!"

The Head touched the bell, and Toby was sent to call Manners minor from prep in the Form-room.

Mr. Selby was still busy with his class when the page knocked at the Form-room door, and put his head in.

"If you please, sir, the 'Ead wants Master Manners!"

"Very well. Go to the Head's study, Manners minor!"

Reggie rose from his place.

The eyes of all the Third followed him to the door. Toby gave him a curious look ere he went on his way. The page could see that something was wrong.

Reggie did not seem alarmed, however. His face was still only sulky. He started as his major met him in the passage. The white misery in Harry Manners' face almost frightened his young brother.

"Reggie!" muttered Manners huskily.

"What's the matter?"

"You're going to the Head?"

"Yes."

"I—I ought not to be speaking to you," muttered Manners hastily. "But he's been asking me questions about you! I've said nothing; remember that. Mind what you say, Reggie, and be careful you

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don't tell the Head any whoppers. He will see through them at once!"

"Do you think I'm going to tell the Head whoppers?" sneered Reggie. "Why should I? What's the matter with you? I don't see anything to be frightened about!"

"Did you do it, Reggie?"

"What?"

"I—I know you didn't—I hope you didn't. You didn't touch Grundy's banknote?"

"So that's what you think of me—you think I'm a thief?"

"I don't—I don't! If you tell me you didn't do it, Reggie, I'll believe you!" said Manners.

"Well, I didn't do it, you silly idiot!" growled Reggie. "I suppose the Head doesn't think I did, does he?"

"Did you see the banknote at all while you were there?"

"No."

Manners drew a deep breath.

The fag's manner was sullen, defiant, unfriendly, but it was not guilty. If Reggie had been guilty, surely he would have realised how serious the matter was? But it was clear that he did not realise it.

"I believe you, Reggie," Manners muttered.

"I suppose you do!" snapped Reggie. "Hang Grundy and hang his banknote! I'll jolly well make him sit up, somehow, for saying a thing like that about me, the cheeky rotter!"

"Never mind about that now. Only—you asked me for five pounds this afternoon, Reggie, and it's five pounds that's been taken!"

"You silly-ass, what's that got to do with it?"

"Nothing, I hope. But—but be careful what you say to the Head. If it comes out about your going to the Green Man—you understand?"

Reggie started a little.

"I sha'n't mention that, of course. I suppose you haven't given me away?" he added savagely.

"No; but—"

"Oh, that's enough! I've got to get to the Head!"

Reggie stalked on, still undismayed, and tapped at the Head's door. Dr. Holmes' deep voice bade him enter. Manners remained in the passage, in a mood of doubt and trouble. He longed to believe in his brother's innocence—he did believe in it; but lurking doubts harassed his mind. The banknote had been taken; someone was a thief! Who was it, then?

Tom Merry and Lowther joined him while he was waiting there. In silence the chums of the Shell waited for Reggie to come out of the Head's study.

Some of Reggie's assurance left him as he entered the dreaded apartment, and found himself under the eyes of the Head and Mr. Railton. His previous interview with the Head had not made much impression upon him; but, in spite of his sulky temper, he was beginning to feel uneasy now.

Dr. Holmes scanned the fag's face searchingly. Reggie realised that under that scrutinising gaze prevarication would be of little use, if he tried it. But he knew, too, that it would never do to admit that he had visited the Green Man to play billiards with Mr. Lodgey. But surely the Head could not question him upon such a point—how could he?

"Manners minor, it is necessary for me to ask you some questions," said the Head, gently enough. "You will, of course, tell me the whole truth! The banknote belonging to Grundy cannot be found. It is established that you were in his study about the time it was taken. You were actually at the drawer where Grundy placed it!"

"I was ragging the place, sir," faltered Reggie. "I upset ink over the things in the drawer. That's all, sir."

"But the banknote is gone."

"I can't help that, sir. I never saw it."

"You will see for yourself, Manners minor, that it is at least a very extraordinary coincidence that you should have gone to the drawer where the banknote was placed, apparently at the precise time that it was taken from that drawer."

Reggie was silent.

"You assert that you went there for what you call a rag. It is somewhat unusual for a Third Form boy to visit a Middle School study for such a purpose. I should imagine that you have very little to do with Shell boys, excepting your elder brother. For what reason did you select Grundy's study for this so-called rag?"

"He's a bully, sir."

"You mean that you were punishing him, in this way, for having bullied you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not take the banknote, and then cause the damage hoping that it would disguise the real purpose of your presence there?"

Reggie started.

"No, sir!"

"Very well. If the fact can be established that Grundy bullied you, Manners minor, your explanation will be much more plausible. I must question Grundy upon that point, however."

Reggie's mouth opened, and closed again. A scared look came into his face. The Head did not fail to notice it.

"You maintain your assertion, Manners minor, that Grundy bullied you?" he asked sternly.

"N-n-not exactly bullied me, sir," faltered the fag. "He—he interfered with me."

"You should be careful in your statements, Manners minor. In what way, then, did Grundy interfere with you?"

Silence.

"You stated, in the first place, that Grundy bullied you. You have now withdrawn that statement, and asserted that he interfered with you. You must see, Manners minor, that unless you can substantiate that statement, your declared reason for visiting Grundy's study must be taken as a falsehood. It would follow that you went there to take the banknote. Give me the particulars of your dispute with Grundy."

Reggie's face was burning now. He was silent. He could not give those particulars without betraying his acquaintance with Mr. Lodgey. He was beginning to understand what that revelation would mean.

"I am waiting for your answer, Manners minor!" said Dr. Holmes, his voice growing very stern.

"He—he interfered with me," panted Reggie.

"In what way?"

"He—he followed me—"

"That is very extraordinary. You were going somewhere, and you did not wish Grundy to follow?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Mr. Railton, will you kindly call Grundy here?"

The Housemaster, with a strange look at Reggie, quitted the study. The hapless fag waited, now, with crimson face and wildly-beating heart.

CHAPTER 10.

GUILTY!

GRUNDY of the Shell followed Mr. Railton into the study a few minutes later. He was looking troubled and very serious.

"Grundy, Manners minor asserts that

he damaged your study in retaliation for some action on your part in interfering with him, as he expresses it. Do you bear out this statement?"

Grundy hesitated.

"I thought it was my duty to interfere, sir," he said. "Manners' major would have interfered, if he'd been there. I'm sure of that."

"Then you did interfere with this boy?"

"Yes, sir, this afternoon," said Grundy. "At least, I tried to, but I was prevented. If Manners minor has told you about it, sir, I don't think you can blame me for that."

"Manners minor has not given me the particulars," said the Head. "He simply states that you interfered with him. If you have been guilty of bullying this lower-form boy, Grundy——!"

Grundy flushed.

"I didn't bully him, sir—I'm not a bully! I didn't see standing by while a St. Jim's chap was disgracing his school. His major would have done as I did—and I got jolly well knocked about for it, too. Manners minor ought to tell you the whole lot, sir, if he tells you anything."

"I intend to know the whole particulars," said the Head grimly. "I imagine that this may have some bearing upon the matter of the banknote. Manners minor states that you followed him somewhere, against his wish."

"That's true, sir."

"Where did you follow him?"

Grundy was silent, looking very distressed. He wondered whether it would come under the head of sneaking if he answered Dr. Holmes's question. To refuse to answer was scarcely possible.

"Well, Grundy?" rapped out the Head.

"I—I'd rather you asked Manners minor, sir!" blurted out the unhappy Grundy. "I don't want to sneak about a chap."

"Manners minor, where were you when, as you state, Grundy followed you?"

Reggie licked his dry lips. He did not speak.

"Am I to understand, Manners minor, that you were visiting some place forbidden to boys of this school?" rumbled the Head.

No answer.

"I conclude, then, that that was the case," said the Head. "I require to know the name of the place in question. I command you to tell me, Manners minor! I may add that if you refuse to reply your guilt will be considered as established, as you can have no other reason for keeping a secret. I hardly think I need say that, in that case, you will be expelled from the school."

"It—it—it was the Green Man, sir," stammered Reggie.

"Good heavens!" murmured Mr. Railton, utterly shocked.

The Head's brow was very grim.

"You followed Manners minor into that disreputable public-house, Grundy?"

"I—I was going to make him come away, sir. I—I thought——"

"Quite right. I do not blame you in the least, Grundy. You may go!"

Grundy left the study.

"Manners minor, you went to the Green Man public-house. Are you in the habit of visiting that place?"

"N-n-n-no, sir."

"Have you been there before? Kindly tell me the exact truth. I can make inquiries in other quarters, you must remember."

"Only—only twice, sir."

"You have acquaintances there?"

"I—I—I—yes, sir."

"And what did you do there?"

"I—I only played a game of billiards,

sir. I—I play billiards at home, sir," mumbled Reggie.

"Under somewhat different conditions, I imagine," said the Head drily. "With whom did you play?"

"Mr. Lodgey, sir."

"I have seen the man. Did you play for money?"

Reggie panted. The answer died on his lips.

"You played for money, Manners minor?"

"Yes, sir," almost whispered the wretched fag.

"Did you win or lose?"

"I—I lost, sir."

"Did you pay your losses?"

Reggie's face was twitching now, his lips were trembling. The keen, clear questioning was eliciting the miserable truth, item by item. He dared not lie—he felt that a lie would be too palpable—that it would not be believed. He knew, too, that inquiries in other directions would disprove any falsehood he might utter. He stood in wretched silence till the Head repeated his question, and then he faltered:

"No!"

"You left the public-house owing this Mr. Lodgey money?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"How much money did you owe him?"

"F-f-five pounds, sir."

"The precise sum missing from Grundy's study," said the Head sternly.

"Do you still deny, Manners minor, that you went to Grundy's study to obtain the money?"

"Yes, sir," panted Reggie. "I—I was going to pay Lodgey somehow. I—I asked my major for the money, and he wouldn't lend it to me. He said I needn't pay him. I—I was trying to think out where to get the money. I wouldn't have stolen it: I'm not a thief. I——"

His voice died away indistinctly in terror. He knew what the expression on the Head's face meant. His eyes turned wildly upon Mr. Railton; he read the same expression there.

"You have said enough, Manners minor!" said the Head, his voice as hard as steel. "You may go. I shall request your father to come here at once, and to-morrow he will take you away from the school. Were you older I should expel you publicly before the whole school. You may go!"

"I—I didn't——"

"You may go, Manners minor!"

Reggie tottered from the study.

CHAPTER 11.

Condemned!

MANNERS caught his brother by the arm in the passage.

"Reggie, what——"

Reggie shook his arm free, and gave his brother a stare of hatred and misery.

"It's all your fault!" he said huskily. "I'm sent away! He's sending for the pater! I'm to go! It's all your fault!"

"Sacked!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Yes, sacked!" Reggie's voice rose shrilly. "I never did it! I never saw the banknote! I don't believe it was there! But it's all come out about my going to the Green Man, and owing Lodgey money. That's done it!"

"It was bound to come out!" said Lowther.

Reggie eyed his brother bitterly.

"If you'd lent me the money I could have paid Lodgey, and this couldn't have been fixed on me. It's because I owed Lodgey money that the Head thinks I took that banknote. It's all your fault!"

"It's not Manners' fault!" broke out Tom fiercely. "It's your own fault for being a blackguardly young scoundrel!"

"Don't, Tom!" muttered Manners. "Reggie, is it true you're sacked?"

"The pater's coming to take me away to-morrow. I'm not to be expelled like Tresham was last term because I'm a fag." Reggie broke into a harsh, bitter laugh. "Nice for the pater, ain't it? Well, you'll get some hot talk from him for letting it come to this! I'm glad of that!"

And the fag tramped away.

Manners turned blindly towards the stairs. His chums went with him to his study. There was nothing they could say to comfort poor Manners. He clung to his faith in his brother. He could not believe Reggie guilty in spite of the dark doubts that haunted him. But Tom Merry and Monty Lowther could not help feeling that the Head's sentence was just. Where was there room for a doubt in the matter? What was gambling likely to lead to if not to theft? What was gambling itself but a kind of theft—a trick of getting something for nothing? The wretched fag had gambled, and he owed money to an unscrupulous sharper who would have threatened him if not paid—who had doubtless threatened him already. He had told Manners that he would pay Lodgey somehow. Now they knew the "how"!

Manners was not seen downstairs again that evening, and fellows forebore to visit his study. Baggy Trimble, indeed, gave him a look-in; but Gore of the Shell found him just tapping at the door, and booted him out of the Shell passage. Nobody else thought of troubling poor Manners in his dark hour.

But the Lower School was in a buzz with the story. The Third were greatly excited. Manners minor had returned to his Form-room. Prep was over, and Mr. Selby was gone. But his reception in the Form-room drove him out; there was no doubt of his guilt among the fags. Wally & Co. had nothing to say to an expelled thief.

The wretched boy went to his dormitory, where he remained in solitude and misery till the Third came to bed. Some of the fags were inclined to rag him there for the disgrace he had brought upon the Form. But Wally put his foot down on that. The sportsman of the Third had got it in the neck, and D'Arcy minor said that was enough. So Reggie was left alone.

There was little sleep for him that night, however.

Manners of the Shell went to bed in his dormitory without a word. His face was white and lined. Even Racke felt something like a throb of sympathy as he looked at Manners' haggard face. The downfall of the minor had stricken the Shell fellow to the very soul.

Through the dark hours of the night he was thinking of the interview with his father on the morrow. He knew that a telegram had been sent, and that Mr. Manners would be at St. Jim's in the morning.

He would be called to account for his stewardship. His young brother had been under his protection and guidance. And this was what had come of it.

Could he have saved Reggie from that? He had done his best—what seemed to him his best. How could he have saved Reggie?

At the back of his mind all the time was the miserable reflection that his father would not have felt the blow so heavily if it had been the elder and not the younger brother who was disgraced and ruined. He tried not to think of it, but the thought would come; he knew it only too well.

How would his father bear this fearful blow?

In his mind's eye he could see the

stricken face, the reproachful look, of the old man, who would think that he ought to have saved his brother from this. How could he have saved him? Had he not intervened again and again, and earned Reggie's bitter animosity by so doing? Ought he to have betrayed Reggie to his father—to have reported his actions like a tell-tale? Even so, knowledge had come too late. It was only that afternoon that he had learned of the extent of the fag's recklessness, and then the blow had fallen. Ought he to have found the money for Reggie to pay gambling debts? There would have been no end to that; there would soon have been another gambling debt to pay, and he could not have found the money a second time, if he had been able to find it the first time. What ought he to have done?

The grey dawn was creeping in at the high windows before Manners' weary eyes closed.

But he was awake at the first clang of the rising-bell. He dressed himself in weary silence. He felt worn out, body and mind, and was hardly conscious of anything but a dull, heavy sense of trouble and suffering. He ate nothing at the breakfast table—he could not eat.

Mr. Linton glanced along the table at him, kindly, compassionately.

"Manners, you will not attend classes this morning," he said.

"Very well, sir," said Manners dully.

He was glad of that, at least. The thought of lessons in his present state of mind almost made him smile with bitterness. And his father was coming that morning.

Tom Merry and Lowther remained with him till the bell rang. They had to leave him then to go into the Form-room. Their hearts were aching for their chum.

"Buck up, old man!" muttered Lowther hopelessly.

It was not much use bidding Manners buck up.

"It—it can't be helped, you know!" said Tom miserably.

Manners nodded without speaking, and they left him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused on his way to the Fourth-Form-room.

"I'm awfully sorry, Manners, old chap!" he murmured, and went out without waiting for Manners to answer.

Manners went out into the quadrangle after all the fellows were in the Form-room. He had the quad to himself, and he wondered where Reggie was. The fag could not be at lessons that morning. Manners knew that his brother's box had been packed already. He was to leave St. Jim's with his father. Manners thought of seeking him out, but he did not. What was he to say to Reggie; what was he to hear from him but bitter reproaches and stinging words?

It was useless to see his brother. He had helped him in the past, but he could not help him now—now that his recklessness had run its course and the inevitable crash had come.

The Shell fellow hung aimlessly about the quadrangle as the sunny morning hours passed. That sunny summer morning was black enough for Manners. The sound of wheels in the drive aroused him at last from his dreary reflections. He ran towards the house as the station hack came to a stop.

His father descended.

Manners ran to him. But it was a hard, stern face that met him.

"Father! You know—"

The junior's voice died away.

"Dr. Holmes telegraphed for me to come on Reggie's account," said Mr. Manners grimly. "He is in trouble. I

know no more. I placed your younger brother here, Henry, under your care. We shall see how you have fulfilled your trust! Wait for me in your study until I have seen the Head."

Mr. Manners passed in without another word, and was shown into Dr. Holmes' study.

Manners remained rooted on the School House steps for some minutes. He had feared the meeting with his father, but this was worse than he had feared. Reproaches, even before his father knew the facts! He was condemned for Reggie's fault before Mr. Manners even knew what the fault was! What would he say when he knew?

Manners dragged himself away to his study, and waited there. How long he waited he did not know; it seemed years of suspense and misery. There was a step in the passage at last. He started up.

His father entered.

"Father!" said Manners huskily.

Then his voice died away as he saw the look on his father's face.

CHAPTER 12.

The Sacrifice!

FOR a full minute there was silence in the room.

Manners could not speak—his eyes, full of hopelessness, were on his father's face. From that face all the kindness was gone. It was hard, grim, cold, reproachful. It hardly seemed to the unhappy junior that it was his father's familiar face that he was looking upon.

Mr. Manners spoke at last.

"I have little to say to you, Henry, before I go. Your brother goes with me—disgraced for life—ruined! You do not seem pleased with what you have done!"

"Father!"

"My son is branded as a thief!" The old gentleman's lips trembled. "Branded as a criminal—at his early age—my son!"

"Am I not your son, too?" was the bitter, miserable question that trembled on Manner's lips. But he did not utter it.

"I do not believe that he is guilty," continued Mr. Manners. "But I cannot blame Dr. Holmes for the view he takes. The evidence is strong enough to satisfy anyone but a father. Reggie declares that he is innocent. And I believe him. He is guilty of reckless, disgraceful folly, but not of crime. And if he has drifted into folly, and worse, for want of helping and guiding hand, whose fault is that, Henry?"

"Not mine, father!"

"He was sent here, a lad—little more than a child. I should have hesitated to send him, but that I knew his elder brother was here. His elder brother, upon whom I thought I could rely to guard him from evil. I knew that there were dangers and temptations in a great public school. I thought that his brother would stand between my boy and such perils. I was mistaken. Under your eyes, he drifted into this!"

"I—I did my best!"

"He could not have taken to such a course at once, it must have been gradual. At every step he might have been led back, if there had been one to help him, to counsel him. You were too busy with your own pleasures—you forgot that you had a brother!"

"I—I did my best," groaned Manners. "Reggie grew to hate me for interfering with him as I did!"

"So you let him go to his ruin!"

"I—I did not! I never knew—"

"You should have known. It was your duty to know." Mr. Manners

made a weary gesture. "But I have not come here to reproach you. I think your conscience will do that. I think it must, when you know that you have ruined your brother's life, and broken your father's heart."

"Father!"

Manners made a blind movement towards the grim old man. His father moved back hastily. Then the junior stood still, dumb. That hasty movement struck him to the soul. It was as if his father had been approached by a leper.

"Do not touch me!" His father's voice was harsh. "You are still my son, Henry, though you have forgotten your duty to your father. I hope that the day may come when I shall feel again towards you as if you were my son. Now I cannot! You have broken my heart, and I cannot forgive you—now. God knows whether I shall survive this blow. You did not know the harm you were doing."

"Father!" breathed Manners.

The bitter, unjust reproaches passed unheeded now, as he noted the lines of intense suffering in the stricken old face. It was from the abyss of misery that his father unjustly upbraided him.

Mr. Manners turned to the door.

The junior's eyes had a wild look in them.

"Father!" The words broke from him as if against his will. "If it had been I, you would not have felt it so much!"

His father looked at him coldly, harshly.

"The sin was yours, and the punishment is your brother's," he said. "I hold you to blame, though it is my dear son who suffers!"

Manners choked. The one who had sinned, in reckless selfishness, was the "dear son"—and what was the other?

"I cannot forgive you, Henry," said Mr. Manners. "The time may come—but not yet. Give me back my son, stainless and innocent as when I sent him here to your care, and then you may ask my forgiveness!"

Manners' face changed strangely. His eyes were still on his father's face.

"If it were I, you could bear it," he said. "If it were I!" He burst into a strange, discordant, almost hysterical, laugh. "Father! I will save Reggie! I can save him!"

Mr. Manners started.

"What do you mean, Henry? There is only one way to save him—to denounce the thief for whose guilt he is condemned."

"That is what I mean!"

"Henry!"

"Let me pass! I—I must go to the Head—don't stop me, or I shall change my mind. It's not easy!"

His voice was almost a cry.

But his father grasped him by the shoulder.

"Why are you going to the Head, Henry? Is it possible—"

"To confess!"

Mr. Manners released him, staggering back.

"Heaven forgive you!" he said. "Go, Henry, confess, then; it is all that you can do—now!"

Manners ran blindly along the passage. His brain was in a whirl. His heart throbbed burstingly. He was not himself at that moment. But one thought was fixed in his aching mind. The blow that had crushed the old man had been so terrible, because it was the younger, the favourite son, that suffered. If it had been Manners major, his father could have borne it. How he reached the Head's study he did not know. He found himself in the presence of Dr. Holmes, whose startled eyes were fixed upon his face.

"Manners!"

"I have come to confess, sir!" A curious calm had fallen upon the unhappy boy. He spoke evenly, as if his words came from some strange mechanism, independent of his will. "I—I can't let my brother suffer for—for what I did, sir!"

"Manners!"

"It was I, sir. I—I—"

The Head's brow grew stern and dark. "Is it possible, Manners? And at the last moment—"

"I confess, sir," said Manners humbly. "I—I'm sorry I didn't speak out before."

"You have almost caused me to commit a cruel injustice, Manners, against your own brother."

"I—I know it, sir," Manners clenched his hands hard. "I—I'm sorry! I—I was afraid to own up—before!"

"You were the thief, Manners?"

For an instant Manners' tongue refused to move. Then the reply came steady and clear:

"Yes, sir. I—I was hard up. I don't get much pocket-money now, and—and Grundy always has plenty of money. I—I saw him showing off the banknote, and—and I went to his study. He has lots of money. So I—I—"

"You did not suppose, I presume, that your brother would be suspected?" said the Head coldly.

"No, sir," Manners licked his dry lips. "No, sir! If I'd thought of that, of—of course, I shouldn't have done it. I—I'm sorry I—I did it!"

"Your sorrow comes too late,

Manners! You have shown an inconceivably wicked duplicity. Thank Heaven, however, that some remnant of decency impelled you to make this confession before your brother was expelled from the school with a stain upon his name! You will leave the school to-day, Manners. Your brother will remain. Go!"

Manners left the study. He went out blindly into the quadrangle. The sunny sky seemed dark to his dazed eyes. He groped along like a blind man. What had he done?

What had he done? He had saved Reggie. He had saved his father! He leaned heavily against an elm, staring straight before him, seeing nothing. From a mist, as it seemed, his father's voice came to him. He saw his father. He saw Reggie. He could not speak. His father was speaking. He did not follow the meaning of his words. A strange, wild inclination to laugh seized upon him. He knew that he was close upon hysteria, and he fought to keep it down. Reggie's bitter voice came as through a veil.

"So it was you—you all the time! I might have known that! So that's why you were so cut up! I wondered why—"

"Silence, Reginald! Henry, you have done infamous wrong; but you have had the courage to speak the truth at last! I shall not forget that. You will leave the school with me. You are still my son—"

There was a rush of feet. Tom Merry came racing up, his face white, his eyes

blazing. He caught Manners by the arm.

"What's this they're saying, Manners! What's this rot—these lies!"

Manners tried to pull himself together. "It—it's true, Tom. I—I did it! I had to own up!"

"Oh, you're mad!" shouted Tom Merry. "It's not true! It's a lie, and you've told it, if you owned up! Manners Manners, old man—"

"Don't Tom! I—I can't stand much more," whispered Manners. "I—I feel—ill—"

The faces, the trees, the old quad seemed to be floating round him. He stretched out his hands blindly. It was him chum's strong arm that caught him as he fell.

There was gloom in the School House of St. Jim's that sunny day. Mr. Manners was gone. But he had gone alone. Manners lay in the school sanatorium, ill. A result of some serious nervous shock, the school doctor said. On the morrow he would be well enough to travel—and then he was to go. Though even yet Tom Merry and Monty Lowther could not realise that in a few short hours they were to lose their chum.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's —"BACKING UP MANNERS!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For next Wednesday:

"BACKING UP MANNERS!"

By Martin Clifford.

The story which appeared last week and the fine yarn in this number are sure to make readers keen on the third, and concluding, story of this series.

Harry Manners, for his father's sake, has put himself into a position in which it is very difficult for anyone to help him. To prove the truth will mean proving that he has not told the Head the truth. To make it clear that it was impossible that he should have been the thief, without showing who was, can only throw new suspicion on Reggie. Now—although his brother has not realised that—Reggie is not guilty. A young ass he may be—he is—but a thief he is not.

Tom Merry and Lowther do their best to clear things up, of course. A suggestion from Cardew helps them to the proof that their chum was not guilty—a fact they had never been in doubt about. But it is accident which at length unravels the tangled skein, with Baggy Trimble as the instrument!

THE HAMPSHIRE REGIMENT.

One of my correspondents, to whom I am much obliged, sends me the words of the Hampshire Regiment's marching song, which goes to the air of "Keep the Home Fires Burning." I cannot guarantee that it is word for word exact, but it reads all right, and I feel sure that many readers will be glad to see it reproduced here.

HAMPSHIRE LADS.

When the drums of war were sounding,
And the cry for men went round,
It was 'way down south in Hampshire
That the finest lads were found,
Straight they answered to the summons,
For they fear no foreign foes,
And the Kaiser's men have learned to dread
The tiger and the rose.

Chorus:

When a wrong needs righting,
And there's any fighting,
Hampshire lads are certain to be somewhere
near.

Folks at home can surely
Sleep at night securely.
Kaiser Bill won't harm them while the
Hants are near.

From the high chalk downs we took them,
From the deep New Forest glade,
From beside the winding Itchen,
And from leafy Alton's shade,
From the flat lands round by Southsea,
From the commons round by Liss,
They have come to serve their country,
And the reason's simply this—

(Chorus as before.)

A good song this, simple and soldierly, with the breeze of the hills in it, and the green of the well-remembered trees, and the silver glinting of the river, with just those home things that a man remembers when he is far from home. Can any man of one of England's fairest counties read it without a thrill? I am not Hampshire, but it gets me. The tiger and rose, in a wreath of laurel, form the badge of the Hampshires, of course.

BE PROUD OF THEM ALL.

Now and then letters reach me which I don't quite like. Several have come from Ireland, and one or two from Australia. Their writers adopt an ungenerous and sneering tone to the English regiments. "The Irish do all the fighting," says one. Plainly ridiculous this. The Irish are not one in a hundred of Britain's armies. "Where would you be without the Anzacs?" asks another. "They do all the hard work."

They don't say so. The Irish fighters don't say so. Only the talkers!
Be proud of your own men. That's all right. But don't run down the others.

"Our own good pride shall teach us
To praise our neighbour's pride,"

wrote Mr. Kipling. That is the spirit. I am not going to argue the case for the English regiments myself. But I will give you an extract from an article in the "Morning Post" of July 4th, and I think some of you may learn something from it.
"Coming along a dusty French road in a

motor-car, I was delighted to give a Canadian officer a lift. He had been in most of the 'shows,' had started as a private, and was now a captain. He was of the right mettle, full of courage and determination to drive the Boche back to his lair. I complimented him on the gallantry he and his countrymen had shown during the war. 'Sir,' he said to me, much to my surprise, 'why will you always treat us as children? We have done well. I don't deny it. But everybody has done well. Your Tommy is the finest fighter on God's earth. Isn't he going to get any of the credit? I'm sick to death of the praise that is plastered all over us. We have done our duty to the best of our ability, but we don't deserve one word more of praise than your fine fighting-men.' This sentiment, on inquiry, I found to be common to all the Colonial forces. One distinguished Australian officer said that he had come to hate the word 'Anzac.' 'We came into the war of our own accord to beat the German. We don't want to be treated as though we should give up the fight unless we were mentioned every day. We are good, stout fighters, as the Boche knows well, but we take off our hats to gallant old regiments of the Home Country. Believe me, an infantry battalion is simply a miniature of the race.'

Read that carefully. Read it twice or thrice if you fail to get the full meaning of it at once. I feel sure that if you do grasp the meaning, you will not be inclined to sneer at other races in the absurd belief that thereby you add a brighter lustre to your own!

We only hear now and then of what English regiments have done. But have not the West Kents, the Worcestershires, and others hung on to practically impossible positions with all the high courage of the Canadians? That, at least, we have been told.

Your Editor

Extracts from "Tom Merry's Weekly."

JOHNNY GOGGS AT ST. JIM'S. By Clifton Dane.

(Continued from last week's number.)

V.

SCROPE went back to his bed. I don't think he had quite made up his mind what to do.

Racke and Crooke sat down together on Racke's bed.

Then someone spoke in a curious way, as if talking in his sleep.

I recognised Tom Merry's voice; but, all the same, I doubted whether it was Tom speaking. In fact, I felt pretty sure it wasn't.

"Serve them right!" said the voice. "Not my bizney, anyway. Why should I butt in? Grundy can if he wants to."

"What's he talking about?" muttered Crooke to Racke.

"They're rotters, all three of them! I'm not sure Scrope ain't just as bad as the other two, only he's managed to keep it a bit darker so far."

So the voice continued. And now Crooke caught on.

"Hanged if the rotter isn't talking about us!" he said. "Cool cheek, I call it!"

"Oh, he's maunderin' in his sleep!" Racke replied. "Let him go ahead. It won't hurt us."

"Grundy says he's going to look after the sweeps—well, let him," went on the voice.

"So Grundy's goin' to look after us, is he?" repeated Racke, grinding out the words unpleasantly. "And where does Grundy suppose I shall be while he's doin' that?"

"I know where you'll be if I once start in on you!"

That was unmistakably Grundy's voice.

"Oh, you're awake, are you, Grundy?" said Racke.

"Of course I am! I've never been to sleep. And I don't mind telling you that I'm going to put my foot down!"

"Rough on the beetles!" remarked Racke; and Crooke sniggered.

"It will be a bit unpleasant for some insects I know; but beetle is rather too good a name for them."

Was that Grundy, or was it Goggs speaking as with Grundy's voice? For the life of me I could not tell. But if it was Grundy, he was much more apt in repartee than usual.

Tom Merry appeared to have ceased talking in his sleep. The few remarks that Goggs had put into his mouth were considered sufficient, evidently. I fancied that Goggs only wanted to find out whether Grundy was awake. Their beds were some distance apart.

For a minute or two there was silence. Then Racke said:

"Come along, Crooke! Are you comin', Scrope, or do you funk it?"

"It ain't safe to-night," answered Scrope.

"Why? Because of Grundy?" sneered Racke.

"No. But Kildare's about. And I rather fancy it's going to rain, too."

"Oh, stay there, you crawlin' funk!"

"I think I will," said Scrope.

"You'd better!" sang out Grundy. "So had you two! I tell you you ain't going out to-night!"

"Are you shouting to give us away?" Racke snarled.

"Of course I'm not, you measly rotter!"

"Well, you've done that sort of thing before, you know," said Racke. "I don't think you can blame anyone if they get a bit suspicious. For a fatheaded ass like you it's rather crafty, but it won't wash every time."

There was just enough truth in this to make it beastly uncomfortable for Grundy to hear. There is nothing of the sneak about the great George Alfred, but he cannot control his bull-bellow, and he has more than once let Railton hear things that he had never intended to. Racke's insinuation was, of course, that he had intended it.

A snort of wrath followed. Grundy lum-

bered heavily out of bed. But before he could reach Racke and Crooke they were through the doorway. And, after what Racke had said, it would have been a bit difficult for Grundy to make a row in the passage.

Someone else slipped out of bed. My eyes had grown better used to the gloom by this time, and I could see that it was Goggs who had joined Grundy. Wilkins and Gunn were sleeping the sleep of the just, unknowing that their chief was on the war-path.

What Goggs whispered to Grundy did not reach my ears.

But I felt certain things were going to happen, and I did not want to miss any of the fun.

Grundy and Goggs were out of the door by the time I had thrust my legs into my trousers. But in the next bed to me someone stirred.

"Wharrer after, Dane?" asked Kangaroo drowsily.

"There's something interesting on, old scout," I said, in low tones. "Better shin out and come along."

He did not want telling twice. He was out of bed and pulling on his breeks in a moment.

It did not quite suit my book to join Grundy and Goggs at once. If they had wanted me they would have asked me, I suppose. But it is not much fun having a joke all to yourself, and I was glad of Kangaroo's company.

"Stop! Who are you?"

It was Railton's voice.

"Too interesting for me," said Kangaroo, and would have scrambled back into bed. But I caught his arm.

"Tain't Railton," I said. "It's only Goggs."

Noble took my word for it. How was I sure? Well, I suppose you might argue that I could not really have been sure, for the voice was just like Railton's.

But that was precisely the sort of dodge to check Racke and Crooke; and I felt certain that Grundy and Goggs would have dodged back if our Housemaster really had appeared upon the scene.

Still, it was very carefully that I opened the door, and Kangaroo and I would have been back in bed in about two ticks if there had been anything in the passage to alarm us.

There was not. Goggs and Grundy were invisible in the gloom, but we could see Racke and Crooke, for they were on a landing, close to a window with its blind up.

The two black sheep stood as if spell-bound. There was no doubt in their minds that it was the Housemaster's voice they had heard. They were waiting to hear it again, afraid to move lest movement might betray them.

What they made up their minds it was I don't know. What was the urgency which was taking them to the Green Man that night, at almost any risk, I don't know either. But I should think that over in the Emerald Isle, where things are a bit topsyturvy at times, some horse they had backed must actually have got home first, and they were in a hurry to collect the spoils from Weeks.

Anyway, they chanced Railton, and went on.

I almost fancied I could hear Crooke's heart beating.

After them stole two dim figures—a slim, dim figure which stole noiselessly, and a burly, dim figure which didn't, though no doubt it tried.

And after them went Kangaroo and I.

"I'm not on to this yet," whispered Kangaroo.

"Racke and Crooke going on the randan," I whispered back. "Goggs and Grundy after them. Goggs is a ventriloquist."

"Nuff said!" replied Kangaroo, who is pretty quick at tumbling to things.

We hung back a bit. So did the two ahead

of us. But they hurried more than we did when once Racke and Crooke were clear outside, and the two gay dogs were at the wall when we saw them again.

It was lighter in the quad, and I can tell you it gave me a start when I discerned a figure in cap and gown standing only a few yards from the wall!

The moment before, glancing towards the New House, I had noticed that there was only one window in it still lighted—that of Ratty's study. The School House was quite dark.

"My hat! Ratty!" I whispered; and Noble and I dodged into the shadow of the elms.

"No; Grundy," answered Kangaroo coolly, a few seconds later. "Can't be Ratty. No whiskers."

Grundy had provided himself with an old cap and gown. Goggs' dodge, of course. Grundy would never have thought of it.

But there the old chump stood, right out in the open. I turned to the lighted window in the New House. But just at that moment the light went out. I hoped that meant Ratty toddling up to bed, not Ratty coming out to breathe the cool air of night.

Crooke had got up on the wall first. He is heavier than Racke. He was giving Racke a hand-up when Ratty's voice spoke. Ratty's voice, I say, but, of course, it was Goggs'.

"Who are you? Ah, I see you, Crooke! And Racke, too! This is very well—very well indeed! No, do not dare to move! Stay where you are!"

Grundy stood there in cap and gown, and the voice seemed to come from him; and Racke and Crooke, one astride the wall, the other clinging to it and to his hand, could not see that he had no whiskers.

I almost pitied those two. They must have been in an awful state of funk.

"Stay where you are!" repeated the harsh, grinding voice.

And the figure in cap and gown bustled off.

Oh, I dare say Grundy thought he was moving no end majestically. But it did not matter that it wasn't any more majestic than an old hen, for that's the way Ratty moves.

He moved towards the School House.

We shifted nearer to where I judged Goggs to be, which also brought us nearer to those two on the wall.

"My hat! He's gone to fetch Railton!" groaned Racke.

"Or the Head!" burred Crooke. "You've done it now, Racke! This means the sack, for a dead cert. And that beast Scrope safe in bed!"

That was just like Crooke—a mean rotter. He really felt that Scrope had done him an injury by escaping.

"Hang Scrope!" snarled Racke.

"That's what I should like to do—and you, too!" Crooke snarled back.

Racke struck at him. I saw the blow given, and I saw Racke fall.

Oh, yes, I mean Racke, not Crooke. You see, it was middling silly for Racke, situated as he was, to hit at Crooke. He had to leave go of the wall to do it, and when Crooke let go of his hand he naturally flopped down.

A big drop of rain fell on my nose. I glanced up, and saw that black clouds were sweeping up fast.

From Racke there came a kind of muffled howl. There had been nothing soft for him to fall upon.

"You measly cad!" he hissed.

"Serve you jolly well right!" snapped Crooke. "It was your own fault, anyway! And don't you think you can sneak off. Ratty saw you as well as me."

My hand touched something warm.

"Who is there?" came Goggs' whisper.

That chap has nerve. He had no notion we were anywhere near, but he did not seem a bit startled.

"Dane and Noble," I answered. "We followed you down to see the fun."

"Do you consider it funny, Dane?" replied

Goggs, with sadness in his voice. "Now, to me—"

"Oh, rats!" said Kangaroo.

Somebody chuckled. It wasn't me. It wasn't Noble. And certainly neither Crooke nor Racke could have felt much like chuckling. So it must have been Goggs.

Big drops rattled on the leaves of the elms.

"It's raining," I said.

"Dear me! I admire your powers of observation, my dear Jotson—pardon me—Dane!" replied Goggs.

A figure in cap and gown came stalking back from the School House.

There ought to have been two figures, of course, as Ratty was supposed to have gone to fetch Railton. But Ratty hates wet like a cat; and if Crooke and Racke were capable of thinking things out—which was doubtful—they would imagine that he had gone straight in to avoid the rain, having had the pleasure of turning them over to Railton.

They were not given much time to think.

"Come down from that wall, Crooke!" commanded the voice they expected to hear. "Racke, where have you hidden yourself?"

"I—I'm here, sir," said Racke.

"What were you two about?"

There was sternness in the tones. Ratty's had been merely snappy. Goggs knew just how to do it.

"I—I—we—it was so beastly hot, sir! We came out for a breath of fresh air," Racke faltered.

Crooke remained obstinately silent.

"Indeed? Then you shall have all the fresh air you need! March at once to the gates, and continue to march up and down the quadrangle until I come out again and stop you!"

Railton would not have ordered that, I fancy. And yet he might have done; and, of course, those two had no suspicion that the gowned figure they saw in the gloom was not Railton's.

"But it's raining, sir!" Racke objected.

He is not much keener on getting wet than Ratty is.

"Do not argue with me! March at once!"

They marched. I don't know whether they looked behind them; but it did not matter a scrap if they did. The gloom was now much too intense to let them see Grundy tuck up his gown and scoot for the School House through the pouring rain, with Goggs and Kangaroo and me in close pursuit.

"What on earth—I say, is it you, Dane? Who asked you to—"

"Shush!" warned Goggs; and Grundy shushed.

It showed what an influence Goggs had gained over him, for it takes a lot to make Grundy shush as a rule.

Up in the dorm he was graciously pleased to forgive us, after saying a thing or two about butting in.

Everybody else seemed to be asleep. It turned out afterwards that Scrope wasn't, but he pretended to be.

"How long d'you think we'd better keep them marching up and down, Goggs?" asked Grundy, after we had discussed the whole affair.

"My dear Grundy, I should suggest that they be allowed to march until they are tired of marching. They are slackers, I understand, and exercise would do them good!"

"Well, yes; but it's raining like blazes!" replied Grundy, who is not really hard-hearted.

"Your metaphor is not a happy one," said Goggs primly; and I suppose there really is not much likeness between rain and blazes.

"Crooke isn't a happy one, either—or Racke!" chuckled Noble.

"I do not think they deserve to be happy," said Goggs. "They are not pleasant or well-doing persons!"

"Bed for me!" said Grundy, wasting no more sympathy on the gay dogs.

It was dawn when Crooke and Racke, drenched to the skin, crept into the dormitory. They woke me up slinging one another. It was rather a pity; but they woke up Scrope, too, and got the truth—or something as near it as Scrope could manage.

I dare say they slept the better for knowing that they had only been spoofed. Their vows of vengeance against us all did not keep me from going to sleep again, I know that.

VI.

THE next day was a lovely one. The rain seemed to have washed everything clean, without doing any damage to the cricket-pitch, which had sucked it up thirstily, and appeared all the better for it. There were white clouds

floating ever so high up, and a gentle breeze blowing, and St. Jim's looked its best.

Kildare's Eleven against the School House junior team was a mixed lot. Baker and Monteith were the only two prefects playing. Railton—pretty hefty even one-handed; his left arm is no use to him yet—and another master were included, and a fellow from the Fifth.

From the New House the skipper had got Figgins and Kerr and Wynn. Redfern was to have played, but at the last minute he hurt his wrist at the nets, and Kildare was left short of a man. Goggs would have been the eleventh man on the list, but the dropping-out of Redfern made him the tenth.

The skipper looked round. There were not many fellows about. Some were packing; some were out of gates. But Grundy hovered near, and Grundy was in flannels.

"Got a man you can spare me, Merry?" asked Kildare.

"I shouldn't wonder if Grundy would play if you asked him!" said Tom, grinning.

"Wouldn't you like to take Grundy and let me have Noble or Levison?" asked Kildare.

"No, thanks, old chap! We don't want to rub it in too hard, you know!" answered Tom, his grin widening.

"Take Grundy, and lick us!" said Lowther. "Could anyone be more magnanimous than that?"

Kildare seemed to think it was just possible anyone might. But he saw Grundy's anxious face, and in another moment that face was made to undergo a most extraordinary change. It shone like the rising sun as Grundy said:

"Right-ho, Kildare! Pleased, I'm sure!"

Tom won the toss, and we batted.

Kildare and Fatty Wynn bowled at the outset, but neither was at the top of his form.

Blake and Talbot played them both easily, and were soon collecting runs at a good pace. Kildare went off, and Baker came on, and with the score at fifty Blake left. Then Tom and Talbot, and later Tom and Kangaroo, made stands; and Fatty had not got a single wicket—a thing which had not happened to him in any match all through the season before.

He did not get one that innings, either. Six bowlers had been tried before it occurred to Kildare to ask Goggs whether he bowled. I don't think it would have occurred to him then, but that Goggs had just made a really first-rate catch in the slips, and, looking round, our skipper saw him without his glasses.

Extraordinary what a difference that made to anyone! When you caught the steady gleam of those bright blue eyes you got, somehow, a notion of something capable and resolute, not of a second Skinny—well-meaning but futile.

"Do you bowl, Goggs?" asked Kildare.

"A little. But I prefer to bowl to the earlier batsmen!"

I was at the wickets then with Gussy. Only five wickets had fallen, and the score was over one hundred and fifty. The runs had been made at a quick pace, too.

I could hardly believe my ears. That sounded like swank. Kildare must have stared rather hard, for Goggs hastened to explain.

"Pray do not misunderstand me!" he said. "The fact is that my bowling partakes of the nature of the googly. It depends for its success upon a certain deception as to break. Now, I have observed that, while a fairly good batsman is puzzled, sheer ignorance is often efficacious in protecting the tail-end man. As he never watches the bowler's hand to discover what break is likely to be put on, he is not deceived, and plays at the ball without any of the misgivings that assail his superior!"

"You talk like a book," said Kildare; "but I'm hanged if there isn't a lot in what you say! Go on, and see if you can google out the rest, though. D'Arcy would never admit being a tail-end batsman, I'm jolly sure!"

But I don't mind admitting I am, though I make runs now and then. And Goggs was quite right as far as I was concerned. I don't know that I had ever thought of looking for a break as early as that. My way was to look for it after the leather pitched.

Goggs took the ball, set the field, and sent down to Gussy what certainly did not look a very dangerous ball. But the great Gustavus played all round it, and his middle stump staggered back.

The tail was coming now, anyway. Herries was next in. He got a fluky single, and I faced Goggs.

Whack!

We ran three before the ball got back.

"Shutting one's eyes is a doubtful policy, Dane," remarked Goggs mildly.

Well, I hadn't exactly shut my eyes; but it really was something like a blind swipe, for I realised that this wasn't the time to start on my education as to breaks, and the influence upon them of the way the bowler held his hand. So I had made up my mind I would not look at Goggs' hand at all, and I didn't.

Herries had gone, clean bowled. Lowther followed him in, pulled one ball for four, and put up an easy catch to Railton at point off the next.

Railton bowled lobs from the other end. I like lobs. I took a dozen off the over.

Then Goggs caught and bowled Clive. Wilkins was last in. He scored a two to leg, and then hit a ball hard into Grundy's hands.

Grundy froze on, and Wilkins was no end surprised. Not a great compliment to his chieftain—eh? But Wilkins was not the only one who was surprised. I fancy Grundy and Goggs—not sure about Goggs, though—were the only people who were not.

So the innings ended for 174, after looking like realising nearer 250, and Goggs had taken the last five wickets at a cost of only ten runs.

"You couldn't have done much better, even against the fellows who can bat," said Kildare, smiling, as he joined Goggs and me on our way to the pavilion. "I say, young 'un, can you bat as well as you bowl?"

"I am considered, I believe, rather a better batsman than bowler," replied Goggs quietly.

"By Jove, you're hot stuff, then!" said the skipper. "Where do you usually go in?"

"Second wicket down is my customary place!"

"All right! You're No. 4 on my list. Do you bat in those things, by the way?"

Goggs had put on his glasses again.

"I usually remove them when I get to the wickets, if not before," he answered.

"H'm! My belief is you don't need them."

The ghost of a smile hovered around the mouth of Goggs. That was also his belief.

I had my pads to get off, and I lost sight of him when we got to the pavilion. Then I had to go into the field with the team, and Kildare and Baker came out to open the innings.

Old Talbot was in better form at the bowling crease than we had seen him for quite a time, and in less than five minutes both Baker and Figgins had fallen to him.

Now it was Goggs' turn.

But it was not Goggs who came. Monteith, head prefect of the New House, appeared from the pavilion.

I saw Kildare frown. A rot looked like setting in, and I think he was relying upon Goggs to stop it.

Levison put paid to Monteith's account with only four added.

Then came a master, and Levison bowled him, too.

Kerr followed. Kildare frowned again. Where could Goggs be?

He asked Kerr; but Kerr shook his head. He knew nothing.

The skipper's face brightened when he saw how Kerr shaped. The Scots member of the New House trio is always at his best in a crisis, and he played with rare steadiness and coolness now.

He and Kildare added over thirty, and the score was beginning to look respectable, when Tom Merry took a difficult catch off Levison's bowling, and the captain had to go.

I had no doubt that the first thing he would do when he go back to the pavilion was to search for Goggs. But Selwyn of the Fifth and Fatty Wynn came and went, and still no Goggs!

Railton, batting one-handed, helped Kerr for a few minutes, and hit one lovely four to leg. But I felt pretty sure that something must have happened to Goggs when Grundy marched in to join Kerr after Railton had fallen to Talbot.

Grundy was No. 11 on the list, of course, and there was little chance that he would stay long enough to allow of much of a search for the missing player.

Somehow, he scraped five or six, and Kerr got a few more, and the follow-on was saved. But when Grundy's middle wicket rocketed, and we hesitated whether to treat the innings as over, Kildare waved us in.

Goggs was still non est!

I wondered what on earth could have happened to him. In a sense, I felt responsible if anything had. But Goggs is not exactly a woolly lamb, you know!

(To be continued next week.)

GUSSY'S PATRIOTIC OFFER!

By JACK BLAKE.

I.
WHEREFORE that worried brow, Gustavus?" asked Monty Lowther, as we all crowded into Study No. 6 after the last House match. "It's quite spoiling the beauty of your noble forehead, you know."

"Bai Jove! I'd completely forgotten you chaps were comin' to tea," said the one and only, regarding the crowd thoughtfully through his monocle. "I'm feahfully sowwy to appeah inhospitable, but I'm afwaid I must request you to pwoceed to some othah studay—say yours, Tom Mewwy."

"What's up with you to-day, Gussy?" laughed Tom Merry. "First you earn hundreds of lines in the Form-room, then you stand out of the House match, then you want the study to yourself. Explain, ass!"

Gussy hesitated, then took us into his confidence.

"You see, it's like this," he said. "I don't know whethah it has evah stwuck you, but our War Office has not yet attained the standard of efficiency necessary for the pwosecution of this war to a speedy and successful conclusion."

"Go hon!" murmured Lowther; while Herries chuckled:

"Good old Gustavus!"

"The idea has pwesented itself to me," continued Arthur Augustus, with a freezing glare at the interrupters, "that the intwroduction of fwesh blood might do much to bwing us neawah the end. I am theahfoah w'iting to offah my services to the countwy as a militawy advisah to the War Office in this hour of need. That is all."

"That's all!" gasped Monty Lowther faintly. "He's not going to take over Haig's job or become sole commander of the Allied forces. He's simply going to be a military adviser at the War Office. That's all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Gussy adjusted his monocle and sniffed emphatically.

"Natuwally, I did not expect to be undahstood by evewybody," he remarked w'itheringly. "A job of this description needs a fellah, of tact and judgment, which qualities, I am sowwy to say, are non-existent among you cacklin' asses!"

"Quite right, Gussy," said Lowther, becoming serious with suspicious suddenness. "I must say these fellows rather surprise me. Patriotism should be the last thing to be exposed to ridicule in these days."

"Well, I like that—" began Manners warmly. Then he stopped short, as Monty made furious grimaces with that side of his face that was out of Gussy's line of vision.

"Seriously, though," said Lowther, with owl-like gravity, "on second thoughts, I rather like your scheme, Gussy. I take back those thoughtless remarks of mine just now. Hop it, you chaps! I'm going to help D'Arcy to write a letter to the War Office."

We could see that Lowther had something up his sleeve, so we promptly cleared off to Tom Merry's study, and began tea there, leaving Gustavus to the mercy of the humorist of the Shell. When we left he was still inclined to be hostile, but we had no doubt that Monty would overcome that difficulty. Gussy is the possessor of a remarkably innocent and unsuspecting nature, you see, though it's the last thing he will admit.

About ten minutes later the two entered the study arm-in-arm and on the best of terms.

"Finished your letter?" asked Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Yaas, wathah!" replied Arthur Augustus. "Lowthah was of gweat assistance to me, you know. How does this stwike you?"

He laid the letter down triumphantly before Tom Merry, and we all crowded round to read it. This is how it ran:

"St. James' College,

Rylcombe.

"The War Office, Whitehall, London.

"Gentlemen,—I am deeply distressed to observe that, in spite of numerous improvements in your methods, you have still a great deal to learn before we can hope to achieve victory. With a view to facilitating the solution of this difficulty, I beg to offer my services as a military adviser. I have

had no previous experience, but have studied the war maps, and think I should be able to win the war for you without a great deal of difficulty.—Yours faithfully,

"A. A. D'ARCY."

There was a regular yell as we finished reading it, and Gussy looked quite astonished.

"Bai Jove, you chaps, this is quite a sewious mattah, you know; not a cacklin' match!" he said, glowering at us through his monocle.

"You'll be the death of us yet," said Digby, wiping the tears from his eyes.

Gussy only sniffed, and began his tea, while Lowther went out to post the letter—at least, so he said!

II.

THREE days later Arthur Augustus burst into the study like a whirlwind, waving a sheet of notepaper in his hand. Unable to pull up sharply enough, he crashed into the table, where Herries was writing an impot, and sent the inkpot flying. There was a Humish howl from Herries as the ink flowed over his neatly-written lines, but Gussy heeded that not at all.

"It's come deah boys!" he gasped. "Listen! Deah Sir,—We are in weceipt of your favour of yestahday's date, an' thank you for your kind offah. We are sending a wepwesentative, Majah Swindell, to intah-view you, an' twust you will come to an awwangement with him.—Yours faithfully, THE WAR OFFICE. What do you think of that, deah boys?"

"What do you think of my impot?" roared the enraged Herries, pointing dramatically to his spoiled sheets of foolscap.

"Sowwy, deah boy, but the news wathah excited me for the moment," said Gussy. "What do you think of it, Blake?"

"Sounds all right," I answered dubiously. "The postmark on the envelope is 'London.' That looks genuine. But—"

"I didn't know, but somehow—well, it was a trifle too steep for me.

Gussy could hardly contain himself all that evening. Every minute or so he would wander out to the front door and glance anxiously in the direction of the gates, evidently hoping to catch sight of Major Swindell of the War Office. But there was no luck for him that night, and he went to bed disappointed.

The following day was Wednesday, and after dinner the four of us hung about the School House steps in the sun. Tom Merry and Manners were there, too, looking very pleased with themselves for some reason.

"Been appointed War Minister yet, Gussy?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Not yet, deah boy," was the modest reply. "In fact, I doubt whethah I shall evah have that honah at all. Pewwaps, if I make a gweat success of my first job—"

He trailed off into some daydream—some vision of himself presiding over the War Council—and the conversation flagged. We had just started yawning, and I was going to suggest an adjournment to the playing-fields, when a stranger appeared through the gates and came towards us.

He was a curious-looking individual, with a fiery moustache and face to match, and, though a great deal fatter, he was no taller than ourselves.

"Anyone here named D'Arcy?" he asked gruffly, as he came up.

Arthur Augustus raised his silk topper elegantly, and bowed with modest grace.

"Majah Swindell, I pwesume?" he said. "Then I am vewy glad to meet you, sir."

"Hub!" snorted the major, fixing a glare on him. "You have been kind enough to offer your services to the War Office, hey?"

"Quite wight, majah!" replied Gussy. "I considah that in this cwisis in Bwitamin's histowy a fellah of tact an' judgment is needed to cawwy things through, and, undah the cires, it is up to me. Noblesse oblige, you know."

The major seemed afflicted with a sudden choking fit, but with an effort he recovered, and produced a typewritten sheet of paper.

"Then all that remains is for you to sign this agreement, my dear sir," he said. "If

you are going to take over the management of the war, it is necessary, for the country's protection, that you should sign a contract—ahem!"

"Bai Jove!" cried Gussy, with dancing eyes. "Am I to take charge of affaihs altogether, then?"

"Quite so. How else are we to beat Germany, hey?" growled the major.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

The major passed over the agreement which read as follows:

"I hereby agree to take over the sole command of the War Office, Admiralty, and British Expeditionary Forces for the period of hostilities, guaranteeing, by the exercise of my tact and judgment, to crush Germany in a short time."

Gussy scanned it through quickly, then producing a fountain-pen, eagerly appended his signature.

"Theah you are!" he said. "You may wely on me as soon as I obtain the Head's permish, sir. Bai Jove, heah is Mr. Wailton!"

Mr. Railton turned round and came up to us at the call, evidently supposing that our visitor was a relative. But the major did not appear anxious for an introduction—rather the contrary, in fact.

Gussy was tremendously excited at the turn of events, and, after introducing the Housemaster, who eyed Major Swindle very curiously, he started to pour the tale into Mr. Railton's ears.

Mr. Railton listened at first in blank amazement, then a grin broke over his face. The grin was followed by a chuckle, the chuckle by a laugh, and the laugh by a roar, while the major made frantic but futile signals to Gussy.

"Is theah anythin' the mattah, Mr. Wailton?" asked Gussy, in a state of considerable astonishment.

Mr. Railton dried his eyes, and, with an effort, calmed himself.

"And do you seriously imagine that you are going to be intrusted with the management of the war?" he asked.

"So I undahstand!" said Gussy stiffly. "I suppose you have no weason to doubt the majah's word, sir?"

"No reason? Really, D'Arcy, you are most remarkably dense!"

And with that, Mr. Railton swung the major round and made a grab at his hirsute appendage—which is Sanscrit, or something, for moustache.

To Gussy's chagrin and utter dismay, it came away in the Housemaster's hand, revealing a smooth, boyish upper lip.

Gussy gazed at the bogus major, almost in horror, then he gave a yell:

"Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We simply couldn't restrain ourselves. Gussy's face was too funny for words.

"You—you—you wottah!" he burst out when he had recovered sufficiently to speak. "You—"

Mr. Railton raised his hand.

"Enough, D'Arcy!" he said. "You have behaved with amazing stupidity. Follow me, Lowther!"

He rustled away, leaving Gussy gasping.

Lowther escaped with two cuts, and considered the jape cheap at the price—as, indeed, it was. The precious contract was hung up on the notice-board in the Hall, together with Gussy's letter to the War Office, and the whole school roared over it. I might add that ever since D'Arcy can be sent into a state of wildest fury by a simple inquiry as to how the war is going on!

THE END.

NOTICES.

Cricket.

Matches wanted by Eastleigh Albion Juniors (average age 13). 7-mile radius.—S. Dacombe, 234a, High Street, Eastleigh.

Football.

Avondale F.C. (15) want matches. 5-mile radius.—H. Crowe, 14, Shalimar Road, Acton, W. 3.

Wanted a strong left-back (15-17).—E. Wilkinson, 5, Willoughby Grove, Leeds.

Campden Rangers F.C. want a good goalkeeper and three heavy backs, also reserves.—J. Noakes, 64, Somerleyton Road, Brixton, S.W. 9.

Players and fixtures wanted for a team in S.E. district.—J. Douglass, 9, Coldharbour Place, Camberwell, S.E. 5.