THE SHADOW OF THE PAST!

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THE SHADOW OF THE PAST!

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

BY

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.
Dogged in the Dark!

"I WEFUSE to huwwy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, spoke with decided emphasis.

And his companions, Blake and Herries and Digby, replied with equal emphasis in chorus:

"Fathead! Buck up!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Shush!" murmured Blake. "There it is again!"

He held up his hand.

The four juniors listened. Through the gusty wind, which whirled light snowflakes round them, there came a faint sound from the dark road behind.

It was the sound of a footfall.

But it was only for a moment. The sound died away, and only the wintry wind could be heard sweeping over the wet fields and rustling the leafless branches.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "We are weally bein' followed, deah boys!"

"Didn't I tell you so!" grunted Blake.

"Yaas, but——"

"Dry up! Listen!"

The St. Jim's juniors stood quite still in the road, their ears strained to listen.

The early winter evening had set in, and it had brought a fall of snow with it. Black darkness lay around them, the snowflakes glimmering faintly through it.

Blake & Co. had been to Wayland Cinema that afternoon, and they had stayed a little late. It was dark when they started to return to the school, and then the snow had come on.

They had taken short cuts through the woods and the fields. And, more than once, as they tramped on with their heads bent down to the wind, and their collars turned up against the snow, they had caught the sound of faint footfalls behind them on the lonely paths.

It was so dark that they could see one another only dimly, and they could not see three yards before them. Only the gaunt, leafless trees loomed up half-seen in the gloom.

Ever since they had left Rylcombe Wood behind those faint footfalls had dogged their steps, and the sound was getting on their nerves.

Twice they had stopped to allow the pedestrian to come up, but he had not come. Always the footfalls ceased a moment after their own.

It gave them an eerie feeling to be dogged like this through the darkness on a lonely path, and they could scarcely suppose that the unknown was dogging them with any good intentions.

The thought of a footpad naturally came into their minds. And the thought of some lurking ruffian, waiting for a favourable opportunity to pounce upon them, was extremely disconcerting under the circumstances.

This time they had heard the footfalls unmistakably just after coming out into the high road, but again the sound had ceased as they listened.

"Oh, come on!" said Digby. "Let the brute follow us all the way to St. Jim's if he likes! It's less than a mile now!"

"Better hurry a bit!" said Herries. "It's a footpad, right enough, and he may be going to signal to his pals to stop us!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, Gussy won't hurry!" said Blake sarcastically. "A mere gang of footpads mustn't be allowed to disturb the serenity of the one and only."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Look here, if there's a gang of them somewhere on the road, we don't want to walk into them," said Herries. "Let's cut across the fields from here."

"The fields are fwightfully wet, Hewwies!"

"Better get your tootsies wet than get a knock on your silly napper, fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Hewwies!"

Blake set his teeth. He was a little alarmed, but he was still more exasperated.

"Look here, we'll interview that chap!" he said. "Whether there's a gang of them or not, he's alone at present. Four of us can tackle any footpad that ever footpadded."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as a much more dignified pwoceedin' than wunnin' away!"

"Who's talking about running away?" demanded Herries gruffly.

"You were, deah boy!"

"You frabjous jabberwock! I suggested hurrying, that's all!"

"I wegard it as vewy much the same thing, Hewwies."

"Will you regard it as the same thing if I biff you over into the ditch?" inquired Herries, in sulphurous tones.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Oh, cheese it!" grunted Blake. "Don't begin to rag now!" He lowered his voice. "Look here, we'll cut across Pepper's field, by the barn where the St. Jim's Parliament meets for chin-wagging. If that johnny follows us we'll make a sudden rush back, and collar him before he can dodge."

"Good egg!" said Dig, with a deep breath. "We can handle him all right, whoever he is!"

"And we'll jolly well bump him in the mud, whoever he is, for bothering us like this!" said Herries vengefully.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as bein' the pwopah capah. It is vewy inconsidewate of the person to make Hewwies nervous like this——"

"Who's nervous?" shrieked Herries.

"You are, deah boy!"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Blake, dragging Herries back just in time. "Lemme get at him!" roared Herries. "I'll show him whether I'm nervous!"

"Pway, do not let your angwy passions wise, Hewwies. I was simply statin' a fact, you know!"

"I—I—I'll——"

"Howevah, if you say you are not nervous, Hewwies, I withdwaw the wemark," said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "But I must firmly wefuse to huwwy, as you suggested. I am gettin' enough mud splashed on my twousahs without huwwyin' and makin' mattahs worse."

"You—you—you——"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Blake. "Never mind, Gussy. You know he's a born idiot! Come on!"

"I object to bein' chawactewised as a born idiot, Blake——"

"Come on, ass!"

Blake grasped Arthur Augustus' arm, and hurried on. The chums of St. Jim's left the road, crossing a stile into the black, wet field.

They followed the well-worn footpath through the reeking grass in the direction of the barn.

That building had been the scene of lively proceedings on other occasions. But now it was dark, silent, and deserted.

Dimly, like a black shadow, it loomed up in the night.

The four juniors passed the barn, and halted in the lee of it. They listened keenly as they stopped.

Footfalls!

Clear through the wind came the sound of the footsteps from the blackness of the night.

The unknown was following them across the fields, and it seemed to them that the footfalls were nearer now.

Blake set his teeth.

"Come on!" he said savagely. "We've got him now, the slinking cad! Rush him before he can dodge!"

Without waiting to see whether his comrades followed, Jack Blake dashed back at full speed along the path. Herries and Digby dashed after him. Arthur Augustus started to follow, caught his foot in a root, and stumbled over. His voice was heard on the wind:

"Yawoooh! Bai Jove, I've dwopped my eyeglass! Pway wait till I've wecovahed my monocle, deah boys!"

But Blake & Co. did not heed. They rushed on fiercely to try conclusions with the mysterious unknown who had so long and so strangely dogged their footsteps.

CHAPTER 2.
No Luck!

"HERE he is!" panted Blake.

The footfalls behind had ceased, as before.

But the unknown pursuer had evidently not expected the sudden rush back of the juniors he had been dogging.

They came on him suddenly.

In the darkness and sleet all they saw was a dim figure standing in the wet grass of the footpath—a figure, they could see, no taller than themselves.

The next instant their grasp was upon it.

Blake & Co. were angry. If it was some practical joker trying to work on their nerves, he deserved punishment for his folly. If it was a footpad, he deserved handling still more. In any case, they meant to punish him for the trick he was playing.

Three pairs of hands landed on the dim figure at once, and it was borne over by the rush of the excited juniors.

"Got him!" panted Blake.

"Bump him!"

"Squash him!"

The half-seen form rolled in the grass, in the grip of Blake & Co. They swept him up, and dashed him down again.

But the next second there came a change.

In spite of the strong grasp of three sturdy Fourth-Formers, the unknown wrenched himself up. Herries went staggering from a shove on the chest, and Blake and Digby, to their amazement and consternation, were grasped and thrown together, and pitched bodily into the grass.

The strength displayed by the unknown was astounding, and they had not been prepared for it. He had handled them as if they were infants.

The three juniors, breathless and almost stupefied, rolled in the grass, gasping. There was a patter of feet as Arthur Augustus came running up. He had found his eyeglass.

"Got him, deah boy—— Oh, my hat!" He stumbled over Blake, and fell, and instantly his grasp closed on Jack. "I've got him! Now, then, you wottah!"

"Yarooh!"

"I've got him, deah boys!" yelled Arthur Augustus, in great excitement. "I'm punchin' him like anythin'——"

"Yarooop! Gerroff!"

"Take that, you feahful wottah—and that——"

"Oh, my hat! I'll——"

"Gweat Scott! Is that you, Blake?" gasped Arthur Augustus, recognising the muffled voice of his victim.

"You frabjous idiot!" shrieked Blake.

"Bai Jove! I'm sowwy, deah boy! Where is that wottah?"

The juniors scrambled to their feet. Blake was nursing his nose, where Arthur Augustus' excited thumps had fallen with only too much vigour. And Blake's remarks were almost blood-curdling.

"Where is the wottah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Have you let him get away?"

Certainly the "rotter," whoever he was, had got away. The dark figure had vanished as Blake & Co. went sprawling in the grass.

"He's gone!" growled Herries. "Oh, dear! I'm aching all over! The rotter was as strong as a horse."

"Bai Jove! It was wathah wemiss of you fellows to let him get away befoah I could come up. I am su'pwised at you, Blake!"

"You—you—you jabberwock!" howled Blake. "How could I prevent it, when a dangerous maniac was crawling over me?"

"Gweat Scott! Were you cwawlin' ovah Blake, Herries?"

"Why, you—you——"

"Were you, Dig?"

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

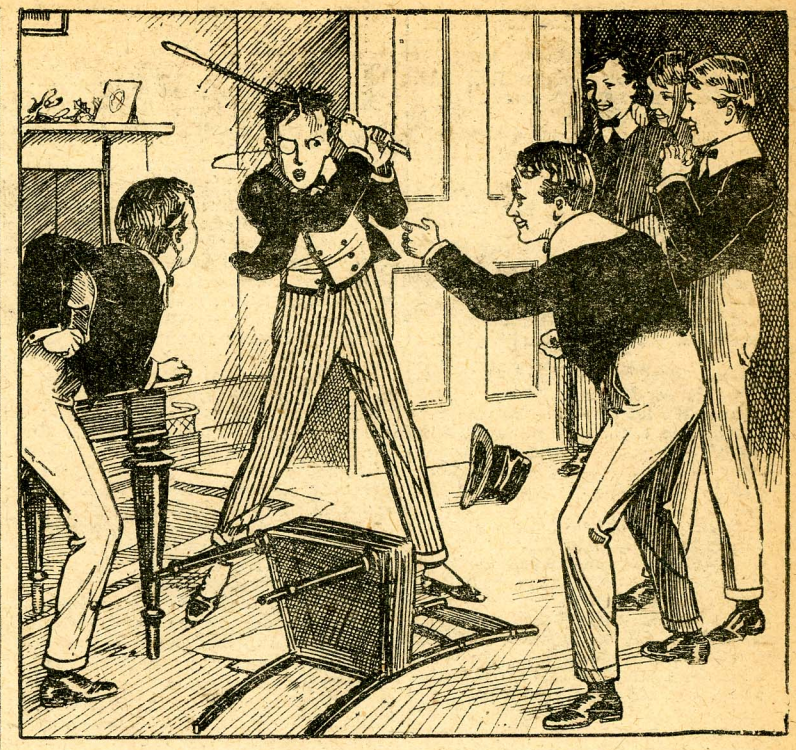
"If you were alludin' to me, with that extwemely oppwobwious expwession, Blake, I can only say—— Yawoooooh!"

Arthur Augustus did not mean to finish his remarks thus. He did so because he suddenly found his head in chancery. Jack Blake had lost his temper.

Pommel, pommel, pommel!

"Yawooh!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, struggling wildly in the grasp of his indignant chum. "Have you gone pottay, Blake? Welease me! Oh, cwumbs! I shall give you a feahful—yawooh!—thwashin'! Oh, deah! Yah! Oh!"

"There!" panted Blake. "Now perhaps you'll think twice before you sit on a chap's neck and punch his nose——"



Gussy on the Defensive!
(See Chapter 7.)

"Gwooh! You uttah wuffian! Hold my eyeglass, Dig!"

"I'll hold your neck if you don't shut up!" growled Dig.

"I am goin' to thwash Blake!" roared Arthur Augustus, quite forgetting the calm repose which ought to stamp the caste of Vere de Vere. "I insist upon your puttin' up your hands, Blake!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Blake. "You fellows coming on? That sneaking rotter, whoever he is, has cleared off. Let's get in. I'm wet all over."

"Blake, you howwid boundah——"

Jack Blake snorted, and tramped on up the path. His chums followed him. They were wet and muddy from their roll in the grass, and all of them were in decidedly morose tempers.

The St. Jim's fellows prided themselves upon being tough, and it was not gratifying to have been handled so easily by the stranger. And they realised, too, that a fellow who could handle three juniors so easily was a fellow it was better to avoid on a lonely path.

They tramped on rather hastily, and came out into the road to the school. There they paused for a moment to listen.

But only the sough of the wind came to their ears now.

There was no sound of footfalls.

"Well, we've shifted him, at any rate!" said Dig.

"Hang him, whoever he was!" growled Blake, caressing his nose. "Not that he would have mattered, if we hadn't had a howling lunatic with us."

"If you are alludin' to me, Blake——"

"Look at my nose!" howled Blake.

"I cannot see your nose in the dark, Blake, so it would be useless lookin' at it."

"It's double size, I believe!" grunted Blake.

"It was a wathah unfortunate mistake, owin' to the dark, Blake, but it would not have hapened if you had not allowed that wottah to get away."

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "I shall spifficate Gussy if he runs on much longer!"

"I should uttahly wefuse to be spifficated——"

"Br-r-r-r! Come on!"

The chums of the Fourth tramped on to the school.

Inglorious as the result of their encounter with the unknown had been, they had at least got rid of the fellow who was dogging their steps. Herries' idea of a gang of footpads in the vicinity was evidently off-side. Yet what motive the fellow could have had for dogging them was a strange mystery.

But Blake and D'Arcy were thinking more about their damaged features than about the unknown, and all four were thinking of their wet and muddy clothes. They were not enjoying that walk home.

It never rains but it pours, and when they reached the school they found that Taggles had locked the gates.

The old porter came down grunting to let them in.

"Which you're late!" he snapped.

"Weally, Taggles, that is wathah a supahfluous piece of information!" remarked D'Arcy.

"Report to Mr. Railton!" grunted Taggles.

"Thank you, deah boy!"

Taggles grunted again, and went back to his lodge, shaking off the snowflakes that had settled on him.

The chums of Study No. 6 tramped on across the quad to the School House.

There were a good many fellows in the lighted hall when they entered, and the muddy state of the four juniors drew attention at once.

"You're late!" said Tom Merry.

"Taggles has just told us that!" growled Blake.

"Been taking the new mud-bath

cure?" asked Monty Lowther humorously.

"Oh, rats!"

"Did you roll home down Rylcombe Hill?" Manners wanted to know.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Oh, come off! Let's get a change!" growled Blake. "Don't waste time talking to those silly Shell-fish!"

"But what's happened?" asked Levison of the Fourth. "You seem to have had bad luck."

"A rotten rotter was following us all the rotten way!" said Blake forcibly "We went for the rotten beast, and—and—and——"

"And what?" asked Tom Merry.

"And—and got rolled over!" grunted Blake.

"All of you?" exclaimed Levison, raising his eyebrows. "One rotter rolled over the lot of you! My word!"

"Three of us, anyway; and then Gussy had to fall on me and punch me in mistake for the other rotter—I mean, in mistake for the rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" said Blake crossly. "Nothing to cackle at that I can see."

"So that's how you picked up that nose?" grinned Cardew of the Fourth.

"Oh, bother my nose!"

"And where did Gussy pick up his?" asked Sidney Clive, laughing. "He looks as if he'd caught it in a gate."

"That uttah ass Blake got my head in chancewy, you know, because I punched his nose by mistake!" said Arthur Augustus, with thrilling indignation. "Any fellah might punch anothah fellah's nose by mistake in the dark."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo!" Kildare of the Sixth came along the passage, and stared at the muddy juniors. "Mr. Railton wants you four. What on earth have you brought all that mud into the house for?"

"Weally, Kildare, it was not of our own choice——"

"Well, go to Mr. Railton now," said the captain of St. Jim's, laughing. "After that, you'd better take a bath with your clothes on!"

"Bai Jove!"

Kildare walked away, and the unhappy four started for the Housemaster's study. There was a loud cackle from Baggy Trimble of the Fourth Form.

"He, he, he! Fancy letting one chap handle them like that! He, he, he! Pity I wasn't with you, Blake! Jevver see such funks?"

It was the last straw. Jack Blake's temper had already been sorely tried. But for the fat funk of the Fourth to lift up the heel against him, as it were, was too much.

Blake spun round and rushed at Baggy Trimble. He smote him hip and thigh, and the fat junior collapsed on the floor with a terrific whoop.

"Yah! Oh! Help! Murder! Rescue! Yaroooooh!"

Somewhat solaced, Blake went on to the Housemaster's study, leaving Trimble roaring.

Mr. Railton looked very severe when they came in. But his expression relaxed as he gazed at the tired and muddy quartette. Blake explained why they were late, and though the Housemaster raised his eyebrows a little at the story of the unknown pursuer who had dogged their steps across the dark fields, he accepted the statement as an excuse. The chums of the Fourth were dismissed with a caution, much to their satisfaction. They did not mind the caution. And they proceeded to the Fourth-Form dormitory for a much-needed wash and a change before they came to Study No. 6 for a very late tea.

CHAPTER 3.
Not in Demand!

"HA, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther, the distinguished humorist of the Shell, gave vent to that sudden burst of merriment.

It was not an hour for merriment, really. The Terrible Three were in their study, and the hour was that supposed to be devoted to evening preparation.

Tom Merry and Manners were working at their prep, but Monty Lowther had allowed his evening task to slide. More important business claimed Lowther's attention.

For the Christmas number of "Tom Merry's Weekly" was in hand, and was taxing the efforts of the numerous editorial and sub-editorial staff. Lowther's comic column was generally a feature of the "Weekly." In the Christmas number he was going to have a whole page, and that was a chance of spreading himself which was not to be neglected. So prep had to go.

Apparently Monty Lowther was very pleased with his humorous efforts. He left off scribbling, and burst into a loud laugh. Monty could always see the intense humour in his own compositions, perhaps because he was such a keen humorist. Many fellows couldn't see it.

Probably Lowther expected his study-mates to look up, with great interest and expectation in their looks. But they didn't. Tom Merry and Manners kept steadily on with their work.

"Ha, ha, ha!" repeated Lowther, a little less enthusiastically.

But deafness seemed to have descended on No. 10 in the Shell. There was no response.

Monty Lowther glared at his insensible chums. Like all great artists, Lowther liked an audience.

"You fellows very busy?" he asked, with deep sarcasm.

"Awfully!" said Manners, without looking up.

"I'm doing my comic page for the Christmas number."

"Do it quietly, then, old chap."

"Yes; don't make a row," said Tom Merry.

"Of all the thumping idiots, I think this study has about the best selection at St. Jim's!" said Lowther witheringly. "I've just written a jolly good thing for the Christmas number——"

"Oh, good!"

"I'll read it to you, if you like," said Lowther, unbending a little.

"That would spoil the effect when we read it in the Christmas number," said Manners blandly.

"Look here, Manners——"

"Besides, we're doing our prep."

"Bother your prep! Bless your prep! Blow your prep!"

"Well, you're bothering enough," said Manners. "Why don't you do your own? I suppose you're not going to read your comic page to Linton in the morning in the Form-room, and tell him you did that instead of prep?"

"Look here," said Monty Lowther, in measured tones. "I've done a rather good thing, and if you'd like to hear it I'll read it out."

"After prep, old chap," said Tom Merry.

"Fathead!"

"Dear man, we're wrestling with merry old Virgil! Leave us to the struggle."

"Yah!"

With that expressive, though hardly classic, remark Monty Lowther rose from the table, his paper in his hand.

"Go and read it to Study No. 6," suggested Manners. "I dare say they'll like it."

"Ha, ha! Study No. 6 mightn't see the humour of this!" grinned Lowther.

"Well, fellows usually don't see the humour of your jokes——"

"Fathead! I'll take it along to No. 9!" grunted Lowther.

"Do!" said Tom Merry and Manners together, with great heartiness.

Lowther marched out of the study, and closed the door after him with quite unnecessary force. Tom and Manners chuckled. They liked Monty Lowther no end, and generally bore with his humorous proclivities nobly; but sometimes they pulled his leg gently. And somehow or other Lowther's great sense of humour often failed him when he was the victim.

Lowther went along to the Fourth-Form passage, and looked into No. 9 there.

Levison and Cardew and Clive were at prep.

At all events, they were supposed to be at prep. Sidney Clive was working away industriously. The South African junior was a hard worker. Ralph Reckness Cardew was yawning over his books. He was a good deal of a slacker, though he could work when he liked, and always kept a good place in the class. Ernest Levison was leaning back in his chair, with a deep wrinkle in his brow, as if in somewhat troubled thought. Lowther coughed emphatically in the doorway, and Study No. 9 all looked at him.

"You fellows like to hear this?" asked Lowther.

"Anythin' that stops work!" said Cardew. "You're a boon and a blessin', Lowther. Go ahead!"

"What is it?" asked Clive.

"Ahem! A little thing I've done for the Christmas number," said Lowther modestly.

"Mercy!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, go ahead, old fellow!"

"Yes, let's have it," said Levison, with a smile. "Hallo, Frank!" He beckoned to the fag who looked in at the doorway behind Lowther. "Trot in! You're just in time."

Levison minor came in.

The fag had a book in his hand, a smear of ink on his chin, and a worried frown on his brow. Evidently he had come to his major for help in some knotty problem which had taxed him more than usual.

"I say, you've not finished prep, have you?" said Frank. "I'll come along later."

"That's all right—we're glad of an interruption," said Cardew. "Can I help you, Franky?"

"It's the ablative absolute——"

"Oh, my hat! Take it next door!"

"All serene, Franky—I'll help," said Levison, laughing. "But first Lowther is going to reduce us to a proper state of seriousness. Go it, Lowther!"

"Look here, Levison——"

"Go it! Got your handkerchief, Frank?"

"Yes," said Frank, in surprise.

"You'll need it. Lowther is going to read us one of his best jokes. We all cry together."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther gave Study No. 9 a glare. Instead of reading out the splendid joke which was to grace the columns of the Christmas number of the "Weekly," he stepped out into the passage, and closed the door with a slam. There was a burst of merriment from the chums of No. 9.

"Poor old Lowther!" grinned Clive. "He never can take a little joke against himself!"

"Lots of humorists like that!" grinned Cardew.

"It's too bad," said Frank Levison, laughing. "Some of Lowther's jokes ain't bad. Wally says he gets them from back numbers of 'Chuckles.'"

"Wally is a youth of great perspicacity," said Cardew gravely. "Are you chaps going to worry the ablative absolute now?"

"Yes, ass," said Levison.

"Wake me up when you've finished," said Cardew, sinking into the armchair.

"Look at the dashed thing, Ernie!" said Frank Levison. "Old Selby's put me on the ablative absolute, you know, and he oughtn't, really. He wants to catch me out, I believe. This rot is Horace——"

Levison chuckled. Frank's opinion of the great Q. Horatius Flaccus was evidently not a favourable one.

"Mr. Selby isn't putting you on Horace, surely?" exclaimed Clive.

"He's told me to pick out an example of the ablative absolute," said Frank ruefully. "We don't do Horace in the Third, of course; but it's just like Selby. He likes catching a fellow. I asked Talbot, and he said this piffle about a chap named Teucer would fill the bill. Is it all right, Ernie? Teucro duce et auspice Teucro——"

"Dear old Teucer!" murmured Cardew. "On the whole, I think I'll go after Lowther. I almost prefer his comic column to the ablative absolute."

And Cardew strolled out of the study, leaving Levison major and his minor with their heads bent over Q. Horatius Flaccus, and Clive grinding away on the other side of the table.

CHAPTER 4.

The Woes of a Humorist!

MONTY LOWTHER was wrathful. There was often a plentiful lack of appreciation for his best jokes. But he felt that there ought to be a limit. In the affairs of the St. Jim's Parliament, Lowther's humorous observations were generally howled down. In the junior debating society fellows would actually rise on a point of order and demand that feeble humorists should be either gagged or ejected. And now here he was, with the best joke of the season—he had no doubt that it was the best joke of the season—and fellows, instead of listening to it and roaring with mirth, persisted in making feeble jokes at Lowther himself.

Really, it was hardly worth while to cultivate his great gift of humour, at this rate.

But Lowther was not to be beaten. He walked along to the study in the Shell passage tenanted by Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn. He was prepared to let Grundy & Co. have the first benefit of his latest effort.

He found Grundy laying down the law in the study, instead of doing his prep. Wilkins and Gunn were listening. They had no choice about that.

"What I want to know is," said Grundy, "what's the good of having a school parliament at all, if the most sensible chap in the school isn't made Premier? Answer that!"

"That!" said Lowther, looking in.

Grundy stared at him.

"Eh? What do you mean by butting in and bleating 'that'?" he inquired politely.

"You said answer that," explained Lowther laboriously. That was the worst of being an unappreciated humorist; it led to so many laborious explanations. "So I answered 'that'—see?"

"No, I don't see!"

"Oh, crumbs! You said——"

"Don't say it all over again," said Grundy. "I suppose it was one of your jokes?"

"Yes, you ass! You said——"

"That'll do! For mercy's sake don't explain it, if it's a joke! What I want to know is, why shouldn't I be Premier? There's a strong resemblance between Lloyd George and me——"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Wilkins.

"Nothing to be surprised at in that, Wilkins," said Grundy. "I've been struck several times by the resemblance, in many ways between the Prime Minister and myself."

"Better not say that in public!" said Lowther warningly.

"Eh? Why shouldn't I say it in public?"

"It might come under the Defence of the Realm Act."

"You silly ass!" roared Grundy, while Wilkins and Gunn chuckled.

Monty Lowther brightened up. Those chuckles from Wilkins and Gunn were like music to his ears—though not particularly musical in themselves. After all, his gift of humour was not quite unappreciated; his voice was not like unto a voice crying in the wilderness.

"I've got a little thing here to read to your fellows," said Lowther, encouraged.

"Rats!" said Grundy. "Is it a speech for the St. Jim's Parliament?"

"No, it isn't! Blow the St. Jim's Parliament!"

"Well, that's what we're discussing. I want to know why I shouldn't be Premier of St. Jim's!" snorted Grundy. "I'd make things hum, I tell you. If you've got anything to say against it, Lowther——"

"I haven't," said Lowther pacifically. He was quite willing to concede all George Alfred Grundy's extensive claims at that moment. "You'd make a ripping Premier, Grundy! In fact, you're wasted here. I'm sure that if you'd been Premier of Britain the war would be over by now."

"Well, I'm glad you can see it," said Grundy, mollified. "What's that you've got there, Lowther? You can read it out if you like."

Properly speaking, Grundy & Co. ought to have begged Lowther to read it out, and hung upon his words. But half a loaf was better than no bread; and, at all events, Lowther was able to read it out at last.

"It's about Study No. 6," he said.

"Those Fourth Form kids!" said Grundy disdainfully.

"You know how they were bowled over by some chap coming home this evening——"

"No, I don't."

"Well, they were. I've made up some comic verses about it——"

Cardew looked in at the door.

"You here, Lowther? Am I in time? Thank goodness! I was afraid I had missed it!" And Cardew gasped with relief.

Lowther gave him a very suspicious look. But the dandy of the Fourth was quite grave.

"Well, shut up, and I'll read it out," said Lowther. "It's about Study No 6 being bowled over by that chap in the fields."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Cardew.

"Eh? What are you laughing at?"

"The joke!"

"I haven't read out the joke yet, you idiot!"

"Oh! My mistake!" said Cardew, becoming grave again. "Read it out, old scout!"

Monty Lowther frowned, and Grundy & Co. grinned. Really, it seemed as if Cardew were the humorist, and not Lowther at all.

"It's in the form of a limerick," said Lowther, clearing his throat with a little preliminary cough.

"If it's in the form of a limerick, it is a limerick, isn't it?" asked Gunn, who was sometimes a rather precise youth.

"Well, yes."

"Then it's a limerick," said Gunn. "No need to say it's in the form of a limerick if it is a limerick."

"Quite so," said Grundy. "Gunn's right. You don't express yourself very clearly, Lowther."

Monty Lowther very nearly boiled over. It was rather too much to be called to order by the thickest-headed fellow in the Shell. But he restrained his feelings.

"Well, it is a limerick, then, if you like that better!" he snapped.

"I don't think much of limericks," said Grundy, with a shake of the head. "Jolly easy to do. Still, I dare say it's the best you can do, Lowther. Chap can't get above his own brain level, of course. Go on!"

"You howling dummy!" roared Lowther.

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, dry up a minute, and I'll read it out," said the unhappy Lowther, realising that he was in danger again of losing his audience. "Here goes!"

"Hush!" murmured Cardew breathlessly.

Lowther, with an expression that was not in the least humorous, read it out:

"Blake, Herries, and Digby and Gussy,
Were feeling so nervy and fussy,
That they tackled a lout,
Who pitched them about,
And they bolted, all howling for mussy!"

Monty Lowther, like Brutus, paused for a reply, expecting that reply in the shape of a burst of Homeric laughter.

But it did not come.

Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn looked surprised and perplexed. Ralph Reckness Cardew took out a delicate cambric handkerchief, and wiped away a tear.

There was silence in Grundy's study—a silence that could be felt. Monty Lowther broke it.

"Understand?" he asked, with intense sarcasm.

"I can't quite say I do," said Gunn thoughtfully. "I didn't quite catch on to the last word. Is it an English word?"

"German, I should think," said Grundy. "I don't think you ought to introduce a German word into a British school magazine, Lowther. It's unpatriotic."

"It isn't a German word!" shrieked Lowther.

"Well, it's not French," said Grundy.

"Of course it isn't, you—you jabberwock."

"Italian?" asked Cardew blandly.

"No!" roared Lowther.

"It's not Latin," said Grundy positively. "And I don't believe it's Greek. Is it Greek?"

"Greek to you, perhaps," said Lowther, unable to resist the opportunity for another joke.

But Grundy's great mind rose far above a mere play upon words. He did not see the point, and did not want to.

"How could it be Greek to me unless it's really Greek?" he inquired. "You seem to be wandering in your mind, Lowther."

"What language is it, anyhow?" asked Gunn.

"English, you ass!" yelled Lowther. "It's a comic way of pronouncing the word mercy."

"A comic way?" asked Cardew.

"Yes, ass!"

"Sure it's comic?"

"Yes!" howled the unhappy humorist.

"Oh, all right! You ought to know, being a humorist. Gentlemen, this is where we laugh," said Cardew. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grundy & Co.

It was the burst of Homeric laughter at last; but somehow it did not seem to gratify Lowther, now he had got it.

He glared at the hilarious juniors.

"You frabjous asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You burbling, chortling jabberwocks——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you——"

"Have we laughed in the wrong place?" asked Cardew anxiously. "Sorry! But you said yourself that it was comic, and we took your word for it. Look here, read it out over again, and hold up your hand when it's time to laugh. Then there can't be a mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grundy & Co., without waiting for Lowther to hold up his hand.

Monty Lowther did not read out his composition again. Instead of doing that, he rushed at Cardew, caught him round the neck, and waltzed out into the passage with him.

They left Grundy & Co. roaring.

"Bai Jove! What's the trouble?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hurried up. "Pway don't let your angwy passions wise, deah boys—— Yahoooooop!"

The kind-hearted Gussy essayed to separate the combatants, with the unfortunate result that he received Lowther's left on the nose, and Cardew's right in his neck. It was a case in which the peacemaker was not blessed.

Arthur Augustus sat on the floor and yelled.

Lowther and Cardew glared at one another and separated. Monty Lowther stamped back to his own study without seeking an audience further. Tom Merry and Manners smiled as he came in. They had finished prep, and were prepared to hear the humorous effort.

"Out with it, Monty!" said Tom encouragingly.

Lowther snorted.

"What's the matter with your nose?" asked Manners.

"Rats!"

And Monty Lowther sat down to his belated prep, and refused to say another word.

CHAPTER 5.
A Late Repentance!

CARDEW was grinning as he strolled back into No. 9. He was also dabbing his nose with his handkerchief.

Frank Levison was gone, and prep was over. Sidney Clive was working at the table, but he was now engaged upon a story of the veldt and karroo for "Tom Merry's Weekly." Levison was in the armchair, staring thoughtfully at the remnant of fire in the grate.

"Been rowing?" asked Clive, looking up.

"Only pullin' Lowther's leg," said Cardew cheerfully. "Queer how his sense of humour fails him at times, isn't it?"

Clive laughed.

"Penny for 'em, Levison," said Cardew, with a curious look at his study-mate's thoughtful face. "What deep problem are you thinkin' out? Not goin' to try for Prime Minister in the St. Jim's Parliament?"

"Rot!" said Levison.

"Well, we ought to be able to dig up a lot of fun as general opposition to everythin'," remarked Cardew. "Are you thinkin' that out?"

"Oh, no!"

"Dear me, surely you haven't been revertin' to your old naughty ways, an' puttin' money on geegees? Are you wrestlin' with the problem of how to deal with a bad bookie who insists upon bein' paid?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" grunted Levison.

"Certainly not," said Cardew urbanely. "Any more polite an' cheery remarks to make?"

"I've been thinking," said Levison, with a knitted brow.

"Yes; I could see it was givin' you a pain. Hence my friendly inquiries."

"Oh, don't rot! I'm worried."

Clive laid down his pen. He had seen some time ago that there was something up with Ernest Levison; but he had left it to Levison to explain if he liked. Cardew looked a little more serious, though it was seldom that he could be forced into a serious mood.

"Don't mind my rottin'," said Cardew. "If there's any trouble, old chap, get it off your chest, and rely on us."

"Go ahead," said Clive concisely. "There's three of us to stand it together, Levison."

Levison smiled.

"I'm not exactly in any trouble," he said. "But—but—but——" He frowned again. "Another chap is—awful trouble."

"Friend of yours?" asked Cardew.

"No."

"St. Jim's chap?"

"Not now."

"Some fellow who's left?"

"Yes."

"And not a friend of yours?"

"No. I—I was his enemy while he was here," said Levison, colouring.

"My hat!" said Cardew, in wonder. "You're worrying because an enemy of yours is in trouble? You used to be a hard case, Levison, but I'm dashed if you can't give points to Good Little Georgie now! Beware of the downward path, my infant. If you keep on like this you'll wind up as a conscientious objector."

"Oh, don't rot, I tell you!" said Levison. "The fellow's in trouble."

"What does it matter to you if he is, then?"

"Well, it doesn't, I suppose."

"Then let the rotter rip!"

"He's not a rotter"

"Didn't you say you were his enemy while he was here?"

Levison's flush deepened.

"It wasn't because he was a rotter," he said.

"Then why was it?"

"Because I was rather a rotter, I'm afraid."

"Oh!"

There was a silence in Study No. 9. Levison's confession had startled both his study-mates.

They knew what Levison had been in the past. He had been—and had prided himself upon being—a hard case in the School House at St. Jim's.

That was before Clive and Cardew had come to the school. But Levison's old reputation was by no means forgotten. Fellows like Racke and Crooke and Mellish affected to believe that his reform was all spoof. Tom Merry & Co. fully believed in him, and were his friends. But naturally the reputation of a specially hard case took time to live down. Clive and Cardew had heard all about it from many quarters.

Levison broke the silence, his face crimson.

"I—I looked at things a bit differently then," he said. "I wasn't wholly in the wrong, either. But—but I was rough on that poor chap, and no mistake. He had to go."

"Through you?" asked Clive very quietly.

"Partly through me."

"Levison, you can't mean——"

"Don't think it's worse than it is. I mean it was partly through me that it came out that he was what he was. He had to go because he was—what he was," said Levison, in a low voice. "He wasn't turned out. He simply left the school all of a sudden, without a word of explanation being given. I never knew all the facts. I fancy Tom Merry does, and the chaps in Study No. 6. He was very friendly with D'Arcy."

"He can't have been a rotter if he was friendly with Gussy," said Clive.

"He wasn't a rotter. He was decent enough while he was here. But he had been——" Levison paused.

"Well, what had he been?" asked Cardew curiously.

"In a reformatory!"

"Phew!"

"A reformatory?" exclaimed Clive.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"For badly injuring a man in a fight."

"Hold on!" said Cardew. "He was a junior here, I understand?"

"Yes; in the Fourth Form."

"I don't quite see how a chap in the Fourth Form could injure a man in a fight so seriously as all that. Sure you've got it right? Was he some merry infant prodigy?"

"He was extraordinary in his strength," said Levison. "It was amazing—the kind of thing that doesn't occur once in ten thousand times. He was in the Fourth, and not remarkable to look at; only when he stripped you could see that his muscular development was a bit out of the common. He could have knocked out Kildare or Darrel of the Sixth with one hand."

"Great Scott! Not the kind of chap to make an enemy of!" grinned Cardew. "You were rather reckless, old scout."

"But how the merry thump could a reformatory kid get into this school?" exclaimed Clive, in astonishment.

"That's what beat me at first. But ——"

"By gad! I've heard him spoken of, now I come to think of it. A kid in the Fourth who stood up to a gang of hooligans who had gone for D'Arcy, and knocked them out. I thought it was a bit of a fairy-tale. Was that chap's name Outram?"

"That's it—Valentine Outram."

"I've heard of him. Some of the fellows spoke of him once," said Cardew, with a nod. "He left suddenly, before I came here."

"Yes, I've heard the name, now I think of it," said Clive. "I heard D'Arcy refer to him once—he spoke of him as a friend."

"D'Arcy was very friendly with him. I—I wasn't!" said Levison. "It's a queer yarn, and I'd rather have forgotten it. It's been brought back to my mind. He's in trouble."

"Suppose you spin us the yarn?" said Cardew. "It sounds interestin'."

"It's not much to tell. I've got an uncle who's governor of a Juvenile Prison. I stayed a vac with him, and saw some of the kid prisoners, and one of them was a chap of tremendous strength, named George Purkiss. I happened to notice him particularly, because his strength was spoken of. He'd knocked a warder about—a grown man. I'd forgotten all about him, though, when suddenly I saw that new fellow—Outram. I recognised him as Purkiss."

"My word! Then he came here under an assumed name?" exclaimed Cardew. "What a nerve!"

"No; it seems that Outram was his real name. I denounced him——"

"Well, that was the right thing to do if you thought he was an impostor," said Clive.

"That's so; but—but when he proved that he was Outram, I—I got spiteful." Levison flushed again deeply. "I—I was rather a beast, and I'm not denying it. It was proved that he was Valentine Outram, son of Major Outram, and nephew of Sir Robert Outram, who brought him to St. Jim's. His father was at the Front. I—I was jeered at for saying he was Purkiss, and it put my back up. The chap's character didn't bear it out, either. He was a Pacifist——"

"Oh, gad!" said Cardew.

"Nothing would make him fight—not even punching his nose."

"Must have been a queer fish."

"I thought it was all humbug, to make out a clear distinction between him and Purkiss, who was a quarrelsome character, you see. But—but I've thought over it since. When D'Arcy was set on by a gang of roughs, Outram dropped all his pacifism, and saved him. That fairly gave him away, of course. It was immediately after that that he left. The fellow who had such wonderful strength was Purkiss, plain enough, and the fact that he had hidden it so long showed that he had good reason for hiding it. Still, nothing came out—he just left, without a word, though I think there was an explanation in Study No. 6 before he went. I—I understand him better now. I believe his pacifism was genuine enough. He was afraid of losing his temper, and hurting somebody if he gave way to it—as he had done before. And I think he had some queer idea of atonement for having been brutal once, by submitting to ragging that he could have stopped by lifting one hand if he liked."

"But you're sure that Outram was really that chap Purkiss?" said Clive doubtfully. "You say it was never proved."

"No, the matter dropped when he left; but I knew very well that that was why he left. After the splendid way he stood up for Gussy, all the fellows liked him, and they were determined to think the best of him, especially as he had gone."

"But if his name was Outram——"

"I suspected first that he was spoofing about that. But it was proved right enough. I thought it out afterwards. He was sentenced to the reformatory in a town a long way from his home. He must have given a false name there. He was sentenced under the name of Purkiss—trying to save the disgrace, I suppose, by keeping his real name dark. That didn't occur to me at first, but it was pretty clear afterwards."

Levison paused.

"I was rotten hard on him," he said, in a low voice. "It's clear to me now that he had repented—more than repented—and that if that old chapter in his life could have been closed, he would never have been guilty again of anything rotten. I dragged it all up. I thought I was acting from a sense of duty, and so I was, too, in a way; but if I'd been a bit kinder—more considerate—I should have looked at the matter differently, and given him a chance. I was sorry afterwards—not that it was much good then. I—I've never spoken about it to anybody, but Frank. Frank heard something about it in the Third, and asked me, and I told him. I—I shouldn't have mentioned it to you chaps, only"—Levison rose restlessly—"he's in trouble."

"Outram is?"

"Yes; bad trouble."

"The same thing over again?" asked Cardew comprehensively.

"It looks like it. Look here. His picture's there."

Levison passed a newspaper over to his chums. There was a tap at the door, and Tom Merry came in, with a cheerful face.

"You fellows busy?" he asked, with a smile. "Grundy is calling a Parliamentary meeting in the Common-room, and I think he's going to get the frog's-march. My hat!" Tom started as he caught sight of a photograph printed in the newspaper, in Cardew's hand. "Outram, by gum!"

CHAPTER 6.
The Fugitive!

TOM MERRY stared at the pictured face in the paper in astonishment.

There was an awkward pause in Study No. 9.

Cardew and Clive were looking at the photograph with interest. It was that of a handsome, quiet-looking lad, fresh and healthy, but with a grave expression that seemed beyond his years.

"Outram!" repeated Tom Merry, in wonder. "That's a photograph of Outram, who used to be in the School House here."

"You fellows comin'?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass gleamed in. "We are goin' to give Gwunday the fwog's-march for his feahful cheek, you know. The uttah ass has the awful nerve to claim to be Pwemiah, because he has a wemarkable wesemblance to Lloyd George, you know—the uttah duffah! There is no wesemblance at all. They are quite diffewent kind of duffahs—I mean, Gwunday is a diffewent kind of duffah—that is to say—— Bai Jove, what are you fellows lookin' so feahfully sewious about?"

Arthur Augustus looked from one to another in surprise.

Then his eye caught the photograph, and he started.

"Outwam, bai Jove!"

"Yes, it's Outram," said Levison.

"My old pal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. He looked sternly at Levison. "The splendid chap you were down on, Levison, you—ahem!"

"That's ancient history now," said Tom Merry hastily. "What on earth is Outram's photograph doing in the paper, Levison?"

"He's wanted," said Levison.

"Wanted?"

"Yes."

"You can't mean——"

"Are you goin' to say anythin' against Valentine Outram, in your old style, Levison?" asked Arthur Augustus, his voice trembling with anger. "If you are, I warn you that I shall knock it back down your throat!"

Levison looked at him quietly, without anger.

"I'm not saying anything against him, D'Arcy. He's in trouble, and I'd help him if I could."

"Oh!" said Arthur Augustus, taken aback. "I—I withdwaw my wemark, Levison. I—I thought——"

"You shouldn't!" snapped Cardew. "You know your brain won't stand it!"

"Weally, Cardew——"

"But what's this about Outram?" asked Tom Merry anxiously. "Why should the old chap be in trouble?"

"Read what it says."

"Wead it out, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

Tom Merry, with knitted brows, read out the paragraph printed under the pictured face in the paper.

"'MISSING!

"'Valentine Outram, age fifteen-and-a-half, height five feet five-and-a-half inches, very sturdy build. Eyes blue, complexion fair. Unusually strong for his age. May be passing under assumed name. Communicate with Headmaster, High Coombe School, Devon, or Sir Robert Outram, Outram Lodge, Surrey. Liberal reward.'"

There was a tense silence in the study when Tom Merry finished reading. It was broken by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Poor old Outwam! He's wun away fwom school, the ass!"

"So he went to another school, after leaving here," said Tom Merry. "His uncle sent him to Devonshire—a good distance. I suppose that was only wise. But what has he bolted for?"

"He must have—have done somethin'——" Arthur Augustus hesitated. "I—I mean, he must have wun away for some weason."

"Go hon!" murmured Cardew.

Tom Merry's face was troubled.

Outram had evidently run away from school, and had not gone home. What trouble had fallen upon him at his new school?

It could not simply be that his old adventure under the name of Purkiss had come to light at High Coombe, as it had at St. Jim's. For in that case surely he would have gone home to his uncle.

Sir Robert Outram had known nothing of that strange episode in his nephew's past when he sent the boy to St. Jim's.

But Outram must have explained since. For he must have given some reason for leaving St. Jim's so suddenly.

If that miserable episode had cropped up again, haunting him with the shadow of the past, doubtless he would leave his new school; but surely he would go home. There was more in it than that.

What had Outram done?

His headmaster and his uncle were both concerned in advertising for the missing junior. Did his headmaster, then, want him to return to High Coombe?

For what?

For punishment. That was the only possible answer. It was not the old shadow on Outram's life that had cropped up again. It was a new offence.

It seemed certain to Tom Merry's mind.

He remembered what Outram had told him before he went—how his temper had broken out, and he had used his strength in a fight with a man who had picked a quarrel with him, and hurt the man. He had never dared to trust his temper after that, to trust himself in a fight. He had gone to the length of being called a funk at St. Jim's by his strange policy of turning the other cheek.

But now!

Tom Merry felt utterly miserable. In spite of that one black episode in Outram's life, he had liked the junior—he had respected him for the brave struggle he had made to atone.

Levison took the paper and folded it up, with the photograph of Outram inside. Levison's face was very grave. The discovery that poor Outram was in trouble again had awakened keen remorse in his breast.

Levison was changed now—greatly changed. But he could not forget how bitterly, how ungenerously, he had pursued the unfortunate lad during his brief career at St. Jim's.

"He must have done something," said Sidney Clive at last. "Something he would be punished for, and he dare not go home."

"By gad!" said Cardew. "I'll find that out!"

The juniors looked at him.

"How can you find it out?" said Tom Merry shortly.

Cardew smiled.

"I know a man at High Coombe. My old tutor got a post there as master when I came to St. Jim's. He's written to me once or twice, an' I've neglected to

answer—awfully busy doin' nothin', you know. I'll answer his letter now, and ask about Outram."

"I am quite suah that it will turn out to be nothin' to Outwam's discredit, if we knew the facts," said Arthur Augustus loyally. "Some wotten beast may have got up somethin' against him, the same as happened here. Ahem!" He checked himself abruptly.

"Rub it in!" said Levison bitterly.

"I beg your pardon, Levison. I did not mean——"

"Oh, you can pile it on! I treated Outram rottenly, and I know it," said Levison, with downcast eyes. "I'd do anything to make it even, but I can't do anything. I feel it bad enough."

"I—I'm sowwy——"

"I'd like to know what Outram's trouble is," said Tom Merry. "It may be possible for us to speak up for him, as we knew him, and knew he was straight as a die."

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, brightening up. "I'd walk all the way to Devonshire to say a word for poor old Outwam."

"And—and the less said about this here the better," said Tom Merry hesitatingly. "This may blow over for Outram, and—and we don't want his name made the talk of the school, do we?"

"I intended to keep it to this study," said Levison. "I showed it to you and D'Arcy because you were Outram's friends. No need for it to go further."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "Better keep it dark. Of course, I must tell Blake and Hewwies and Dig, but they will not jaw."

"And Manners and Lowther, if you like, Tom Merry. But keep it at that."

"Right!" said Tom.

D'Arcy and the captain of the Shell left No. 9 with thoughtful faces. They were not thinking of the rag on George Alfred Grundy now.

The great Grundy was already getting the frog's march in the junior Common-room, to the accompaniment of a great deal of noise, but the rag proceeded without Tom Merry's or D'Arcy's assistance.

Levison of the Fourth slipped the paper into his pocket.

"I came on this by chance," he said. "I kept the paper—it's a good many days old. I—I've been thinking about it ever since."

"The chap must have done something at High Coombe," said Clive.

Levison nodded.

"I—I'm afraid it's something like the last," he said. "His temper may have broken out again, and he's hit out, and—and somebody's got hurt. But I'd help him if I could."

"We shall know soon what he's accused of, anyway," said Cardew. "I'll write to old Trotman at once."

And Cardew sat down to write his letter to High Coombe without delay. Clive left the study, and Levison sat in the armchair again, a wrinkle in his brow. He could not help thinking of Outram—a fugitive now, in the bitter winter weather. What sort of Christmas-tide was coming for Valentine Outram?

What had he done at his new school? Levison did not know, but he knew that at St. Jim's, at least, Outram had been more sinned against than sinning. From the bottom of his heart Levison repented of his hard dealing with the unhappy lad, and wished that an opportunity would come to set that wrong right.

The shadow of the past lay black over Ernest Levison, as over Valentine Outram. Could Levison do anything to atone?

CHAPTER 7.
A Sore Subject!

BUMP!

Yell!

Those lively sounds proceeded from Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage in the School House.

It was a couple of days after Blake & Co.'s unfortunate adventure with the unknown near Pepper's barn. But during those two days the incident had not been forgotten.

Study No. 6 were willing to forget it. But it did not rest with them. The fact that three of them had been handled like infants by a tramp seemed to tickle the fancy of the School House juniors.

The fellows would not let it rest.

Baggy Trimble made the most of it. Trimble was a funk of the first water, so he found a certain amount of pleasure in attributing funk to Study No. 6. It was not quite safe to do so in the presence of those warlike juniors, however, as Baggy was finding to his cost.

Trimble had just looked in at No. 6, in the hope of being asked in to tea. He had had tea in Hall, and another tea in his own study—both frugal meals, owing to the food regulations and shortness of cash. He was prepared for another tea if he could get it. But instead of an invitation to tea Baggy only received a cushion on the waistcoat, hurled by Jack Blake's unerring hand. Whereupon Baggy yelled "Yah! Funks!" and Study No. 6 collared him, and bumped him on the study carpet; and Baggy yelled still more loudly.

Blake and Herries and Digby were bumping Trimble, causing clouds of dust to rise and a series of fiendish yells. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked on with calm approval.

"Wag him, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. "Wag the wottah! Anybody who accuses this study of funk is a wottah, and must be wagged. But, bai Jove, mind you don't burst him! It would wuin the carpet!"

Bump, bump!

"Yaroooh!"

"You must weally learn bettah mannahs, Twimble. Blake and Hewwies and Dig were not funkay in dealin' with that twamp chap! Pewwaps a little nervous——"

"What?" yelled Blake.

"Pewwaps a little nervous, deah boys, owin' to my not bein' with you to buck you up—— Yawooh! Wharrer you at?"

Blake & Co. suddenly released Trimble, and collared Arthur Augustus instead. The next bump was apportioned to the noble Gussy.

"There, you chump!" panted Blake. "That'll show you whether we were nervous."

"Yawoooh!"

Trimble sat up, gasping.

"Oh, crumbs! You rotters! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Welease me, you uttah wuffians!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, struggling in the grasp of his incensed chums. "It is not my fault if you were wathah nervous—yoooooop!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Oh cwumbs! Oh, cwikey!"

Trimble staggered up.

"He, he, he!"

He backed to the door, while Blake & Co. were busy with the swell of the Fourth.

"He, he, he! Yah! Funks!"

Blake and Herries and Dig released Arthur Augustus at that fresh insult, and spun round towards Baggy Trimble.

Baggy bolted through the doorway.

Then there was a roar.

Trimble had bolted fairly into Levison and Cardew and Clive, who were coming along the passage.

The three juniors went staggering, and Baggy sat on the floor and roared.

The next minute Study No. 6 were upon him. Three pairs of boots helped Baggy along the passage. He fled wildly, with Blake and Herries and Dig in hot pursuit, dribbling him down to the stairs.

Grundy of the Shell was coming up, and he viewed the scene with a stern frown.

"Now, then, stop that bullying!" said Grundy authoritatively.

"What?" yelled Blake.

"Stop that bullying!"

Baggy Trimble was allowed to run.

Blake & Co. seized upon the great George Alfred, bumped him on the floor, and rolled him down the stairs. By the time he reached the next landing, Grundy of the Shell had reason to repent him that he had chipped in.

The three juniors, with wrathful brows, returned to Study No. 6.

"What's the name of that game?" asked Cardew.

"Oh, rats!"

"Gwoogh!" came a voice from within the study. "Gwoogh! It was wotten of Twimble to hint that you fellows were funkay the othah night, but I wepeat that you were wathah nervous——"

Arthur Augustus had no time to finish. His study-mates rushed in to deal with him, and there was a terrific uproar in the study as Levison & Co. went on their way grinning.

"Hallo, this sounds like a merry dog-fight!" remarked Monty Lowther, as the Terrible Three came along from the stairs.

The chums of the Shell looked in.

Arthur Augutus was in a corner of the study, very dusty and dishevelled, brandishing the poker

"Keep off, you feahful wottahs! I shall bwain you, you know. I wefuse to be wagged! I wegard you as wuffians!"

"What's the row?" grinned Manners.

Blake snorted.

"Gussy is too funny, that's all!"

"I wepeat——"

"Shut up!" roared Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Ring off, you burbling jabberwock!" howled Blake.

"I wefuse to be woared at, Blake. It thwows me into a fluttah when a fellow woars at me like a wagin' bull!"

"Hush, hush!" said Monty Lowther soothingly. "Let me read you a little comic thing I've composed in honour of this study, and it will soothe you."

"Oh, travel!"

"Listen! Lend me your ears, dear boys! I'm sure this will entertain you."

And Lowther recited:

"Blake, Herries, and Digby and Gussy,
Were feeling so nervy and fussy,
That they tackled a lout,
Who pitched them about,
And they bolted; all howling for mussy."

Study No. 6 listened to that beautiful composition. They glared as they listened. Then, with one accord, the four of them rushed at the humorist of the Shell.

"Here, I say—hold on——" yelled Lowther.

The humorist went flying through the doorway, and landed in the passage. Tom Merry and Manners were shoved after him, and the door of Study No. 6 slammed.

Lowther scrambled up.

"I—I—I'll scalp them!" he roared. "Come on!"

"Yes, come on—to tea!" smiled Tom

Merry, collaring him. "Take his other arm, Manners."

"I'm going to smash them——"

"My dear chap, you've punished them already——"

"Eh? How have I punished them?"

"Well, you've recited your poetry to them!"

"You silly owl!"

"Come on," said Tom Merry, laughing, and the wrathful humorist was walked away to the Shell passage.

Lowther's humorous limerick had had the effect of uniting Study No. 6. They had acted as one man against the enemy.

"The cheeky wottah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Fancy hintin' that this study was pitched about, and howled for mercy! The cheeky ass! It was only you fellows who were pitched about——"

"What?"

"Because you were wathah nervous——"

Arthur Augustus did not finish. Once again there were sounds of strife in Study No. 6!

CHAPTER 8.

What Outram Did at High Coombe!

"IS that from High Coombe?" Levison asked the question, as Cardew came into Study No. 9 with a letter in his hand.

Cardew nodded.

"It's from my old tutor," he said. "He's told me about Outram."

Clive set down his tea-cup.

"Well, what's the news?" he asked.

"I'll read out the bit about Outram."

Cardew looked over the letter.

"Hope you are progressing—h'm—remember that work is necesary as well as play——oh, my hat! Oh, here it is. The boy you name, Valentine Outram, was here until recently. He was a very quiet lad, to all seeming, and did not attract much attention in the school. His sudden outbreak came as a surprise to all. He was guilty of a most unheard-of outrage—nothing less than an attack upon a master——"

"Oh!" ejaculated Levison.

Clive looked very grave.

Cardew proceeded:

"He appears to have had very bitter animus against Herr Gompers, the German master. Herr Gompers, naturally, was not popular among the boys, owing to his nationality. Outram, with unexampled audacity, interfered between him and a boy he was punishing, and struck him. The master proceeded to chastise him, and was knocked senseless to the floor of the class-room. This was the first discovery of Outram's extraordinary physical strength. Herr Gompers is now ill in bed, as a result of the assault, and Outram has disappeared. He would, of course, have been expelled from the school, but his punishment could hardly have stopped there, as Herr Gompers is determined to invoke the law. For certain reasons connected with Outram's past, it is probable that his punishment will be severe, and will be administered by the law. I am not surprised that you say he has many friends at his former school, as he was quite liked here, and was apparently a very quiet and inoffensive boy until the occasion of this amazing outbreak. It must be said for him that he had never taken advantage of his extraordinary strength; he was seldom or never engaged in a quarrel, and certainly never appeared to be overbearing in any way. In fact, he had rather given the impression of being a timid boy, which makes his outbreak all the more surprising."

Cardew looked up from his letter.

"That's all about Outram," he said.

"Serious enough!" said Clive. "I—I suppose it was a bit thick, knocking a man senseless. He couldn't be expected to like Huns though, his father's at the Front killing Huns."

"The Hun may have ragged him," said Levison.

Cardew coughed.

"Old Schneider rags us in class," he said. "I don't think any St. Jim's chap would think of knocking him senseless, though."

"Outram may have hit harder than he intended. He was like a young Sandow," said Levison. "I—I don't know that I blame a chap much for hitting a Hun."

"Well, there's such a thing as law and order," remarked Cardew. "Of course, it would be a distinct pleasure to hit any master in the eye, if you come to that."

"I daresay he had reason for what he did," said Levison doggedly. "I'd stand by him, if I had a chance."

Cardew laughed.

"You mean you were down on him too much once, and you want to make up for it by backing him up against all rhyme and reason," he said.

"Well, there may be something in that," admitted Levison. "Anyway, I'd like to show him that—that I'm sorry for what happened while he was at St. Jim's."

"Not likely to have a chance," said Clive. "You're not likely to meet him."

Levison knitted his brows.

"I don't know," he said.

"You don't think he's likely to come anywhere near St. Jim's!" grinned Cardew. "Too jolly well known in this neighbourhood!"

"Yes, I—I suppose so."

"Hallo! Here's the Honourable Member for the Third!" said Cardew, as Frank Levison came into the study. "Wherefore that grin, my young friend?"

"Just seen old Pepper!" said Frank cheerfly. "There were three of us—Wally and Reggie and me—and old Pepper and three snowballs! It was ripping!"

"There may be difficulties about the St. Jim's House of Parliament if you snowball old Pepper!" said Clive, laughing.

"Well, he is a rotter!" said Frank. "We were only looking round the barn, and he came down on us. It's our barn now, isn't it, so long as the rent's paid for it? The cheeky old beggar said we'd been playing tricks in his cottage!"

"And you hadn't?" chuckled Cardew.

"No—honest Injun! As if we'd want to sneak his mouldy old bread and cheese!" said Frank disdainfully.

"Somebody sneaked his bread and cheese!" exclaimed Levison, in astonishment.

"So old Pepper said. He says somebody sneaked into his cottage in the mist—it was pretty thick to-day in Rylcombe—and bagged his bread and cheese, and left sixpence on the table. He says the bread and cheese was worth a shilling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So he was actually going to lay his stick round us!" said Frank warmly. "Us, you know! Us!"

"Awful!" said Cardew gravely. "Lese majeste, by gad!"

"I don't know what lazy majesty is, but I know we weren't going to stand it," said Levison minor. "We snowballed him, and fairly bowled him over. We left him sorting himself out of a snowdrift. We thought we wouldn't stay for any further conversation with him. He had a big stick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I haven't done my exercise for Selby, and I've got to show it up at prep," said Frank. "If you're not busy, Ernie——"

"Who wouldn't have a minor in the

The Fugitive in Pepper's Cottage.
(See Chapter 8.)

Third?" said Cardew, as Levison signed to his brother to sit down at the table. "Keeps you from growing fat an' lazy, at all events. Come along and chip Study No. 6, Clive, while Levison's doin' the kind-brother bizney. Study No. 6 like hearin' about that tramp they met the other night."

Clive laughed, and followed him from the study, and soon afterwards there were sounds of wrath in the passage. Blake & Co. were growing fed-up with reminders of their unlucky adventure.

Levison and his minor finished the exercise, and Frank rose.

"Heard anything from the chap Cardew wrote to, Ernie?" he asked.

Levison told what Mr. Trotman had explained in his letter.

Frank opened his eyes wide.

"My hat! Biffed the German master!" he ejaculated. "Are they going to punish him for that, Ernie?"

"Yes, you young ass!"

"Well, I don't see why we shouldn't biff Germans in England, considering the amount of biffing they're getting in Flanders. I say, wouldn't it be ripping if he had biffed old Schneider like that while he was at St. Jim's!" Frank's eyes glistened. "My hat! We'd shoulder him round the quad!"

Levison laughed as the minor left the study. Frank evidently did not take a serious view of Outram's offence.

The elder brother remained in deep thought for some time after his minor had left him.

He rose at last, and made his way along to Study No. 6.

There was a sound of raised voices within as Levison tapped at the door. An argument was proceeding in that celebrated apartment.

"Oh, come in!" growled Blake. "What idiot is it now?"

Levison entered.

CHAPTER 9.
Levison Wants to Know!

STUDY No. 6 did not appear to be enjoying its old-time harmony. Blake and Herries and Dig were sore about their unhappy adventure on that snowy night; and Arthur Augustus, though he prided himself upon being a fellow of tact and judgment, did not pour oil upon the troubled waters by his observations. The four juniors looked grimly at Levison. They anticipated that he had come there to chip, as Cardew and Clive had come a short time before

Blake dropped his hand on the study inkpot, evidently in readiness.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Pax!" said Levison, with a grin. "I haven't come to chip you. I only wanted to ask you something about your little adventure the other night!"

"Fed up!"

"Buzz off!"

"Yaas, wathah! Twavel off, Levison!"

Levison did not travel off. He had come there for information.

"It was rather an odd thing, wasn't it?" he said cheerfully. "From what I've heard, that chap, whoever he was, dogged you a long way——"

"From the wood to Pepper's field, at least," said Blake. "I'd like to give him something for his trouble, the rotter!"

"A tramp, I suppose?" asked Levison carelessly.

"I suppose so."

"But you saw him?"

"Only just a glimpse of him in the dark."

"He must have been a big chap, I suppose, from the way he handled you—ahem!—I mean, you fellows aren't babies, and only a regular Hercules could have handled the three of you at once!"

"Well," said Blake, somewhat mollified by Levison's tactful way of putting it, "we had bad luck. No, he wasn't a big chap; so far as I could see in the dark, he wasn't any taller than ourselves—either a boy or quite a short man. But he was as strong as a horse—no mistake about that!"

"If I had been on the spot, deah boys——"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"And he cleared off after you tackled him?"

"Yes. We saw nothing more of him."

"Then you never found out why he was dogging you?"

"No. I suppose he was a tramp looking for a chance to rob us."

"But if that was his object he could have tried it when you tackled him, if he wanted to try it at all."

"I suppose so. But we reckoned there might be a gang of them about, and he was waiting to give them a signal."

"But you never saw any gang, and you got back to the school without seeing any of them?"

"Yes, that's so."

"It is simply inexplicable, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "There wasn't any gang; and the fellow couldn't have been intendin' to attack us, because he had his chance and nevah took it. He seems to have followed us all that feahful way without any object at all!"

"Jolly queer proceeding on a snowy and windy night!" said Levison.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I can't account for it, unless he was some lunatic," said Blake, with a grunt. "Can you?"

"Well, I've been thinking about it a bit," said Levison. "Is it possible that he only wanted to speak to you——"

"He could have come up and spoken to us if he liked, couldn't he?" asked Dig.

"He might have wanted to speak to only one of you," suggested Levison. "If that was the case, he might dog you a long way, hoping to catch one of you alone. If you had taken separate ways, or one had dropped behind—or perhaps he might have been looking for a chance of making a signal to the one chap he wanted to speak to. That would account for it all."

Jack Blake stared at him.

"Why should he want to speak to one of us specially?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean he may be a chap one of us knows?"

"Well, that would account for it, wouldn't it? Suppose it was some friend of Gussy's, for instance, who wanted to see Gussy, and didn't want to see you chaps?"

"What rot!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that suggestion as wot, Levison!"

Levison laughed.

"Well, it's only a suggestion," he said. "But that theory would fit in with all the facts, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose it would," said Herries. "But it's rot!"

"Yaas, wathah! But, as a mattah of fact, we should soon have found out who the wottah was if I had not had to wemain behind and look for my monocle. As it was, these chaps let him get away——"

"You silly ass!" roared Blake and Herries and Dig in wrathful chorus.

Levison strolled out of the study, leaving the chums of No. 6 engaged in a heated discussion.

He came on Talbot of the Shell in the passage, just going into his study.

"Hold on a minute, Talbot!" said Levison.

The Shell fellow stopped.

"Not in a hurry?" asked Levison.

"No. Gore and Skimmy are having tea, but that can wait," said Talbot. "Anything wanted?"

"Only a word of advice."

Talbot smiled.

"You're welcome to that, if I can give you any," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"Suppose——" Levison paused.

"Well, suppose——" said Talbot.

"Suppose you had been down on a chap, who didn't really deserve it, though you partly thought he did!"

"I don't suppose I should be down on a chap, if I only partly thought he deserved it," said Talbot.

"Quite so! You wouldn't! But I might," said Levison calmly. "Suppose—to put a case—that you'd been down on a chap, partly because you thought he deserved it and partly because you were a suspicious, worrying kind of a fellow who couldn't let things rest. Suppose you were sorry afterwards, when it was too late, and saw a chance of helping the chap when he was down on his luck, though possibly he had done wrong. What would you do?"

"Well, that's rather a problem," said Talbot, in surprise. "Do you really want my advice on a queer question like that, Levison?"

"Yes; that's how the matter stands." Talbot reflected.

"Well, I'd help him, in that case, if I could," he said. "I should look on it as a sort of debt I owed him."

"You think so?"

"Yes, I'm pretty sure I should look at it like that," said Talbot.

"Good!" Levison nodded. "I thought I'd get a tip from you, Talbot. And your view agrees with mine. That's the programme for me."

And Levison went on down the passage, leaving Talbot of the Shell looking considerably astonished.

CHAPTER 10.
The Haunted Barn!

"YOU fellows ready?"

D'Arcy minor—Wally of the Third—asked that question.

He addressed Frank Levison, Reggie Manners, and Joe Frayne, three of his comrades of that important Form, the Third.

And his comrades answered with one voice:

"What-ho!"

"Then come on!" said Wally.

"Got the bag?" asked Reggie Manners.

Wally glared at him.

"Am I likely to forget it?" he demanded.

"Very likely, I think," said Manners minor. "You know what you are."

"If you want a thick ear before we start, young Manners——"

Young Manners sniffed.

"I want all the thick ears you can give me!" he replied.

"Then I'll jolly well——"

Frank Levison interposed.

"Order! Order! There's no time for ragging now, or we sha'n't get the barn ready for Grundy."

"I'm not going to have any cheek from Manners minor!"

"I'm not going to have any cheek from D'Arcy minor!"

"Oh, dry up!" urged Joe Frayne. "Let's get off."

Wally and Manners minor exchanged a mutual glare, and the fags got off. They crossed the quadrangle in the winter dusk.

There was a dim mist hanging over St. Jim's, and it was thicker in the road outside the school gates. But the hardy fags did not care for a mist or a keen

wind. They turned up their coat-collars and tramped down the lane.

Wally was carrying a bag. The black stains on his fingers and trousers hinted that the bag contained soot.

Evidently the preparations the fags were going to make for Grundy of the Shell were not of a friendly nature.

They turned into Pepper's field, and approached the barn, which loomed up dimly in the mist.

The barn was a somewhat solid structure. The door was flush with the ground, but the ground sloped under it, and at the back the floor was several feet above ground level. The space below was bricked in, with a door, and was used as a storehouse. In that somewhat dismal recess under the barn, the great Grundy had, on a celebrated occasion, spotted Mr. Pepper counting his miser's hoard. But the half-subterranean storehouse was unused now; the barn was wholly devoted to the uses of the St. Jim's Parliament. The building was tenanted by the dog Binks, but the fags did not mind Binks. They were quite friendly with Binks. Wally & Co. approached the door, and Wally fumbled for the handle.

"Is it locked?" asked Reggie.

"No; it's not kept locked now, fathead! Grundy busted the lock last time he found it locked, and it's not mended yet. Like to see anybody keeping it locked against us!" said Wally warmly. "It's as much ours as anybody's isn't it?"

"Course it is," said Frayne.

"It's like Grundy's thumping cheek to call a meeting here," went on Wally. "Who's Grundy? Calling a meeting to point out his claims to the position of Premier in St. Jim's Parliament! My hat!"

"The fellows won't come," said Levison minor.

"Well, Grundy will come, and the booby-trap will be ready for him," said Wally, with a chuckle. "That's all we want! Hallo! Somebody's there!"

D'Arcy minor broke off suddenly, as there was the sound of a movement in the barn.

"Only the dorg!" said Frayne.

"It didn't sound like a dog. What's the matter with this dashed door?" grumbled Wally. "It's fastened somehow."

"Shove it!"

"I'm shoving it, fathead!"

"Well, get out of the way and let me shove it!" said Manners minor. "I can open it all right!"

"I'll shove you, young Manners, if you shove yourself forward! Something's in the way, I suppose. All of you shove together!"

The four fags braced themselves against the door, and shoved.

The door slowly yielded.

"Hark!" exclaimed Frayne.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally, exasperated. "There's somebody in there, and he's fastened the door with a wedge or something. I'll spifficate him when I get in."

"Binks would bark if there was anybody there," said Frank.

"I tell you there's somebody there! Shove away!"

"Hark!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The four fags ceased shoving suddenly. For from within the barn came a deep, blood-curdling groan.

They started back, their hearts beating.

"Great pip!" muttered Manners minor. "Wha-a-at's that?"

Groan!

"Oh, crumbs!" said Joe Frayne, through his chattering teeth. "It's a g-g-ghost!"

"Rats!" growled Wally.

"I—I say, they say in the village that this place is haunted at Christmastime," muttered Frayne. "I've heard it. There was a man hanged himself here one Christmas, and——"

"You cheerful idiot, don't spin a yarn like that now!" howled Wally. "It's somebody playing a trick on us. We'll scalp him! Shove the door open!"

"I—I say, Wally——"

"Shove away!"

The Third Formers shoved all together, and the door flew open. A chip of wood wedged under it had been forced away.

Wally & Co. tumbled headlong into the barn as the door yielded.

It was intensely dark within.

The fags scrambled up in hot haste. They were getting in rather a state of nerves, and the blackness within was full of unknown terrors.

Wally fumbled in his pocket.

"I'll get a match!"

"Hark!"

A deep groan resounded through the barn. It echoed strangely, eerily, uncannily, in the mist.

"I—I say, let's get out!"

"Come on, Wally!" faltered Manners minor. "I—I don't like this!"

"It's somebody playing a trick!" exclaimed Wally ferociously. "I'm going to see who it is, and scalp him!"

Scratch!

The match flickered out, glimmering in the dense gloom.

The next moment there was a gasp of affright from the startled fags. From the shadows a face looked at them—a fearful face, white as chalk—white as no living face could be!

For an instant the light flickered on that terrible vision, and then the match dropped from Wally's fingers, and the four fags bolted out of the barn.

The bag of soot dropped in the doorway, forgotten now. The fags raced away from the barn with gasps of horror.

There was a sudden crash in the mist, and a yell.

"What—who—which—yarcoooh!"

"Leggo!" shrieked Joe Frayne, as a hand closed on his collar. "Yah! Oh! Help! Ghosts! Mercy!"

"You young idiot!"

"It—it's only Grundy!" panted Wally.

The four fags, shaking in every limb, stopped, and Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn stared at them in the mist.

CHAPTER 11.
Grundy's Meeting!

GRUNDY eyed the fags suspiciously. "What have you been up to?" he demanded. "You've been in my barn."

"'Tain't your barn!" said Wally snappily. The scamp of the Third was recovering himself now, at a safe distance from the haunted barn.

"None of your cheek, D'Arcy minor!"

"But what's the row?" demanded Wilkins. "What were you bolting for? Is old Pepper after you, or Binks?"

"It—it—it's a ghost!" gasped Joe Frayne.

"What?" roared Grundy.

"A—a—a ghost!"

"You young ass!"

"You've seen a ghost in the barn?" yelled Gunn.

"We—we saw something," faltered Reggie Manners. "An awful white face, groaning——"

"How could a face groan?"

"Well, we saw it!"

"Silly young goats!" said Grundy contemptuously. "Frightened of the dark!"

"We're not frightened of the dark!" shouted Wally furiously. "There was something there—a fearful, pale face, and groans!"

"Well, we'll soon have him out!" chuckled Grundy. "If the ghost wants to walk, he can do it some time when we're not holding an election meeting. Come on, you fellows!"

The three Shell fellows tramped on grinning, to the barn. They had not the slightest doubt that the fags had been scared by some shadow in the dark.

Wally & Co. looked at one another dubiously.

"Let's go back!" said D'Arcy minor.

"I—I'd rather not!"

"It must be a trick," said Wally resolutely. "After all, there ain't such things as ghosts. It's all rot!"

"There's ghosts at Christmas!"

"You're a silly young ass, Frayne!"

"Let's go back," said Levison minor. "We—we oughtn't to have scooted really. Might be only a New House chap practical joking. Figgins & Co., perhaps."

"They couldn't have known we were coming——"

"Well, let's go back, anyway!" growled Wally. "I suppose the Third ain't afraid to go where the Shell go?"

That argument was convincing. The fags hurried after Grundy & Co.

Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn were already in the barn. Grundy had lighted a lantern that was kept there, and was flashing the light about the building.

Binks, the dog, crept up to him. Binks did not seem alarmed. And certainly there was no trace of anyone in the barn.

Grundy tramped to and fro over the bare planks, which rang to his heavy footsteps, casting the light into every corner.

He looked round, with lofty scorn, at the fags, who were peering in at the doorway.

"Nobody here!" he growled. "What was it you funky young idiots took for a ghost?"

"It—it was an awful face," faltered Joe Frayne.

"Bah!"

"Look here, Grundy——"

"What were you fags doing here at all?" demanded Grundy suspiciously. "What's in this bag? Soot, by gosh!"

"You'd have got that on your napper if it hadn't been for the ghost!" grunted D'Arcy minor. "Go and eat coke!"

"My hat! I—I'll——"

Grundy grabbed up the bag of soot, and made a rush at the fags. Wally & Co. scudded. Like the gentlemen in Macbeth, they stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once.

George Alfred Grundy snorted as the nimble heroes of the Third vanished in the mist.

"Cheeky young villains!" he growled. "Setting a booby-trap for me—me, you know! Lucky they got frightened by a shadow!"

"I—I suppose that's all it was," said Gunn, with a rather uneasy glance round the barn.

"Of course it was, ass! Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Nunno! But—but a man hanged himself here once."

"One Christmas," said Wilkins, with a nod. "The village folk say he haunts the place when the anniversary comes round."

"Well, the anniversary hasn't come round yet," said Grundy, "and when it does, the ghost won't come round. I'd like to see a dashed ghost butting in when I'm holding a Parliamentary meeting! I'd ghost him!"

"Somebody playing a trick, I expect," said Wilkins, after some thought. "Anybody could get in here now the lock's busted. He cleared off before we came, I suppose."

"Rot! Binks would have barked!"

"Not if it was a St. Jim's fellow—a New House chap, perhaps—Figgins or Redfern very likely."

"My hat! Let me catch New House fellows playing tricks in my barn!" said Grundy wrathfully. "As the fellows haven't come yet, we may as well have a look round. The cads may be hanging about to interrupt the meeting."

Grundy took the lantern out, his chums following him. Though they did not believe in ghosts they showed a remarkable disposition to keep all together.

They went round the building, looking for possible practical jokers, but there was no trace of them. Grundy tried the door of the storehouse under the barn. But it was locked, and there was no key.

"Couldn't have got in there," said Gunn.

"Of course not! Let's get in," said Wilkins, shivering. "It's jolly cold here!"

They returned to the barn.

Grundy set the lantern down, and Binks frisked round them, evidently pleased to have visitors.

"The fellows are late!" growled Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn exchanged a wink.

"They do seem late!" agreed Wilkins.

"I put six o'clock on my notice on the board," said Grundy. "It's jolly nearly half-past six now. Queer."

"Awfully queer!" said Gunn solemnly. "Now, I wonder what can be keeping the fellows when you've called them to a meeting, Grundy?"

"Yes, I wonder," said Grundy unsuspiciously. "I said on the notice that it was a very important meeting. There couldn't have been any misunderstanding."

Grundy went to the door, and blinked out into the mist.

But there was no sign of the expected crowd of St. Jim's juniors. It was really very puzzling—to Grundy, at least.

Wilkins and Gunn did not seem puzzled. They smiled.

Grundy came in again, looking angry and perplexed.

"It's jolly cold here!" hinted Wilkins.

"Did you expect it to be warm in winter?" inquired Grundy sarcastically.

"Well, suppose we get back."

"How can we get back before the meeting, fathead? Do you want the fellows to find us gone when they come?"

"When!" murmured Gunn.

Grundy stamped his feet on the floor to warm himself. He was feeling the cold, too, though he disdained to heed it.

"Don't go through into the cellar," suggested Wilkins. "Old Pepper would want you to pay for the floor. Is it elevens or twelves you take, Grundy?"

"Fifteens, isn't it?" said Gunn.

"Don't you start being funny, you chaps!" said Grundy darkly. "You can leave all that to Lowther. Why the thumping dickens don't the fellows come? I said six o'clock on the notice, and I stuck it up on the board where everybody could see! It's extraordinary!"

"Perhaps the fellows don't intend to come out in the mist to hear you jaw, Grundy," suggested Gunn.

"Don't be a silly idiot, Gunn!"

"Oh!"

"I said distinctly it was a very important meeting, for me to explain my views at length," said Grundy, in perplexity. "Yet nobody's come!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you dummies?"

"Look here. I'm not going to hang about in the cold here," said Wilkins. "I'm off!"

"Hold on! I tell you the meeting ——"

"There isn't going to be any meeting, you chump!" roared Gunn. "We knew that all along! Yah!"

And Wilkins and Gunn, quite out of patience, tramped out of the barn, and vanished into the mist, unheeding Grundy's wrathful shouts.

"The silly chumps! That's how a chap with brains gets backed up by the common herd!" exclaimed Grundy bitterly. "It's enough to make a chap chuck it up, it really is. Silly asses! But a chap's got to be patient. It's a born leader's duty to lead, after all. But why on earth don't the fellows arrive?"

That was really inexplicable—to Grundy. He had stated quite plainly in his notice on the board that the meeting was at six, and that it was very important. Surely nothing more was wanted.

Yet nobody had come!

It was really perplexing.

Grundy stamped about the barn for another half-hour. Then even Grundy realised that something must have gone wrong, and that there was not going to be any meeting.

With feelings almost too deep for words, Grundy blew out the lantern, and left the barn. With knitted brows he tramped back to St. Jim's, through a light fall of snow.

As he tramped across the quadrangle three forms looked up in the gloom—Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn of the New House. Three snowballs flew with deadly aim, and Grundy caught them with his nose and ears.

The great Grundy stumbled, and sat down in the snow. There was a chortle from the mist.

"Groogh! You rotters! Yow-ow! I'll——"

Grundy leaped to his feet, at boiling-point. But Figgins & Co. had vanished in the mist, and vengeance had to be postponed. Grundy tramped furiously on to the School House, and tramped in.

A loud chuckle greeted him.

"Had a good meetin'?" grinned Cardew.

"I twust it was a vewy successful meetin', deah boy!" chortled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't understand it—nobody came!" growled Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you really expect anybody?" asked Monty Lowther, with an air of mild surprise.

"Eh? Of course I did! I put my notice on the board——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a very important meeting ——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Too important for us," observed Cardew, shaking his head. "We couldn't think of buttin' in an' disturbin' you, old top."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy glared at the hilarious juniors, and tramped up the staircase. Even upon the mighty brain of George Alfred Grundy it had dawned at last that it took two to make a bargain—and that he could call as many meetings as he liked, and the other fellows could please themselves about attending them.

Wilkins and Gunn greeted him with smiles as he stamped into the study.

"Successful meeting—what?" smiled Gunn.

"Did you bring down the house, old fellow, with your epoch-making eloquence?" inquired Wilkins.

Grundy's reply was surprising. It took the form of a furious charge at his study-mates, with Grundy's leg-of-mutton fists thumping out, and Wilkins and Gunn dodged out of the study, and fled for their lives.

CHAPTER 12.
Levison Thinks it Out!

"FRANKY!"

"Hallo, Ernie!"

Levison major was standing in the doorway of the Third Form-room. Frank was there with the rest of the Form.

There was an excited discussion going on. The adventures of Wally & Co. at the haunted barn caused much excitement.

Certainly, nobody believed in the ghost, and Wally & Co. had been considerably chipped, and there had been punchings of noses as a result.

Frank left the excited group, and came over to the door inquiringly.

"I've heard about your little game," said Levison. "It seems that you woke up a ghost in the barn."

"There was something," said Frank.

"Tell me what you saw."

Frank duly described the unearthly groans and the white, deathly face that had looked at the fags from the shadows of the barn.

Levison listened with keen interest. His expression showed pretty plainly that it was not merely the ghost-story he was interested in. There was something else in his mind.

"And that was all, Frank?"

"Yes; we—we bolted!" Frank coloured. "We were—were startled, you know."

"I suppose you were, kid," said Levison, with a smile. "What's the matter with your nose, Franky?"

"Hobbs said I was funky," was Frank's reply.

That answer seemed explicit enough. Hobbs' face was adorned with signs of combat, also.

"It was somebody playing ghost, I suppose," said Levison.

"I—I suppose so. I've asked some of the New House chaps, but Figgins & Co. don't know anything about it—or Redfern, either. I don't think it could have been a St. Jim's chap."

Levison nodded, and turned away.

The Fourth-Former made his way to Grundy's study, in the Shell passage. He found the great George Alfred alone, and in a very bad temper.

"Well?" growled Grundy.

"Did you see anything of the ghost at the barn?" asked Levison.

"Of course I didn't!" snapped Grundy. "There wasn't any ghost—only those silly fags frightened by a shadow."

"But did you look?"

"I searched the place. Nobody there. The silly funks thought they saw something."

"They might have been frightened in anticipation," said Levison calmly. "It seems that your face was coming along, Grundy! That's enough to frighten anybody when fairly brought to bear on them!"

And Levison retired from the study before George Alfred Grundy could reply to that observation.

Levison went to No. 9, with a thoughtful frown upon his brow. He sat down, and the frown grew deeper and deeper in an effort of thought. Levison was dealing with a problem.

"It all fits together!" he murmured. He ticked off the points of his argument on his knee, as he spoke aloud. "First of all, a fellow dogs D'Arcy and his friends in the dark, for no reason except to catch one of them alone to speak to—so far as can be seen. He turns out to be a fellow of tremendous physical strength. Outram was a fellow of tremendous physical strength. And he was very friendly with D'Arcy here. D'Arcy stood up for him against the whole House at one time. It was through saving

D'Arcy from the roughs that he gave himself away. Query—Was that unknown tramp really Outram, trying to get a chance to speak to D'Arcy without giving himself away to the others?"

Levison drew a deep breath.

"Second, old Pepper misses bread and cheese from his cottage, and a sixpence is left to pay for them. Somebody in the vicinity wanted food, and didn't want to go into a shop to spend his sixpence on it. Evidently a chap who's under some necessity of keeping out of sight.

"Third, the fags find somebody in the barn, who plays ghost to scare them off, so as not to be spotted there. It doesn't seem to be a St. Jim's chap. What could anybody want in the barn—excepting shelter?"

Levison rose, and moved restlessly about the study.

"Outram's a fugitive, bound to keep himself dark, with prison hanging over him—a reformatory, at least—for damaging a master at High Coombe. He dared not go home. He couldn't have much resources, and he dared not show himself where he was known. Query—Did he head for St. Jim's, in the hope of getting into communication with D'Arcy, and getting help from him? That accounts for all the facts."

Cardew and Clive came into the study. Levison had stopped at the window, and was staring out, unseeingly, into the winter dusk, buried in deep thought. His study-mates looked at him in surprise.

"Hallo! A merry mathematical problem?" asked Cardew. "Or are you wrestling with the cheery old ablative absolute?"

Levison started, and spun round.

"Oh, I didn't hear you come in!" he exclaimed.

"Anything up?" asked Clive, with a curious look at him.

"Oh, no!"

"Goin' to do any prep?" yawned Cardew, as Levison moved for the door.

"Not now! I'm going out."

"Going out!" exclaimed Clive. "It's close on locking up."

"All serene!"

"It's beginning to snow again," remarked Cardew.

"Bother the snow!" Levison went out of the study, but he paused to look back. "Nothing going on at the House of Commons to-night, is there? I mean the St. Jim's House—Pepper's barn."

"No—since Grundy's meeting was a frost!" laughed Clive. "A bit too cold for Parliamentary proceedings in the barn this evening. Are you going there?"

"I'll be back a bit later," said Levison, without replying directly to the question.

He went down the passage before his study-mates could question him further. A few minutes later, with his coat-collar turned up, and his cap pulled down, he was crossing the snow-covered quadrangle to the gates. He slipped out at the gates just before Taggles came down to lock them.

The gates clanged shut after Levison.

Unheeding, the plucky Fourth-Former tramped on, and his footsteps took him in the direction of the haunted barn.

CHAPTER 13.
Levison's Discovery!

DARK and gloomy the barn looked as Levison approached it across the wet, snowy field.

The grass was half hidden under snow, and Levison's footsteps made no sound as he drew near the barn. He was moving cautiously, too, as if to avoid giving warning of his approach.

He reached the barn, and stood for some moments outside the door, listening intently.

There was no sound within.

Levison knew that Binks must be there, but the dog was doubtless asleep. Save for the sough of the winter wind, all was still and silent. Levison shuddered a little as the snow-flakes whirled round him.

He pushed open the creaking door at last.

Then there was a sound—the sound of a sudden movement, and Levison's heart beat faster.

Levison's nerves were of iron, but the story of the man who had hanged himself in the barn was fresh in his memory, and the deathly face the fags had seen came vividly into his mind.

He hesitated on the threshold.

"Who's there?" he called out, as firmly as he could.

There was no answer, but there came a low whine. Binks had awakened.

"Is anybody there?"

Creepy stillness.

Levison stepped firmly within the barn, and groped in his coat pocket for a box of matches.

Someone was there, he felt certain of that, and he intended to know who it was.

He extracted a match from the box, and the sound he made in doing so was followed by an indefinable movement in the darkness.

Levison smiled grimly.

The unseen occupant of the barn had heard him, and knew that he was about to strike a match.

Scratch!

The light flickered up.

Levison held up the match, and stared round him uneasily, his nerves thrilling a little, in spite of himself.

Black shadows met his eyes.

The match went out.

Levison set his lips, and struck another match. Then the blood went pulsing to his heart as a white, deathly face glimmered through the gloom.

He caught his breath.

The light flickered on the deathly features before it expired. Levison made a spring back through the open door.

Darkness rushed on the scene again.

The St. Jim's junior stumbled in a drift of snow, and fell, crashing into the yielding snow with a gasp.

The matchbox fell from his hand into the snow.

"My—my hat!" muttered Levison.

He scrambled up.

In spite of his nerve he was shivering, and it was not from cold.

That white, ghastly face looking at him from the gloom had sent a thrill of horror to his very heart.

For a moment or two he backed away, as if deciding to leave the spot. But he set his teeth, and moved back.

Man or ghost, Levison of the Fourth had the courage to face him. He did not intend to go.

He groped savagely for the fallen matchbox in the snow. But it was hidden in the darkness, and his groping fingers encountered only the soft snow that lay thickly outside the doorway of the barn.

He rose to his feet at last, muttering an angry word.

He had no more matches, and he could not get a light. But his determination was stronger than ever. He stepped into the doorway again.

As he groped his way in he heard a movement.

He made a spring in the direction of the sound, and stumbled over something, and uttered a startled cry.

"The dog! Confound it!"

There was a sharp yelp from Binks.

Levison straightened up, his hands outstretched in the darkness.

"Look here, I know you're here!" he exclaimed. "Do you think you can frighten me by playing ghost?"

Silence.

"I tell you I know you're here, and I suspect that you are Valentine Outram, of High Coombe School! Answer me!"

He heard the sound of a catching breath.

"Will you answer me? I've come here to look for you—— Ah!"

Levison broke off with that sharp exclamation.

A sudden, strong grasp had closed upon him from the darkness—a grasp that seemed to be of iron.

The Fourth-Former struggled.

"Let me go! Let me go, I tell you! Listen to me! I did not come here as an enemy——"

The terrible grasp that was upon him closed harder. Levison ceased to struggle. His strength was not equal to that contest.

His breath came in panting gasps.

"Outram! I know it's you—I know it's you! Let me go, you fool! I tell you—I tell you——" His voice died away in painful panting. The terrible grasp of the Unseen seemed to be crushing the very life out of him.

Still there was no word.

In grim, fearful silence Levison felt himself lifted from the floor—lifted as if he were a child.

Still in grim silence, powerless to help himself, he felt himself swung through the chill air—how, whither, he knew not.

He crashed upon an earthen floor.

Dazed and bewildered, the Fourth-Former sprang to his feet with a panting cry. But the iron grasp was upon him, and he was borne to the earth again, helpless in that grip, which was as the grip of a giant.

CHAPTER 14.
Missing!

"SEEN Levison?"

Cardew and Clive were asking that question up and down the School House.

The School House fellows were heading for the hall, for last call-over, and Levison of the Fourth was not among them.

His chums were anxious.

Levison had told them that he was going out, though he had not told them where. Why he should go out just before locking-up in the falling snow was a mystery. They had noticed how troubled and thoughtful he had looked before he went, and he wondered vaguely whether anything was wrong with Levison. Cool and unconcerned as he usually was, they had noted that Levison had not seemed the same since he had learned of Valentine Outram's misfortune.

Apparently their study-mate had not yet come in, for they failed to find him in the School House.

"Seen Levison?"

Nobody, apparently, had seen him.

"I believe he went out of the House some time ago, deah boys," Arthur Augustus told them. "Pewwaps he is in the New House."

"Well, he knows the time for call over," said Blake. "Come on, Gussy!"

"Seen Levison?" repeated Clive, as the Terrible Three came along.

"Oh, yes!" said Lowther cheerily.

"Good! Where is he?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"You said you'd seen him!" exclaimed Cardew.

"Yes, but that was at dinner."

And Monty Lowther, chuckling over his little joke, walked on with Tom Merry and Manners. Clive and Cardew glared after him. They were not in a

humour for Monty Lowther's little jokes just then.

"Seen Levison?" called out Sidney Clive, as Julian came along with Reilly and Kerruish and Hammond.

"No. Hasn't he come in?"

"Seems not," growled Clive. "Let's try the New House, Cardew. He may be there."

"Righto!"

The chums of Study No. 9 were uneasy—they hardly knew why. They cut across the quadrangle to the New House, and found Figgins & Co. in the hall, just going in for their House roll-call.

"Is Levison here, Figgins?" asked Clive hurriedly.

"Haven't seen him," said Figgins.

"I saw him go out just before Taggles locked up," said Kerr.

"Gone down to Mrs. Murphy's for a feed in Rylcombe, perhaps," suggested Fatty Wynn. "Chap would naturally forget about locking up if he was having a good feed."

"Bow-wow!"

The School House juniors cut back to their own House. There was no more time to lose looking for Levison. They joined the Fourth in Hall, just in time to answer to their names as Mr. Railton called them.

"Adsum!" gasped Cardew breathlessly.

"Clive!"

"Adsum!"

The roll-call went on, but Levison of the Fourth did not answer to his name. He was not there. The Housemaster marked him down as absent.

"That means lines for Levison," Racke of the Shell remarked, as the fellows came out of the hall. "You fellows looking for him?"

"Yes!" grunted Clive.

"I can give you a tip," smiled Racke.

"If you know where he is——"

Racke nodded genially.

"I can guess," he said.

"Well, where?"

"Try the billiard-room at the Green Man, old scout!" said Racke agreeably.

Racke walked away, chuckling, with Crooke. Clive clenched his hands for a moment, but he unclenched them again. It was not much use punching Racke.

"Still missin'?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, joining them.

"Yes. I suppose he's still out!"

"That is wathah wemarkable! This weather isn't weally temptin', is it?" said the swell of St. Jim's. "It may be Chwistmass, but it is wathah disagweable. Pewwaps Fwank knows where his majah is. Heah, Fwanky!"

Frank Levison came up. He had already noted that his major had missed call-over.

"Seen your majah, Fwank?"

"No. He's missed call-over!" said Frank anxiously. "That means lines. Don't you fellows know where he's gone?"

"He said something about the old barn before he went out," said Clive. "I don't see why he should go there, though."

"No reason why he should stop there if he did," remarked Cardew.

"Might go and look!" suggested Clive. "We could get out over the wall."

"Nice and wet and snowy!" said Cardew, with a grimace.

"Oh, rot!"

"All serene! I'll come!"

The two juniors went for their coats. Frank, looking a little worried, went to his Form-room. He could not join them, as evening prep with Mr. Selby demanded his presence soon.

Clive and Cardew slipped quietly out of the house. The mist was thick in the quadrangle, and it was easy for them to scud away unnoticed. There was thick snow on the school wall, under the frozen elms, and Cardew made a very expressive grimace as he looked at it.

"Oh, buck up!" said Clive.

The hardy South African junior plunged up through dripping snow. Cardew followed him, and they dropped to the road outside in a shower of flakes.

They lost no time in getting to the barn, running all the way.

The barn was dark and silent. Cardew stopped at the door, and his foot struck against something hard in the snow. He stooped and picked up a matchbox.

"Found something?" asked Clive.

"A matchbox—a metal one. Got a match about you? This seems wet."

"Get inside first."

It was not much use striking a match in the mind. Clive opened the door and entered, and Cardew followed him in and closed it. Then the Colonial junior struck a match.

Cradew held up the metal box he had picked up. Both the juniors knew it by sight.

It was Levison's.

"So he's been here!" said Clive.

There was a whine as Binks came snuffling up to them. Sidney Clive patted the dog's head.

"Binks could tell us if he could speak," grinned Cardew. "Binks, old chap, have you seen Levison?"

Binks whined.

"Blessed if the little beggar doesn't look as if he's trying to tell us something!" said Clive, staring at the animal.

He struck another match. Binks was scratching at the plank floor, and still whining.

"What's the matter with him?" said Cardew, in wonder.

"Something's happened here," said Clive, in a low voice. "Binks knows, and he can't tell us, poor chap! Levison's been here, Cardew. He dropped the matchbox where you found it, right enough. He's not here now. Where the dickens is he?"

The juniors scanned the dim interior of the barn, striking match after match.

But, save for themselves and Binks, it was deserted. They left the barn at last, leaving Binks still scratching and whining. In the misty darkness they looked round the building, peering into corners, and trying the door of the storehouse under the barn. But there was no sign of Levison.

"He may be back at St. Jim's now," said Cardew at last.

"I—I hope so." Clive was vaguely alarmed. "Let's get back. There's nothing doing here, at any rate."

Cardew peered at him in the gloom.

"Something's happened here, Clive!"

"I—I think so."

"But what?"

"Goodness knows!"

"You don't take any stock in that ghost story, do you?"

Clive drew a deep breath.

"Not as a ghost story," he said. "That's rot! But the fags saw something here; and now Levison's been here, and disappeared. There's something more in this than we can catch on to, Cardew."

"Let's get back!" said Cardew abruptly.

They tramped back through the snow to the school. In a shower of snow they dropped down inside the school wall.

In the School House they inquired for Levison at once. But he had not come in.

A good many of the fellows were very curious on the subject. Levison's prolonged absence was exciting remark.

"What about going to the Housemaster about it?" asked Cardew at last. "If he doesn't come in by bedtime——"

"If he doesn't, Mr. Railton will know, anyway. Levison may have gone off somewhere, after going to the barn," said Clive uneasily. "Better wait."

They went to their prep in Study No. 9 in a troubled mood. A little later Frank Levison tapped at the door and came in. His face fell as he saw Clive and Cardew by themselves in the study.

"Ernie hasn't come in?" he asked.

"No."

"Did you look for him?"

Clive explained.

"He was there, if you found the matchbox there," said Frank, his lip quivering. "Something's happened to Ernest. That—that Thing we saw there——" His voice trembled a little. "It—it was something—and now Ernest——" He broke off.

He may be in before bed-time," said Cardew.

Frank nodded, and left the study.

Five minutes later Levison minor, in coat and scarf, was clambering over the snowy wall under the elms, and dropping into the road outside.

CHAPTER 15.
Friend or Foe?

LEVISON of the Fourth lay in black darkness on an earthen floor, and the grip of the unseen was upon him. But there was no fear of the supernatural in Levison's breast. That grip was the grip of human hands, that strength was exerted by human muscles of extraordinary power. As well as if his unseen assailant had told him, Levison knew that he was in the grasp of Valentine Outram, the boy who had left St. Jim's under a cloud, and who had since bolted from High Coombe School, in far-off Devonshire. Levison knew it; and he knew, too, that his assailant had recognised him in the brief glimmer of the matchlight in the barn. He had come there as a friend, but he had been received as an enemy. He had not counted on that.

Where was he now?

The grip upon him relaxed; the unseen figure moved from him. Levison sat up dazedly. His limbs ached with the terrible compression that had been put upon them.

He heard a sound of fumbling in the darkness—a sound which he knew was the sound of a plank being put into place. Then there were footsteps, and a light gleamed out. A match had been struck, and a lantern was lighted.

Levison rose to his feet, and leaned, panting, on the wall. His face was white. But his nerves were steady as he looked at his companion in the dim light of the rusty old lantern.

He saw before him a sturdy figure, a face he knew. The face was strangely, hideously white, but he knew the features now that he scanned them. It was the face of the boy he had sought—Valentine Outram!

And as he looked Levison could see in the light that the whiteness of the face was not natural; it was caused by chalk. It was by so simple a device that Valentine Outram had played ghost and scared the fags from the barn.

Apart from the artificial deathly hue of the face, there was a great change in Outram from what he had been when Levison had last seen him.

His face was thin, there were hollows under his eyes, and the signs of suffering were only too plain in his looks.

His clothes were torn and soiled and ragged, showing traces of rough camping out in rough weather. His boots were worn and leaky. Outram had suffered, and suffered severely, since his flight from High Coombe. Evidently he had tramped the great distance to St. Jim's, and had felt the grim hand of want.

The look on Outram's face was not pleasant, as his eyes glittered at the St. Jim's junior.

Levison met his gaze calmly.

He knew where he was now. He knew how Outram had dodged the searchers for the ghost.

He was in the locked and disused storehouse under the barn.

Grundy & Co. had concluded that it was impossible for anyone to have dodged into the storehouse, as the door was locked fast.

But Outram had not entered by the door. He had descended by removing a plank in the flooring above, carefully replacing it to leave no trace. And now Levison shared his hidden prison with him. He wondered what the intentions of the outcast might be. Not friendly, that was certain.

His eyes, as they glittered at Levison, had a threatening look. And his strength placed the St. Jim's junior absolutely at his mercy.

There was a long, grim silence. Levison did not care to break it, and he was still panting for breath.

It was Outram who spoke first.

"So you've found me, Levison?

"You know me?" said Levison.

"I recognised your voice at once, and knew that you were spying again. I remembered you at St. Jim's!" said Outram bitterly. "Hadn't you injured me enough when I was here before?"

Levison's lips quivered.

"I did not come here to injure you," he said. "I came as a friend."

Outram stared at him, and burst into a bitter, mocking laugh. The blood flushed into Levison's face.

After all, it was what he might have expected. Outram took his statement for a falsehood, as a matter of course. As he had said, he remembered the Levison of old.

"Still the same fellow!" said Outram scornfully. "Couldn't you think of a cleverer lie than that, Levison?"

"It is the truth."

"Oh, don't try to keep that up!" said Outram contemptuously. "You came here spying, and you've found me. Now I want to know how you knew I was here, and whether the others know."

"No one knows."

"Or suspects?"

"No."

Outram drew a deep breath of relief.

"Then you haven't babbled about your suspicions yet?" he said.

"I did not intend to."

"You meant to make sure first. Yes, that was like you; you were always cautious and cunning." The bitter scorn in the outcast's voice stung Levison to the very soul; but it was shame, not anger, that he felt. Outram had a right to think so of him from his old experience of him. "All the better, Levison. You have not babbled yet, and you will have no chance to babble!"

Levison was silent.

"But how did you suspect that I was here?" asked Outram. "I know how cunning you are, but how——"

"I saw your headmaster's advertisement in a newspaper," said Levison. "A friend of mine has had news from High Coombe, too, and I know why you left."

"And then you guessed——"

"It was you who dogged Blake and his friends the other night. I guessed that."

Outram started.

"Did they guess?"

"No."

"Not even D'Arcy?"

"No."

"But you did?" said Outram, eyeing him.

"There were other circumstances, too. I worked it out that you had fled in this direction, hoping to get into communication with D'Arcy, who was your friend at St. Jim's. Wasn't I right?"

"You ought to be a detective," said Outram, with a bitter curl of the lip. "Yes, you were right. I had no friend, no help, and I thought of D'Arcy. I arrived in this neighbourhood freezing and starving. I could not go home. I thought of D'Arcy. I knew he would stand by me, if he could hear what I had to tell him—my defence. I hung about for days and nights, hoping to get a chance of seeing him. Then I saw the four of them one night, and I followed. I—I hoped to get a chance of speaking to D'Arcy apart from the others. I could not trust them to know. But I failed."

"I guessed," said Levison.

"It was like you to guess. And then you came to spy!"

Levison winced.

"I heard the ghost story," he said. "I put two and two together. I came to see whether you were hiding here. I was startled when I saw you, with your white face, in the dark. If I hadn't guessed——"

"The trick was good enough for the others, but not for you," said Outram, with a sneer. "You were always too sharp for me, Levison! I've been hiding here for days and nights; but when it seemed safe I went up into the barn. Twice I've nearly been spotted there. But I remembered the ghost story about this barn, from the time I was at St. Jim's before. I thought of playing ghost to gain time to get clear." He laughed a little. "A few hair-raising groans and a chalked face did the business. I got the chalk from a cottage where I looked for food." He sneered again. "I did not steal the food. I left my last coin to pay for it."

"I heard of that," said Levison.

"You know your vocation now, when you're done with school; you must become a detective," said Outram, "or a criminal—I don't know which role would suit you best, Levison."

"You've had a hard time," said Levison.

"I have."

"How have you lived since——"

Outram shivered.

"I've dug up turnips in the fields with my bare hands. I've picked up crusts thrown away by the labourers. I've frozen and starved," he said bitterly. "Better to die free than to live in prison!"

Levison's face softened.

"You've been through it," he said. "But now——"

"Now I'm sticking it out," said Outram, with deadly coolness. "I'm safe here—from everyone who was not born to be a spy. I slept in this barn one night. There was no one but the dog here, and I was glad of his company. I've made friends with the dog. I could always make friends with a dog. Then I thought of making this place my quarters—it seemed deserted—till I could get into touch with D'Arcy. I loosened a plank in the darkest corner to get into the cellar. I could see that it was disused. Every time I went up into the barn I moved the plank. When I came down I replaced it, and left no trace. Someone searched the barn this very evening——"

"Grundy!" said Levison.

"I thought I knew the voice. They found nothing. I do not think anyone will find the loose plank. I wedge it with a chip of wood from underneath, and it will not move when trodden on." Outram smiled grimly. "I am safe here, Levison, and you are safe!"

Levison started.

"I?"

"You!" said Outram quietly. "You have found me out, Levison, but you are not going to betray me. You are going to remain here with me."

"Remain here!" repeated Levison, staring.

"Yes."

"A prisoner, do you mean?"

"That is what I mean."

"By gad!" said Levison.

"You can measure your strength against mine, if you like," said Outram, with a grim smile. "You are welcome to try!"

"You can't keep me here," said Levison.

"You will see."

"Are you mad?" muttered the St. Jim's junior. "I shall be missed at calling-over. I shall be searched for."

"No doubt; but you will not be found."

Levison stared at him. Outram was desperate, there was no mistake about that. In his eyes Levison was still the bitter, unscrupulous enemy of old, and he did not mean to run risks with him, and he cared little if he suffered. Once more, as had happened many times, Levison, repentant and reformed, had to pay the price of his old reputation.

"But—but this is madness," muttered Levison at last.

"It is my intention."

"I came here as a friend——"

"You lie!"

"Hang you, Outram!" broke out Levison. "I tell you——"

"You will tell me anything to get out of the trap you've fallen into through your spying," said Outram. "But you will not be believed. I know you too well."

"Listen to me! I've changed a bit in some ways since you've left St. Jim's——"

Outram shrugged his shoulders.

"I was sorry afterwards for having pursued you as I did," said Levison, in a low voice.

"You say so!"

"When I learned that you were in trouble, my first thought was to help you if I could, to make up for the past."

Outram laughed mockingly.

"You do not believe me?" asked Levison.

"Not a word!"

"Enough said, then! Do as you choose."

"I intend to."

The outcast sat down upon a box, and Levison watched him curiously as he drew a couple of raw beets from a recess, and began to eat. It was the unhappy boy's evening meal. And as he watched him all the anger and resentment faded from Levison's heart.

He felt no anger now. His desire was to convince the outcast of his sincerity, to help him in this terrible extremity. But that was a problem which even Levison's keen brain could not solve.

CHAPTER 16.

Levison a Prisoner!

OUTRAM gave a sudden start.

There were sounds in the barn above.

The outcast started suddenly to his feet, and approached Levison.

"Silence!"

"I did not intend to call out," muttered Levison.

"You will not have the chance."

The outcast grasped his prisoner, and a hand of iron was pressed over Levison's mouth.

He could not resist the strength of the fugitive. He could not have called out

to save his life. Outram blew out the lantern.

In grim, deadly silence they stood there in the dark, Levison a helpless prisoner in the iron grasp of the outcast, forced to silence.

Footsteps moved about above their heads, and they heard the whining of Binks and the murmur of voices.

It was not difficult for Ernest Levison to guess that it was his chums who had come to look for him.

In the deep silence he could catch a few of the words spoken above. He knew that Cardew had found his matchbox in the snow. The voices died to a murmur, the footsteps were silent at last.

But it was not till long after silence reigned in the barn that Valentine Outram released his prisoner.

When all was safe he relighted the lantern.

Levison breathed hard.

"How long do you think you can keep this up, Outram?" he said. "You must know that it cannot last long."

"It will last till I am safe away from here, and you cannot betray me," said Outram icily. "And that cannot be till I get help. Sooner or later I shall find a way of speaking to D'Arcy, and I know that he will be true—he will believe when I tell him what happened at High Coombe, and that I was not to blame. He will help me; I know that. Until then I stay here—and you stay, too! You have only yourself to thank. You injured me enough before; you might have left me in peace now."

"I tell you I meant——"

"Enough of that! I don't believe you."

Levison bit his lip hard.

"When you go out I shall escape," he said.

"You will not escape easily. When I leave this cellar I shall leave you bound hand and foot and gagged," said Outram coolly. "You have brought it on yourself, Levison."

"I suppose you know that you are breaking the law in doing this?" said Levison.

Outram laughed contemptuously.

"The law? The law is after me already—because I knocked down a German brute who was ill-using a small boy," he said. "Never mind the law! If I am caught, I go back to the reformatory—and I will die first!"

Levison eyed him very curiously.

"I know what happened at High Coombe," he said. "Cardew wrote to Mr. Trotman there, who used to be his tutor."

"He was my Form-master at High Coombe," Outram said. "Not a bad sort; rather an old donkey, that is all."

"His version is that you knocked the German master senseless in the Form-room."

"That is true! I would do the same again."

"Because he was a German, do you mean?"

"Because he was a cowardly brute!" said Outram. "But I don't expect my story to be believed. My past is against me—the past you succeeded in raking up at St. Jim's. But for you nobody might have ever known that I had served a sentence in a reformatory under the name of Purkiss."

"The fellows don't really know it now."

"They guess pretty correctly, I think. I had to own up at the finish, and when I left St. Jim's I had to tell my uncle why." Outram smiled bitterly. "You can imagine that it was a surprise for him. He never knew that while I was supposed to be spending a long holiday with a friend in Scotland I had really been an inmate of Hillstall Reformatory. He had been offended at my not writing to him while I was away; that was all. The truth was a blow to him; and I had to tell it to explain why I had left St. Jim's. I owe you a good deal, my dear Levison!"

Levison shivered.

"It might have come out, anyway," he said. "It was not actually I who gave you away. You gave yourself away."

"But it would not have been so if you had not raked up my past. Oh, I make allowances for you. You had a certain amount of sense of duty in the matter; but it was chiefly because you were suspicious, and spying, and ill-natured. You did not dislike me because I was a reformatory boy. It was not my bad qualities you disliked me for."

"I admit it," said Levison, in a low voice.

"When I went to High Coombe, my uncle would not deceive them. He told the headmaster everything, and the Head agreed to give me a chance there. There was no trouble then. There was not a fellow in the school I could not have handled easily, from the Sixth to the Second; but no one ever accused me of bullying, no one ever knew that I was so strong. Not till the finish. And that was not my fault. Not much good telling you that, though."

"I believe what you tell me," said Levison.

Outram shrugged his shoulders.

"You will not believe that I am your friend now, and that I want to make what amends I can?" said Levison.

"No."

Levison was silent.

He sat on an old case in the cellar, shivering a little. The storehouse under the barn contained few things—two or three old boxes and sacks, fragments of rope and wood and lumber, a rusty lantern, and a can of oil.

It was a dismal den.

Levison could see that Outram had arranged the old sacks on the boxes to serve as a bed.

He had lived for long, bitter days under conditions that had tried his hardy strength. Even upon his iron constitution the hardship had told.

"I could help you, if you'd let me," Levison said, breaking the silence at last.

"You would betray me, you mean!"

"You can't keep this up, Outram."

"That is my business."

Levison was silent again. There was nothing he could say in the face of this grim determination.

Outram blew out the lantern—he had to be careful with his meagre supply of oil. Mr. Pepper had unconsciously provided him with that.

"I am going up," he said. "You will be silent here, Levison. I don't want to use you worse than is needed. But I shall take no risks with you. If you make the slightest sound, you will suffer for it."

"Outram, I tell you——"

"That's enough!"

Levison heard him remove the heavy plank, and draw himself into the barn above. He heard him muttering to Binks, and he realised how much the dog's companionship had meant to Outram in his solitary hiding-place.

Ernest Levison moved restlessly about the dark cellar to keep himself warm.

How was this to end?

His chums had searched the barn for him, without dreaming that he was hidden there under their very feet.

How could they suspect it?

They could not. And others would not suspect. He was a helpless prisoner, unless he could escape. How was it to end? It was an unexpected and terrible result of his attempt to atone for the past. Yet he could not blame Outram for not trusting him. How was it to end?

There was a sudden movement above. He heard Outram drop into the cellar, and close the plank in its place. Someone was approaching, and Levison wondered whether it was a St. Jim's fellow looking for him. He knew that the time must be getting late now.

"Not a word!" came Outram's whisper in the darkness.

His hand was over Levison's mouth again.

Above them, faintly in the silence, footsteps sounded in the barn, and the whine of Binks.

CHAPTER 17.

Seeking his Brother!

FRANK LEVISON tramped through the wet fields, his head bent down to the bitter wind. In the midst of whirling snowflakes the panting fag came up to the barn.

His heart was heavy with a vague fear for his brother.

It was late in the evening—it wanted only an hour to bed-time—and Levison major had not returned to the school. Only an accident of some kind could have kept him out. He had gone to the haunted barn, and he had not returned. What could have happened to him there was a mystery; but that something had happened there seemed no doubt.

With anxiety gnawing at his heart, Frank had come to search for his major. Clive and Cardew had searched in vain, and there seemed little hope of succeeding where they had failed. But the fag could not rest.

He stepped into the barn and struck a match.

His heart was beating in great throbs.

The deathly face he had seen there in the shadows haunted his imagination. He had no superstition in his nature—but he had seen it and in that lonely place, in the darkness, ghost stories did not seem so absurd as they seemed in the well-lighted Form-room at St. Jim's.

But dangers, real or imaginary, would not have stopped the loyal little fellow then. Something had happened to his brother, and he was there to find him, to help him.

But his face was pale as he peered about the barn. Binks whined, and ran to him, rubbing his nose against the fag's trousers, and Frank was glad that the dog was there. It relieved the terrible loneliness.

He groped for Grundy's lantern, and found it, and lighted it with the match. The lantern-light glimmered through the barn, dimly lighting it.

Frank scanned the place, his heart beating. He would not have been surprised if that deathly face had loomed up again in the shadows. But this time he was determined to stand his ground. But the barn was empty, save for himself and the dog.

"Binks, old chap!" murmured Frank, rubbing the dog's head. "Binks, old fellow! What have you seen here, Binks?"

Binks whined.

He was scratching at the plank floor, as he had scratched when Clive and Cardew had been there—and had not understood.

Neither did Levison minor understand.

That the dog was excited—that he had seen something happen in the barn—the fag could tell easily enough. If Binks could only have spoken!

But Binks could not speak. He could only whine and scratch, his dark eyes gleaming with intelligence.

Levison minor scanned the barn for

traces of his brother's visit there; but there was no trace, save for the muddy marks on the floor. He left the barn, as Clive and Cardew had done, and searched the surroundings, even trying the rusty lock of the storehouse. But the lock was fast.

He returned into the building, to get out of the falling snow, and think.

Where was Ernest?

He had been there, that was certain. And he had not returned. Where was he? What terrible harm had befallen him?"

"Ernest!" Frank shouted the name in the desperate hope that his brother might be within hearing of his voice. "Ernest!"

Only the dull echo of his voice replied. Little did he dream that his cry reached the ears of his brother, and that an iron hand held Ernest Levison's lips sealed from replying.

"Ernest! Ernest!"

The dog whined.

Frank was silent again, his heart heavy. Where was his brother? What had happened to him in that lonely place?

The wind howled round the barn. Snowflakes blew in at the open doorway, and Frank, shivering, closed the door. Binks whined and scratched.

"If he could only tell me!" muttered the fag.

It came into his mind that Binks was trying to tell him something. Several times the intelligent animal had rubbed against his leg, always returning to the same spot to scratch at the floor. A strange look came over the fag's face as he approached the dog at last, and scanned the floor about him. Was there some clue to his missing brother to which the dog was trying to draw his attention?

Binks wagged his tail as Levison minor came to him. Binks knew that Frank understood at last.

Frank scanned the rough planks.

What secret was there for him to read if only he knew what Binks knew?

He turned the lantern-light on the plank, in the darkest corner of the barn, where Binks was scratching.

He started as he discerned several smears of a whitish colour. It was the mark of chalk—faint, yet discernible.

In spite of his anxiety Frank smiled. He knew now what had made the deathly hue of the face he had seen in the shadows, with Wally & Co. The face had been chalked. His quick mind jumped to that at once. And the unknown, who had played ghost, had touched this plank—not with his chalked face, that was certain—with his hands still smeared with chalk. Why should he have touched that obscure section of the floor with his hands?

Frank's heart throbbed.

There could only be one reason—the reason that little Binks, in his dumb intelligence, was trying to tell him. Because the plank was not firmly fixed, as it appeared—because it was removable!

The fag rose upright, almost giddy for a moment with the discovery. Binks rubbed a cold nose against his hand.

There was a way into the underneath storehouse, then, besides the door outside. The plank could be raised. Had Ernest gone that way? What other way could he have gone?

He had gone, and he had not returned. Why he should have explored the cellar under the barn Frank did not know; but in his mind was a picture of his brother, fallen and hurt, lying helpless, senseless, in the dismal den half underground.

"Ernest!" There was anguish in Frank's voice as he cried out the name. "Oh, Ernest!"

He threw himself on his knees, and dragged at the plank. Binks, satisfied now, ceased to scratch, and contented himself with wagging his tail.

The plank was immovable!

But it could be moved, he knew that. The pretended ghost, with his chalked face, had escaped that way from discovery. He was sure of it. Had he harmed Ernest Levison for discovering his secret den? Frank tore savagely at the plank, and as it did not move, he sprang up and looked wildly round for some instrument to move it. There was an iron bar at the window, and the fag dragged it from its place easily enough. He drove the end of the bar into the interstice between the planks, and prised.

Something dropped below.

Frank guessed that it was a wooden wedge, which had been jammed between the planks to keep the removable one wedged tight.

The next instant the plank flew up under his efforts.

He dropped the bar, seized the plank, and dragged it away.

Blackness yawned underneath.

Frank Levison picked up the bar again. He knew he might need a weapon. In his left hand he took the lantern, and, leaning down, flashed the light into the cellar. He could see nothing from above, save the old lumber there. But the floor was only a few feet down, and, without a tremor—anxiety for his brother hand banished fear—Frank dropped through.

There was a panting exclamation in the darkness of the cellar.

"Ernest!" shouted Frank.

He held up the lantern, keeping the bar in his right hand gripped ready for use. A form loomed up—the deathly face he knew, but which had no terrors for him now. There was a panting cry:

"Look out, Frank!"

"Ernest!"

Outram, with a desperate face, closed in on the fag. He had had to release Levison to face this new enemy. Frank faced him grimly, the iron bar gripped and ready.

The Fags Flee from the Ghastly Face!
(See Chapter 10.)

"You villain! Have you hurt my brother?"

Levison ran forward, and caught Outram by the shoulder.

"Outram, hold your hand, you madman! I tell you I am your friend, and my brother is your friend!"

"Outram!" shouted Frank, in amazement.

The iron bar clattered to the floor.

"Outram! My hat! Then it's all right!"

CHAPTER 18.
The Outcast's Story!

OUTRAM stood panting.

His hiding-place was discovered—and discovered by Levison's brother. He had not known that Levison had a brother. But as he looked at Frank's face he read there what he would never have expected to read in the face of a brother of Ernest Levison's.

The honest, loyal face was a clue to the honest, loyal heart. And Frank had thrown down his weapon.

Outram held his hand.

"Outram!" repeated Frank. "You! And you're here, Ernest! I—I thought that—that something had happened to you!"

"Something had!" said Levison grimly. "I found Outram here, and he took me for an enemy."

"Oh!" gasped Frank.

"Outram, if you can't trust me, you can trust my brother," said Levison quietly. "Frank will tell you that I mean you well."

"Why doesn't he believe it?" said Frank.

Levison flushed.

"There was something before you came to St. Jim's, Frank. Outram had reason not to believe me. I think he understands now, though."

"I—I don't quite understand, though I believe you," said Outram, at last.

"Whatever you may be, Levison, I can see that that kid is straight."

"Do you mean to say that my brother isn't straight?" exclaimed Frank indignantly.

Outram looked at him very curiously.

"So you are Levison's brother?" he said. "I never knew he had a minor. You were not at St. Jim's in my time."

"If he had been, things might have been a bit different!" muttered Levison. "They got different—after Frank came. Frank, old kid, I'm jolly glad you found me here—for my sake and for Outram's sake! We can help him now."

"You want to help me?" exclaimed Outram.

In spite of himself, the outcast had to believe now.

"I want to make up for some other things," said Levison.

"I—I suppose I must believe you."

Frank's eyes flashed.

"If he can't take your word, Ernie, let him alone!" he exclaimed hotly. "What right has he got to doubt your word?"

"He has a right—or he had once," said Levison quietly. "But surely you can trust me now, Outram? Strong as you are, you couldn't deal with the two of us—with that iron bar thrown in! I tell you we are your friends."

"I believe you," said Outram frankly. "I don't quite understand, but I believe you. Keep my secret, then, and go with your brother."

Levison smiled.

"Not yet!" he said. "I came here to find you and help you. You need help, Outram."

"But—but you——"

"I am going to help you."

Outram drew a deep breath.

"Yet you say you know why I left High Coombe!" he said.

"I know, but I haven't heard all your side of the story yet," said Levison. "In any case I should help you. I owe you a debt."

"I am wanted, now, by the police! You know that?"

"I—I suppose so," said Levison, hesitating. "But I tell you I owe you a debt, and I'm going to pay it."

"I'm not to blame for what happened." Outram sat down on the case, shivering. "What I did at High Coombe I'd do again, though I don't expect to get fair play. I'll tell you."

"You only hammered a German," said Frank.

Outram smiled faintly.

"But that German was a master in the school. You've heard that I knocked him senseless in the class-room. It's true! I'd do it again!"

"But why——"

"I'll tell you. Gompers was a naturalised man, but he was a Prussian to the very finger-tips. He was silky and soapy to the Head and the other masters. He couldn't make himself popular, but he was tolerated. But to the boys—well, he was a tyrant and a cowardly hound. He knew how to keep in the Head's good graces, with his Prussian cunning. The fellows hated him like poison, but it was no good complaining of him. He hated us all—he hated everything English. He fawned on the masters, and took it out of the junior boys. He licked us as much as he dared, just keeping within the limit so that there wouldn't be marks to show. He would twist a fellow's arms, and that hurts. He was specially down on me and some other fellows."

"Why?" asked Levison.

"Because our fathers were at the Front, killing Germans," said Outram grimly. "He made a special mark of every fellow who had a relation in the fighting-line, and took it out of him, in an underhand, cowardly way. But it wasn't any use saying that to the Head, even if the fellows had wanted to take that way of dealing with him. I stood him quietly enough—I could stand him. But there was one fellow—a little chap in my Form, delicate and not very fit—named Lee, a good little chap, and his life was fairly made a burden to him by that brute. When the row came at last, we were in the class-room doing German, and Gompers was in a specially ratty temper. There'd been news from the Front about Haig pounding the Huns, and that always made him bitter."

"I suppose it would," said Levison. "Old Schneider at St. Jim's doesn't enjoy it."

Frank did not speak. His eyes were fastened on Outram's face.

"Well, then the row came," said Outram moodily. "Gompers was more savage than usual. He had ragged nearly every fellow in the class, rapping knuckles, caning, and sneering and bullying. Then he had young Lee out before the class, and he caned him until the kid was nearly in hysterics, and then he picked on him again, and twisted his arm——" Outram gritted his teeth. "I couldn't stand it any longer! I knew I could handle the Hun brute. I collared him, and dragged him off."

"Phew!"

"Good for you!" exclaimed Frank breathlessly.

Outram grinned a little.

"You should have seen his face, when a Fourth-Form chap yanked him," he said. "He didn't know I was so strong. He was simply mad with rage. He picked up a pointer, and came for me like a wild beast. I might have been badly hurt, too, and he would have had to answer for it, but he was too wild to think of that. He came for me, and I—I didn't stop to think. I let him have it. You know how I can punch, when I like! I let him have it fair and square, and he went heels over head, and—and didn't move again."

"By Jove!"

"I never really meant to hit so hard, but I had let myself go. He was knocked senseless, and—and there was a fearful row, of course. The Head came down on me. I was locked in a room. When the brute came to, he pitched his yarn to the Head. I don't know what he said, but he made it all right for himself. And he was so bitter that mere expulsion from the school wouldn't satisfy him for me—he meant to make a police case of it. If it hadn't been for my past, it might have been hushed up by my leaving the school. But the Head wouldn't listen to a word from me. He had my rotten past in his mind."

"Hard lines!" muttered Levison.

"I don't know that I can blame him. It sounds pretty steep, knocking down a master in his own class-room," said Outram moodily. "Any other chap, it would have been different; but with me, you see, the Head knew I'd once been sent to a reformatory for hurting a chap when I lost my temper in a fight. That did it."

"I suppose it would."

"Well, it did. The Head simply took it that my savage temper had broken out again, and he wouldn't hear a word. Gompers insisted that the affair should be brought before a magistrate, so that I could be sent back to the reformatory. And I—I bolted."

"Best thing to do in the circumstances," said Levison. "But didn't the other fellows speak up for you?"

Outram smiled bitterly.

"I dare say they were afraid of that German brute taking it out of them afterwards. They didn't, anyway! I don't know that it would have done any good. It was my term at Hilstall that did for me. If the Head hadn't known that! But he did know it. I was done for! But they haven't got me yet!"

He looked up quickly.

"You believe me, I suppose?"

"Every word," said Levison.

"Thanks!"

"And you're not to blame," said Frank hotly. "The rotter was only a Hun, anyway. Wouldn't your uncle stand by you?"

Outram laughed bitterly.

"My uncle had had enough of my ruffianism, as he called it. I can't blame him, when he knew about Hilstall. But I wasn't to blame in this instance. Even in that old affair I wasn't wholly to blame. The man I hurt was a brutal rough, and he attacked me. But this time—this time I did right. No good asking anybody to believe that, though."

"You've got friends at St. Jim's who will believe it," said Levison.

Outram shook his head.

"D'Arcy, perhaps—I relied on D'Arcy. But the other fellows—no! I don't know why you should take my version, Levison," he said at last. "I—I said some things to you that I'm sorry for. But never dreamed——"

"You thought the leopard couldn't change his spots, nor the giddy Ethiopian his skin," said Levison coolly. "All serene! It was a surprise to the other fellows as well as you." He looked at his watch. "By gad, we shall have to scoot now, or we shall get scalped! It's Frank's bed-time nearly! You don't want to keep me a prisoner now, Outram?"

Outram laughed.

"I'm coming back later," said Levison; "after lights out! I'm going to bring you some grub, and some coats and rugs—to start with. You're going to be a bit more comfortable here. And I'll give any message you like to D'Arcy."

"Tell him what I've told you," said Outram.

"Right!"

"And—and I'm sorry, once more, Levison——"

"All serene!" Levison held out his hand. "Friends now, at any rate!"

Outram took his hand. The Levison he had once known was not the fellow to make friends with an unhappy outcast utterly down on his luck. Levison had changed—and it was a great change!

A few minutes later the plank was closed, and the brothers were tramping back to St. Jim's through the snow. And Frank Levison was in the School House just in time to join the Third as they marched to their dormitory.

CHAPTER 19.
Gussy Knows Best!

"BAI Jove, heah's Levison!"

"Hallo, here you are!"

"Where on earth have you been?" exclaimed Clive.

"Out, dear boy," said Levison calmly. "Frank looked for me and brought me home. I suppose I've got to report to Railton?"

"Yaas, wathah! But what have you been up to, Levison? I was weally gettin' quite alarmed, you know," said Arthur Augustus.

Levison smiled.

"Drop in at my study presently, and I'll tell you," he said.

"Wight-ho!"

Levison repaired to the Housemaster's study to report his return. He was a little doubtful about what to say. Certainly he could not explain the facts to Mr. Railton. The Housemaster must not

be allowed to know about Outram. That would not have done at all.

Mr. Railton looked at him very severely when he presented himself.

"Ah! You have returned, Levison!"

"Yes, sir."

"It is nearly nine o'clock," said the Housemaster sternly. "What excuse have you to give for staying out till this hour, Levison?"

"I'm sorry, sir!"

"No doubt. But why did you stay out?"

"I—I never meant to, sir," said Levison. "But I couldn't get back. A—a fellow played a trick on me."

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton. He looked rather sharply at the junior. "Very well; you will take a hundred lines, Levison!"

"Yes, sir."

Levison left the study, glad to get off with that, and to escape further inquiry. Possibly Mr. Railton thought that it was some Grammar School fellow who had played that trick on Levison and kept him out. At all events, he did not suspect that it was the fugitive junior from High Coombe.

Levison went to his study, and found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy there with his study-mates.

"You haven't much time left for prep," remarked Clive.

"Never mind prep. I shall chance it with Lathom for once!"

"What on earth did you stay out for?" exclaimed Cardew. "We jolly near came to going to Railton about it."

Levison closed the door. What he had to say was for no ears outside Study No. 9.

"I went out to find Valentine Outram," he said quietly.

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"And did you find him?" grinned Cardew.

"Yes."

"What?" yelled Cardew.

"I found him!"

Arthur Augustus' eyes glistened.

"Gweat Scott! Is old Outwam neah heah, Levison?" he exclaimed excitedly. "Bai Jove! Where is he?"

"At Pepper's barn."

"Wippin'! I'm going' to see him!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, turning to the door.

"Hold on!" rapped out Levison.

"Wats! I am goin' to see old Outwam, and assuah him that I am backin' him up!" exclaimed D'Arcy warmly.

"I tell you——"

"I shouldn't wondah if he came this way, hopin' to fall in with me," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "He would know that I should stick to him. I'm not down on a fellow for biffin' a Hun! I wish he would come here and biff old Schneidah, bai Jove!"

Levison gently pulled the swell of St. Jim's away from the door.

"You can't go now," he said. "You'd be missed at bed-time."

"Yaas, but——"

"It's got to be kept dark, fathead! It means Hilstall Reformatory for Outram again if he's nailed!"

"Oh, cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus stopped at that. In his eagerness to testify his unshaken loyalty to his old pal, he had forgotten Outram's danger. Gussy's noble heart was unequalled, but Levison's head was wanted, too, in this matter.

"Suppose you spin us the yarn," drawled Cardew.

"Yaas, go ahead, deah boy! It is vewy wemarkable that you have found old Outwam, when I nevah thought of anythin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Weally, Cardew, I see nothin' whatevah to gwin at in that wemark!"

"Lend me your ears!" said Levison.

And Levison told the story, interrupted by a series of surprised ejaculations from the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, when Levison had finished. "And it was old Outwam who was followin' Blake and Hewwies an' Dig an' me the othah night, and we nevah knew it! The ass should have spoken to us! I should not have allowed them to talk about it aftahwards!"

"He wasn't sure that Blake and Herries and Dig wanted to see him," grinned Cardew. "I fancy they wouldn't, either."

"Wubbish! Of course they will stand by old Outwam!"

"I fancy not."

"Weally, Cardew, you are an ass, you know!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Outwam is one of the best, and my fwiends are quite awaah of it."

"Better not tell them," said Levison uneasily.

"Wats!"

"Look here, Outram is wanted—wanted by the law!" rapped out Levison. "I don't know whether we've the legal right to help him, even."

"Oh, cwikey!"

"As the police are not officially looking for him I suppose we can do as we like——"

"We should, anyway!" yawned Cardew.

"Well, I should," said Levison. "But other fellows mayn't like to be mixed up in a thing of this kind."

"It's jolly serious!" said Clive. "I know what the Head would think, if he knew."

Levison gave him a quick look.

"I've told you chaps," he said. "There's no secrets in this study. But you're at liberty to keep out of the bizney, of course. I don't need help."

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said Clive. "Of course we're with you. But the less said outside this study the better, that's what I mean. There's risk in the bizney, and some fellows mightn't like it. I'm taking your word about Outram being straight. I don't know him."

"Outwam is as stwaight as a stwing, Clive!"

The South African junior nodded.

"That's good enough for me!" he said. "But it's queer, if it happened at High Coombe, as he told Levison, that the High Coombe fellows haven't spoken up for him, and against that German beast Gompers."

"Yaas. That does seem wathah wotten!" admitted Arthur Augustus. "But I am quite suah Outwam told Levison a stwaight yarn."

"I am sure of it, too!" said Levison. "I'm going to help him. After lights-out I'm going to cut dormitory bounds, and take him some things. You fellows can contribute, if you like."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"By gad! What an adventure!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew, his eyes glistening. "I back him up all along the line! Biffing a Hun master in his own classroom—why, he ought to have a medal for that! And bolting from school, and camping in a cellar under a barn—by gad! The chap's got some nerve! What's he going to do afterwards, Levison?"

"I don't know, and Outram doesn't either. He's got to keep clear; that's the first thing. He's not going back to Hilstall."

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically. "I'll w'ite to my patah about it if necessary, and ask him to get the House of Lords to pass a new law banishin' filthy German masters from the country."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass stiffly upon the hilarious denizens of Study No. 9.

"If you fellows will explain where the mewwy joke comes in I shall have the pleasure of laughin', too!" he remarked freezingly.

"Look in the glass, deah boy!" said Cardew.

"Weally, you uttah ass——"

"Let's get to bizney," said Levison. "It's agreed to keep it dark, and not to say a word outside this study!"

"Nothin' of the sort, Levison!"

"What?"

"I am bound to tell my study-mates. Also Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah, as they are Outram's friends."

"Look here," said Levison testily, "I've told you, D'Arcy, because Outram asked me to. Otherwise I shouldn't have been ass enough to trust you with a secret."

"I wegard that wemark as dispawagin', Levison!"

"Outram himself would not try to speak to you while you were with Blake and the others!"

"The poor chap was very uneasy, of course," assented Arthur Augustus. "He had too much at stake to wisk it, the poor chap! But it is diffewent with me. I know that my fwiends are to be twusted absolutely. Howevah, I agwee to be cautious. I will appwoach the mattah vewy diplomatically, and ascertain their views befoah I uttah a word. It will be all wight, Levison!"

And Arthur Augustus, with a reassuring nod, quitted the study.

"Well, my hat!" said Clive.

Levison grunted, and Cardew burst into a laugh.

"The merry yarn is spreadin'!" he remarked. "You were a howlin' ass to say a word to D'Arcy."

"I had to! Outram asked me to. It was to get in touch with D'Arcy that he came this way at all. I couldn't refuse. But—oh, he's a good ass, but he's a silly ass! Those chaps were sorry for Outram when he went; but it's a long step from that to chumming with a fellow who's trying to dodge the reformatory."

"The fat's in the fire now!" said Cardew. "Can't be helped! Use up your spare energies in makin' a rippin' parcel for Outram. If he's been feedin' on raw beets, it's about time he had a square meal."

And Study No. 9 were soon busy on that important matter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had to be given his head. There was certainly no stopping him. He had promised to be diplomatic; but at St. Jim's there was only one fellow who had any faith in Gussy's diplomacy—and that was Gussy!

CHAPTER 20.
Diplomatic!

TOM MERRY & CO. had just finished prep when the door of their study was opened, and an eyeglass gleamed in.

The Terrible Three turned inquiring glances on the swell of St. Jim's.

"Trot in, Gussy!" said Lowther heartily. "I've been making up some new verses for the Christmas number. Something about Fourth-Form chaps who were chucked around by a tramp in a field——"

"I wefuse to heah a fwiend of mine alluded to as a twamp, Lowthah!"

"Wh-a-at!"

"A friend of yours!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So the tramp who pitched your pals about is a friend of yours?" said Manners. "Well, my hat! How long since you took to chumming with tramps?"

"You uttah ass! Outwam is not a

twamp!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly.

There was a yell of astonishment from the Terrible Three.

"Outram!"

"Ahem! I am not goin' to tell you anythin' yet," said Arthur Augustus hastily. "I looked in to ask you to step into my studay. Pway, come along. I have a wathah important communication to make."

"Gussy——"

"D'Arcy, you ass——"

But Arthur Augustus was gone.

The Terrible Three looked at one another blankly.

"Is he off his rocker?" asked Monty Lowther, in wonder.

"Let's go and see!"

And the Terrible Three, their curiosity greatly excited, repaired to Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

Blake & Co. were there. Blake and Herries and Digby had been busy on their contributions for the "Weekly" Christmas number, when Arthur Augustus ruthlessly interrupted them with the statement that he had an important communication to make.

"Go and make it to Tom Merry," suggested Blake, without looking up.

"Tom Mewwy is comin' heah to heah it, deah boy."

"Look here, Gussy, you're not holding a meeting in this study while I'm doing my ghost story!" said Herries warmly.

"Wats!"

Then the Terrible Three came in.

Arthur Augustus glanced out into the passage, and then closed the door in a very mysterious manner.

Blake tapped his forehead significantly.

"Now, deah boys——"

"All serene! We know what's coming!" said Blake sympathetically. "When did you first feel it coming on, Gussy?"

"Eh? Feel what coming on, Blake?"

"That sad attack of insanity."

"You uttah ass!"

"Weren't you just going to confide to us that you'd gone off your rocker?" asked Blake, in surprise.

"Certainly not, you burblin' ass!"

"Oh! My mistake! What is it, then?" asked Blake blandly.

"I have a vewy important communication to make," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I am goin' to surpwise you vewy much!"

"Are you going to talk sense?" asked Digby.

"Yaas, of course!"

"Well, that will surprise us, and no mistake! Go ahead, and let's see if you can do it."

"You feahful ass, Dig——"

"Yes, nothing like trying," said Monty Lowther heartily. "I don't suppose it will be a success. But try. 'If at first you don't succeed, try again,' you know!"

"Pway don't be a funnay ass, Lowthah!"

"If Gussy's finished," remarked Lowther, "I've got a few verses I'd like to read to you, about some Fourth-Form kids who were chucked about by a tramp——"

"Chuck him out!" exclaimed Herries, jumping up.

"Hold on, Hewwies! Dwy up, Lowthah! I have not made my important communication yet. Pway, keep the peace," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Lend me your eahs, deah boys. Levison thinks that pewwaps you had bettah not be told!"

"Levison!"

"Told what?"

"That is the secwet, deah boys!"

"Oh, there's a secret, is there?" grunted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! You see, if there were any incautious talkin', it would lead to that poor chap bein' nabbed."

"Eh? What chap?"

"I am not goin' to tell you yet," said Arthur Augustus cautiously. "I wequiah your solemn pwomise not to jaw wecklessly befoah I say a word about Outwam, or even mention his name."

"Outram!" yelled Blake and Herries and Dig.

"Ahem! That is the secwet. The first question is, suppose a chap—any chap, you know—knew a chap was hidin' away because he had biffed a filthy Hun—only suppose, you know? Well, a chap would be bound to stand by a chap, and his fwiends would be bound to stand by him, wouldn't they? I wequiah an answah to that befoah I mention Outwam's name."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I fail to see anythin' to cackle at. This is a vewy sewious mattah indeed!"

"So you do know something about Outram?" exclaimed the captain of the Shell.

"I have not said so, Tom Mewwy."

"Is Outram anywhere near St. Jim's?" exclaimed Blake, in wonder.

"I wequiah an answah to my question, Blake, befoah I weply to that inquiwy in the affirmative."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the six juniors in chorus. Arthur Augustus' diplomacy tickled them immensely. Certainly Gussy's diplomacy couldn't be stigmatised as secret diplomacy.

"If you fellows persist in cacklin', I shall wefuse to tell you a word about Outwam!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly.

"So Outram's here?" said Tom Merry. "You may as well pitch out the whole yarn now, Gussy. Of course, we shall keep it dark. I'm standing by Outram, for one!"

"Same here," said Herries. "I don't know that I liked him much when he was here; but he's biffed a Hun since then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus looked satisfied.

"Vewy well, deah boys. I expected that of you. I will welate the whole circs."

And he did.

Tom Merry & Co. listened in wonder as D'Arcy related the whole circs.

"And it was weally poor old Outwam who was doggin' us the othah night," Arthur Augustus wound up. "Lookin' for a chance to speak to me, you know. I suppose he wemembahed that I, at least, was a fellow with some tact and judgment."

"And it was Outram handled us in the dark?" said Blake, with a whistle.

"Yaas, wathah! You surpwised him, wushin' on him, you know, an' he wanted to get away. Natuwally, he did not wely on your tact and judgment as he did on mine. Outwam was always a wathah sensible chap."

"Fathead! He was relying on your soft head!" grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"It was like his cheek to handle us," said Herries. "Still, I'm for backing him up. He seems to have given that Hun beans, and that's a point in his favour, at any rate. I wish he'd do the same to Schneider!"

"We're all in the game," said Tom Merry. "We back him up through thick and thin. I believe every word he's told Levison. He wasn't to blame."

"Wathah not!"

"And we'll all jolly well go and see him," said Tom Merry. "Not all at once, as we don't want to risk being spotted. But he'll be glad to know we're standing by him. We may be able to help him somehow."

"I am goin' to think that out, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly.

"Then it's as good as done," said Monty Lowther, with a wink at the ceiling.

"Thank you, Lowthah! That is an unusually sensible wemark for you!"

"Ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass, Lowthah! If you are twyin' to pull my leg——"

"Let's go and see Levison," said Blake.

"Pway keep it dark, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, as the juniors left the study. "Not a word about Outwam!"

"Hallo!" said Talbot of the Shell, who was passing the door. "News of Outram?"

"I am sowwy I cannot answah that question, Talbot, as I am keepin' it stwictly dark about Outwam bein' neah St. Jim's!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Talbot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Talbot can know," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But if all St. Jim's isn't to know, you'd better buy a gag for Gussy, Blake!"

"Bai Jove! I wegard that wemark ——"

"Bow-wow! Dry up!"

Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to No. 9, Talbot with them, and until bed-time there was a keen and interested discussion on the subject of the refugee in the barn. And after lights-out that night, half a dozen juniors quitted the School House under cover of the mist, most of them carrying bundles. And that night the heart of the outcast was lighter, and his face was brighter, than for many long days past.

CHAPTER 21.

Bravo, Gussy!

"OUTWAM, deah boy, this won't do!"

It was a strange scene in Mr. Pepper's underground storehouse.

A rusty lantern on an old box shed a dim light through the cellar. Valentine Outram, his face much happier now, was seated on the case, eating a good meal—the first good meal he had had for a long time. Tom Merry was there and Levison and Cardew and Clive and Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was quite a representative body that had come to visit the outcast in his hidden retreat.

Outram had been startled at first; but he was glad enough to see them. The juniors had found him munching a dog-biscuit borrowed from Binks in the barn. He had something better than that now.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had come very near to blubbing as he saw the pinched, thin face of his old pal. He blew his nose very violently after he had shaken hands with Outram half a dozen times at least.

"Wotten!" Arthur Augustus mumbled twenty times at least. "Wotten!"

There was a low buzz of conversation in the storehouse under the barn. It was agreed that Tom Merry & Co. were going to stand by the fugitive, and see him through. They fully believed Outram's explanation of what had happened at High Coombe, and they knew that it was not so much his action there, as the miserable shadow of his past, that had brought about his disgrace and danger. And it is much to be feared that the juniors did not see anything very wrong in "biffing a Hun" in any circumstances. And, as Tom Merry remarked, if High Coombe had only known Outram as his St. Jim's friends knew him, the headmaster would have taken a different view.

Arthur Augustus sat on a box, his noble brow deeply lined with thought. He had been silent for some time now

while the other fellows talked. He broke suddenly into speech, with the remark that it wouldn't do.

Outram glanced at him affectionately. It was Levison to whom he owed most, and he was grateful. But it was to the noble Gussy that his heart turned.

"I have been thinkin'——" continued Arthur Augustus.

"Keep it up," said Blake. "That will save you the trouble of talking."

"Pway dwy up, Blake! I have been thinkin', Outwam, deah boy, this won't do. You can't wemain heah long. Of course, we are goin' to look aftah you, and keep you supplied with gwub an' things, and keep it awf'ly dark. I was vewy diplomatic, I assuah you, about lettin' these fellows into the secwet. But shortly we shall be bweakin' up for the Chwistmas vacation, old chap. Befoah then, somethin' has got to be done."

"If I get clear——" said Outram.

"That is not suffish!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "You have got to be westored to your pwopah place in all honour, deah boy."

Outram smiled sadly. He had given up hope of that.

"You came in this diwection, Outwam, to see me, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You knew you could wely on my tact and judgment to set mattahs wight, didn't you, old chap?"

There was a chuckle in the cellar. Arthur Augustsus turned his eyeglass sternly on the chucklers.

"I—I knew I could rely on your friendship, Gussy," said Outram. "I—I oughtn't to have troubled you. I know that. But I was down, and when a chap's down, he turns, naturally, to a fellow who's stood by him before. I knew you'd help me if you could, though I know I ought not——"

"Wats! If you had not thought of comin' to me, Outwam, to get you out of the fix, I should have been vewy much annoyed."

"You can't get me out of the fix, Gussy, old chap!"

"All you can do is to keep your head shut, and not give the bizney away," remarked Levison. "That will be hard enough for you, Gussy."

"Wubbish! I have been thinkin'—this won't do! It is weally wathah odd, Outwam, that I did not find you heah. Levison found you. Howevah, heah you are! I am goin' to get you out of the fix. You did quite wight to wely on me. I have thought of a wheeze."

"Bow-wow!" murmured Blake.

"Pway don't uttah widiculous ejaculations, Blake. You disturb the sewenity of my weflections. I have thought of a way out."

"You have?" asked Outram, with a smile.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And what is it?" demanded Clive.

"A wound wobin."

"Wha-a-at?"

"A wound wobin!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"What in the name of the Kaiser is a wound wobin?" yelled Cardew.

"A wound wobin, deah boy, is a wound wobin. Fellows sign a papah all wound, you know, with their names ——"

"Oh, a round robin!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, a wound wobin. That's the ideah!" said Arthur Augustus triumphantly. "We are goin' to wescue old Outwam——"

"With a round robin?" asked Levison dazedly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Does this run in your family, D'Arcy?" inquired Cardew.

"I wegard that wemark as asinine, Cardew! A wound wobin is the pwopah capah."

"But what on earth is a round robin going to do?" shrieked Levison.

"You are wathah slow of appwehension, deah boy. I will explain. Outwam is judged guilty of a feahful assault and battewy at his school, because he knocked ovah the Hun mastah. The Head, knowin' an—an unfortunate incident in his past, jumped to the conclusion that it was a wuffianly act. Weasonably speakin', Outwam cannot blame his headmastah, as he does not know Outwam as we do."

"I don't blame him," said Outram, in a low voice.

"Quite wight. The old johnny is only actin' accordin' to his lights," said Arthur Augustus benevolently. "I believe in goin' easy with headmastahs. They are not, as a wule, a vewy intelligent class. Pway don't cackle, deah boys, you are intewwuptin' the thwead of my thoughts. Now, suppose the Head of High Coombe knew that Outwam was one of the best—a vewy decent chap in evewy way, a pwime favowite with excellent fellahs like us——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, do dwy up! If the old johnny knew that, it would be bound to altah his opinion on the mattah."

"But he doesn't know it," grunted Blake.

"Exactly. That is where the wound wobin comes in. We are goin' to tell him."

"What?"

"We are goin' to w'ite a lettah to the headmastah of Coombe," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "We are goin' to point out that Outwam was at St. Jim's a good time, and while there he won golden opinions fwom evewybody, as Shakespeare wemarks. We are goin' to point out that he is a wippin' chap, an' vewy populah, and quite incapable of a wuffianly act. Evewy fellow in the school who is at all decent will sign the wound wobin. We can get at least a hundwed signatures. When the headmaster of High Coombe gets that lettah, it will make him wub his eyes—what?"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry.

"By gad!" murmured Cardew.

Outram sat up, his eyes sparkling.

"Oh, Gussy!" he said.

Arthur Augustus smiled. He had succeeded in making an impression.

"You see, the old johnny will simply have to sit up an' think," he explained, "when he finds that a whole cwowd of fellows at St. Jim's think a gweat deal of Outwam, knowin' his past all the time. We will give him Outwam's explanation of the affaih at High Coombe, an' state that we believe it thowoughly, an' suggest his makin' inquiwies among his own boys as to the chawactah of his German mastah, pwomisin' to pwotect them fwom the wevenge of the Hun if they tell the twuth about him. He may wegard it as cheek, but it is bound to make an impwession on him. And we shall say that if Outram is bwought befoah a magistwate we shall all come up and speak for him at the twial, and state on oath that we know him to be incapable of the wuffianism attwibuted to him. I wathah think, deah boys, that that would get a verdict in Outwam's favah."

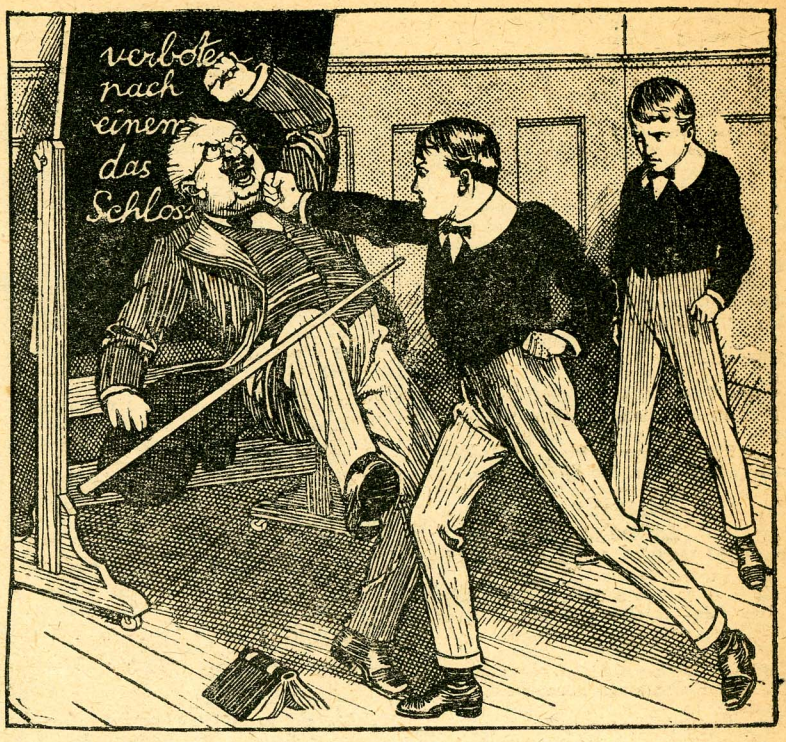
"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings——" murmured Levison.

"I wefuse to be called a babe an' sucklin', Levison, you ass! The ideah is simply wippin', and it's bound to see Outwam through."

"By Jove!" said Outram, with a deep breath. "It would make no end of difference—no end. If you fellows cared to do it! But why should you speak up for me?"

"Of course we'll do it!" said Tom Merry warmly. "It's a simply corking idea, and how Gussy thought of it beats me hollow."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"



Outram and the Hun.
(See Chapter 18.)

"I should say it would do the trick," said Levison quietly. "All that's needed is a fair and thorough investigation at High Coombe, irrespective of Outram's past. It's bound to cause that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus rose from the box.

"It's time we got back to St. Jim's, deah boys. That lettah is goin' to be w'itten in the mornin'. Buck up, Outwam, old chap! We're seein' you thwough."

"Heaven bless you, Gussy!" said Outram huskily.

"And if all goes well, deah boy, you'll come home with me for Chwistmas," said Arthur Augustus. "I pwesume you have not made any othah engagements, undah the circs?"

Outram smiled.

"No, hardly."

"Then it's all wight! Keep your peckah up!"

That night the outcast slept soundly and peacefully in the hidden cellar.

CHAPTER 22.
Righted at Last!

TOM MERRY & CO. were very busy the next day.

Arthur Augustus' great scheme was carried out with thoroughness.

The secret of Outram's presence in the barn was kept. But that Tom Merry & Co. had met him was necessarily an open secret, now.

The letter to the headmaster of Coombe was carefully concocted and written out, and signatures were attached to it in crowds.

Study No. 6, the Terrible Three, and Study No. 9 started the signing. Talbot came next, and Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn and Julian & Co. Gore and Skimpole and other fellows added their names, and Frank Levison and Wally & Co. of the Third. There was great, though suppressed, excitement over the affair. When a crowd of signatures had been secured in the School House, Tom Merry carried the document over to the New House. Figgins & Co., as soon as they knew what was on, signed with great promptness, and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence followed their example, and two dozen more New House fellows.

By the time the letter was completed, it consisted chiefly of signatures. It was a testimonial to Outram's good character, which certainly could not have been neglected in a court of law, and was not likely to be despised by Outram's new headmaster.

The letter told of the juniors' faith in Outram, and their friendship for him. It told how he had saved the life of Levison's uncle, at the risk of his own, when the Governor of Hilstall was coming to St. Jim's to identify him as a former inmate of Hilstall Reformatory. It told how he had betrayed his secret by defending D'Arcy from a gang of roughs, and by that self-sacrifice made it necessary to leave St. Jim's. It told Outram's own story—that he had struck down the German master to save a frightened, small boy from lawless brutality. It requested a searching investigation at High Coombe, with a promise of protection to the boys who should tell the facts. It hinted that if the affair came before the magistrates, as the spiteful Gompers desired, such an investigation would be demanded there, and could not be refused. There was, perhaps, a little in the letter which the headmaster of High Coombe might regard as cheek, but that could not be helped. It was certainly a letter that he was bound to take notice of and act upon.

And when it was finally complete, the juniors walked down to Rylcombe and registered it, to make it safe.

As the next two or three days passed, while they waited, the juniors visited Outram in his hiding-place, in twos and threes at a time. The outcast had plenty of company now, beside that of Binks.

They had asked for a reply when the investigation had been made, undertaking to hand the reply to Outram—without a hint, however, as to where he was. The days passed slowly for the juniors. But on Saturday afternoon there was the sound of a motor-car on the drive, and a white-whiskered gentleman stepped out at the School House. And Tom Merry & Co. gathered round anxiously, as they recognised the outcast's uncle, Sir Robert Outram.

Sir Robert glanced rather curiously at the breathless juniors as he passed into the house. He was shown into the Head's study.

"That means business!" said Levison.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, with a smile of satisfaction. "I have not the slightest doubt that it is all wight."

"Wait and see!" remarked Cardew.

"My dear fellow, it was simply a question of dealin' with the mattah with tact and judgment——"

"For which the one and only is justly celebrated!" said Monty Lowther gravely.

The juniors waited.

Kildare of the Sixth came out presently, and told Tom Merry he was wanted in the Head's study.

"You are suah the Head does not want me, Kildare?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "Bai Jove, that is vewy cuwious! Pewwaps you had bettah go, Tom Mewwy, as the Head has asked for you."

"Perhaps I had!" said Tom, laughing.

And he went.

He found Sir Robert Outram with Dr. Holmes. A letter lay on the Head's desk—the celebrated round robin.

The doctor looked at Tom over his glasses kindly.

"Your name is written here, Merry, among the others."

"Yes, sir."

"You sent this—this somewhat extraordinary letter to the headmaster of High Coombe School?"

"Yes, sir. We felt bound to speak up for Outram—a real good fellow, down on his luck," said Tom firmly.

Sir Robert gave him a very kind glance. The Head coughed.

"You have seen Outram, then, Merry?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, with some hesitation.

"You know where he is at this moment?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Then you will kindly inform Sir Robert Outram, who has come to fetch him."

Tom Merry's lips set.

"You need have no fear for my nephew, my dear lad," said the baronet. "As his uncle, I thank you from my heart for the way you and your friends have stood by him. His name is cleared."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Tom, his face lighting up.

"I admit that when I first received that shocking report from High Coombe I was very angry," said Sir Robert. "Neither can his headmaster be blamed for taking the view he did, considering my nephew's unfortunate record. But this letter made a very deep impression upon Dr. Tremaine. A very searching investigation was made among the junior boys at High Coombe. The headmaster discovered, to his surprise and horror, that the German master had been guilty of consistent cruelty and tyranny, and had so terrorised the boys that they did not venture to make any complaint. Some of the boys had spoken up for my nephew, after he had fled, to their Formmaster, but they seem to have been poohpoohed. A strict and unsparing investigation, however, brought the whole matter to light. Herr Gompers has been turned out of High Coombe in ignominy."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry, his eyes dancing.

"It is known now that he was cruelly ill-treating a small boy when my nephew interfered—that he then attacked my nephew with a pointer, and that Valentine struck him down in self-defence, to escape serious personal injury. Needless to say, this put a new complexion on the whole matter. Valentine's place is open for him at High Coombe—he will return there with all honour. Gompers, now that the truth is known, is only too glad to let the matter drop—indeed, only to avoid a scandal at Dr. Tremaine's school have I agreed not to prosecute the ruffian. Now, Merry, you can understand that I am anxious to see my nephew as soon as possible. You know where he is."

"Yes, sir. I'll take you to him at once."

"Please do so, Merry!" said Dr. Holmes.

Levison dashed off, ahead of the others, to the barn. By the time the baronet arrived there, with an army of joyful juniors, Outram was out of the cellar and in the barn—waiting for his uncle.

Outram's face was happy enough now.

"Valentine!" exclaimed the baronet, as he entered. His face contracted as he saw Outram's pale, almost haggard face, happy as it was now. "My poor boy!"

"Uncle, I——" Outram's voice broke.

The juniors discreetly withdrew, leaving uncle and nephew together.

* * * * *

Valentine Outram left St. Jim's in his uncle's care that afternoon.

A roar of cheering from the St. Jim's fellows followed the car down the road.

His last grip of the hand was for D'Arcy, but the look he gave Levison was very grateful. His old enemy had served him well, and Outram did not forget.

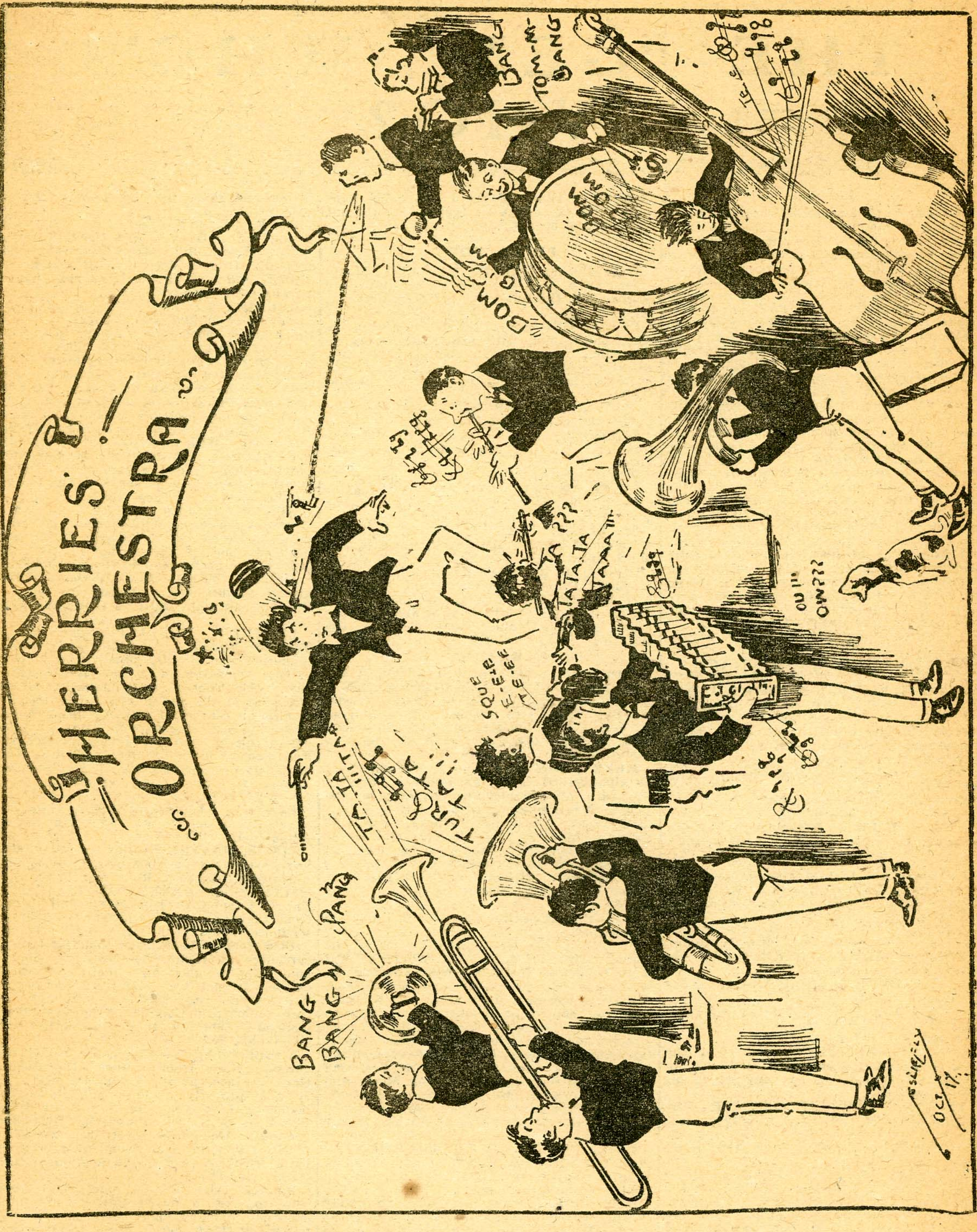
"Bai Jove, the clouds have wolled by, and no mistake!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as the car disappeared in a cloud of powdery snow. "Wasn't it jolly lucky that Outwam came heah, wememberin' that there was a fellow heah whose tact and judgment he could wely upon?"

"Wasn't it?" grinned Levison.

It was an open question as to whom the honour was due for having rescued Outram from his sore strait. Study No. 9 claimed the honour, with some justice. To Frank Levison, however, much was due. And it could not be denied that Arthur Augustus' great idea of the round robin had finally done the trick. It had to be agreed that the honours were divided.

Outram was gone—back to his old school, to be received there with rejoicing. The shadow of the past darkened his life no longer. But it was not long ere the chums of St. Jim's met him once more—under the hospitable roof at Eastwood, where they met for Christmas, with Arthur Augustus doing the honours. And that it was a merry Christmas need not be said.

THE END.



Herries' Orchestra.

(These verses would appear to be by Monty Lowther. Herries, questioned upon the subject, said that he could not help it if the practice of his orchestra chanced to coincide with the time when the Terrible Three were scratching their heads and racking their brains over an issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly."—Editor.)

(Herries didn't say anything about the brains of the Terrible Three. I don't know that they have any.—George Herries.)

What is it jars upon our ears,
  With such unearthly din?
There's the crash of the drum and the trombone's hum,
  And a squeaking violin.
They're at it once again, the oafs!
  Our blessing on him who buries,
Alive or dead, that noisy crew,
  The orchestra of Herries.

There's one that blares, and one that bangs,
  And lots are toot-i-tooting.
One rasps on the flute. I'd like to shoot
  The lot, or give 'em a booting.
Their chief's of understanding void,
  Though his feet are the size of wherries.
And a wooden-headed set of freaks
  Are the orchestra of Herries.

They don't begin to comprehend
  The needfulness of quiet.
No chap can pen his best stuff when
  There's all this rotten riot.
I'm fed up quite, and Manners growls
  Like a dog, and old Tom Merry's
In a regular bait—and all because
  Of the orchestra of Herries.

THE "GEM" WHO'S WHO?

NOTE.

FROM time to time enthusiatic readers write demanding a complete list of the boys and masters at St. Jim's. Now, it is quite impossible to give this, and it would be useless if it could be given. No purpose could be served by a list of the names of people quite unknown to the stories. But the desire to have a record of those who do figure therein is quite a reasonable one. Two years ago an attempt was made to gratify it; and the demands for the number containing the Supplement have gradually changed—since my readers found it could not be procured—to requests that I should reprint it.

I am not going to do that. Some of the information given in it is now out of date; some seems to me now quite superfluous. There were omissions from it, and there were errors in it—for none of us is infallible. In compiling the list which follows I have done my best to be accurate, and I have had the invaluable help of Mr. Martin Clifford—who certainly ought to know all about it; but I may have made a mistake or two, for all that. The list is presented in a different form from that of two years ago—a more convenient form, I consider; and it has been enlarged to include characters in the stories who do not belong to St. Jim's. But here again it is not possible to mention everyone whose name has occurred.—THE EDITOR.

ST. JAMES'S SCHOOL.

Headmaster: RICHARD HOLMES, M.A., D.D.

There are two Houses—School House and New House; the former having very considerably the larger number of occupants.

Housemaster, School House: VICTOR RAILTON, M.A.

Housemaster, New House: HORACE RATCLIFF, M.A.

School colours: Red and white.

SIXTH FORM.

Form-master: VICTOR RAILTON, M.A.

KILDARE, ERIC.—The captain of St. Jim's, one of the best of good fellows, and a rare all-round athlete. Irish to the core.

BAKER, STANLEY.—A prefect of the right sort, and a chum of Kildare.

DARREL, GEORGE BRUCE.—Also a prefect, and the skipper's most intimate chum.

DUDLEY, EDWIN BARNET.—Another prefect, and a good one.

GRAY, ALBERT THEODORE.—One of the New House prefects.

JONES, HORACE ANSTRUTHER.—A good-tempered and good-hearted member of the Form, not specially distinguished.

KNOX, GERALD.—The black sheep of the Sixth. A gambler, a bully, and a wrong 'un generally; but contrives to hang on to his office as prefect.

LANGTON, HERBERT OSWALD.—Prefect, good fellow, and one usually in the lead.

MACGREGOR, NIGEL.—From the Highlands. The right sort.

MONTEITH, JAMES GARSTON.—Head of the New House, and second to Kildare in the Form. Was formerly an enemy of Kildare, but is so no longer. Somewhat cold and selfish in temperament, but straight-going now.

MULVANEY, PATRICK.—Mulvaney major—has a minor in the Fourth. Irish, and a good sort.

NORTH, JOHN.—A prefect, and one of the right kind.

RUSHDEN, PHILIP.—One of the leading lights of the Sixth—a prefect, and good value at games.

WEBB, GEORGE GARNER.—A New House prefect—a sound and reliable fellow.

(The average age of the Sixth Form is about seventeen. But there is nothing to prevent a fellow of under that age achieving promotion, and as some of the seniors are eighteen or so there would be a range of fully two years between the oldest and youngest members of the Form. Questions as to the exact age of individuals are not wanted, and cannot be answered.)

FIFTH FORM.

Form-master: HORACE RATCLIFF, M.A.

The Fifth does not come much into the stories; but the following members of it call for mention:

CUTTS, GERALD.—Prides himself on his doggishness, and, with plenty of money at command, apes the man about town. Not so utter a blackguard as Knox, however, and has been known to show up decently now and then.

GILMORE, PHILIP REVEL.—A chum of Cutts, and cut much to his pattern.

LEFEVRE, PHILIP.—Quite a different sort, and perhaps the best fellow in the Form.

PRYE, HERBERT.—Not a nice individual.

SMITH, WILLIAM WADE.—Smith major—has a minor in the Fourth. Quite a decent sort.

ST. LEGER, ARTHUR UMPHREVILLE.—A chum of Cutts and Gilmore, snobbish and unprincipled.

(Here again the range of age is fairly wide. A stupid fellow, or one who will not work, may stick in the Fifth till he leaves. A clever youngster may gain a place in the Form while no older than many in the Fourth.)

SHELL.

Form-master: LESLIE M. LINTON, M.A.

In the case of the Shell a complete list is given as far as the School House is concerned. There are not many Shell fellows in the New House, and only the four mentioned have so far played any part in the stories.

MERRY, TOM.—Must be given a place out of alphabetical order, as junior captain of St. Jim's, and the leading character in the yarns. A fine specimen of the very best type of British schoolboy; plucky, straightforward, fond of fun, athletic, and clever enough without any claim to being a genius. Was formerly at Clavering. (Study No. 10.)

BOULTON, ROBERT FREDERICK.—A fellow of no particular distinction. (Study No. 8.)

CLAMPE, LESLIE.—New House. A snob and a rotter.

CROOKE, GEORGE GERALD.—One of the worst fellows at St. Jim's. Would be still more dangerous if he had more courage; as it is, is a bad enemy, an unreliable friend, and a gay dog in a dingy way. Has a pretty plentiful supply of pocket-money, but no longer expects to be the heir of Colonel Lyndon, his uncle, who is also Talbot's uncle. Consequently hates Talbot, for supplanting him. Hates Levison major, for deserting the rotters' brigade. Hates Tom Merry and all his chums because they are not his sort. Quite a Hun in the hating line, but even there inferior to his associate Racke. (Study No. 7.)

DANE, CLIFTON.—A Canadian, and a real good sort. Has brains and muscles, fond of a jape, ready for a fight if need be, and can hold his own with most. (Study No. 11.)

FINN, BUCK.—From the wild and woolly West. Given to big talk, but not to great deeds. No particular harm in him, but is certainly not to be taken as a fair representative of the American boy. (Study No. 4.)

FRENCH, LANCELOT.—New House. A decent sort, with no very outstanding characteristics.

FRERE, HARRY.—Not a personage of special distinction. Nothing black against him. (Study No. 2.)

GIBBONS, HUGH.—Another of the rank and file. Rather a better fellow than his study-mate, Scrope. (Study No. 5.)

GLYN, BERNARD.—Has been rather lost sight of lately, but has played prominent parts at times. Quite a genius at invention, with a practical touch that Skimpole, the other St. Jim's inventor, lacks. Glyn's home is close at hand, and notes concerning his father and sister will be found later on. (Study No. 11.)

GORE, GEORGE.—Used to be an utter wrong 'un. Of late has shown up much better, though still a trifle inclined to petty bullying. Owes a deep debt of gratitude to Talbot, and will do more for him than for anyone else. (Study No. 9.)

GRUNDY, GEORGE ALFRED.—Came to St. Jim's from Redclyffe, whence he got the order of the boot for "whopping a prefect." A big, burly, robustious fellow, with altogether too exalted an opinion of his own brains and capabilities generally. Thinks himself a heaven-born detective. A duffer at games, though keen, but can box, and in a fight would probably whack any of the Lower School except Tom Merry, Talbot, and Noble. With all his faults, he has many good qualities. Brave as the bravest, transparently honest, and a rare sticker. Has a rich uncle, and is generous with the frequent tips he receives. (Study No. 3.)

GUNN, WILLIAM CUTHBERT.—One of Grundy's liegemen, Wilkins being the other. A very decent fellow indeed. Rather more bookishly inclined then either of his chums, but quite a useful man in the playing-fields.

JIMSON, FRED.—New House. Nothing known against his character, so must be taken as all right until he shows the cloven hoof!

LOWTHER, MONTAGUE.—One of the Terrible Three. A fellow of decided humorous and literary proclivities, with the artistic temperament. Has less backbone than either Tom Merry or Manners, but does not lack pluck, and has a happy knack of looking on the bright side of things. A loyal chum and a good sportsman. Has a constant flow of speech, and a weakness for bad puns. Possesses dramatic ability, and has often turned it to account in the way of impersonations, for fun's sake generally. (Study No. 10.)

LENNOX, JAMES.—Not an important personage in the stories. Buck Finn's stable companion. (Study No. 4.)

LUCAS, MATTHEW.—Has not as yet made any great mark for good or evil in the little world of St. Jim's. (Study No. 2.)

MANNERS, HENRY.—Of the Terrible Three. Came with Tom Merry and Lowther from Clavering. A rather more quiet and studious fellow than either of his chums, with a temper that lacks something of the sunniness of theirs, but with a heart of gold. Not as good an athlete as Lowther, and far behind Tom Merry in that respect. An ardent and skilful photographer, a capable mathematician, and more studiously inclined generally than the other two. (Study No. 10.)

NOBLE, HARRY.—Commonly called Kangaroo. Hails from Victoria, the Cabbage Garden State, as its neighbours call it, so is not properly a Cornstalk, that name belonging to the men of New South Wales. But it is pretty often used for Australians generally. One of the best, a powerful and plucky fellow, good all round at games, very hefty with the gloves, and a staunch chum. (Study No. 11.)

RACKE, AUBREY.—"Young Moneybags." The son of a war-profiteer, purse-proud, snobbish, cunning, unscrupulous, and dissipated. Is the leader of the rotters' brigade, and more dangerous than Crooke, because more reckless and less cowardly. There is a yellow streak in him, but he can show fight on occasion.

SCROPE, LUKE.—A disciple of Racke's. No good to himself or anyone else, but less positively harmful than Racke or Crooke, and perhaps not quite such a mean creature as Clampe or Mellish. (Study No. 5.)

SKIMPOLE, HERBERT.—A brainy, weedy youth. Really has ability, but dissipates it in the pursuit of useless 'isms, and is looked upon with contempt by most of his schoolfellows for his absent-mindedness and impracticable ways. His inventions will never work, and all his reading serves only to fill his head with queer notions. But he is thoroughly good at heart, and has a keen

sense of justice and a real desire to do good. Is happy in sharing a study with Talbot, who likes and befriends him, but naturally does not get on so well with Gore, his other partner. (Study No. 9.)

TALBOT, REGINALD.—One who has learned many lessons that his Form-fellows have still to learn, and is naturally somewhat older than his years. He came to St. Jim's a cracksman, for the sake of spoil; but life there wrought a complete reformation in him, and he is now a fellow above suspicion—honourable, kindly, and with courage equal to any trial. His nature is somewhat reserved, and he hates dragging others into his own troubles, yet he has again and again steered others through theirs, and has sacrificed much for some who had no claim upon him. Ranks with Tom Merry himself as a sportsman and in the esteem of the Form, though he may not be so general a favourite as the genial Tom. (Study No. 9.)

THOMPSON, HUBERT.—New House. A decent fellow of no marked importance.

WALKLEY, PAUL.—Not one of the leading lights, but the right sort on the whole. (Study No. 8.)

WILKINS, GEORGE.—Henchman to the great Grundy. Quite a good fellow, and a staunch friend. Useful in the playing-fields. (Study No. 3.)

(The age of the fellows in the Shell ranges from slightly under 15 to 16 or so.)

FOURTH FORM.

Form-master: PHILIP G. LATHOM, B.A.

This is a complete list of the Form, New House as well as School House. At the request of many readers the New House studies are shown.

BATES, HAROLD.—Not a conspicuous personage, but quite a decent fellow. (Study No. 3.)

BLAKE, JOHN.—John, of course; but equally, of course, "Jack." May be regarded as the leader of the Fourth in his House. Yorkshire by birth and breeding, and a fine example of what the big county can produce. A first-rate all-round athlete, a rattling good fellow, and a very decided individual. Appeared with his study-mates in St. Jim's stories even before the birth of the GEM, and before Tom Merry was known to us. (Study No. 6.)

BROOKE, DICK.—The one day-boy at St. Jim's. His people are not well off, and he had opposition to face at the outset, but came through it all right, and is now regarded as one of the best by everyone whose opinion is worth anything. Has written verse of some merit, and possesses a bent to musical composition also. A good cricketer and footballer.

CARDEW, RALPH RECKNESS.—A comparatively late-comer to the school. A spoiled boy, and a very queer mixture. When the good in him is uppermost he is as decent as the best, and very generous; but he is capable of reckless folly and tricks that can only be described as underhand. Very much of a dandy, with a turn for sarcasm; fond of chipping Grundy and D'Arcy. Might be a good athlete if he were not so slack. The influence of Levison and Clive has helped him to pull himself together, and for some time past he has been as straight as he is plucky. (Study No. 9.)

CHOWLE, CYRIL.—New House. A black sheep, who has a study to himself, because no one in his Form cares to share it. (Study No. 6, N.H.)

CLARKE, RICHARD.—New House. Decent, but at present undistinguished. (Study No. 2, N.H.)

CLIVE, SIDNEY.—From South Africa. Very capable and hefty, full of fun, and as "straight as a string." Great chum of Levison and Cardew. A very useful man in the half-back line, and a good cricketer. (Study No. 9.)

CONTARINI, GIACOMO.—The son of a prominent Italian statesman, who has been the object of more than one German plot. A nice fellow in every way, with a very winning nature, and plenty of courage. Is cherished by all the fellows of the right sort for his own sake and that of his gallant and glorious nation. (Study No. 7.)

D'ARCY, THE HON. ARTHUR AUGUSTUS.—The great Gussy. His chums sometimes wonder whether his heart or his head is the softer; but, though he does plenty of silly things, he never does a mean one, and lives up to the high traditions of a noble name. An exquisite, wasting too much time and money on dress. Quite as certain that the quality of his brains is top-hole as the magnificent Grundy is in the case of those with which Nature has endowed him. His chums decry his athletic abilities in jest, but he is a more than useful man at any game, and can use his fists. Has a difficulty in pronouncing the letter "r," which is sometimes taken as affectation, but is not so. We all love Gussy! (Study No. 6.)

DIGBY, ROBERT ARTHUR.—One of the four staunch chums who, as a Co., rank second only to the Terrible Three. A good fellow in every respect, and of a fair level of attainment both in work and play, though not striking in either. (Study No. 6.)

DIGGES, ADOLPHUS.—New House. Not a prominent character. Pretty much of a normal boy. (Study No. 3, N.H.)

FIGGINS, GEORGE.—The acknowledged chief of the New House juniors, in spite of the fact that they include fellows of a Form senior to his. A good leader, too, though not remarkable for finesse. Trusts to Kerr for that. Long-legged and wiry, an athlete of skill and pluck, and a fellow beyond reproach. Cherishes a devout admiration for D'Arcy's Cousin Ethel. (Study No. 4, N.H.)

HAMMOND, HARRY.—The son of a man who has made a fortune in the hat trade. Had not much in the way of schooling as a child, and still finds difficulty with the letter "h." A typical little Cockney, with all the alertness, cheeriness, and pluck of the species. Is devoted to D'Arcy major, who championed his cause when he first came to St. Jim's. On the best of terms with the other three in his study. (Study No. 5).

HERRIES, GEORGE.—The burliest member of the Study No. 6 quartet. Renowned for the size of his pedal extremities. Good at games. Growls a bit at times, and drops on to Gussy hard, but is by no means bad-tempered. Keen on music. (Study No. 6.)

JULIAN, RICHARD.—A Jew, and a fine specimen of a race that has a wonderful history. Was up against Lowther when he first came to St. Jim's; but that was Lowther's fault, as he has admitted since. They are good friends now. Cheery and light-hearted, but capable of serious thought, Julian holds his own well alike in the Form-room and on the good greensward. Good stuff all through. (Study No. 5.)

JONES, EDWIN ALFRED.—One of the rank and file. Is Jones minor—has a brother in the Sixth.

KERR, GEORGE FRANCIS.—A Scot from the Highlands, long-headed and crafty. Great at impersonating, and full of wiles. Withal a strictly honourable and good fellow. One of the best at all sports. United in the closest chumship with Figgins and Wynn. (Study No. 4, N.H.)

KERRUISH, ERIC.—The boy from the Isle of Man. A real good sort. (Study No. 5.)

LAWRENCE, EDGAR.—One of the three scholarship boys, who are close chums. Clever and good at games, and absolutely sound. (Study No. 5, N.H.)

LEVISON, ERNEST.—Levison major; has a minor in the Third. Of old a real black sheep, but even then a fellow with strong characteristics and big possibilities. Now thoroughly straight, largely through the influence of his young brother, Talbot and D'Arcy also helping. Shrewd and crafty, with a knowledge of the world beyond his years, and a touch of sarcasm. A forward of skill and dash, a fine bowler, and a plucky bat. (Study No. 9.)

LORNE, ALAN.—A Scot, who has not often played a leading part in the stories. (Study No. 1.)

LUMLEY-LUMLEY, JERROLD.—Not much to the fore of late, but was prominent when he first came to St. Jim's, and earned the nickname of the "Outsider." Has lived that down long ago, and is now a fellow of somewhat quiet and reserved disposition, whose place is always on the right side, and who is generally respected and liked. The son of a millionaire. (Study No. 8.)

MACDONALD, BRUCE.—Another Scot; a decent fellow of no very great mark. (Study No. 3.)

MELLISH, PERCY.—Toady, spy, and sneak. A wrong 'un, but less black than Racke and Crooke, for he is not so spiteful, and does, once in a way, have a decent impulse, though it never lasts long. No hero. (Study No. 2.)

MULVANEY, MICHAEL.—"Mick." Mulvaney minor—has a brother in the Sixth. A broth of an Irish boy. (Study No. 4.)

OWEN, LESLIE.—A scholarship boy and a sterling fellow, the close chum of Redfern and Lawrence. (Study No. 5, N.H.)

PRATT, PERCIVAL.—Another New House fellow of the right sort. Plays for the House at cricket and footer, and usually supports Figgins & Co. (Study No. 3, N.H.)

RAO, KOUMI.—Jam of Bundelpore. An Indian boy, against whom plots from outside the school have had to be met. Of fiery courage and high, chivalrous nature, he is not easily understood by the rest, for there is in him much of the Orient, hard for the Western mind to fathom. But he is known as a good sort, and can hold his own on the cricket-field. He greatly admires Figgins, whom he destines for the post of vizier in his kingdom in the future. Has a study to himself. (Study No. 1, N.H.)

REDFERN, RICHARD HENRY.—By way of being a competitor for the leadership of the New House juniors, though he is ready enough to back up Figgins against their School House rivals. Nailing good at sports, and has the makings of a fine journalist. A fellow of character and marked ability, who should go far, but no despiser of a jape for all that. (Study No. 5, N.H.)

REILLY, PATRICK.—One of the four chums of whose little band Dick Julian may be looked upon as leader. From Ulster. Has a keen sense of humour and a great love of a practical joke. Full of spirits (Irish, but not whisky!) (Study No. 5.)

ROBINSON, WILLIAM THOMAS.—Robinson minor, having a brother in the Fifth, and, like him, in the New House. Quite all right on the whole, but not famous. (Study No. 2, N.H.)

SMITH, FRANK.—Smith minor—his brother is a member of the Fifth Form. Nothing wrong with Smith minor! (Study No. 7.)

TOMPKINS, CLARENCE YORK.—Decent enough, but with queer notions at times. Is considered by Mulvaney minor, who shares a study with him, a trifle potty; and considers Mulvaney a mad Irishman. But they are good chums in spite of this. (Study No. 4.)

TRIMBLE, BAGLEY.—His like St. Jim's has never known. At Greyfriars he has a brother in the spirit, one William George Bunter. Trimble is a braggart, a liar, a coward, a sneak, and, above all, a glutton. He opens other fellows' letters, he borrows or annexes anything that takes his fancy, he is not too cleanly in his person, and he is disgustingly lazy. But he is always amusing. (Study No. 2.)

WYATT, PERCY.—A far better fellow than the egregious Baggy—quite a decent sort, indeed—but far less interesting. (Study No. 8.)

WYNN, DAVID LLEWELLYN.—One of the very best. A big eater, and fond of his grub, too; but not by any means to be classed with Trimble and Bunter. Can practise self-denial, and is full of generous instincts. A tiptop goalkeeper and a splendid bowler. A fellow of a simple and confiding nature, with great faith in Figgins and Kerr, but no fool. Hails from Wales, and is a credit to the gallant little Principality. (Study No. 4, N.H.)

(There is little difference in age between Fourth and Shell, and no great gulf between them in scholastic attainment. The average age of the Fourth would be a trifle lower, as clever younger boys must go through it first, and as dull older ones are usually placed in the Shell on account of age and size.)

THIRD FORM.

Form-master: HENRY SELBY, M.A.

It is neither possible nor necessary to give a complete list in the case of the Third. All the members of the Form who have appeared in the stories are included here, however.

BUTT, BERTRAM.—A decent youngster.

D'ARCY, THE HON. WALTER ADOLPHUS.—D'Arcy minor, third son of Lord Eastwood and younger brother of the great Gussy. The leader of the fag tribe, full of pluck, cheek, and boisterous fun, but with something of his brother's high ideals for all that. Wally, as everyone calls him, may not know that he has them; but he is as straight as Gussy, and, in his different way, as proud. There is nothing of the dandy about Wally. He is not fond of his second name, and anyone calling him "Adolphus" is apt to get disliked.

FRAYNE, JOE.—Formerly a waif of the London streets, but a good, honest, loyal kid, with a great affection for the two D'Arcys and Tom Merry, who helped to rescue him and to make things easier for him at St. Jim's. Backs Wally up for all he is worth, and is also very fond of Levison minor.

GIBSON, STANLEY.—Known as "Curly." Quite a nice youngster, but without great strength of character. A member of Wally's little band.

HANKEY, SIDNEY.—New House. Not much known of him—for or against.

HARVEY, RICHARD.—"Dicky" to the Third. A youngster of the right sort on the whole.

HOBBS, RAYMOND.—One of the Wally brigade, and a sturdy member thereof.

HOOLEY, PHELIM.—The Third's wild Irishman.

JAMESON, ERNEST.—Of the New House, but accepted by Wally & Co. as one of themselves, in spite of that drawback!

KENT, LANCELOT.—Not a bad sort, though he was led astray by Piggott on a time.

LEGGETT, GEORGE LUDOVIC.—A harmless youngster with right instincts; handicapped by a stutter, which makes him something of a butt, and draws upon him the ire of Mr. Selby.

LEVISON, FRANK.—Levison minor. As good a fellow as St. Jim's holds, absolutely straight and unswervingly loyal, yet without a touch of priggishness. Has the firmest faith in his major and a very strong affection for Ernest's chums, Clive and Cardew, and for his own leader, Wally D'Arcy. A most promising little footballer.

MANNERS, REGINALD.—Manners minor. A spoilt child, wayward and self-willed, but with little real vice in him. Has been led astray more than once by older fellows, and has caused his major no end of trouble. Is his father's pet. Wally has taken him in hand, but finds him distinctly a handful, and there may be further trouble before long. The least ready to acknowledge Wally's leadership of the six who stand closest to him, but still one of them for weal or woe.

PERKINS, CECIL.—A New House fag of small note—as yet, anyway.

PIGGOTT, REUBEN.—The one real rotter in the Third. Rather older than most of his Form, and older in ways than in years. Plays the blade, toadies to Racke & Co., and is the sworn enemy of Wally.

WATSON, OLIVER.—Nothing really wrong with Watson, though he has listened to the siren voice of Piggott, and made sundry feeble experiments in the gay dog direction. Says he won't do it again, and may be believed—at any rate, till it happens.

(Though most of the members of this Form are in the neighbourhood of 13, there are boys both above and below that age in it. The extreme variation would be from 12½ to 14½.)

SECOND FORM.

THE members of this Form, mainly youngsters of under 12, have never figured in the stories, and no list of them is necessary.

FIRST FORM.

THERE is no First Form. It was abolished years ago, when preparatory schools became more plentiful, and the age of admission to St. Jim's was raised to 11.

AMONG the other masters must be mentioned:

MORNY, ADOLPHE LE BLANC.—The French master.

SCHNEIDER, OTTO GOTTFRIED.—The German master.

MEMBERS of the school staff who should be mentioned are:

House Dame (Matron), School House: MRS. MIMMS.

House Dame (Matron), New House: MRS. KENWIGG.

Nurse: MISS MARIE RIVERS.

Porter: EPHRAIM TAGGLES.

Keeper and proprietress of the tuckshop: MARTHA TAGGLES, wife of Ephraim.

Page: TOBY MARSH.

OUTSIDE of the school (and of Rylcombe Grammar School, some particulars of which are appended later) there are several characters which have often appeared, and may figure again.

CLEVELAND, MISS EDITH.—The charming girl cousin of the D'Arcys. Is about the same age as Arthur Augustus.

CONWAY, CAPTAIN LORD.—Elder brother of Arthur Augustus, and son and heir of Lord Eastwood.

CRUMP, WILLIAM ZEDEKIAH.—The fat and slow-witted Rylcombe policeman.

EASTWOOD, THE EARL OF.—Family name D'Arcy. Father of Gussy and Wally.

FAWCETT, MISS PRISCILLA. — Tom Merry's old governess and present guardian. Has a number of queer and old-fashioned ideas, and would like to coddle Tom, but is one of the best in spite of her eccentricities.

GLYN, MISS EDITH.—The elder sister of Bernard Glyn, of the Shell. Just what an elder sister should be, and a handsome girl, too.

GLYN, MR. LYELL BERNARD.—Bernard's father. A very rich man, and extremely hospitable.

JOLIFFE, ABEL.—The landlord of the Green Man Inn at Rylcombe. A stout rascal.

LEVISON, MISS DORIS.—The very pretty and very nice sister of the two Levisons.

LODGEY, JOE.—A hanger-on at the Green Man. Knew Talbot in his days of crackmanship, and has tried to trade on the knowledge, but without success. Has been employed by Racke and Crooke in some of their rascality.

LYNDON, COLONEL ARTHUR FRANK WILMSLOW.—Uncle of both Talbot and Crooke. Regards Talbot as his heir now, vice Crooke, cut out for gross misconduct.

MOSS, MR. ISIDORE.—The uncle of Dick Julian. A retired moneylender, regarded by many people as a very hard case. Is certainly a shrewd man of business, but knows how to be charitable and generous. Has more than once helped St. Jim's boys with good advice and in other ways.

PEPPER, MR. ERASMUS ZACHARIAH.—A miser and shyster. Lives at Rylcombe in a dirty little cottage, though he is, next to Mr. Glyn, the wealthiest man in the parish. Owns the barn in which the St. Jim's Parliament sits.

RIVERS, JOHN.—Known to Talbot in his old days as "the Professor." A burglar of great cunning and resource. Father of Miss Marie. Has now put his old life behind him, and is serving King and country as Private Rivers of the Loamshire Regiment.

RYLCOMBE GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

THE friendly rivals and near neighbours of St. Jim's.

Nothing like a complete list of the Grammar School boys is necessary, or can be given. Very few of the seniors ever come into the stories. The fellows who do are chiefly members of the Fourth Form, of about the same ages as the Shell and Fourth at St. Jim's. (Rylcombe has no Shell.)

Colours, green and black.

Headmaster: THE REV. FRANCIS GODOLPHIN MONK, D.D., M.A.

SIXTH FORM.

THE only two calling for mention are:

DELAMERE, EDWARD HEREWARD.—Captain of the school, and a good fellow.

HAKE, ALBERT SIMON.—A wrong 'un and a bully.

FOURTH FORM.

BLANC, GUSTAVE.—From la belle France. Known as Mont Blong. Quite one of the right sort, and dead nuts on a jape. Speaks rather queer English, but can make himself understood.

CARBOY, WALTER WILLIAM. — A bustling, robustious fellow of the right sort.

CARKER, CHARLES EZRA.—A sneak and something of a funk.

GAY, GORDON.—Leader of the juniors. An Australian. Of the Tom Merry type, frank, fun-loving, straight, and plucky, capable of deadly seriousness when need arises, but usually taking life mirthfully. A skilful amateur actor.

LACY, ALGERNON.—Was formerly at Cardew's old school, Wodehouse. Is a fine bowler, but nothing else good can be said of him. Empty-headed, snobbish, and no hero. Does not get on well with Gay and his chums.

MONK, FRANCIS.—Son of the Head, and close chum of Gordon Gay. Like Gay, a fine all-round sportsman, and in every way a good sort.

TADPOLE, WALTER.—A very eccentric junior, who adopts all kinds of weird notions. Less brainy than Skimpole, but even more amusing.

WOOTTON, JACK.—Wootton major—the two brothers are twins, but Jack saw the light first. Another Australian. Sound, plucky, and hefty at all games.

WOOTTON, HARRY. — Wootton minor. Very much the same type of fellow as his brother, and very like him in appearance. The two Woottons and Gay are called at Rylcombe "the Three Wallabies." For the benefit of those who may not know, it may be mentioned that a wallaby is a species of kangaroo.

THE FIGHTING SPIRIT.

When the camp begins to rally at the sound of the reveille,
And the stars are still a-shining overhead;
When the prospect's far from sunny, and you'd give a mint of money
Just to have another forty winks in bed.
When the game begins to bore you, and the sergeant tries to floor you,
And the joy of life seems gone for evermore;
By the manliness that's in you, brace your heart and nerve and sinew.
And assist your level best to win the war!

When you shave in icy water, and no beaming bright-eyed daughter
Brings your "brekker" on a dapper little tray;
When you're faced with plum and apple, just before you have to grapple
With the thousand pressing problems of the day;
When the road seems long and dreary, and you're sick and stale and weary,
And you're sighing for the things that are sublime,
Don't go flying in a paddy, but be up and doing, laddie,
And you'll find you're on the target every time!

When you feel you're growing older, with a pack upon your shoulder,
As you double up and down the dusty square;
When the sergeant's voice is bawling that you're really most appalling,
And he hauls you up to say you're not "all there";
When you feel, whilst eating dinner, that you haven't backed a winner,
For you cannot tell the coffee from the stew;
Let your heart be tuned to laughter—there's a good time coming after,
And you'll rank with those who love to dare and do!

When the sunset's rays are streaming, and you're lying down a-dreaming
Of that ripping little spot you call your home,
Where you dwelt in mirth and pleasure, in a realm of love and leisure
Which you'll think of wheresoever you may roam:
Though the glorious past may haunt you, do not let the present daunt you;
Be a soldier, cool of courage, sure of aim;
Keep a resolute endeavour, and your name will stand for ever
As a Trojan who could always play the game!

Oh, I know it's often cheerless, and we cannot all be fearless,
And the strife may be severe, the warfare long;
Yet beyond the far horizon which you keep your longing eyes on
You will come to peace and rest at even-song.
When your spirits are at zero, meet reverses like a hero,
For the winter of your life must turn to spring;
And in joyous days to be, lad, you'll be glad that you were free, lad,
To do honour to your Country and your King!

G. R. S.

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA

Our Great New Serial Story.

THE CHIEF CHARACTERS OF THE STORY.

PHILIP DERWENT .. .. } The twins from Tasmania—Philip (Flip) at Highcliffe, Philippa (Flap) at Cliff
PHILIPPA DERWENT .. .. } House.
PONSONBY .. .. The leader of the Highcliffe nuts.
GADSBY .. .. One of the nuts, and Flip's enemy.
VAVASOUR .. .. Another of them—an empty-headed swell—hand in glove with Gadsby
MONSON MINOR .. .. .. Yet another—sulky—disposed to the Gadsby faction.
MERTON .. .. .. } Two more of the nuts—chums of Flip's—they share No. 6 Study with him.
TUNSTALL .. .. .. }
FRANK COURTENAY .. .. .. Captain of the Fourth at Highcliffe—a fine fellow.
RUPERT DE COURCY .. .. His chum, known as the Caterpillar.
THE GREYFRIARS FELLOWS .. .. For further information see the "Magnet."
MARJORIE HAZELDENE .. } Cliff House girls and friends of Flap.
CLARA TREVLYN .. .. }
PHYLLIS HOWELL .. .. }
MOLLY GRAY .. .. A little red-headed Cliff House junior—knows Merton at home.

Gadsby and Vavasour, with the aid of Hazeldene, of Greyfriars, have stolen Flip's cockatoo, and the bird has been set loose. Flip and his chums go to look for Cocky, although they are due on the beach for a five versus five conflict between Highcliffe and Greyfriars. The girls, up on the cliffs, find the bird, and the searchers find them. They reach the beach late, and the fight begins.

(Now read on.)

Spectators of the Fray.

ON the cliffs above, three of the girls saw the first blows struck.

"Oh, there are ten of them—five Highcliffe and five Greyfriars! I don't think it can be really a fight," said Phyllis Howell. "It's just a boxing-match, you know. They've all got gloves on!"

"Then they can't hurt each other much," said Miss Clara.

"Can't they?" said Flap, who knew more about boxing-gloves than Clara did. "It isn't quite so bad, of course; but you can hurt all right through gloves. It's a fight, Phyllis, I'm sure! Look at the Highcliffe boys' faces! They're all very serious, except Flip's; and that smile of his means that he's in dead earnest, though you might not think it. Aren't you going to look, Marjorie?"

"No—at least—no, I'd rather not. Not till I can't help it, anyway."

"Your brother isn't there—not even in the crowd," Phyllis said.

"Well, he would be in the crowd, if he were there at all," said Miss Clara. "It's the Famous Five—as the silly creatures call them—who are fighting Highcliffe. And the Highcliffe five are the great Flip, the lordly Pon, lazy Algy, Tunstall—do you know, I rather like Tunstall?—and that sulky-faced Monson."

"Flip's opposite that boy with the jolly face—but he doesn't look so jolly now," said Flap.

"That's Bob Cherry," Marjorie replied. "He's ever so nice. Oh, it's horrid that he and your brother should be punching each other, Flap!"

"And Harry Wharton and Ponsonby are matched together," said Phyllis. "If I were a—a betting girl I should put my money on Harry—he's sure to win!"

"Monson's against the Indian boy, and Merton and that nice-looking fellow with rather a girlish face——"

"That's Frank Nugent, Flap," said Marjorie. She added, almost reproachfully: "You seem to know the Highcliffe boys much better than those from Greyfriars—but they're our real friends!"

"Oh, but I must barrack for Highcliffe!" said Flap. "Flip's Highcliffe, and I can't help wanting his side to win."

She was alone in that. It was but natural that the other three should stand firm by the old friendships, in spite of Flip and Algy and Tunstall.

The fight began as though the ten were paired off, although if they had been they would not have been bunched so closely together, of course.

"Go!" said Squiff.

Hurree Singh was the first to get home a blow that counted. There were few, if any, quicker hitters among the Greyfriars juniors than the lithe and active Inky, though Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and several others, were all better than he considered as all-round boxers.

And Inky was up against the softest proposition of the five. No one but Gadsby and Vavasour and himself knew how little heart Monson had for the fray; and quite certainly no one suspected how much Merton and Tunstall and even Pon, for once, had.

Tunstall was worse over-matched than anyone else on either side at the outset. Johnny Bull was a hard hitter, and Tunstall's guard lacked effectiveness. But he took punishment well to-day, and his return punches were vigorous. Johnny began to feel some respect for him.

Frank Nugent was a better boxer than Merton, and Greyfriars had quite expected Frank to be all over his opponent. But he was not. He had but slightly the best of the exchanges.

Pon was sticking to it hard; and, but for the yellow streak in him Cecil Ponsonby might have been a class boxer, as he might have shown up well in any game he chose to take seriously.

And Bob Cherry had his hands full! Bob had rarely met a fellow of his own age and a trifle below his own weight who had pressed him so hard as Derwent did. Bob began to look less grim—which may seem strange. But Bob always liked an opponent who was really clever and meant business; and the bitterness he felt was not against Flip.

Tunstall was down!

"Hooray!" yelled Greyfriars.

Johnny Bull dropped his hands and waited.

"Now then, slacker!" howled Bulstrode. "You're wanted somewhere else if you've finished there!"

Johnny had forgotten for the moment the terms of the combat. They were Highcliffe's choosing, and if they worked to Greyfriars' advantage at the outset Johnny was not to blame for that.

He gave a grunt, and looked round him. Neither Bob nor Harry was likely to be grateful for aid, he saw. Inky certainly did not need it. But for the moment Frank Nugent seemed hard pressed.

"Take a rest, Frank!" growled Johnny, and he guarded a blow from Merton which would otherwise have taken Frank on the ear, and dealt a mighty punch in return.

Frank dropped to the sand, blowing hard. He felt pretty confident that he could have proved himself Merton's master in the long run. But in those last few seconds Merton had got in two punches which had made him feel a trifle sick.

But he was up again in a moment, for Tunstall had scrambled to his feet, and Frank ran to meet him.

"Go it, Bull!" roared the Bounder. Merton was catching it hot now. But, out-fought, overweighted, he stuck to his guns still.

"I don't understand it!" said Phyllis Howell above. "They've changed!"

"Like musical chairs, my dear—but more painful," said Miss Clara.

Marjorie could restrain her curiosity no longer. She came closer to the edge of the cliff, and looked.

Flap's eyes were all for her brother. To Flap it was as though there was but one fight going on down there—that between the two wavy-haired, hard-hitting fellows who looked not unlike at this distance, who ought to have been the best of chums.

It was a very equal fight. But Harry Wharton was getting the upper hand of Pon. Physical fitness told there. Pon gave ground till he was far out of line, but still fought on doggedly, savagely.

But the line scarcely existed now. Johnny Bull was forcing Merton back even faster than Wharton forced Ponsonby. And now Tunstall, to the surprise of all, drove Frank Nugent in the other direction.

Monson crashed down. Gadsby drew a deep sigh of relief. Then he groaned, for Monson was up again. Even in Monson the spirit of battle stirred, and he would not go out of the fray yet.

"Close up!" roared the Bounder. He saw that the advantage of the general battle arrangement, which he had believed all along to lie with his own side, would be lost by such a splitting-up of forces as was now taking place.

But no one paid any heed to him. They were all too intent on the matter in hand.

The sun glistened on a calm sea, and the tide came in with no more than a ripple on the sand as yet. The scene, as the girls saw it from above, themselves unseen and unsuspected as they lay at full length on the grassy edge of the cliff, would have made a rare picture. The ten combatants, bare-headed one and all, fighting their hardest; the little group of nuts on one side; the crowd of Greyfriars fellows on the other, nearest the sea; Squiff standing alone on a small rock, and the Bounder over against him on another—so they saw it in glimpses now and then. But for the most part their

attention was too centred upon the fray to take in the whole scene.

"Good old Pon! Pon for ever!" yelled Drury; and even Gadsby joined in the cheering of the nuts.

For, just when it seemed that Ponsonby was beaten to the wide, he had got in a lucky punch with all his weight behind it; and under the chin it had taken Wharton, and Harry had measured his length!

"Oh!" gasped Marjorie.

"He's all right! See! He's getting up again!" breathed Phyllis.

But Pon had dashed off. Merton was on his back, and Johnny Bull turned to meet the Highcliffe leader.

"Bit blown, aren't you?" grunted Johnny.

Pon's only reply was a vicious punch. Johnny guarded it coolly, and got home on his opponent's right cheek with good effect.

But now Monson had had enough. He wished he had been wise enough to go out at the first fall. He had to go now, anyway—so he told himself. He lay on his back with his head swimming and his breath coming in stabbing gasps.

Inky dropped his hands, and waited. Harry dropped his, and waited, too.

"Oh, wade in!" howled Bulstrode.

"Wade in, Wharton!" yelled Temple.

Harry paid no heed. Inky only smiled.

Wade in where? Not for much would either of them have interfered with the dogged battle between Bob Cherry and Derwent. Johnny Bull was fully a match for Ponsonby, and now Frank Nugent was getting the upper hand of Tunstall.

"I'm done!" groaned Monson; and Gadsby came to help him up and away.

"Silly idiot! Why didn't you cut out when you were floored the first time?" said Gadsby comfortingly.

"One of us goes out, Inky," said Harry Wharton.

"It is certainfully my opinion that such is correctfully the gamefulness, my esteemed chum," replied Inky quietly.

"Will you? Or——"

"I will retirefully depart from the fray, for so will my side be at the less losefulness," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

It was a chivalrous move, and one worthy of Wharton.

But it did not meet with general approval.

"What a mug!" said Skinner. "He's sent Inky out of it! That wasn't in the conditions."

"The other side wouldn't do it," Bulstrode growled.

"If he goes out he stays out, Wharton!" shouted Ponsonby.

"That's the idea!" Harry answered.

"Don't you be idiot enough for that game, Pon!" cried one of the nuts.

Ponsonby could not reply. He was being kept too busy.

"There is no great danger of Pon's being that kind of idiot," said Peter Todd.

"It's magnificent, but I'm not sure that it's war," remarked Delarey.

"It's Wharton all over, if it isn't war," Tom Brown answered quietly. "Let's be satisfied with the magnificence of it, Piet."

So felt a few. But the majority were of opinion that Harry Wharton was throwing away chances in a fashion that could not be justified.

"It's rot!" snapped Temple.

"It may be rot—I don't agree with it myself—but it ain't your bizney, Temple!" returned Rake.

"I think it's the square thing," said Mark Linley, who had come up after the rest, but in time for the start.

"Oh, of course you would!" sneered Skinner.

"Jerusalem crickets! Wharton ought to be sent to the foolish-house for that!" was the opinion of Fisher T. Fish, given after a sufficient pause for consideration. Or it may have been that Fishy had not spoken sooner because Wharton's action had fairly taken his breath away.

"Not my bizney?" roared Temple.

"Of course not!" said Rake. "This is the Remove, you know. Your Form ain't in it at all."

"It's Greyfriars, anyway, an' I don't see chuckin' away chances," returned Temple. "If I'd been there——"

"You could have come off instead of Inky, and then we shouldn't have been let down so much," said Wibley.

"Rot! If I'd been there I should naturally have been in command! An' I'd have seen to it that things were done differently. Look at Wharton, standin' there idle! Why don't he wade in an' help Cherry?"

"Well, Bob might turn on him," said Delarey, chuckling. "Anyone who interfered there needn't expect much gratitude from either of them. My hat, Browney, that Tasmanian chap is hot stuff!"

"He's no better than Bob," answered Tom Brown.

"He's as good—and that's saying a heap."

"Those two will go on till sunset, unless one of them gets a knock-out," said Bulstrode. "But Pon won't—nor Tunstall. Hallo! Merton's up again! That chap's got more in him than I thought!"

A Hard Tussle!

MERTON was up again; and, with a head that rang and buzzed, but a heart that was still high, he advanced to meet Wharton.

The nuts were putting up a far better fight than anyone among the Greyfriars crowd had expected of them.

But then the nuts were scarcely the nuts they had known of old.

Monson had gone out of it—as might have been anticipated. Pon—well, they had always known Pon had it in him to stick things out if he chose. And Flip Derwent, without knowing it, had wrought a change in the other two, who had never been quite as Pon and his special chums were, even at their worst.

Merton and Tunstall had not made up their minds beforehand what they were going to do. It is hardly likely that they had expected the fight to last as long as this. But now that they were in it all the courage of their natures rose to meet the demands made upon it. Not for very shame's sake would they go out while they might yet stagger up and fight on. They would last as long as Pon, anyway!

So Merton came on to meet Wharton, amid the cheers of the nuts.

But it was not Wharton whom he had to face.

Pon, with a word to Johnny Bull, had dashed off again to renew his combat with the Greyfriars leader. He had floored Wharton once. Perhaps he fancied it would be easier to floor him again than to beat down the solid Johnny, who had been playing the waiting game, seeing that Pon's condition was telling against him.

So Merton and Bull met.

"Sticking it out well—what?" grunted Johnny.

Merton saved his breath by saying nothing. He had less breath to spare than his opponent. But he was not offended. There might be surprise in Johnny's tones, but there was also something very like friendliness.

Even Ponsonby had gone up in the estimation of the Famous Five. Highcliffe itself did not admire more the fine fight Flip was putting up than did Greyfriars, while Merton and Tunstall had opened the eyes of many there.

"It would have been over long before now if Gaddy and Vav had been in it," remarked Rake.

"Can't complain about that," replied Peter Todd. "Give Pon credit for once—he chose his men well!"

"What about that funk Monson?" demanded Skinner.

"He stuck it longer than you would have done, Skinney!" snapped Bulstrode.

"All the same, I don't agree with Wharton's chuckin' a man out to even things up," grumbled Temple. "Why did you come, Singh?"

"Because my esteemed leader sofully ordered," replied Inky calmly.

Johnny Bull was in no desperate hurry. But his hitting was hard when he did hit, and Merton had enough to do to hold on. Never in his life before had he held on like this; but it was not so hard as he had thought it might be. There was something in sticking it that made a fellow "feel good," after all!

Tunstall had found out the same thing. He had fairly got his second wind now, and he was stronger of build and heavier than the lithe and graceful Frank Nugent.

But Frank had stuck it against heavy odds many times before this!

"Hooray! Cherry's down!"

Highcliffe roared applause. Flip had got in one which was too heavy even for big-hearted, sturdy Bob, and Bob had tumbled backwards.

For a moment the fray held up. Pon and Harry Wharton dropped their fists. Johnny Bull stopped himself in the act of punching at Merton's nose, and Merton stood still with his guard high to ward off the punch. Tunstall and Frank Nugent each took a step or two to the rear; and both stood gasping.

"Now then, Wharton!" yelled Cecil Reginald Temple.

"Excuse me, Ponsonby!" said Harry, and darted across.

"Now then, Pon!" yelled Drury. "Now's your chance to put one of them out of action!"

Cecil Ponsonby had no scruples. Just such a chance as this had he contemplated when he had fixed up conditions.

If Flip and he went for Wharton together they should have a very fair chance of knocking him out of action before Bob could rise.

But Flip Derwent saw things otherwise. It was a fair chance, no doubt; but to him it seemed anything but fair play.

"Chuck it, Pon!" he snapped, as he met Wharton's attack.

Biff!

Flip had got through Harry's guard even as he spoke, and had landed him heavily on the cheek.

Biff!

Flip staggered. His own guard had proven defective—Pon's fault, that, for distracting his attention—and Harry had got home one perilously near the solar plexus. And whoso getteth one on the solar plexus—otherwise, "the mark,"—he is counted out!

Biff!

Pon had paid no heed. His vicious punch caught Harry just below the right temple, and the Greyfriars leader all but fell. Had Flip struck again then he must have gone down.

But the Highcliffe champion held his hand. And now Johnny Bull rushed up, leaving Merton to a welcome rest; and Johnny's gloves played tattoo on Pon to some purpose.

"Out of the way, Harry!" said Bob, getting to his feet; and he and Flip were hard at it again.

"Oh, did you see?" cried Marjorie, her voice shaking. "Ponsonby is a coward! It was two to one; Harry would never have had a chance! But your brother, Flap——"

"I love that brother of yours!" breathed Phyllis. "But why isn't he Greyfriars?"

The girls did not understand, of course. Pon had done nothing that the rules of the fight barred. But the girls were not angrier than Flip and Bob Cherry were. If Bob could have spared a few moments from his tough opponent, he would have liked nothing better than to teach Pon a lesson!

"The thing's all wrong," said Squiff to the Bounder. "Pon acts according to conditions, and we feel that he's an outsider. Well, he is, but not because of that. Wharton won't take full advantage of conditions, and most of us feel that he's a fool for not doing it. Oh, bravo, Cherry!"

Bob had got level. Flip was down!

But he was up again in a second or two, and seemed none the worse.

"Pon looked too butcherly," answered the Bounder. "There are ways and ways of doing things. Pon's ain't quite a nice way—that's all. But that Derwent chap takes things Wharton's way. It's not mine, you know—but I can't help liking the chap for it!"

"More your way than you think, Smithy," said Squiff, who had always liked the one-time black sheep, and held him better than he believed himself.

That blow of Pon's had rattled Wharton badly. He was still quite equal to holding his own with Merton, whose head was also buzzing; but there was little vim in their exchanges for the next few minutes. They seemed to be sparring for openings, which Harry did not take when they offered themselves, and Merton did not always know when he saw them.

The combat between Tunstall and Frank Nugent had become rather slack, too. Each of them had had pretty nearly enough; but neither would cry a halt.

But the other four made up for any deficiency in interest as regards Wharton and Nugent, Merton and Tunstall.

Johnny Bull was going it hard. His temper was thoroughly roused, and he punched fiercely at Pon. And Pon himself, forgetting all his usual dislike for being hurt, took the punishment as none had ever seen him take punishment before, slammed back for all he was worth, and showed far more skill than even his chums had suspected him of possessing.

Flip and Bob held on like bulldogs. So evenly matched were they that there was not as yet even the shadow of an indication as to the likely victor. And in their struggle, though there was plenty of hard hitting,

there was no savagery, no bad feeling. With every moment the fight lasted their respect and liking for one another grew.

Pon had reckoned ill when he counted on bad blood through the meeting of those two!

"Oh, I wish they'd stop!" said Marjorie, with something almost like a sob. "How can they go on like that? Bob and your brother must have hurt each other horribly, Flap!"

"I don't think so. Oh, of course, it hurts; but you see, Marjorie, boys don't mind that—not boys like those two, anyway. And they aren't feeling spiteful—you can see they're not. They both want to win—that's all."

"I've had nearly enough," confessed Miss Clara. "But I can't look away till it's over. Do you know, I used to think that the Roman ladies who gazed at the gladiators fighting must have been pretty horrid minxes. I'm not so sure now. If they once got persuaded to go, they simply couldn't help looking!"

"Poor old Merton!" said Phyllis. "He's done!"

It was so. While Wharton had been gradually recovering himself, Merton had taken the opposite road. He was not nearly as fit as his rival, and that fact told now.

"Can't go on!" he panted, as he lay where Harry had put him.

The Greyfriars leader knelt by his side.

"Hope it didn't hurt too much, old chap!" he said.

"Well, it hurt. I'm dashed well one mass of dashed bruises, by Jupiter!" admitted Merton. "But I'm not blamin' you, Wharton. An' it was really a jolly sight more fun than I had fancied it would be."

Drury had come forward; but it was Harry Wharton who helped Merton to his feet.

The Highcliffe fellow held out his gloved hand. Wharton's met it. Merton limped away, and the Greyfriars crowd gave him the cheer that his own side seemed to have forgotten.

"Four to three now! A hundred to one on Greyfriars!" roared Bulstrode.

"Unless Wharton plays the fool again!" sneered Skinner.

"He don't seem disposed to pile in, that's a fact!" grumbled Temple.

The End of the Fight.

HARRY WHARTON looked round him. To intervene in the combat between Flip Derwent and Bob was, for him, out of the question.

If he had been in Bob's place he would have hated anyone who had meddled. And, good chums though they had always been, he knew that Bob would hate him if he meddled.

And Johnny Bull needed no aid. Pon might do his best. Pon was doing his best. But Johnny was his master. He made no attempt to bring the conflict to a sudden end. He was just wearing Pon down—punching away at him again and again, taking the return blows with a grunt and a toss of the head, knowing all the while that Pon was travelling the road to defeat, and glad to know it.

Johnny had never been fond of Cecil Ponsonby, and that blow at Wharton's unguarded temple, though it might have been within the rules, had made Johnny vengeful and bitter.

There remained Frank Nugent.

Frank was near the end of his tether. But so was Tunstall.

Only their pluck kept them going.

Easy enough for Harry to order Nugent aside—not so easy for him to make up his mind to pile in to finish off a fellow who was plainly nearly done.

He could not do it. The very word that Vernon-Smith had used came to his mind. It was too butcherly!

So he stood and waited. He had at least the right to do that.

If he went out of the fray, as Inky had done at his order, he would have to face the reproaches of the crowd. Mark Linley would understand—a few more, too—Squiff, Tom Brown, Delarey—but the rest would cry out upon him, would say he was letting them down.

So he waited, paying no heed to the cries that urged him on.

Then something—a floating wisp of cloud touched with the colours of the sinking sun, and made glorious—drew his gaze to the top of the cliff, and he saw the girls.

His face flushed hotly, but not so hotly as Marjorie's. She would not for much have had Harry and the rest know that they had watched the fight. She had meant to bind the other three to secrecy about that.

And now Harry knew, and the rest would know, of course—at least, all who mattered.

Marjorie was too sensitive. There was no real cause for shame. And if there had been—if it had been wrong to look—it must surely have been far more wrong to fight. But she never thought of that.

And Harry, with his head swimming, and his bruised face and body aching, stood looking up almost stupidly, until a cry aroused him.

"Oh, look out, Wharton! Are you asleep?"

Then he saw that he was needed.

Misfortune had come to staunch Johnny Bull.

He had Pon all but beaten. Another hard punch might have clinched the matter. And then he had gone down all in a heap, groaning.

It was no blow of Ponsonby's that had sent him down. He had caught his right foot between two small outcropping rocks, and had wrenched his ankle badly.

And in the same moment a roar of triumph from Highcliffe hailed Tunstall victor over Frank Nugent!

Luck again there! They had been hitting almost blindly, and of the two Tunstall had been in rather the worse case. But a random punch had taken Frank under the chin, and had sent him flying. He tried to struggle up; but there was not strength enough left in him.

Neither Pon nor Tunstall was equal to the task of tackling Harry Wharton successfully alone. But the two together might be too much for him.

Harry looked round. He saw Pon making in, and he heard him yell to Tunstall as he made in.

"Oh, come on, Tun! We've got 'em set, by gad!"

Tunstall hesitated. He did not half like it.

But the rules said that this thing might be done, and Highcliffe yelled him on. If he refused they would say he had betrayed his side.

So he, too, made in.

Bob Cherry glanced behind him, taking a nasty one on the ear as reward for his lapse of attention to his own concerns. But Bob did not mind that.

"Draw in to me, Harry!" he shouted.

Good tactics—Wharton saw that. Back to back, he and Bob might yet uphold the fight.

He gave ground before the two. He had to manœuvre carefully, for one of them was trying to get into a position to strike him where he could not guard. That one was not Tunstall. Tunstall's attack was manful, if feeble, face to face. But Ponsonby hovered like a wolf on the trail, waiting his chance, his face aglow with evil joy.

"Oh, hang it, Pon!" Tunstall gasped.

"Go it! Highcliffe for ever!" yelled the nuts.

"Pile in an' swipe him, Pon!" shrilled Vavasour.

"Stick to it, Wharton! Oh, good man! That's the style!" shouted Tom Brown, as Harry gave Tunstall one in the chest that pulled him up short, and got in on Ponsonby's left ear with telling force next moment.

Every backward step he took brought Bob nearer. With Bob at his back he would be safe from Pon's tactics. But he would hamper Bob, whose hands were full already—he knew that.

Now at last both Bob and Flip were showing signs of having had nearly enough.

But neither showed more signs than the other. The faces of both were battered, in spite of the gloves. Their bodies were aching. But they were not done yet, and they smiled at each other now and then, and fought on. Thrice more Bob had been down, and twice Flip; but Flip's last fall had been heavier than any of Bob's. It was the kind of knockdown blow that had won many a fight for Bob Cherry. It could not win this one for him, because he was up against somebody tougher by far than most of his opponents, somebody with a spirit as high as his own, and nerves as good, and body as fit and wiry.

Ah! Derwent was down again!

A quarter of an hour earlier, and the chance thus offered would have enabled Bob to win the fray for his side in similar circumstances. He would have dashed in and dealt with Pon—one blow might have been enough—before Flip could rise; and Harry would have had Tunstall down; and they two would have stood there victors!

But now Bob turned heavily, slowly—doing his best, but not doing it quickly enough. And while he strove to corner the elusive Pon, and force him to close fighting, a warning cry came to him.

"'Ware hawk, Bob!" yelled the Bounder.

Pon dodged. Bob turned. He faced Flip again, knowing that in that moment Flip might have got in a blow at him unawares, but had been too decent to do it.

And Harry had seen. He knew now that he must not hamper Bob's chance by crowding in upon him.

He pulled himself together for one last desperate effort. With the corner of an eye on Pon, he rushed at Tunstall, smote hard, crashed through his enfeebled guard, and knocked him fairly and squarely off his feet!

Then he swung round. But even as he did so Ponsonby struck, with all the force left in him, and the blow took Harry on the point of the jaw, and sent him gasping to the sand.

But Ponsonby was down, too!

Right across Tunstall he sprawled, from the force of his own vicious blow. He struggled hard to get up. If but for a minute he could rise and keep his feet, the victory was Highcliffe's! For such were the conditions agreed upon—two up on one side, only one on the other, meant an end.

But no more than Wharton could Pon get up. Wharton, too, was striving his hardest; but weakness pinned him to the sand, as sheer weakness pinned Pon—Pon, who for once in his life had gone all out for victory and had not spared himself, had not shown the white feather, even if he had shown the cloven hoof—Pon who cursed as he lay, knowing that it was hopeless!

A long, shrill whistle-call sounded, and the two champions left dropped their hands.

Squiff had blown the signal, and it meant that the fray was at an end.

"A drawn game! Well, I don't mind, Derwent," said Bob Cherry.

"Can't say I do, either," answered Flip cheerily. "I'll own I've had enough for one day. How do you feel?"

"Well, I ache so much everywhere that I don't really know where I'm hurt and where I'm not!" replied Bob candidly. "I must be hurt in places—you've slogged me hard enough—but I ain't hurt everywhere, and it all feels alike."

Flip's ringing laugh floated up to the girls on the cliffs.

"Laughing after all that!" said Miss Clara, almost as if annoyed.

"Why shouldn't he?" returned Flap. "That's like Flip. You don't want him to cry, do you, Clara? Oh, he and Bob Cherry are shaking hands, Marjorie! Of course, I knew they would; but Bob Cherry must be an awfully good sort!"

"He is!" said Phyllis fervently.

"And he worships Marjorie most reverently, and regards Phyllis as a pearl and a wonder, and when he knows you, Flap, he will look upon you three as the Three Graces, leaving poor little me out in the cold completely," rattled Miss Clara, talking very fast, for the excitement had told upon her.

But Marjorie was silent; and as Inky and Mark Linley came forward to help Harry up she had to wink hard to keep back her tears. Harry's face was not so pale as hers.

But Pon sat up now and began to argue.

"Oh, by gad, Field," he said, "you blew that whistle too soon!"

"It was according to the articles of war, Ponsonby," said Squiff coolly. "You took what advantage they gave you. Here there wasn't any advantage on either side, and the game's a draw, which ought to be satisfactory to all concerned."

"But Derwent an' Cherry——"

"There wasn't any provision for deciding the issue by single combat. You barred that out when you made it a mix-up—which went some way to spoil it, I think. Can't have it both ways, you know."

"But why couldn't they have gone on an' settled it?" snarled Pon. "Our man would have won. He's lots fresher."

"Fresh be hanged, Pon!" said Flip, grinning. "I'm about as fresh as a chap would be after going through a mangle! And I really don't want any more, thanks! I wouldn't admit it, perhaps, only Cherry says the same thing, so it don't matter."

"There's one useful sort of reason why it can't go on, Pon," said the Bounder smilingly. "If we don't clear out of here inside five minutes, the tide will pen us in the cove. As it is, I've got a jump to do if I'm to get off with dry feet."

He jumped as he spoke from the rock on which he had stood all through the fray, and landed just clear of the waves that were coming up round it

"By gad, that's true!" said Ponsonby. But his face still wore a scowl as he put on his upper garments hurriedly.

Up above, the girls were moving away, and they were in a hurry, too, for they did not particularly wish to be spotted by their friends below.

"I'm glad it's over!" said Marjorie, with a deep sigh of relief. "And I'm glad no harm has come of it. I didn't enjoy it one little bit, but it wasn't so bad as I had expected, because the only boy who behaved like a brute was just the one we should all have picked out as the likeliest to, so we were not disappointed in him. And Harry and Bob and your brother, Flap; yes, and Merton and Tunstall, too, and the rest of them—somehow, one doesn't think any the worse of them for fighting, because they fought so fairly and without a bit of spite!"

"I didn't like it much, either," confessed Clara. "But I've a higher opinion of Tunstall and the languid Algy than I had. Could anyone have guessed that they had so much in them?"

"It will be some time before Flip is able to bring them to tea at Cliff House," remarked Phyllis.

"Why?" asked Marjorie innocently.

"Because, my dear, Miss Primrose wouldn't at all approve of the state of their faces! She'd be horrified!"

After the Battle.

UNDOUBTEDLY Miss Primrose would not have looked without horror upon the faces of the combatants. Mr. Quelch, Mr. Mobbs, Dr. Locke, and Dr. Voysey were very unlikely to approve of them, though all of these gentlemen were better used to seeing the marks of battle than was the lady who ruled Cliff House.

As the Greyfriars and Highcliffe fellows hurried out of the cove, into which the tide was now swirling, leaving them but narrow passage-way, it was easy to pick out nine of the ten warriors from the rest.

Monson was the least marked of the Highcliffe five; but he had a bruised cheek and a swollen mouth. Pon bore many marks, and there was hardly a square inch of his face that was not painful. Merton and Tunstall had never before looked as they looked now, for both were distinctly lop-sided viewed from the front. Flip told them that the one thing for them to do was to keep side by side, each with his enlarged side outward—they happened to have got it one on the left and the other on the right—when they might hope to balance one another. For himself, he said, having got it on both sides about equally, he had no need for any such dodge. And, indeed, of all the five Flip had taken most, though his hurts were not so plain to view as Ponsonby's.

Flip and Merton and Tunstall were all quite cheery. So was Monson, for that matter. He had got out of it with less pain and more credit than he had expected.

But Pon was very morose. He could hardly have expected a win; but he seemed very dissatisfied with a draw as the result of the battle.

On the Greyfriars side, the one fellow who bore no marks was Inky. He had gone out of the fray early; but that had not been by his own wish. Inky was satisfied. He had a way of thinking that what Wharton did was right.

But Bob Cherry was the only one of the other four who was at all cheerful.

Bob had enjoyed himself. He had come out of the battle with honourable wounds, after meeting an opponent whom he respected greatly. It was something more than respect by this time, indeed; the feeling Bob had was more like affection. It would take a great deal to persuade Bob that Flip Derwent was anything short of "one of the best" after that afternoon!

But Johnny Bull limped, growling. He had had the most wretched luck. That Pon had not gone down before him rankled with Johnny. It had been partly his own fault. He ought to have hurried things more. But that was no consolation.

And Frank Nugent, with an aching head and a battered body, was not best pleased to think that he was the one of all the Greyfriars five who had really gone down before a Highcliffe man.

There was no disgrace in Frank's downfall, but he could not feel satisfied about it.

As for Wharton, it was not to be wondered at that he was not in his customary spirits.

Most of the Greyfriars crowd made no secret of the fact that they considered he had thrown away victory when it was in his hands. And Harry himself was not sure they were wrong. All he knew was that he would have done the same thing again in the same circumstances.

A loyal few supported him. Some of the rest were quite bitter.

"Beastly rot, I call it!" growled Bulstrode, who had felt all along that it was hard he should be out of the fray.

"Worse than a crime—a blunder!" said Peter Todd, not without sarcasm.

"So you agree that Wharton was wrong, Todd?" said the lordly Temple.

"Not at all," replied Peter coolly.

"But you said so!"

"Nothing of the sort!"

"Then I can't understand what you mean!"

"I'm not responsible for your understanding—if any," said Peter.

"You mean to say that you think Wharton was right, Todd?" demanded Skinner.

"I haven't said so."

"You're a silly idiot!" rapped out Bulstrode. "I don't believe you know what you do think!"

"Thanks, Bulstrode!"

Peter slipped his arm inside Wharton's. That sort of thing was not much in Peter Todd's line, and Harry knew it meant something, but he did not know what.

"What do you really think, Toddy?" he asked. For he really cared something for Peter's judgment—in fact, he cared too much for opinion generally. It was always one of Wharton's weak spots. His pride was high, and he did what he believed right in defiance of all who might differ from him. But when he had done it their differing worried him. He would have had every decent fellow see things his way.

"You were right and you were wrong," said Peter oracularly.

"Can't say I'm much forwarder on that."

"I'll explain. You did the decent and sportsmanlike thing. But it's a fair question whether one can afford to do that with Huns."

"But the Highcliffe chaps aren't all Huns, Toddy. Derwent isn't. I don't consider Tunstall and Merton are. I'm not going to say that Ponsonby and Monson are anything else. But I'm not complaining about anything they did in the fight."

"You might complain of Pon. I don't think Pon played up to your chivalric notions, old scout."

"Well, I didn't ask him to, and I didn't expect him to. But I don't see what else I could have done. It's never been our way to go for a win by fair means or foul, Toddy. If it can't be had fairly it's not worth having."

"Right on the wicket, old chap! But you've got to consider our own Huns—Skinner and his like."

"Skinner can shout himself black in the face if he likes!" said Harry disdainfully. "I don't care what Skinner thinks! But Bulstrode and Rake and some of the rest aren't Huns. Temple's not a Hun. He plays the game. Yet they all say I was wrong."

Peter could not deny it. He put it down to the inevitable difference of opinion in a case where rules and the unwritten standards of fair play conflicted. Peter had a legal mind, and it was easy for him to consider things dispassionately. But for Harry Wharton, whose love of fair play and hatred of all things mean and cunning were intense, logic and philosophy were little comfort.

Nevertheless Peter's support comforted him. And so did the backing of staunch Mark Linley and the the three Colonials and his own nearest chums, and the few words, half mocking though they were, by which the Bounder showed that he was with him.

Meanwhile among the Highcliffians, as they took their separate ways, there was also argument.

"That fellow Field was in a dashed hurry to blow his whistle, by gad!" growled Pon.

"It was all according to the rules, as he said," answered Flip. "Field's straight enough; he's Australian. Besides, we had to get out of the cove before the tide came in."

"You'd have had that dashed swanker Cherry licked inside another five minutes," said Gadsby.

Gadsby's trick had failed, and Gadsby did not want suspicion aroused about it. So he spoke to Flip quite civilly—almost in a fawning manner, indeed.

"Not in another five days, without luck!" answered Flip, swinging Cocky's cage, over which a coat had been thrown during the fray. Flip had not considered further excitement good for Cocky.

"You're better than he is," said Vavasour, taking his cue from Gaddy.

"I'm not! Not sure that I'm quite so good. But that's not very likely to be proved now. I'm not keen on fighting Cherry again."

"Never say die, Flip!" sang out Cocky.

"What on earth do you mean, Derwent, by gad?" asked Pon.

"I mean that I don't see the use of this continual squabbling with Greyfriars," replied Flip deliberately. "They seem a decent crowd, and those five fellows we met to-day are all right, every man of them."

"They're the enemy, dash it all!" snapped Pon.

"Yes, that's the thing! They're the enemy!" echoed Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour, with his rather vacant grin.

"That's the way to look at it," Monson said, just as it had begun to appear that he had nothing to say on the subject.

But Tunstall and Merton were silent, and so was Drury; and none of the lesser nuts spoke up.

"What's the matter with you chaps, by gad?" said Pon nastily.

"Take too long to tell in detail, old boy," Merton replied. "I ain't quite sure that there isn't a broken rib or so in my little lot. An', if anythin', Tun caught it worse than I did."

"I don't know about that," said Tunstall, smiling wryly. It hurt him to smile with the face he had. "But if you want to know what I think, Pon, I agree with Flippy—all the blessed way! We've never got any change out of scrappin' with Greyfriars; an' though I don't propose to take 'em to my manly buzzom an' hug 'em all separately or together, I'd as soon be on decent terms with them as not. Courtenay an' the Caterpillar get along with them all serene, an' I can't see why we shouldn't."

"By Jupiter, you're quite eloquent, Tun!" said Merton. "I'm not goin' to speechify myself—not with this dashed mouth—but them's my sentiments, gentlemen—take 'em or leave 'em!"

"An' yours, I suppose, Derwent?" snapped Pon.

"Yes; I agree," said Flip.

"Then you're a set of dashed renegades, an' I'm dashed well fed up with you, by gad!"

They had not expected that, and Flip flushed hotly. He had learned that afternoon that Pon's standard of honour was not as his. But it could not be said that Pon had transgressed the rules. Squiff would soon have brought him to account had he done that. And Flip still liked Pon, who had done all he knew how to win his liking.

Flip would have spoken, but Tunstall's grip on his arm checked him. Pon, with a glance of anger and contempt, stalked on. Gadsby and Vavasour and Monson went with him. The rest, in an undecided way, fell a few yards to the rear, and the three chums were left alone.

All three felt that a crisis had come, and not one knew how it should be met.

"Give him time, an' he'll come round," said Merton.

"An' if he don't, I guess we three can get along all serene without that crowd," Tunstall added.

Flip did not answer. His eyes followed Pon with almost a wistful look in them. The day was to come when he would learn how false a friend Cecil Ponsonby was. But as yet the glamour was still upon him, and he valued Pon's friendship.

Making It Up.

"THIS is dashed dull!" said Tunstall, yawning.

"You're right, by Jupiter!" replied Merton.

Flip Derwent, the third of the three chums who inhabited Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage at Highcliffe, laughed.

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He looked up from writing to laugh.

Merton lounged gracefully in the easy-chair. Tunstall was seated astride a chair, with a new toothpick between his teeth, after the fashion of a groom with a straw. Tunstall came of a family noted for its love of horse-flesh, and was himself a bold and skilled rider.

But Flip was seated at the table, scribbling away industriously.

Outside rain came down in torrents. The trees, fast shedding their leaves now, dripped wet, and there were runnels in the quad. It was a particularly cheerless day, and Merton and Tunstall seemed badly under the weather.

"You chaps are so jolly easily bored," Flip remarked.

"Well, what is there for a fellow to do, by Jupiter?" demanded Merton.

"You can get on with your lines. I'm doing mine," said Flip.

"What's the giddy use? It's wasted labour. Mobby don't really expect us to show them up," replied Merton. "He only gave us them as a matter of form, y'know."

"He'll expect me to show up mine. And he gave me a double dose," said Flip.

He seemed quite cheerful about it. But then Flip was usually cheerful.

"A rare old rotter! He ain't worth a dump!" came a fourth voice, though there was no fourth person in the room.

But Cocky was there—Flip's cockatoo, who was on the very best of terms with all three of the juniors.

"You're right, old topknot!" said Tunstall. "Strikes me, Flippy, my son, that Mobby don't really love you."

"I know that well enough," answered Flip. "And I don't want him to. Mobby's a rank outsider. I never guessed till I came here that any master at any school could be such a crawling worm."

"Mistake to let him see what you think of him, though," said Merton lazily.

"Don't know that I have. If I have, can't be helped, and I don't care. You chaps might shut up now and let a fellow get on. Your conversation ain't cheerful, and it certainly ain't valuable."

Tunstall pulled his chair up to the table.

"I'll do some of your whack, Flippy," he said, taking up a pen.

"Better get on with your own, old scout."

"Mobby won't want mine. He will yours. You're right there. He's twigged that you an' Pon have fallen out. That's what's done it."

"I don't want Pon or anybody else to stand between me and Mobby," Flip said.

Merton yawned for about the twentieth time.

"By Jupiter, that hurts!" he said.

"Arma virumque cano," murmured Tunstall. "Better stick to the three or four lines I know. He won't kick at their bein' repeated, I s'pose?"

"Can't answer for Mobby about anything, but I should say he won't notice," Flip said. "He's a slack little rotter. What hurts, Algy?"

"Yawnin'," replied Merton.

"Don't yawn, then, ass!"

"Can't help it. It is so dashed dull. Look here, I'll do some of those lines, too, by Jupiter!"

And he drew up to the table.

Yawning is not usually painful. But these three were not in their usual condition. The faces of Tunstall and Merton were still distinctly unorthodox in outline, one of them having thrown out a westerly and the other an easterly wing as an addition to the main structure, as Flip said. Flip's own countenance was not specially swollen, but it was as badly bruised as the physiognomies of his chums.

It hurt them all to yawn and to talk, and even to eat and drink. As for laughing, none of them felt greatly tempted to that at present. The world did not seem a very funny place.

Of the five Highcliffe fellows who had fought the great drawn battle on the seashore with the Famous Five of Greyfriars, only Monson minor, who had beat an early retreat, had escaped without a good deal of punishment. And Monson had received more than he had any liking for. These three and Cecil Ponsonby, the leader of their party, all had faces most unbeautifully diversified in hue. Mr. Mobbs, their Form-master, could not fail to notice their condition.

He had allotted three hundred lines each to Ponsonby, Merton, Tunstall, and Monson; but to Flip, who must have been the ringleader, according to his version, which was wholly imaginative, he had given six hundred. It sounds like a double dose, but it was in reality much more, for Mr. Mobbs did not expect the other four to show up their lines. He would leave the entries in his imposition-book for a week or two, and then write them off as bad debts.

He had no intention, however, of applying this easy method of bookkeeping to Flip Derwent, and Flip knew that very well.

All three were scribbling away, and Merton, who had been scribbling nearly five minutes, was feeling that the time for a rest drew nigh, when there came a tap at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Merton.

It was Pon who came in.

Pon had not addressed a word to any of the three since the fight on Wednesday. It was now past noon on the Friday.

But it was evident from Pon's face that his visit was a friendly one. He grinned, although it hurt him to grin, and he clapped Flip on the back.

"Chuck that game, young-feller-my-lad!" he said. "You're not such an ass as to do lines for Mobby—what! Waste of time, by gad!"

"He'll expect 'em," said Flip, smiling up at Pon.

Flip had not learned yet what an utter rotter Cecil Ponsonby was. Pon's manners were quite charming when he chose to make them so; and never until the day of the fight had Flip seen anything of his worst side.

"Let him whistle for 'em, by gad! I'll see you through any trouble he makes, old top!" Pon said.

"Oh, I shall do them! Suits me better not to be owing Mobby anything. Much obliged for the offer all the same, old chap."

The breach was healed. Merton and Tunstall looked at one another, and there was relief in the face of each. They had not wanted to break with Pon, though they knew he was no good to them; and they had quite definitely made up their minds that they would not break with Flip Derwent.

"Well, dashed if you two aren't a pair of beauties!" Pon said, looking at them critically.

"There's a looking-glass over the mantelshelf, Pon," observed Tunstall pointedly.

"Oh, by gad, I know! I'm the worst of the crowd; an' I'm not too sure that my features are ever comin' straight again. Can't be helped. We weren't licked, anyway. That's to the good. I say, Flip, what's this yarn about the cockatoo?"

Cocky put his head aside, and seemed to be regarding Pon with no great favour.

"Deep—deep—deep!" he murmured.

"Some rotter took him and let him loose. Chucked the cage over into the garden at Cliff House. But the girls found him up on the downs," answered Flip.

"An' you fellows, bein' after the girls, came upon him. Bit of luck, that!"

"We weren't after the girls, ass! Is it likely we'd have kept the Greyfriars chaps down there waiting while we pottered round after girls?"

"Don't get on your ear, Flippy! You wouldn't, I know; but I ain't so sure about Merton an' Tun, by gad! Who on earth could have played a trick like that?"

Pon did not really feel much interest in Cocky, but he was quite in the dark as to the plot which Gadsby and Vavasour had plotted against him. It would not have suited those two that Pon should know.

He talked about Cocky because he counted upon that as being the surest way to Flip's heart. Pon was quite unable to comprehend Flip's affection for the bird; but he knew it was there, and he knew it was shared by Merton and Tunstall.

"I don't know. Wish I did!" said Flip.

"Haven't you chaps a notion—what?" asked Pon.

"We don't know either," said Merton. "How should we?"

But they had a shrewd suspicion, and they had already given Gadsby a hint that if he did not leave Cocky alone in future he would be hard up against three friends of Cocky's.

"Well, it's sure to be found out sooner or later, by gad!" Pon said. "Glad to see the old boy's none the worse."

"Deep, deep—oh, very deep!" murmured Cocky.

And Merton and Tunstall thought that Cocky was right when, next moment, Pon said:

"Shove those rotten lines out of the way, you three, an' have a game of nap!"

A False Step.

PON'S proposal was not turned down cold at once, as it might have been at another time.

Tunstall and Merton had been shunning the card-parties of late, and Flip had never yet joined in one, though he had now and then sat by and watched others play.

But no one of the three was fixed in any objection to cards. Flip's objection was mainly that card games did not interest him. He had seen little of the results to which gambling led, and had never been given special warning against it.

And he was tired of writing lines, and glad to make it up with Pon. And the other two were bored and discontented, and ready to be tempted.

Nevertheless, Tunstall made a half-hearted protest.

"I don't mind," he said. "But Flippy here rather bars it."

"Not he, by gad!" returned Ponsonby. "You're no mealy-mouthed Puritan, are you, old scout?"

"I don't think I am. But I know so precious little about the game that I shall only spoil it for you fellows if I join in," Flip said. "It never seemed to me very interesting; there's so much chance in it."

"Plenty of room for skill, too, by gad," Pon replied, taking a pack of cards from his pocket and beginning to shuffle them. "An' room for coolness an' nerve. You ought to make a tip-top player, Flippy; you've got nerve an' judgment enough, dash it! Another pack to be had, Algy?"

Merton produced a pack, and next moment Flip, without ever having actually consented to play, found himself having cards dealt to him.

He did not care to draw back then; and, truth to tell, he felt no shuddering dread of the false step he was taking. It did not seem to him a thing of importance. If he lost a few shillings, it would make no real difference; he had plenty of pocket-money. Pon and the other two wanted a game, and he knew that they preferred to have money on it.

But Pon was cunning. He suggested half-penny nap to start with—"till Flippy had got his hand in," as he said.

It did not take Flip long to do that. He had watched the game before, and knew enough to need few hints. His judgment was cool and good, and from the first he held his own.

"Might have had a plunge an' gone, nap on that little lot, by gad!" growled Pon, as Flip raked in the coppers on a safe four.

"No go! It hadn't an earthly for nap, with a low card of an odd suit for fifth," said Flip. "Tun would have smashed me. Plunging ain't showing judgment, is it, Pon?"

"You'll do—dashed if you won't!" replied Pon, smiling.

Tunstall called nap the next hand, and got it.

"Was that worth it, Flippy?" Pon asked.

Flip shook his head.

"It doesn't seem so to me," he said. "The first suit was all right. But the hearts were weak. Anyone might have had an ace to put on his king, and a seven for second card in a suit ain't good enough."

"But I got it, fathead!" said Tunstall.

"That proves nothing. You oughtn't to have got it, and most times you wouldn't have."

"Our novice has got a better dashed grip of the game than you have already, Tun," said Merton.

Flip did not care much about the flattery; but he was getting far more interested in the game than he had expected to be. It had its own fascination, he found; and as yet there was as little of the gambling element in that fascination as well might be. The coppers in front of them had silver among them now, for the cards had run his way, and he had not banked on his luck and called over the value of his cards, as both Merton and Tunstall were inclined to do.

As for Pon, his luck was out—as far as the cards went. But Pon was not thinking very much about the cards. Any sum he might lose at halfpenny nap would not worry him. And he reckoned his luck in in another sense. It had taken some time to get Flip Derwent into a game of this sort; but it was done at last, and the next time would find him easier to persuade, Pon was sure.

He tried another step. A handsome silver cigarette-case came from his pocket.

"Try one, old scout?" he asked. "They're the best Egyptians."

"Not for me, thanks!" said Flip. "Best or

worst, they'd have the same effect; and it's not worth it."

"Dash it, you can't tell till you've tried, man!"

"I have tried, and I was," replied Flip, grinning at the memory. "Horribly! Once was enough, Pon."

"Tun?"

"No, thanks, Pon! I'm rather off it lately."

"Algy?"

"Well, on the whole, no. Don't want to shock Cocky, y'know."

"Well, I suppose you ain't so dashed strait-laced that you mind my smokin' here?"

"I don't—if Flip don't," said Tunstall.

"An' I don t—if Cocky don't," added Merton.

"Never say die!" shrilled Cocky.

"Cocky evidently approves," observed Pon.

"Deep—deep—deep!" crooned the bird.

Flip made no protest when Pon lighted up. But he didn't quite like it. It seemed too small a thing to trouble about, however.

Ten minutes or so later Gadsby put his head in at the door, just as a hand had been played out.

"Oh, you're here, by gad, Pon!" he said. "I've been huntin' for you everywhere."

"Well, you've found me now, an' you needn't have hunted quite everywhere before you looked in here, either," said Pon. "Am I wanted?"

"Yes! Better come along at once, too; it's important!"

Gadsby had not spoken to the other three yet. He sniffed before he did so.

"Thought you saintly bounders had chucked all that!" he remarked, in a tone that put Tunstall's back up at once.

"Go an' do your thinkin', somewhere else!" Tunstall snapped. "It ain't wholesome enough for this study, my tulip!"

Gadsby looked hard at Tunstall, and read something in his eyes. There had never been any close friendship between those two, and now it was apparent to Gadsby that Tunstall counted him an enemy.

Had he found out the truth about Cocky's disappearance? Had he told Derwent? More important still—had he told Pon?

A quarrel with Pon would have troubled Gadsby far more than one with Flip. Sooner or later there were bound to be open hostilities between Gadsby and the new fellow. When that time came Gaddy wanted Pon's weight on his own side.

No, he did not think Tunstall had told anything. Probably he knew nothing—he merely suspected.

"You chaps don't mind my goin', I take it?" said Pon, in his most agreeable manner. "I'm not levantin' with any of your cash. Matter of fact, I'm five bob or so down. No need for you to stop, y'know; but I must cut."

He threw his cigarette-end into the fender, and lounged out.

The game stopped at once. The chums of Study No. 6 had little inclination for it without Pon.

"I've been winning, it seems," said Flip, picking up his cash.

"Yaas—but don't let it get into your head, kid," drawled Merton.

"It isn't likely to. But there's more in the game than I thought," Flip replied. "This will do for pea-nuts for——"

"Phil-ip! Cocky wants a pea-nut! Poor old Cocky! Poor, forlorn, old Cocky!" spoke the voice from the cage.

"It's rather rot," Tunstall said.

He might have said more if Merton had not been there. Somehow, it had not particularly pleased Tunstall to see Flip join in the game so readily at Pon's request. Tunstall did not want Flip changed—he liked him well as he was. But he could not preach before Merton; even if he could have preached at all; so he said no more.

There came a time when he wished that he had spoken out then.

But would it have been of any use? Flip, level-headed enough as he was about most things, had a good deal of self-will and faith in himself.

(To be continued next week.)

NOTICES.

Leagues, Magazines, etc.

L. Baker, 7, Harborne Road, Beech Lanes, Birmingham, wants members for GEM and "Magnet" League. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Albert E. Thomas, 11, Postern, Brecon, would be glad to contribute stories or sketches to amateur magazine.

Regal Correspondence and Exchange Club wants more members. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.—J. R. Graham, 37, Chermside Road, Aigburth, Liverpool.

Miss Cora Mayor, 14, Station Parade, Portsmouth, Todmorden, wants readers for an amateur magazine to be circulated among girls. Specimen copy, 1½d.

Members wanted for the United Kingdom Companion Papers Club, fortnightly magazine to be run.—H. Cooper, C.C., 9, Pike Street, off Wharf Street, Leicester.

Club forming for purpose of exchanging back numbers of GEM and "Magnet." A thousand members wanted at once. Write GEM and "Magnet" Exchange, 5, Stanley Grove, Blackpool.

Members wanted for a correspondence club.—S. Mylne, 12, Eldon Street, Sheffield.

Basil G. Cox, Kenilworth, Poplar Grove, Rugby, wants members for Confidential Code Club in support of GEM and "Magnet," with other features

S. R. Hoare, 76, Dunlace Road, Clapton, E. 5, wants to start a book club. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

S. Mitchell, 43, Crosscliffe Street, Moss Side, Manchester, will send a copy of his amateur magazine for 1½d.

G. Oliver, 5, Barry Avenue, Stamford Hill, N., would like to hear from readers who want to join a GEM and "Magnet" Club.

Boys and girls wanted as members of GEM and "Magnet" Club.—R. Taylor, 62, Belmont Park Road, E. 10.

Roy Bennett, 22, Rodthorpe Road, Horfield, Bristol, would like to hear from other readers interested in story-writing.

Archie McNeill, Union Bank, Greenock, will send specimen copy of printed amateur journal for 1½d.

Cyril C. Haynes, 56, Strathcona Road, Liscard, Cheshire, wants readers to join Mersey Correspondence Exchange. Readers in the East should write to Wm. S. Birney, Ripon House, 22, Ripon Lane, Middleflat, Calcutta, India. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

F. Steer, 199, Albert Road, Peckham, S.E., wants readers for his sports and hobbies paper; also stories. Specimen copy, 1½d.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:
"RATTY'S LEGACY!"
By Martin Clifford.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, is not a popular character. It is a fair question whether he or Mr. Selby is most thoroughly disliked. On the whole, I think Ratty has it. His scope for being unpleasant is wider than that of the Third Form master.

Ratty is not the hero of next week's entertaining story, but he figures largely in it. I am not sure that it has a hero. Baggy? No; no one on earth could take Baggy as a hero! Grundy? H'm! Not quite so impossible. But though old Grundy means well, as usual, he can hardly be said to play a hero's part. Levison? Well, no. What he does is bold enough, but it would be a misnomer to describe it as heroic. And though Mr. Silas Simpkins, whom you have not met before, is amusing, it would not do to class him among the heroes.

You will like this story, I feel sure.

ABOUT THE "GEM."

Some of you may have wondered why I offered you my good wishes last week, a long way ahead of Christmas, and a week before our Christmas Number.

I had a reason. There was a little space to spare then, and good wishes are never out of place; and I wanted all the room I could contrive in this number to tell you something about the history of your favourite paper. I have not space even now to go much into detail, but what I can find room for will, I know, be read with keen interest by many thousands of boys and girls.

The GEM is nearly eleven years old. That does not correspond with the numbering, you may tell me, as the present issue is only 510. But I am right for all that, as you will see soon.

The first volume of our paper lies beside me as I write, and I can well remember buying the first number—at Shoreham-by-Sea. I was not at the Fleetway House in those days.

The date of No. 1 is March 16th, 1907. That would be the Saturday; it was out on the 14th, Thursday being publishing day then.

There was no St. Jim's story in it. The St. Jim's yarns were then appearing at frequent intervals in "Pluck." But Tom Merry was not in them. Gussy was, and so were Blake and Herries and Digby, and Figgy & Co. and Kildare, and some more old favourites.

The long complete story in No. 1 was an adventure yarn with the title "Scuttled." Its author was Mr. Lewis Bird. The serial was a school story, "Stormpoint," by Maurice Merriman, who was—I must not divulge secrets, but if you think of Jack, Sam, and Pete you will be on the track.

"On the Trail of the Grizzly," by Nat Barr, appeared in No. 2. In No. 3 Tom Merry made his bow—but not at St. Jim's. When Tom came along in his dark blue velvet suit and his nicely-tied bow, very polite, and altogether rather soft, it was to Clavering that he came.

Mr. Railton was at Clavering. He was the school's Head. Herr Schneider was there. Manners and Lowther and Gore were there.

No. 4 had another of Lewis Bird's yarns in it—"A Secret Quest." In No. 5 Tom Merry reappeared—"Troublesome Tom" was the title. No. 6 contained "A Britisher's Pluck," by Brian Kingston. In No. 7 was "Our Captain," another Tom Merry yarn. But No. 8 was "The Night Rider," a Buffalo Bill story, by Mark Glover. With the next number we had Tom Merry again—"Tom Merry on the War-path." No. 10 was "Treasure Trove," by Lewis Bird. But from No. 11 onwards there was no break in the Tom Merry stories. By this time it had become plain that they were what most of the readers wanted; and what most readers want is just what an editor tries to discover.

No. 11 was "Tom Merry at St. Jim's." Fatty Wynn figured in it prominently. The next story was "The Terrible Three."

But, though it might be interesting, no complete list of the hundreds of fine yarns can possibly be given here. I can only note in passing a few items. Thus: Ferrers Locke appeared on the scene in No. 16, the title of which was "On the Trail." No. 21 was "The Triple Alliance," and in it the Terrible Three, the chums of No. 6, and Figgins & Co. joined hands and forces for the first time. In spite of many a raid and many a bickering that alliance has held.

No. 26 was "The Smart Set of St. Jim's," with Gore as their leader. No. 31 had the alluring title of "The Nine Detectives." No. 33 was "Tom Merry's Weekly." No. 37 was the first Christmas Number—"Tom Merry's Christmas." No. 42 was that famous story, "Figgins' Fig-Pudding." It takes a genius like Mr. Clifford to weave a great yarn round a pudding—but he did it, and he could do it again!

No. 49 was—No. 1! No. 1, New Series, that is. The GEM became a penny paper when the "Magnet" started at a halfpenny, and it was deemed best to bring the numbers into line. It certainly was a convenient dodge from the Editor's point of view; and probably that was what the Editor was thinking about. I only have to remember one number for each week, instead of two numbers; but it is not really one and two, you know; it's more like four and eight. There is the issue I am sending to the printers, and the one just before that, of which the proofs are coming along; and the one after the next, which is being illustrated; and sometimes the one before the last, which may still need some slight rectification after the proofs have been passed.

But this will have to become a serial, I perceive. I have no room for more now, and I know you will not be satisfied with this fragment. So look out for more next week!

Yours Editor