RIVALS IN SPORT!

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

The GEM LIBRARY 1D

No. 515 Vol. 11

SCHOOL HOUSE TO THE FRONT!

RIVALS IN SPORT!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Deeds of Darkness.

"TOM MEWWY!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Tom Mewwy! Wake up, you champion slackah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, arrayed in a weird and wonderful suit of pyjamas, to which Joseph's celebrated coat of many colours would certainly have had to play second fiddle, stood over Tom Merry's bed in the Shell dormitory.

The moonlight, streaming in at the high windows, showed that Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby were also there or thereabouts, armed with sponges. They were willing to assist Tom Merry to wake, if he found it too great an effort to do so without help.

Arthur Augustus danced to and fro beside the bed like a Red Indian.

"Have you forgotten the awwangements we made for lickin' the New House?" he shrieked.

"Grooh!" mumbled Tom Merry. "Gerraway! How can a fellow sleep, when you're making that silly row? Gerraway, I say!"

To drive his remarks home, the captain of the Shell landed out with his fist. The swell of St. Jim's, unprepared for this surprise attack, received the blow on the tip of his aristocratic nose.

"Yawoooooh!" he yelled.

Jack Blake strode forward grimly.

"We're not having our tame Gussy knocked about like this!" he said.

"Rather not!" echoed Herries and Digby.

And the next moment a drenching avalanche of water, the joint contents of three sponges, descended upon Tom Merry's devoted head.

There was a roar from the victim—a roar of such volume that it might have aroused the Seven Sleepers.

"Now," said Digby sweetly, "p'r'aps you'll turn out!"

Tom Merry had no choice in the matter. His pillow was like a wet sack; his hair streamed limply over his forehead. Choking and spluttering, he rolled out of bed, and blinked his way towards the nearest towel.

"Now for the other beauties!" said Jack Blake. "They seem to have forgotten there's a war on, and that we've got to reduce the New House to a pulp!"

Arthur Augustus clasped his damaged nasal organ tenderly.

"I wefuse to wemonstwate with the west of the bwutes," he said. "If they all behave like Tom Mewwy, I sha'n't be in a fit condish to put it acwoss Figgay & Co."

"That's all right, Gussy," said Herries cheerfully. "We'll do the needful! Lowther first!"

But Monty Lowther, with timely wisdom, sprang out of bed, and Manners and Talbot and several more of the shining lights of the Shell swiftly followed suit. They had no wish to be a target for the little pleasantries of the Fourth-Formers.

Having dried himself, and come to a complete state of wakefulness, Tom Merry rapped out a series of commands.

"Line up, you fellows! Get your pillows ready! And, whatever you do, don't go charging into the New House quarters like a mob of cavalry run riot! This is a surprise attack, mind, and we're not to give the beggars the slightest warning of our approach!"

The juniors—there were about a dozen in all—armed themselves with pillows and bolsters, and set off on their warlike mission.

Opposition from the New House had been keen of late, and Tom Merry & Co. felt called upon to keep their end up. It would never do for St. Jim's at large to get the impression that the New House was cock house.

And so, while the funks and conscientious objectors lay and snored, the combined forces of the Shell and the Fourth crept over to the enemy's quarters. It was a risky manœuvre, at the best of times; but Mr. Ratcliff, the unpleasant and unpopular New House master, had been compelled to take a fortnight's holiday, owing to a breakdown in health, and thus the most dreaded barrier to the juniors' enterprise was removed.

In the New House dormitory all was still and silent. Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, Redfern and Lawrence and Owen, and the rest of the mighty men of the House, were in the arms of Morpheus. There had been no air-raid warning, so to speak—no policemen with comic cards urging them to take cover, and thus Tom Merry and his followers had a clear field.

Even when the raiders were actually inside the dormitory, not one of the sleepers stirred.

"Now," muttered Tom Merry, "are you ready?"

There was a low murmur of response.

"All serene, then! Pile in!"

A moment later, it seemed to the bewildered Figgins & Co. as if the earth had suddenly risen up and smitten them in the face. Bolsters and pillows came thudding upon them as they lay; and as fast as they tried to rise they were beaten back again.

"Once more into the breach, dear friends!" sang out Monty Lowther. "Charge, Gussy, charge! On, Digby, on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A raid, by Jove!" spluttered Figgins, caught between two fires, Manners and Lowther whacking at him from either side.

Kerr sniffed.

"Has that only just occurred to you, fathead?" he exclaimed. "Pull your socks up, for goodness' sake! It looks as if we're in for a thundering good licking this time!"

"Grooh! And I was dreaming of pre-war rations!" mumbled Fatty Wynn.

But the School House did not carry everything before them. They were not dealing with weaklings, and in a very short space Figgins & Co. succeeded in getting into fighting trim.

Then the affray commenced in real earnest, no longer one-sided. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were the sort of fellows who, when bowled over, bounced up again like indiarubber balls; and at the other end of the dormitory Redfern and his comrades were going great guns.

The great Gussy had suffered capture, and had been tied to a bed-post; and in the wild rush to rescue their chum the School House suffered heavy punishment. They succeeded in setting Gussy free, but not until five or six of their number had been fairly floored.

And then, to quote Byron, a change came o'er the spirit of the dream.

Figgins & Co. had no mind to give the School House a chance to crow over them. So they fought like Britons, who never know when they are beaten.

It was Tom Merry & Co.'s turn to pull up their socks. Slowly, but surely, the tide of battle turned against them. The New House had the dual advantage of fighting on their native heath and of being stronger in numbers.

"Sock it into 'em!" gasped Tom Merry desperately. "Buck up, Blake! There's work to be done at Redfern's end. He's carrying everything before him!"

Jack Blake did not rush to obey his leader's command, owing to circumstances over which he had no control. He was stretched at full length on the floor of the dormitory, his head being completely hidden from view by the pillows of his opponents.

"Gurrrg, gurrrg, gurrrg!" was the only reply he was able to make to Tom Merry's remark.

Figgins began to crow—too soon, as it chanced!

"We've got 'em fairly beaten this time!" he exclaimed. "Hurrah! New House for ever!"

And then, as if in mockery of his boast, reinforcements arrived for the School House, in the shape of Levison, Cardew, and Clive of the Fourth.

This cheerful trio staggered in at the doorway, bearing between them a long and wicked-looking hosepipe, which Levison at once proceeded to operate.

Seeing what was afoot, Tom Merry & Co. hastened out of the line of fire, and the New House fellows were left to the tender mercies of Levison and his two associates.

Swish-sh-sh-sh!

A deluge of water shot into the dormitory, and confusion reigned supreme.

The baffled warriors of the New House darted this way and that way; but Levison's aim was deadly, and there was no escape for them.

The beds were drenched; the fellows who should have been occupying them were soaked to the skin. It was not merely a licking for the New House; it was a rout, thorough and complete.

"Yaroooop!" yelled Redfern, as a lively spurt of water smote him underneath the chin, causing him to topple over. "Chuck it, you beasts! Chuck it, I say!"

The School House did chuck it—suddenly and without warning. The stream of water ceased; there was a sudden scamper of feet without, and the next moment dead silence prevailed.

Figgins & Co. looked at each other in blank amazement.

What did that silence mean?

CHAPTER 2.
A Call to Arms.

THE reason for Tom Merry & Co.'s sudden flight was soon made known.

There was the sound of a firm tread without, followed by the appearance of a tall, good-looking young man, whom none of the juniors had ever seen before. He carried a suit-case, and a pair of humorous grey eyes twinkled out from under his tweed cap.

"Good-evening, my boys!" he said pleasantly.

Figgins gasped.

"Who—who are you, sir?" he blurted out.

The stranger set down his bag, and gazed at the strange scene around him.

"My name," he said, "is Grenfell. I have come to take Mr. Ratcliff's place during his absence. Excuse me, but are such scenes as these usual?"

"Nun-no, sir!" stammered Kerr. "They only happen—er—once in a blue moon, sir!"

"I hope so! Nature intended you to be boys, not water rats. Dormitories, too, were made for slumber, not for conversion into swimming-baths! Who is the head boy here?"

"I am, sir," said Figgins, rather shamefacedly.

"Your name?"

Figgins gave the desired information.

"Then you will clear up this abominable mess, and wait upon me in Mr. Ratcliff's study in the morning!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

Mr. Grenfell picked up his bag, nodded, and withdrew, leaving behind him a stony silence, which was not broken until Fatty said, very deliberately:

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

Nobody knew what to make of it. The juniors had not known that Mr. Grenfell was coming; and now that he had actually arrived, it was hard to tell whether his coming was for better or worse. Whether he would prove to be such another as the much-hated Ratty, and how he would deal with Figgins, were questions which only the morrow could satisfy.

"What do you make of him, Reddy?" asked Figgins.

"Give it up. He seems a sport, but appearances are jolly deceptive sometimes. He didn't seem to go into hysterics, or anything of that sort, when he saw that the dormitory was swamped out; but p'r'aps he's one of those cold, cruel beggars, who don't jaw much, but lay it on thick. Anyway, in the morning we shall see what we shall see."

It was a very long time before the New House juniors composed themselves to slumber that night.

Levison had done his work well, and it took a good hour to mop up the floor. When this was done, the juniors scouted round for dry blankets, and settled down to slumber on the hard boards. Sleeping in the beds was out of the question.

Figgins got up next morning with many misgivings. He was no funk, and would have faced the stiffest of lickings without flinching; but—well, it seemed rather bad luck, he reflected, to be caught red-handed, like that.

Figgins had little appetite for breakfast—a fact which was duly applauded by Fatty Wynn, who sat next to him and cheerfully disposed of his share.

When the meal was over, the leader of the New House made his way to Mr. Ratcliff's study.

Mr. Greenfell was there, smoking a heavy bulldog pipe.

Figgins scanned the master's face anxiously, to see if it would give some clue as to the nature of his punishment—if any. But Mr. Grenfell's countenance was so impassive that the junior didn't know whether he was to be soundly flogged or whether Mr. Grenfell would produce sherry and cake for the occasion.

Rough on the New House!
(See Chapter 1.)

"Ah, Figgins!" said the master, roused from his reflections. "Take a chair, will you?"

Figgins blithely obeyed. This, he felt, was a good opening. He much preferred to sit down in a chair to being ordered to bend over one.

"You are the acknowledged leader of the junior boys of this House, I understand?" said Mr. Grenfell.

"Yes, sir."

The master regarded the speaker steadily for some moments—more in sorrow than in anger, it seemed.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, at length, springing to his feet so suddenly that Figgins promptly backed his chair away, thinking Mr. Grenfell had developed some form of lunar madness.

"I—I—— what's the matter, sir?" he stammered.

"Matter? Why, everything! You are the recognised leader of the New House juniors, and yet you allow a party of boys from a rival House to stroll casually into your dormitory at dead of night, and fairly mop you up!"

"Excuse me, sir——" began Figgins warmly.

"Don't interrupt! What I say is correct. You were bearded in your own den, so to speak, and instead of quelling the invaders you allowed your comrades to be swamped out! Your display—I only saw the tail end of it, but that was sufficient—was feeble in the extreme. Come, Figgins! Why should the juniors of this House have to knuckle under in this way?"

Figgins turned crimson. He had been prepared for many things, but not for this!

"It—it's only once in a while, sir!" he blurted out. "When you come to reckon up all the tussles between the two Houses, you'll find that honours are fairly easy."

Mr. Grenfell puffed at his pipe.

"I am not satisfied, Figgins," he said. "I have only been here a few hours, yet it has struck me that the School House are top dogs, if I may use the expression."

"By Jove, sir," said Figgins, "I should like to prove otherwise!"

"Then you shall be given an opportunity of doing so."

Mr. Grenfell was smiling now, and the sparkle of enthusiasm in his eyes was brighter than ever.

"I am not going to suggest," he went on, "that you take your revenge in the form of a pillow-fight. I don't encourage pillow-fighting. But I propose that you issue a challenge, Figgins, to the School House juniors—a challenge to a series of sporting events. Football and boxing and the usual running races thrown in."

"Topping, sir!" said Figgins involuntarily.

His heart jumped at the suggestion put to him by the Housemaster. He grinned at the mere thought of Ratty launching such a scheme. A fat lot Ratty cared which House ranked highest in sport. A victim to indigestion and other ailments, he didn't care a twopenny rap about games. But this newcomer—this brisk, smiling, upright master was quite the reverse. Figgins' heart warmed to Mr. Grenfell.

"Very well," said the master. "Leave it to me, and I will draw up a programme of events and exhibit it on the notice-board, where your challenge will also appear. Meanwhile, I shall expect you to get into form. If you don't put up a good show, I shall leave St. Jim's with the feeling that, as a Housemaster, I'm a dead failure. Do you understand me?"

"Quite, sir!" replied Figgins.

Mr. Grenfell rose, shook the junior cordially by the hand, and watched him

from the room with an approving glance. John Norman Grenfell was a man who "never turned his back, but marched breast forward," and his summing-up of Figgins was that the junior was after his own heart.

"There's good stuff there," murmured the master to himself. "We shall see some Trojan tussles shortly, or I'm no prophet! And if the New House don't win, they'll do something that's just as good—lose honourably!"

CHAPTER 3.

Throwing Down the Gauntlet.

"WHAT cheek!"

Tom Merry stood before the notice-board in the junior Common-room, his eyes nearly bulging out of his head.

Manners and Lowther, who peered over his shoulder, simply gasped. They could not trust themselves to speak.

It was quite a common occurrence for notices to greet the gaze of the School House juniors in the early morning. They grew up in the night like mushrooms. But the latest announcement put all previous effort entirely in the shade.

The wording was as follows:

"A CHALLENGE
TO THE
SAUCY SCHOOL HOUSE
HUSTLERS!

"We, the undersigned, on behalf of all the New House juniors, do hereby challenge the School House, not to a pillow-fight in the dark, where the results are fluky, but to a good, solid, stand-up series of sports on the playing-fields, in order to prove to Mr. Grenfell that the New House is the cock House at St. Jim's.

"The School House Hustlers are asked to hold themselves in readiness for the following events:

"1. Footer match.
"2. Boxing contest.
"3. Running races.
"4. Tug-of-war.

"Points will be awarded at the discretion of Mr. Grenfell, who will supervise the sports.

"New House for ever!

"(Signed)
"GEORGE FIGGINS.
"GEORGE FRANCIS KERR,
"RICHARD REDFERN,"

The challenge was certainly an audacious one, but Tom Merry & Co. did not know that Mr. Grenfell's influence had already made itself felt, and that Figgins was determined to move heaven and earth in order to place the New House at the top of the tree.

"Wherefore these frozen faces?" inquired Jack Blake, strolling upon the scene with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Have you fellows swallowed your tooth-stoppings?"

Tom Merry waved his hand expressively towards the notice-board.

"We live in stirring times," he said. "Figgy's got a touch of madness now—a sort of war mania, I suppose. It's the old, old House rivalry game."

Jack Blake read the notice, and nodded.

"We must wade in and slaughter them," he said. "We must drive it home to them that the School House is the only House at St. Jim's that matters—in a word, that we're IT."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! Whoevah would have thought the boundahs had such colossal nerve?"

The cluster of juniors around the notice-board grew fast, and the crowd resolved that they would make the New House pay a heavy price for having suggested the sport.

"We shall hold our own on the footer-field all serene!" said Tom Merry.

"True, O King!" said Monty Lowther. "If you ask my opinion on the subject, I think we shall reduce the New House to ashes—yea, even unto pulp!"

"My hat!" said Cardew. "Those New House beauties want sitting on pretty badly. This is the extreme outside edge!"

"They'll sing to another tune presently," said Levison, with satisfaction.

Levison was a sportsman now, and he showed a sportsman's keenness for the forthcoming encounter. Time was when he would have sniffed at it, and filled in the time by holding a card-party in his study. But a sweeping change had come over Levison in this, as in many other respects. He was fast winning for himself a very creditable position at St Jim's: in fact, his wild and wayward past was now quite a back number.

"I say, you fellows," exclaimed the shrill voice of Baggy Trimble, "you might make room for a chap!"

He jostled Levison with one elbow, and Cardew with another, and waddled up to the notice-board. A smile spread over his flabby features.

"This is where I come in!" he remarked airily. "I'll make a clean sweep of all the races, I think, and leave you fellows to tackle the footer and boxing. I don't want to take too much of the limelight, you know. He, he, he!"

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"And it wouldn't be a bad move," added Trimble, too short-sighted to notice that Levison was standing near, "if I wired for Doris Levison to come along, so that she could have an opportunity of seeing her—ahem!—her hero romp home in some of the events. Of course, she may have already noticed my form——"

"She couldn't possibly miss it!" murmured Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I shall fairly bring the house down," went on Trimble, unheeding. "Doris will grow keener on me than ever. She's awfully sweet on me, as it is. But there! How can a fellow help being a lady's man? It's not surprising, really, that any flapper should want to run after me——"

Baggy Trimble got no further. There was a roar behind him, like the roar of an infuriated bull, and the next instant Levison's hand closed in a vice-like grip on the fat junior's collar. Trimble was swung back into space, and, glancing round, he met the indignant, flashing gaze of Levison of the Fourth.

"You cad!" hissed Levison. "How dare you speak of my sister like that! Take that, you miserable fool!"

And Levison landed out with his left. He was in a fuming passion, and Tom Merry & Co. made no attempt to interfere. Trimble's remarks certainly merited a thrashing.

"Yaroooooop!" yelled Baggy, curling up under the impact of Levison's fist. "Lemme alone! I was only rotting, honour bright! I——"

Biff!

Levison landed out again—harder this time. The infuriated junior was scarcely aware of his own strength. The blow caught Trimble between the eyes, and sent him spinning to the floor, where he rolled over, with a curious groan.

"Draw it mild, Levison," said Tom Merry gravely. "He's not made of cast-iron, you know!"

At the same instant, a stern voice exclaimed:

"Levison—I think your name is Levison, is it not?—how dare you strike down one of your schoolfellows in that brutal fashion!"

Levison swung round, and encountered the accusing gaze of Mr. Grenfell, who had come over to the School House for the purpose of discussing the sports with Mr. Railton.

"He spoke insultingly of my sister, sir," answered Levison. "I'm not standing that at any price!"

Mr. Grenfell bent over the prostrate Trimble.

"You have half stunned him," he said quietly. "He must be removed to the sanatorium at once. Even though you acted under provocation, Levison, nothing can justify such a display of hooliganism. I shall cane you severely!"

"Mr. Railton is our Housemaster, sir!"

Mr. Grenfell flushed.

"Thank you for endeavouring to point out where my duty lies, Levison!" he said. "I feel sure, however, that Mr. Railton would commend my action in this matter. You will follow me to my study."

For a moment a spark of rebellion smouldered in Levison's breast. But there was something commanding about Mr. Grenfell—something which stamped him as a born leader of men. Levison saw that he was not to be trifled with, and reluctantly followed the New House master from the Common-room, while Tom Merry & Co. rendered first aid to Baggy Trimble.

Mr. Grenfell was evidently a man of action. He wasted no more time in words, but picked up Mr. Ratcliff's cane, and ordered Levison to hold out his hand.

Swish, swish, swish!

Levison bit his lip, but betrayed no sign of weakness.

"Now the other!" panted Mr. Grenfell.

Levison obeyed.

Swish, swish——

Then a strange and startling thing happened.

A spasm of pain passed over the master's face. His hand suddenly relaxed, and the cane fell from his nerveless grasp on to the floor.

Levison sprang forward.

"Are you ill, sir?" he muttered.

Mr. Grenfell pulled himself together.

"I—I am all right, thank you, Levison," he said, though it cost him an effort to keep his voice steady. "You may go now. And do not let me have to take you to task for such conduct again. If you repeat this bullying, the matter will pass out of my hands into those of Dr. Holmes."

Levison turned on his heel, and left the study.

His feelings towards Mr. Grenfell were the reverse of amiable. After all, he had only championed the cause of his sister with, perhaps, a little more vigour than was necessary. What right had this man—this raw new-comer, and a master of an alien House at that—to lick him?

Levison's first impulse—and perhaps a natural one in the circumstances—was to be revenged upon Mr. Grenfell, to do all in his power to cause him an injury.

But his better nature prevailed, and he decided to content himself with dropping out of the sports. He would not associate himself with anything launched by Mr. Grenfell; and he would persuade Clive and Cardew to do as he did.

Having arrived at this conclusion, Levison sought out his two study-mates, who, after a brief discussion, decided to throw in their lot with him, and let the sports continue without them.

"We'll wash our hands of Grenfell," said Levison. "I don't like his style. He's not quite such a tyrant as Ratty,

but he was a jolly sight too high-handed just now!"

"Hear, hear!" said Clive. "What's more, I can't understand why a chap of his build and age isn't in khaki. He may have excellent reasons, of course, or p'r'aps he's wangled an exemption of some sort; but——"

"It looks fishy," said Cardew. "England expects every man to do his duty. There's no savin' clause for Housemasters. But I don't know that we can judge."

"I suppose not," said Levison slowly. "Anyway, we'll give the sports a miss. I won't join in anything that's run by a rotten tyrant, who butts in where he has no right!"

Clive and Cardew nodded their agreement.

CHAPTER 4.
An Uphill Game.

TOM MERRY & CO. were rather annoyed with Levison for the attitude he had taken up. They considered he was making much ado about nothing, and urged him to turn out for the School House. Clive was likely enough to be useful, too; and though Cardew might not be wanted badly, he was no duffer when he chose to exert himself.

But the three mutineers remained firm, and when the House match was due to start on the following afternoon the School House took the field without Levison or Clive—though Clive's place was well filled.

"We've got to put up the game of our lives," said Tom Merry.

"Wely on us, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "We won't be satisfied with anythin' short of a cwushin' victory."

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Grenfell, on the other hand, was giving Figgins a little good advice. He didn't sermonise; he didn't point out a host of pitfalls. All he said was this:

"Go in and win. Remember that attack is the very best form of defence, and keep the ball rolling all the time. Hold on, and hold out to the finish!"

A moment later the speaker, himself a footballer with a past, had blown the whistle for the game to commence.

Right from the kick-off the New House were on top. They swung the ball about in great style, and Reilly, who was keeping goal for the School House, found himself busily engaged even in the first minute.

The New House supporters, who crowded behind the goal which Reilly was defending, cheered boisterously.

"Keep it up!" they chortled. "Bravo, Reddy! Shoot, man—quick! Herries is on you!"

Herries was; but he was the fraction of a second too late. The ball caught the full impact of Redfern's boot, and cannoned full into Reilly's chest, knocking the goalie backwards into the net.

"Goal!" roared the New House supporters, in great glee. "We're one up! Well played, Reddy, old sport!"

"Do it again!" grinned Figgins, "and half my kingdom is thine!"

Redfern was certainly in sparkling form, and he wanted watching. The worst of it was that the School House had to concentrate on checking him, with the result that they were very seldom in the picture themselves. Once, however, Arthur Augustus broke away on the wing, and sent in a rattling cross-shot; but Fatty Wynn, the finest junior goalkeeper St. Jim's had ever known, rose to the occasion, and the New House swarmed to the attack once more.

Levison, Cardew, and Clive were among the crowd on the touchline, and none of them felt quite happy. Levison and Clive longed to be in the thick of the fray. Cardew didn't long for that so much, but he was not comfortable about the affair.

Pheep!

It was half-time, and the New House, leading by a goal to nothing, sprinted off to the dressing-room, feeling that all was for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

"You've done splendidly!" said Mr. Grenfell, clapping Figgins on the shoulder. "I was a little too hasty in my judgment the other evening."

Figgins flushed with pleasure, and resolved to renew his efforts on the resumption.

As for the School House fellows, they found it difficult to conceal their dismay.

"There's one nail in our coffin already," remarked Monty Lowther "Barring a solitary spurt by Gussy, we did no attacking right through the first half."

"Our luck was out," said Tom Merry. "Confound that chap Levison! I wish to goodness he hadn't got the sulks!"

"Nevah say die!" interposed the swell of St. Jim's cheerfully. "We'll show the beggahs that there's life in the old dog yet!"

But luck had forsaken the School House. No sooner had the game been resumed than Jack Blake, in a wild endeavour to get within shooting range, fell foul of Figgy's boot. The New House skipper took a large size in boots, and Jack Blake came up against a nasty calamity. It was found necessary for him to retire, and the School House carried on with ten men.

One misfortune trod upon another's heel. Herries, who had been putting up a capital display at full-back, slipped and fell in trying to clear, and Kerr notched a second goal for his side.

"Oh, help!" groaned Monty Lowther. "This is enough to make the angels weep! I shall crawl off the field and expire in solemn silence. No flowers, by request!"

It was certainly a bitter blow for the School House, who, however, continued to play with dogged determination.

Manners was prominent shortly afterwards with a sparkling run, and from his well-placed centre Tom Merry scored a magnificent goal. Thrown off his balance for once, Fatty Wynn had entirely misjudged the flight of the ball, which crashed past him into the net, amid a chorus of delighted cries from the School House spectators.

The closing stages of that great game were nothing if not thrilling. Time and again the School House strove to equalise, and time and again they were driven back.

It seemed a pretty hopeless case; but Herries and Monty Lowther gallantly warded off a dangerous move on the part of Redfern, and then Talbot, who had been doing a lot of good work in a quiet way, took the ball the length of the field, and steadied himself to shoot.

It was an exciting moment. Opponents to right of him, opponents to left of him, and the ever-watchful Fatty Wynn in front of him, Talbot was up against heavy odds. But he shot at once, before he could be tackled.

Fatty Wynn fisted the ball out with a triumphant grin; but Talbot, swift as a lightning flash in a summer sky, pounced upon it again, and drove it into the net.

"Level!" roared the crowd; and while the word was still hot on their lips, Mr. Grenfell blew the final whistle.

"Saved!" gasped Monty Lowther dramatically. "Saved at the giddy scaffold! Talbot, old man, shake!"

And Talbot shook, not only with Monty Lowther, but with all the host of School House fellows who were waiting to congratulate him. He had proved the salvation of his side at the crucial moment, and the House match—the first event in the series of sports—would have to be replayed at a later date.

Meanwhile, there were other conquests to be made; and the members of the rival Houses faced the future with stout hearts, animated by the joy of battle, and resolved, for the sake of the cause they had so dearly at heart, to play up, play up, and play the game!

CHAPTER 5.
When Fortune Frowns.

THE day of the races dawned crisp and clear, and many distinguished visitors filtered in at the gates of St. Jim's, chief among whom were Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison.

Levison's sister had not known that anything was amiss. She was expecting to see her brother romp home in several of the events.

But the morning wore on, and Levison showed no sign of changing his togs; and at length, with the curiosity of her sex, Doris spoke out.

"Is there anything the matter, Ernest?" she asked. "You aren't crocked, by any chance, are you?"

"No, Doris. I'm simply washing my hands of the sports."

"Why?" flashed Doris. There was a challenge in her tone.

Levison moved uneasily from one foot to the other.

"It's the new man—Grenfell," he said. "He's a pig. And I'm not going to have anything to do with him. Clive and Cardew are standing by me."

Doris shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"It's all very well to say that Mr. Grenfell's a pig," she said. "I should want proof of his piggishness before I decided to condemn him. What's he done?"

"He lammed me," growled Levison.

"But perhaps you deserved it!"

"I didn't deserve it. It wasn't fair! But it's no use explaining these things to you. You're a girl, and girls never understand!"

"Don't you think it's—well, rather too bad to let your House down?"

Levison turned crimson.

"Look here, Doris," he said; "don't keep on this strain, for goodness' sake, or we shall quarrel! I said Grenfell was a pig, and I repeat it! He's a slacker, too—a chap who's spent the last three years in dodging military service, I should say!"

"Ernest! You have no right——"

But Levison had caught sight of Clive and Cardew strolling on to the sports' ground, and he sped off to join them. He was very fond of his sister, and did not wish to risk a rift in the lute. By tea-time, he reflected, Doris would have forgotten all about Mr. Grenfell, and then their happy relations would be restored once more.

Meanwhile, the competitors for the hundred yards had lined up—the best of the junior runners from both Houses.

Quickness in getting off the mark has a lot to do with the ultimate result of a sprint, and the long-legged Figgins, taking a tremendous leap at the crack of the pistol, broke away, beating Jack Blake by a short neck.

Cheers from the New House.

The high jump came next, and attracted a crowd of entries.

Everybody cleared four feet eight inches, but as the tape crept higher and higher a large number dropped out of

the running, and once again Figgins was in at the death, with Tom Merry as his opponent this time.

Figgy cleared the tape every time, and the captain of the Shell easily kept pace with him, until at length he failed in his take-off, and came crashing down to earth, leaving victory in the hands of the New House leader.

This was a calamity from the School House point of view; but worse was to come. Redfern entered the quarter-mile as fresh as a daisy, and won it hands down.

The long jump went to the New House, for Figgins had few rivals in this respect; and it was not until the sports were well advanced, and the hurdle-race took place, that the School House registered their first success. Tom Merry, in a gruelling race, just managed to overhaul and beat Kerr.

"Well played, Tommy!" cried Monty Lowther. "If you hadn't worked the oracle that time I should have suggested chucking up the sports, and leaving the spoils with the New House. They've won seven events to our one, and now comes the tug-of-war!"

The School House had every reason to dread the tug-of-war, for Fatty Wynn was a member of the opposition, and the Falstaff of the New House took a good deal of shifting.

"Teams for the tug-of-war line up!" rapped out Mr. Grenfell.

The School House four—Tom Merry, Kangaroo, Talbot, and Jack Blake—noted the smile on Fatty Wynn's full-moon countenance; and they resolved to exert every ounce of strength to secure the mastery.

Mr. Grenfell gave the command, and a straining, heaving struggling line of juniors wriggled and wrestled, and gasped and grunted, while their respective supporters stood by and shouted themselves hoarse.

"Pull, you beggars, pull!"

"Chuck your weight about, Fatty!"

"Now, then, all together!"

Driven to desperation by reason of their almost hopeless plight, the School House simply lay back and tugged for all they were worth. Four brows were damp with perspiration: four pairs of hands gripped the rope so tightly that the knuckles stood out sharp and white; and then four faces glowed with satisfaction as the New House quartet came tumbling over the line, beaten all ends up in the first pull!

"That's better!" panted Tom Merry. "Keep it up, you fellows!"

But the New House were not yielding tamely to this sort of treatment. They rallied mightily in the second pull, and Fatty Wynn's weight worked wonders. The New House won the issue, and a third and final pull became necessary.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "I can't even feel my own hands! They're grazed horribly!"

"Third time does it!" said Tom Merry.

The third pull was the most strenuous of all. The heaving mass of humanity refused to budge at either end of the rope. Eight faces were upturned to the sky, and eight pairs of arms hauled hard.

One side must give out sooner or later, that was certain. Which side would it be?

Something seemed to crack in Figgins' long, sinewy arm. He abandoned his hold for a brief instant to get a firmer grip, and the movement was fatal. Still pulling strongly together, the School House hauled their opponents inch by inch over the fatal line, and won gloriously. It was a Spartan effort, and the crowd took off their caps to the valiant four who overcame.

The last event of the afternoon was the mile, for which, curiously enough, there were only five competitors, the New House sending in Figgins and Redfern, and the School House being represented by Tom Merry, Talbot, and Jack Blake.

Throughout the first lap it was anybody's race. Figgins had a slight lead, then lost it, only to regain it again; and Tom Merry seemed to be in fine trim.

In the second lap, however, the captain of the Shell, after establishing a good lead, began to feel the effects of his collapse at the jumping-stand. He had slightly sprained his ankle on that occasion, and the effects now began to make themselves felt.

Tom Merry came to a very sensible decision. If he kept on, he would probably crock himself for the replayed footer match. Besides, Jack Blake and Talbot were behind him, and both were reliable runners. So Tom dropped out.

Figgins had a lead of about a dozen yards at the commencement of the last lap. Redfern and Jack Blake had run themselves almost to a standstill; but Talbot, who had been holding considerable energy in reserve, suddenly put on a terrific spurt, and rapidly overhauled his man.

"Good old Talbot!"

The drooping spirits of the School House supporters rose. Barring the tug-of-war, they had had little to enthuse over during the afternoon; but Talbot was making up for this now.

It was a close finish, so close that Kildare and Monteith, who stood at the tape, had to consult each other before giving the verdict. Then it transpired that Talbot had scraped home by inches.

"Thank goodness!" muttered Tom Merry fervently.

But the School House were a long way behind their rivals, and it was absolutely essential that they should win the boxing contest next day, or their number would be up.

The New House had chosen Redfern as their champion; the School House had plumped for Tom Merry. It was bound to be a keen struggle, but the captain of the Shell was not thinking of that just then. He was wondering how he could persuade Levison and Clive to come back to the fold.

But Levison had hardened his heart, and the reproaches of his sister Doris only made him all the more determined not to yield. And Clive, though he secretly longed to play his part in the half-back line, had promised Levison, and would not go back on his word.

CHAPTER 6.

By Right of Conquest.

"WHERE'S Tom Merry?"

The question was on everybody's lips.

At the very moment when he ought to have been the principal figure in the drama, so to speak, the captain of the Shell was missing.

The gym, where the boxing contest was to take place, was packed to overflowing, and on the platform stood Redfern, ready for the fray, and Mr. Grenfell, who was to referee.

Figgins was there also, as Reddy's second; and Jack Blake paced up and down the platform, waiting for his leader to appear.

But minute after minute passed, and there was no sign of Tom Merry.

Mr. Grenfell waxed impatient. Unpunctuality was his pet aversion, and he did not feel disposed to wait for Tom Merry much longer.

Monty Lowther had made a rush to the study shared by the Terible Three, but had drawn blank. Had he gone farther afield, he would have found Tom Merry in Levison's study. The leader of the School House had routed out Levison, and was trying to bring him to reason. Levison was as obstinate as a whole pack of mules, and Tom remained in conversation with him, using up his store of eloquence, regardless of the fact that time was flying fast, and that he ought to be at grips with Redfern in the gym.

After Monty Lowther had returned from his fruitless quest, Mr. Grenfell spoke.

"Someone will have to take Merry's place," he said. "I refuse to wait any longer."

Jack Blake was about to take off his coat, with a view to plunging into action, when another junior leapt suddenly on to the platform, with flashing eyes and an evident desire to get to business. It was George Alfred Grundy.

"Bunk, you fool!" muttered Blake. "What are you playing at?"

"I'm taking Tom Merry's place," said Grundy resolutely. "It's no use getting your wool off, Blake! I've been kept out in the cold long enough, and you fellows aren't going to mop up all the limelight!"

"Hear, hear!" came a loyal shout from Wilkins and Gunn.

Jack Blake turned appealingly to Mr. Grenfell, but that gentleman, who didn't know Grundy, and who considered he had quite as much right to represent the School House as anybody else, turned to the audience.

"This boy, Bundy——"

"Grundy, sir," corrected the owner of that name.

"This boy, Grundy, will take the place of Tom Merry. I trust we shall witness an interesting encounter."

And then, before the School House fellows could recover their breath, the referee rapped out:

"Time!"

Redfern advanced with a grin. In his heart of hearts, he had been a little dubious about meeting Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell was a shrewd, sound boxer, and he took a great deal of beating. Redfern might have lasted half-a-dozen rounds against him, but the probabilities were that in the end he would have been licked.

But this fellow—this cheerfully conceited ass of a Grundy—why, he could knock him into the middle of next week! The thing would be a farce. Grundy might, by some extraordinary fluke, last a couple of rounds, and then he would go to pieces.

That was Redfern's reckoning, but it was far from being accurate. The truth was that Grundy, with all his swank, was quite a useful man with his fists, and he knew no fear.

The New House candidate took things very easily in the first round, and he paid dearly for it. Grundy came for him hammer-and-tongs, and his big fists came up against Reddy's ribs like battering-rams. The School House supporters, once indignant and dismayed, now began furiously to think.

Grundy was not a forlorn hope, after all!

"Time!" said Mr. Grenfell.

Jack Blake received Grundy on his knee almost affectionately. He noted with approval that his man was, as yet, unmarked; but Redfern, in the opposite corner, had bellows to mend, even at that early stage of the proceedings.

"Good old Grundy!" said Blake involuntarily.

The second round saw Redfern rally. He saw that he could not hope to beat Grundy by taking things easy. He was up against a very determined customer, and would need to go all out.

Grundy had his full share of blows this time, but they glanced off him like

water from a duck's back. He was one of those solid fellows who could stand any amount of punishment.

He reeled under a perfect avalanche of blows, but righted himself again, and then it was Reddy's turn to be the under-dog. He finished the round on his back, and only the call of time saved him from being counted out.

"He's knocking spots off you, man!" said Figgins desperately. "Wade in and slaughter him, for goodness' sake! It'll be too awful for words if—if——"

Figgins did not finish. The bare thought that Grundy was superior to anything the New House could produce in the boxing world was a nightmare.

"My hat!" muttered Redfern. "Grundy's a better man than I ever imagined! I'm going all out in the next round, but I can't guarantee that I shall lick him."

Unfortunately for Reddy, George Alfred Grundy had also resolved to go all out in the next round. He bore down upon his opponent like a whirlwind, and his fists came smashing through Redfern's guard time and again.

Then did the School House fellows rise and cheer. They had sat in silent stupefaction, most of them, throughout the first two rounds, and now they began to realise that Grundy was winning—winning gloriously.

And while they were still on their feet, shouting and stamping with wonder and delight, Grundy brought matters to a climax. He drove in his right, and, before Redfern could recover, followed up with a brilliant uppercut.

Redfern threw up his hands, and landed in a heap on the mat—beaten all ends up in the third round!

Mr. Grenfell counted the vanquished boxer out, but his voice could not be heard for the storm of cheering which prevailed.

And then, in the moment of Grundy's great triumph, the door of the gym swung open, and Tom Merry dashed in.

"Am I in time?" he began dazedly. "I forget——"

Manners and Monty Lowther embraced their chum, and waltzed him towards the platform.

"Grundy's done the trick!" chortled Lowther delightedly. "Grundy, of all people! He took your place, and licked Reddy hands down!"

"You—you must be rotting!" gasped Tom Merry.

But a glance at the prostrate form of Redfern told him the joyful truth; and George Alfred Grundy, who had come into his own at last, was the hero of the hour.

CHAPTER 7.

A Bolt from the Blue.

"IT'S all up with the School House!" said Cardew.

"Absolutely!" agreed Clive.

Levison, who was enjoying an afternoon stroll with his two study-mates, nodded.

"They're twelve points behind," he said, "even after Grundy's little miracle last night. And there are only two more events—the Marathon race and the replayed footer match."

"Figgy will win the Marathon," said Clive.

"I'm afraid so."

"And that'll give the New House twelve more points—and victory."

"Complete and crushin'!" said Cardew

Levison did not speak for some time. He was gazing out towards the far horizon, his mind in a tumult of thought. Was he justified in remaining a mere bystander? Was he playing the game by his House?

Tom Merry & Co. were driven to the wall by bad luck.

"Penny for 'em," said Cardew.

Levison came to himself.

"I was wondering," he said, "whether we'd done the decent thing in standing out. Grenfell doesn't seem such a bad old stick after all; and he didn't actually hear that worm Trimble slanging my sister the other day, so he couldn't really be blamed for lamming me!"

"Getting sentimental all of a sudden?" said Cardew. "I didn't think it of you, old son! When you make a resolution you should see it through."

"Rather!" said Clive. "Grenfell's not bad, but there are one or two points that want clearing up before we can take him to our bosoms. Why on earth isn't he in khaki? Surely he knows there's a war on?"

"Comes from a neutral country p'r'aps," suggested Cardew sarcastically.

The speculations of the three Fourth-Formers were disturbed by a rumbling sound overhead—a sound which grew more and more distinct as they listened. Glancing upwards, they presently discerned an aeroplane, flying very low, and coming in their direction.

At first neither of the juniors took much notice. Aeroplanes were as plentiful as blackberries in that part of the world, for there were several squadrons on the Sussex coast, and many more inland, and flights to and fro were of frequent occurrence.

But, somehow, the engine of this particular 'plane did not seem to be running smoothly, and it was making a most unearthly din.

Levison glanced meaningly at his chums.

"Something wrong with the works," he observed. "I wonder——"

Even as Levison spoke a burst of flame came from the machine, which was descending rapidly, the pilot having little time to choose a landing-ground.

The three juniors stood spellbound. It was clear to them now that the petrol tank was on fire!

Levison tore off his coat as the aeroplane neared the ground, and then, taking stock of the field in which it was landing, he sprang through the hedge and sped off hot-foot towards the scene.

Sharp brambles clung to his face and hands, and a spurt of blood trickled on his forehead, but he took no heed. Death, swift and terrible, awaited the unhappy pilot unless rescue came quickly.

Clive and Cardew had also started running, but Levison had left them well behind.

The machine was enveloped in a dense cloud of smoke, and Levison had to fight his way to the pilot's seat.

He was nearly stifled. And the task confronting him was no light one.

But he struggled with deft fingers to release the pilot, and, after what seemed an eternity to Clive and Cardew, who were watching breathlessly, rescuer and rescued came staggering out of the burning debris.

Levison's coat and trousers were smouldering, and Clive and Cardew promptly rolled him over and over in the thick grass.

"That better?" asked Clive.

"Yes: I—I'm all right now," faltered Levison. "My hat! Don't talk about the burning fiery furnace after this!"

The pilot—he was a mere stripling of eighteen—calmly lighted a cigarette. He did not seem in any way perturbed by what had taken place. He was of that gallant company of British airmen described by an Army leader as the salt of the earth—men whose courage, tenacity, faith or fatalism, have led them to face countless trials in wind-riven skies—men who have laughed through a howling wilderness in proud defiance of death. Such was the spirit of the navigators of old.

The airman removed his heavy gloves and extended his hand to Levison.

"Thank you, old chap!" was all he said, but there was a world of sincerity in his tone.

"Glad I was able to chip in!" said Levison. "It was a close call, though."

The youthful pilot surveyed the machine which, an hour before, had been plunging through the cloud-banks. Now it was a total wreck.

He grinned.

"Afraid it's no use sending that 'bus into dock for repair," he said. "I shall have to get my mechanics to clear away the wreckage. By the way, you are St. Jim's fellows, aren't you?"

Levison nodded.

"Then I dare say you know Mr. Grenfell?"

"Of course! He's acting as Housemaster while Mr. Ratcliff's away."

The aviator smiled.

"I must look him up in a day or two," he said. "He's my brother."

"My hat!" muttered Cardew.

The juniors were astounded at the information, but they were still more astounded at what followed.

"One of the best, my brother," continued the flying man. "He put in some rattling good work before the Huns bowled him over."

The horizon seemed to swim before the three juniors.

"The Huns!" muttered Clive.

"Bowled him over!" repeated Levison, like a fellow in a trance.

"Yes. He got it in the neck at Vimy Ridge. Refused to retire under heavy machine-gun fire, you know. That was how he got his D.S.O."

"His—his D.S.O.!" murmured Levison faintly. "I—I——"

"They gave him a month's sick leave," said Mr. Grenfell's brother, "and he's spending a fortnight of it in relieving the pressure at St. Jim's. His shoulder ought to be quite sound again in a week or two. Then I s'pose he'll go back. Good old Jack! He's a real Grenfell, you know! About one in a dozen of us dies in his bed. Jack won't, I fancy. Well, I'll be toddlin' now, or they'll be gettin' anxious at the aerodrome. See you again shortly."

And the pilot, whose life Levison had saved in such gallant fashion, shook hands with the juniors all round, and strode away across the silent meadows.

CHAPTER 8.

Clearing the Air.

"KICK me!" gasped Levison.

"Me, too!" said Clive.

"Grenfell — D.S.O.!" muttered Cardew. "It absolutely beats the band!"

Levison was already repenting of his attitude towards the new master. He had refused to help his House on the plea that Mr. Grenfell was a slacker and, therefore, an outsider; and now he knew of the master's heroism, Levison felt sick and ashamed.

"Here's your sister!" said Clive suddenly.

Doris Levison sauntered up to the trio, and surveyed her brother in amazement.

"Great Scott, Ernest! What have you been doing with your face?"

Levison grinned.

"I've been wrestling with a forest of giddy prickles and a burning aeroplane," he said.

"What!"

"It was great, Miss Levison!" said Clive. "At the risk of his life, he——"

"Shut up!" said Levison, digging his companion in the ribs.

"I've a good mind," said Doris severely, "to refuse to walk back to St. Jim's with you, with your face in that disgusting state! However, I will, if only to drive home a few remarks concerning Mr. Grenfell!"

"Grenfell?"

The name was beginning to haunt Levison.

"Yes. I've been to a tea-party this afternoon in his study, and he's really no end nice. You've no right to say a word against him, Ernie!"

"I know I haven't," said Levison humbly.

"Because a man wears civilian clothes, it doesn't follow that he's a slacker," said Doris. "That's the mistake the white-feather girls made early in the war. You really made me feel a bit doubtful about Mr. Grenfell's patriotism; but when he was showing us some photographs and things, after tea, I came across a little plush case, with the Distinguished Service Order inside it. It was his—for distinguished services in the field! Why, Ernie, you don't seem at all surprised!"

"I'm not," said Levison. "Grenfell's brother has just told us the story."

"And aren't you ashamed of yourself for the way in which you behaved?"

"Rather! I feel a worm!"

Doris smiled.

"I'm glad of that!" she said. "Because I know you're not!"

She saw hope for the School House yet. The Marathon was to be run that very afternoon, and it was quite on the cards that Levison, his objection towards Mr. Grenfell removed, would be one of the runners. And Clive and Cardew would rally round, too.

Levison's entry into the Marathon would be a godsend. The other crack runners of the School House were not exactly fit to tackle such a gruelling contest. Tom Merry had to nurse his ankle, lest it should give out in the replayed football match; Talbot and Jack Blake, two of the best runners in the House, had wearied themselves with their recent exertions. Levison, on the other hand, would be perfectly fit and fresh.

"There's still time to make amends," said Doris. "If a School House boy wins the Marathon the two Houses will be level. If the School House wins the football-match, as well, they'll come out on top, after all."

"There are two mighty 'if's' about it," said Levison doubtfully. "Still, we'll see what can be done to pull the game out of the fire."

"That's the spirit!" said Doris approvingly.

Levison's first move, on reaching St. Jim's, was to visit the bath-room. Then, having made himself presentable, he went over to the New House, and proceeded to Mr. Grenfell's study.

As he passed through the corridors he saw Figgins, Redfern, and a few others were in running shorts. The Marathon Race was now at hand.

"Come in!" called Mr. Grenfell, in response to the Fourth-Former's knock.

Levison entered the study rather shamefacedly.

The Housemaster stood erect before the mantelpiece. Despite his grey flannel trousers and sports coat, he looked every inch a soldier; and Levison, usually so cute and discerning, marvelled that he had not noticed it before. There was a certain limpness about the master's right arm, too, and Levison recalled how Mr. Grenfell had, a few days before, been seized with a sudden twinge of pain whilst administering that memorable licking.

"Well, Levison? You wish to speak to me?"

"Yes, sir. I—I——"

"Go on."

"I'm beastly sorry I've been such a sulky beast, sir!" blurted out Levison.

Confessions were not much in his line; but he meant to see this one through.

"Nonsense!" protested Mr. Grenfell. "I fail to see that you owe me any sort of apology."

"You don't understand, sir. Ever since the day you lammed me, I haven't treated you with a shadow of respect. I thought you were a slacker and a tyrant. And I stood out of the sports because of that. I know differently now. I met your brother this afternoon, sir, and he jolly soon made me see daylight!"

"You met my brother! Under what circumstances?"

Levison grinned.

"He crashed in flames, in a field about two miles from the school."

Mr. Grenfell turned pale.

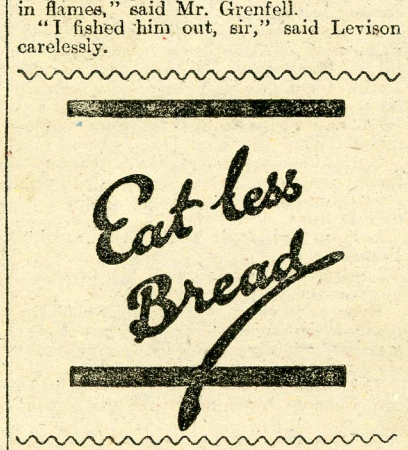
"Was he hurt?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no, sir!"

The master drew a long breath of relief.

"But—but I fail to understand how he could have got clear, if his machine was in flames," said Mr. Grenfell.

"I fished him out, sir," said Levison carelessly.



"It was nothing, sir, I assure you. There was no real risk. I just waded in and unstrapped your brother, and we both got clear of the flames in time."

"Splendid! But I think you played a much more gallant part than you would lead me to believe. I am very glad that you have come to me in this way, Levison. It has removed the barriers that have stood between us. My stay here is very brief, and I do not wish to incur the enmity of any of the boys. Life's much too short to quarrel in wartime. And now I must be going. I have to start the Marathon runners."

"I'm one of them," said Levison.

"You?"

"Of course, sir! I'm not standing out after this!"

"You will have some staunch rivals."

"I know I shall, sir. Figgins is the favourite, from what I can gather; but it's not going to be a walk-over—not by any means!"

Master and junior went their ways, and Levison sought out Clive and Cardew, and they hurried up to the Fourth Form dormitory to change.

A huge crowd had already congregated in the old gateway, and the runners stood ready. There were over a dozen of them, and they looked as fit as fiddles.

When Levison and his study-mates were seen sprinting across the quadrangle in their shorts, a cheer went up from the School House crowd. They had not expected to see this sudden change of front on the part of the three fellows who had been so dead-set against Mr. Grenfell, and their entry into the Marathon was hailed with the keenest delight.

The order was given, and the next instant the plucky band of runners started off down the long white road.

And back in the old gateway, and on the ivy-clad wall of St. Jim's, welcome and applause awaited the fellow who won!

CHAPTER 9.

The Supreme Effort.

LEVISON'S plans in connection with the Marathon race were all cut and dried.

Clive and Cardew were to act as pacemakers, and when they were exhausted, Levison would simply forge ahead, and—the Fates being willing—win! Both Clive and Cardew were good runners, but they were not up to the form of the long-legged Figgins, and neither could have won the race himself. But they could do the next best thing, and be of great assistance to Levison.

Levison had never won a Marathon race, for the simple reason that he had never taken the trouble to enter any. In his old wild days he had no use for athletic sports of any description.

But all that was changed now. Mr. Grenfell had made a deep impression on Levison's mind. He would do anything for old Grenfell, he felt, as he went ahead, with his long, loping stride, over the first mile, with Clive and Cardew on either side of him.

Grenfell had been a brick. More than that, he had done valiant deeds on the fields of Flanders. A spark of devotion had been kindled in Levison's breast, and he resolved to go all out. Even if he failed to win, he told himself grimly that he would at least finish in the first three, and so prove to Mr. Grenfell that he was a trier, and that he was making amends for having stayed out of the other sports.

The course led through the old-fashioned High Street of Rylcombe. Figgins was a born runner, and, like Levison, he meant to put in all he knew to win, out of sheer regard for Mr. Grenfell.

Behind Figgins came Redfern and Kerr; behind those two came Lawrence and Owen. The New House were taking the lead in a most amazing manner; but some of the School House runners smiled to themselves as they thought of what would be happening an hour hence. The test of a Marathon lies, not in the opening stages, but in the last stern struggle, when the frame is exhausted, when the feet are like lumps of lead, and when every stride is an agony.

"By Jove!" said Cardew, as he sped along. "You're in topping form, old man!"

Levison grinned. He certainly felt capable of overcoming every obstacle. True, he was not in strict training; but he had kept off cigarettes, and had enjoyed his full share of sleep—two very distinct advantages in a situation of this kind.

The familiar market-town of Wayland saw Figgins still taking the lead. Kerr had dropped back, and so had Lawrence and Owen. But Redfern, who was second, was running quite easily.

Levison and his loyal pacemakers were next, followed at no great distance by Grundy and D'Arcy.

Few would have suspected that Arthur Augustus possessed sufficient stamina to keep going for mile after mile in such a dogged, persistent manner; but the swell of St. Jim's was prepared to astonish the natives.

He looked anything but an aristocrat now. His attire, so far from being a

thing of beauty and a joy for ever, was stained and splashed with mud. His hair had lost its sleek smoothness. But the expression on his face showed that he meant to keep on keeping on.

"Whethah I finish first or last," he confided in short breaths to Grundy, "I shall stick it wight out an' complete the course."

"Good for you, D'Arcy!" grunted George Alfred.

And so the merry game went on. When the turning-point came, and the course led towards home, Figgins had established a bigger lead than ever.

His face was flushed with the prospect of victory. Looking back over the long stretch of road, he could see no one. He seemed to hold all the cards.

But, as if to mock the hopes of the New House leader, a sudden calamity overtook him. He was descending a steep and slippery hill when his foot caught in a rut, sending him sprawling.

With a gasp of pain Figgins rolled over on to the bank.

"Oh, hang!" he ejaculated dismally.

The spoils of victory were not for him. For fully five minutes he lay there, bitterly lamenting his ill-luck.

But all would yet be well if only a New House fellow got home first, and Figgins' eyes sparkled as he saw Redfern coming into view.

"Mind how you go, Reddy!" he sang out. "This is a brute of a hill. Don't stop, there's a good chap. Never mind me. I'm crocked. It's up to you to see things through."

"Are you sure it'll be all right if——"

"Yes, yes. There's no time to lose. There are three more fellows coming along."

Redfern streaked off down the hill. He was sorry for Figgy, but his best way of helping that injured hero was to win the race himself. To stop in the roadway offering consolation would only be to play into the hands of the rival House.

So Reddy, gritting his teeth and clenching his fists tighter than ever, went ahead.

The three runners mentioned by Figgins were Levison, Cardew, and Clive.

The two pacemakers, their work accomplished, dropped out of the running on reaching the brow of the hill. For many a weary mile they had rendered Levison loyal assistance, and now they had run themselves out, and Levison went on alone.

He slackened on catching sight of Figgins, but the latter urged him on.

"I'm all right!" he assured Levison. "Don't let me muck up your chances!"

"You're sure?"

"Quite! Go ahead!"

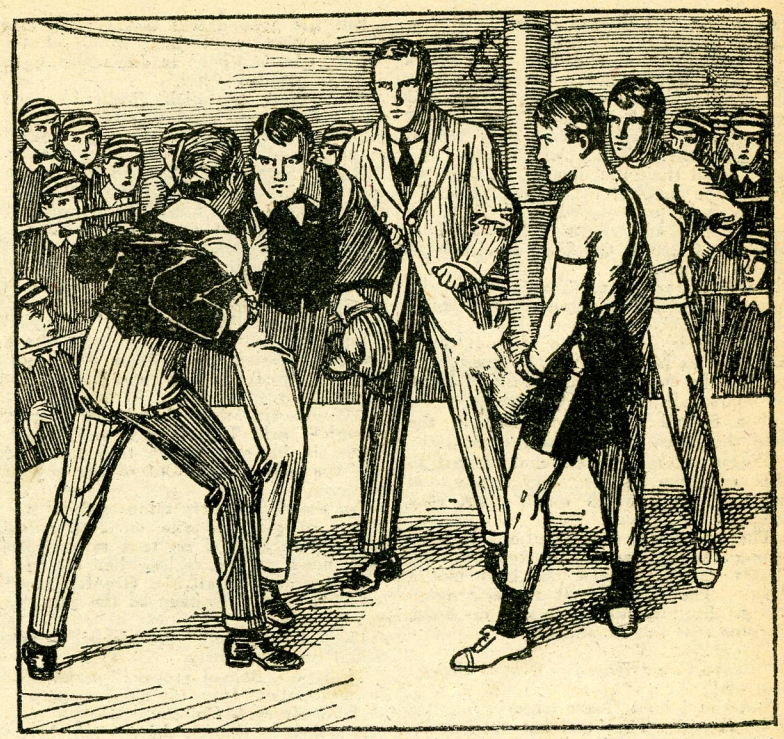
At the foot of the hill, and still running strongly, was Redfern.

Levison recognised this hill, and realised, with something of a shock, that it was only a mile from the school.

Only a mile! And Reddy was simply running away from him!

Levison was fagged—more fagged than he himself would have known or admitted. But he pulled himself together, and shot off down the hill like a hare.

At all costs he must overtake Redfern. If he didn't, no one else would. Three of the School House fellows—D'Arcy, Grundy, and Talbot—had battled like heroes over the lumpy road; but they had as much chance of catching Redfern as of vaulting the moon. The race had thinned itself down into an individual tussle between two fellows of stubborn determination and high endeavour. Redfern was prepared to go on till he dropped; likewise Levison. It was the spirit that has made history in muddy Flanders—that spirit upon which the Germans have had occasion to comment with some bitterness—that the English never know when they are beaten.



Grundy Claims His Rights!
(See Chapter 6.)

The sun was sinking over the hills. Levison heard a distant roar, proclaiming that the waiting crowd on the school wall had already caught sight of Redfern.

"Now or never!" panted Levison.

And he ran as he had never run before.

The distance between the two runners speedily diminished, and when Redfern got into the straight for home Levison was hard on his heels.

Another desperate spurt, and they would be level; yet another, and Levison would be leading. The School House runner made both.

A fresh volley of cheering burst from the crowd on the wall.

Ahead of him, near the old gateway, Levison could see the tape suspended across the road, and could distinguish the excited, expectant face of his sister Doris. She seemed to be beckoning to him—urging him on to the final goal!

Then a motor hooted past, and in the blinding cloud of dust Levison choked, and nearly collapsed.

His legs, which had been putting in a considerable amount of overtime, gave way under him when he was only a dozen yards from the tape, and he sprawled helplessly in the roadway.

No one cheered now. It was too tense a moment for demonstrations.

Redfern saw that his rival was down, and flogged his way painfully over that last stretch of road. He, too, was almost down and out, but he had more in him than Levison, and the odds looked greatly in his favour.

Levison heard the quick patter of feet behind him, and lurched desperately to his feet. He staggered blindly towards the outstretched tape, with Redfern's hot breath in his ear.

He must get there somehow, he told himself. He had not fagged all these miles for nothing. True, his brain was swimming, and his frame thoroughly exhausted, but then, there was Doris. She would be disappointed if he failed.

And Mr. Grenfell!

He must win!

He felt, rather than saw, Redfern pass him. This gave the final spur to his determination. With the spring of a tiger, he bounded forward, and the tape came fluttering down.

Levison collapsed fairly and squarely this time, but not before he knew all that he cared to know—namely, that he had won. He had run a great race, and victory had crowned his efforts.

But while the limelight of praise was turned full upon Levison, there were others richly deserving of applause. Redfern, who had run a magnificent race and been beaten on the post; Figgins, but for whose untimely accident the New House might have been well away with the honours; Talbot, who seemed to have suddenly sprung up from nowhere, and finished third; Grundy and Gussy, who were close behind him.

All had done well—but Levison had won, and School House scored!

CHAPTER 10.
The Last Great Game.

SCHOOL HOUSE and New House were now level, and the replayed House match would decide the issue.

It was feared at first that Tom Merry would be absent from the School House team, and Figgins from the New House, on account of injuries; but on the day of the match both juniors were pronounced sound enough to play.

A special stand had been rigged up for the occasion, many amateur carpenters having lent a hand, and several of the masters were seated there, including the Head himself. Cousin Ethel and Doris, Levison's sister, sat together, chatting merrily, and both determined

to put in a vast amount of hand-clapping on behalf of the School House.

A wild burst of cheering went up as the New House eleven sprinted on to the field. They were all in white, and even the School House fellows in the crowd had to admit that they looked fit and lusty. There was sparkle and dash in all their movements, as they beguiled the interval by potting at goal.

Five minutes elapsed, and then, in red jerseys and white knickers, Tom Merry & Co. took the field, amid a fresh burst of cheering.

Levison was there, fit as a fiddle despite his terrible exertions in the Marathon; and Clive was there also. Cardew sat by Doris Levison—he was out of it. That it was his own fault he knew, and perhaps he regretted that want of keenness now. But he did not say so.

The School House now had in the field the finest side at their command.

Figgins won the toss, and elected to kick with the wind—a very strong and powerful wind, which would count very much in his favour.

The opening was dramatic. Figgins swung the ball across to Redfern, and Reddy raced it down the field like a flash. Then he lobbed it back again beautifully, and, with a jerk of his head, Figgins sent in into the net.

"Goal!"

"Bravo, New House! Bravo, Figgy! Hurrah!"

But the School House were in no wise disheartened. They had not yet had an opportunity of giving a taste of their quality.

Five minutes later, following some grand work by the halves, Levison and Tom Merry got the New House defence in knots, and Tom Merry literally walked the ball into the net.

The School House fellows grinned triumphantly. They had soon deprived the opposition of their lead, and thereafter the game developed into a ding-dong struggle.

Levison was in fine form. He led many attacks upon the New House citadel, where Fatty Wynn rendered yeoman service. Had anybody but Fatty kept goal for the New House, they would have been several goals in arrear at half-time. As it was, the interval arrived with the score still one all.

"With the wind in our favour, we ought to get well away with it in the second half," said Manners.

And that was the general opinion.

During the interval, a flood of drenching rain swept over the ground, and when the players emerged from the dressing-room a storm of great intensity was raging.

The wind veered round, too, so that the School House did not enjoy the benefit to which they had so keenly looked forward.

Mr. Grenfell questioned the players as they lined up.

"Do you think the game had better go on, boys?" he asked, and the merry twinkle in his eye showed that he anticipated the nature of their answer.

"Yes, rather, sir!" came in a unanimous chorus from School House and New House alike.

"Very well, then!"

And the referee blew his whistle.

Almost immediately Arthur Augustus broke away on the wing. Throughout the first half he had been a thorn in the side of the opposition, and as he tore away, with his monocle trailing behind him, the School House section of the crowd gave vent to their feelings in a mighty roar.

"Good old Gussy!"

"Right away with it, old man!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 515.

But the ground was treacherous, and Gussy's shot went just wide. Fatty Wynn, who had been in difficulties, gave a great gasp of relief.

From the goal-kick Redfern raced away. Clive made an heroic effort to pull him up, but slipped at the crucial moment.

Reddy continued his all-conquering career, winding up with a shot which Reilly would have sniffed at in ordinary circumstances, but which, owing to the fierce gusts of wind, he fumbled.

"Goal!"

The New House supporters were in danger of going mad.

"My hat! What a life!" growled Monty Lowther, shaking himself like a drenched terrier. "We seem to be getting a jolly sight more kicks than pence this journey."

"We'll win this thundering game, though!" said Tom Merry, and a look blazed in his eyes which they knew of old—the look which told of the joy of battle.

For the next twenty minutes there was plenty of give-and-take on both sides. Not a man slacked on that rain-sodden field, not a man gave less than his best.

And through it all Mr. Grenfell raced with his whistle, as keen on the game as any player.

The clock outside the dressing-room ticked on relentlessly.

"Play up, School House!" came in a desperate shout from the loyal supporters of Tom Merry & Co.

It looked as though there would be no further scoring, for Fatty Wynn and Reilly, though sorely pressed on numerous occasions, were putting up a rock like defence.

But persistent energy and courage bring their reward, and with a whoop of delight the School House fellows saw Talbot break away and flash the ball across to Gussy, who sent in an unstoppable shot, which left Fatty Wynn absolutely helpless.

Cheer upon cheer rang out as the Falstaff of the New House ruefully fished the ball out of the net.

"Isn't it just exciting!" exclaimed Doris Levison, squeezing Cousin Ethel's arm delightedly. "Scores level, a storm raging, and five minutes to go! I wouldn't miss this for anything!"

The New House attacked fiercely, and Redfern wormed his way within shooting distance and sent in a terrific shot. But Reilly kicked hard, and sent the ball soaring up the field once more.

Then it was that Levison, who had gathered up large quantities of mud and glory during the second half, pounced upon the ball, and manœuvred it well within the enemy's lines.

"Shoot, Levison!"

The exclamation burst from a hundred lips.

Levison didn't shoot. He lobbed the ball across to Tom Merry, who was in a much better position.

Face to face with Fatty, Tom seemed paralysed. But he only seemed. He suddenly whipped the ball in between the goalie's legs!

It was the cleverest shot of the afternoon, and it won the match. Shortly afterwards the final whistle sounded.

Amid a scene of vast animation, victors and vanquished streamed off the field.

The School House bore their blushing honours thick upon them. It had been an uphill climb, and many obstacles had beset their path; but they had won through, and that was all that mattered.

And none the less glorious was the gallant display of the New House. Figgins & Co. had amply proved that they were made of sterner stuff than Mr. Grenfell had at first supposed.

The only cloud on the horizon was Ratty's imminent return, but the St. Jim's fellows resolved to take no thought of the morrow; and when, a day or two later, Mr. Grenfell's brother, who had also been granted leave, came to accompany the master to their home in a valley of Devon, the juniors gave them a rousing send-off.

And, as it happened—but it wasn't all chance, of course—Levison's was the last hand Mr. Grenfell shook, and his last words were to Levison—the fellow who had doubted him and sulked, but who had risked his life for a life dearer to Mr. Grenfell than his own!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"NUMBER NINE ON THE WAR-PATH!" by Martin Clifford.)

NOTICES.

Back Numbers, etc., Wanted.

By W. Seaton, 3, Cooke Street, Failsworth, Manchester.—"St. Jim's Airmen" and any stories dealing with Talbot's early days at St. Jim's.

By L. B. Adams, 164, High Street, Stirchley, Birmingham.—"Magnet," Nos. 1-505; GEM, Nos. 1-504. Please state prices.

By Albert Jepson, 13, Marlborough Terrace, Barnsley.—GEM and "Magnet" Double Nos., 1910 to 1916. 2/- offered.

By Miss M. Ellis, 46, Worlingham Road, East Dulwich, S.E. 22—"Under D'Arcy's Protection" and "A Strange Secret."

By H. Lampard, 121, High Street, Stevenage.—"Boys' Journal," No. 48.

By Roy Harris, 10,218, 105th Street, Edmonton, Alta., Canada.—GEM, Nos. 1-250. £1 and postage offered.

Leagues, Amateur Magazines, etc.

Readers and contributors wanted for amateur magazine—specimen copy, 1½d.—W. H. Millar, Avondale, 82, Harrow Road, Leicester.

A. E. Hamblin, 4, Prospect Road, Hungerford, would like particulars and terms of subscription from readers running amateur magazines.

Cheap hectograph wanted by J. Dean, 40, Crosby Row, Snowsfields, London, S.E. 1.

Secretary, Pastime Correspondence Club, 53, Kingswood Road, Chiswick, W. 4, wants more members—boys and girls—no fee.

Readers wanted for hectographed magazine.—J. Staveley, 33, High Street, Bridlington.

Readers and contributors wanted for printed amateur magazine—specimen copy, 1½d.—Patrick Hart, 21, Lower Dorset Street, Dublin.

Readers in Ireland wanted for amateur magazine.—T. Ffrench, 31, Percy Street, Northumberland Road, Balls Bridge, Dublin.

Readers and contributors wanted for amateur magazine.—G. Oliver, 5, Barry Avenue, Stamford Hill, N. 15.

Readers wanted for monthly magazine—stamped and addressed envelope, please.—F. Gregson and F. Ogden, 1, Everton Road, Reddish, Stockport.

Football—Matches Wanted by:

ROYAL MINT RANGERS—15-17—6 mile radius.—F. Banker, 12, Chamber Street, Leman Street, E. 1.

GILFORD JUNIORS.—A. Bower, 4, Whitehouse Terrace, Clough Road, Blackley, Manchester.

OVERTON—15½.—J. W. Rogers, 60, Cardwell Street, Edge Hill, Liverpool.

EVERTON JUNIORS—15-16—home matches only.—E. Bromley, 3, Cupid Street, Everton, Liverpool.

WHITEFIELD JUNIORS—15—7 mile radius.—H. Griffiths, 16, Hunt Street, Everton, Liverpool.

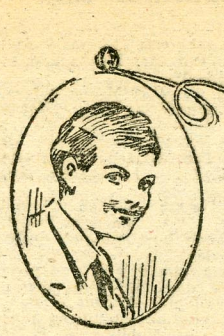
NEWSHAM—16½—3 mile radius—players also wanted.—W. J. Lindop, 22, Venus Street, Liverpool.

ST. PAUL'S, WITHINGTON—16—5 mile radius.—S. Smith, 1, Brown Street, Withington, Lancs.

RANGERS—13-14.—P. Smith, 22, Norland Gardens, Notting Hill, W. 11.

CLEVELAND—16—5 mile radius.—R. Johnson, 151, Vittoria Street, Birkenhead.

CRYSTAL ROVERS—15-16.—R. Joyce, 30, Egerton Street, New Brighton.



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.

Ponsonby insists on being one of a Highcliffe party which is going to tea at Cliff House. Flap lets her brother know that the girls would rather not have Ponsonby as one of their guests, and Gadsby manages that the postscript of her letter, in which she says this, reaches Pon instead of Flip. Pon contrives to persuade Flap that Flip has shown him this, and gets on something like a friendly footing with her. On the way back he and Merton quarrel. Flip does his best to make peace, but Ponsonby is certain that Merton has played a dirty trick on him, the trick being really Gadsby's, and the two fight. Flip refuses to second Pon, and stays away from the combat in the gym.

(Now read on.)

Fighting It Out.

"ONCE is enough, absolutely!" said Vavasour. He counted Pon's victory very nearly a certainty; but he did not like risking so much.

"Then I'll take on your lower price, Gaddy! Queer you should only have half the confidence in Pon that Vav has, by gad! An' Vav ain't heroic about his quids, either."

"In half-crowns—that's my limit," replied Gadsby sulkily.

"Rot! What's the use of a half-dollar to an expensive chap like you?"

"Take it or leave it! Dash it, Drury, I believe you want Pon to get licked!"

"Of course I do—now! Ten—twelve—six in my pockets if he is. Besides, I never did want Merton to be."

Merton looked like being, though, in the first few rounds.

Pon started off in a style that made his supporters look upon the issue as a foregone conclusion.

Twice Merton was floored, and his face showed many marks. Pon, on the other hand, was scarcely touched.

Grimly Merton strove to pull himself together; with friendly words and such wise counsel as was in him, Tunstall comforted him between rounds. Monson minor had an easier task than Tunstall. He had only to grin and give Pon the gross flattery Pon's soul loved.

But Merton was not done. The feeling in him was that he had to go through with this to the bitter end, whatever he suffered. The fellow who feels like that is not to be beaten easily.

It was in the fifth round that he fairly woke up. And that was due to Drury.

"Buck up, Merton, old chap!" howled Drury.

Merton knew nothing about Drury's bets. It was as well he did not, for it would have given him a wrong impression. Not wholly because of those bets—not chiefly because of them—was it that Drury cheered him on.

Biff!

It was Pon down this time!

And there was cheering! Drury led it; but Smithson and Yates and Benson joined in. And it was not with them the mere fact that Pon was an enemy that counted. Merton was not a friend, it is true; but they had never had cause to hate him, and they admired his pluck now.

"Hooray!" they yelled. "Go it, Merton!"

"Buck up, Pon!" yelled the nuts.

After that for a while the exchanges were pretty even. Pon had acquired an increased respect for his opponent, and Merton had warmed up to his work.

He remembered things Flip had taught him, and he used them. Pon was surprised to find that he knew them. Flip could have given Pon wrinkles in boxing, too; but Pon had never asked him to. Pon was rather in the way of fancying he knew it all.

The crowd in the gym was becoming something like a real crowd now. Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar had turned up—practically all the Fourth except Flip—and most of the Fifth. A few of the Sixth had lounged in, Langley among them. Prefects were expected to stop fights with bare fists at once—at Highcliffe as at any other school. But at Highcliffe there was a biggish gap between what was expected of prefects and what prefects did. And they were seldom brought to book for any omission, so that it was small wonder they should think such things mattered little.

Langley did not appear to think that this particular breach of rules mattered at all. He laughed and joked, and cheered a good hit impartially, regardless of by whom given or by whom received.

But there was no such impartiality about the Caterpillar.

"Why don't you howl him on, Franky, by gad?" demanded De Courcy.

"I don't see why I should, if you mean Merton. And I suppose you must, as you certainly haven't favoured Ponsonby with any of your support," answered Frank, smiling.

"A horrible suspicion preys upon my ingenuous mind, old scout. I can't help believin' you want the dear Pon to win!"

"Well, why shouldn't I? After all——"

"Don't say he's your cousin! I can't quite stand that, by gad! Cousins is as cousin does, as someone said somewhere—anyway, I've said it now, if no other genius did before me. An' you can't say that Pon has ever behaved as sich. Now, honest Injun, can you, Franky?"

"I was only going to remark that Merton has never been a chum of mine," said Frank.

"That's better! I would rather you should shut your noble an' trustin' heart to Merton than open it to Pon. Oh, good punch, Merton!"

Pon was down again. Tunstall began to look happy, and Vavasour very glum.

"Do it again, Vav!" said Drury mockingly. "Just one more tenner! Gaddy, have you got any more half-dollars burnin' holes in the pockets of your elegant trousers?"

"Shut up, you rotter!" growled Gadsby. "You're a beastly renegade!"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"He's done! Merton wins! Good old Merton!" yelled Yates.

There was no mistake now about the feelings of Frank Courtenay's clan. They were all for Merton. Frank himself kept silence, but the Caterpillar made noise enough for two.

He was clapping his white hands now. Pon turned eyes of deadly hatred upon him. The timekeeper had his eyes on his watch. A little more, and Pon would be counted out—licked!

But Cecil Ponsonby was one of those to whom hatred can serve as a spur to smite when courage might fail—and he did not lack courage either. It was the mocking look on the face of Rupert de Courcy that galvanised him into fresh life, though.

He was on his feet as "Eight" was counted—on his feet, but groggy, weak about the knees, with head sagging somewhat forward and guard low and feeble.

"By gad, I thought young Pon had got it then!" said Langley.

"He's as good as got it, I fancy," said Reedman of the Fifth.

"Not while he can stand an' shove his fists out. The other chap's had some, my son," replied Langley wisely.

He was right. Merton ought to have been able to push home his advantage then, for another knock-down blow must have settled Pon's account.

But Merton could not give it. He, too, was staggering. That last hard punch had taken very nearly as much out of him as out of Pon. He had swung half round after giving it, and had all but fallen.

"Time!" came as a very welcome respite to both.

"I ought—settled him—then—Tun!" gasped Merton.

"Never mind, old fellow! You've got him set, I think, if you can only keep on keepin' on. By Jupiter, you're stickin' it well!"

Merton smiled wanly. His eyes wandered round in search of a face that was absent.

He was looking for Flip. He could not understand Flip's not being there. But he did not like it. Only a cold-blooded fellow could have stayed away thus, he thought.

There was nothing cold-blooded about Flip Derwent, and only he knew how much it cost him to stay away from the gym. He paced the quad outside alone, listening to the buzz

of voices within, the shouts that told of one or another getting in a shrewd blow; hearing even the thud when Pon smote the boards that last time.

He did not know how to keep away then. It was as though invisible ropes were drawing him.

But he had made up his mind, and he stuck to it. If he could only have decided about something else he would not have needed to make up his mind to stay away.

He could not. He had not yet learned to know the true friend from the false; and he hated the notion of Merton's licking Pon as much as he did that of Pon's licking Merton. Whereas—if he had but known—he might have gone in and cheered with a good heart every hit Merton made.

The next two rounds were slow and dull. The two did little but push each other about; punching was off. Both were trying to get back breath and some measure of strength. And each knew that even a push might finish him. If he was once down on his back again he might not be able to get up in time.

Merton had a difficulty in seeing; both his eyes were puffed up, and every minute getting worse. Pon's elegant hands had suffered even more than his face; his knuckles were bruised and swollen. But his face had got it, too, and his under lip was three times its normal size.

"Why on earth don't they chuck it?" said Frank Courtenay. "Neither's fit to go on."

"Chuck it? My dear, good ass, why should they chuck it?" expostulated the Caterpillar. "They're out to lick one another, by gad, an' you can't expect to give a chap a lickin' that he will feel for weeks without gettin' a tap or two yourself."

"They ought to have worn the gloves, Rupert."

"Why—oh, why? What they wanted was to hurt one another—savage, if you like, but refreshin'ly human. Gloves would only have been in the way, y'know."

"Well, I've had nearly enough."

"Stay another round or two, dear boy. I'm not much in the Jeroboam line myself. Was it Jeroboam or Jeremiah who was the prophet? Oh, no; I've got it! Jehoshaphat! I'm not much of a prophet, I say, but I think Pon's goin' out within two rounds. I never do feel quite sure about Pon's limit—it's a kind of movable mark—but he's dashed near it now, I should say."

"And what of Merton?" said Frank gravely.

"I used to think Merton a bigger slacker than myself, Franky. But I rather fancy now that Merton's limit comes somewhere near where yours does—it's a physical limit, not a moral one at all. You're fitter, and you'd last longer; but you couldn't mean more than Merton means, for he's out to fight as long as he can stand. He's fairly gropin' for Pon now, but he'll have him yet—he'll have him yet, by gad!"

The Caterpillar was in dead earnest now, though his last words rang with a hard exultation that his chum scarcely liked.

And others had come to see it as the Caterpillar saw it. They knew now that Merton was fighting temporary blindness as well as fighting Pon. He was groping for his opponent. De Courcy had got the right and fitting word.

Not even Tunstall had ever dreamed that lazy Algy had all this in him. The smiling face was set and hard and bruised; Merton was hardly recognisable. The fighting spirit had awakened in him.

And Pon was beginning to know it. Pon's face, battered and swollen, had taken on a look of surprise such as it might have worn had someone he had been trying to do down done him down with a bad sovereign. He really felt that he had been grossly deceived in Merton.

A half-blind hit got home on his jaw with more force than any hit had done for some time past, and he was plainly rattled.

"This," said the Caterpillar, "is where the dear Pon quits!"

Pon heard that, and it may have helped to keep him from quitting, though De Courcy had not intended it to do so.

He tossed his head, and flecks of blood fell from his nostrils as he did so. His aching knuckles were full of sharp, stabbing pains as he got in a right and left on the face of Merton, but he almost revelled in the pain, believing that now at last he had triumphed.

For Merton reeled—was almost down.

But he pulled himself together by a big effort, lunged forward blindly, tapped Pon lightly on the nose with his left fist, and then let him have the full force that remained in the right on the point of the jaw.

"By gad, he did that by touch, not by sight!" gasped the Caterpillar, as Pon reeled and crashed down.

And, indeed, it had looked like it. Merton admitted to Tunstall afterwards that something very like that was the case.

"I felt my left on his dashed nose," he said, "so I knew his dashed face was there, though I couldn't properly see it, an' I let him have all that I'd got left in me. If there'd been anythin' much left in him he wouldn't have let his face stay there to get it, by Jupiter!"

Pon crashed down. He did not look in the least like getting up.

"Pon's lodging on the cold, cold ground!" softly chanted the Caterpillar.

"One—two—three—four—five——"

"What does this disgraceful scene mean?" demanded the acid tones of Mr. Mobbs, as the master of the Fourth pushed his way through the crowd. "Ponsonby, I am utterly surprised——"

"But not so much as Pon was!" murmured Rupert De Courcy.

"And shocked!"

"But there again Pon's shock was even seven times greater!" said the Caterpillar.

"Merton! This is beyond——"

It was beyond Merton, quite. Merton lay in a dead faint in the arms of Tunstall.

Who Was the Winner?

MR. MOBBS looked very reproachfully at Langley.

That was about as far towards rating the Highcliffe captain for permitting the disgraceful scene as Mr. Mobbs felt capable of going.

The tall prefect could look over the head of Mr. Mobbs, and he had rather a way of doing so. Moreover, he was highly connected—a fact which Mr. Mobbs never forgot when dealing with a Highcliffe boy.

It did seem to the snobbish little master that Langley had been very wrong in permitting so highly connected a youth as Cecil Ponsonby to suffer such hard treatment as this. But even on that score Mr. Mobbs was rather at a loss, for Merton was quite well connected, too, and had very much the same supercilious way of dealing with the Form-master as Pon had.

Altogether, as the Caterpillar remarked, "it was quite a dashed difficult position for Mobby, Pon bein' the apple of his eye, an' Merton not the sort of chap to be trampled upon."

And it is a fact that Mr. Mobbs looked round as if in search of someone upon whom to vent his wrath.

The Caterpillar met his gaze with a glance of deep sympathy—at least, that was what the Caterpillar said it was, and he should have known. But Rupert De Courcy, nephew of an earl, had no reason to dread that terrible wrath.

"Then he looked at you, Franky," said the Caterpillar. "But that was quite obviously n.g., since not even Mobby could suspect your bein' at the bottom of a fight between two of the nuts. An' thereafter his eagle glance fairly brooded upon Smithson, who was not lookin' too innocent. Mobby would dearly have liked to bring in Smithson guilty. But he had to drop the notion; it was too absurd even for Mobby!"

"I didn't see all that," Courtenay replied. "I only saw him kneel down by Ponsonby and try to lift his head. Ponsonby hit out at him, which didn't seem very grateful. Of course, Mobby's a worm; but he really did seem concerned about the fellow's having got it in the neck so badly."

"But he didn't mind Pon's punchin' him, dear boy. Mobby would gloat all the days of his life if he had but once been kicked by a real, live lord. Pon ain't quite that, an' Pon didn't kick. But he may have a title some day, if the other fellows die out of his way conveniently. I ain't sayin' he would help them, Franky, dear boy; but, 'pon my honour, I wouldn't care much to stand between our Pon and a title—eh, where was I?"

"Lost in the wilderness of your own words, I think!" laughed Frank Courtenay. "You get more and more rambling every day, Rupert!"

"Effects of old age, dear boy—an' Pon. Pon's almost turned my hair white. But perhaps he'll give me a rest now, by gad!"

Mr. Mobbs and Monson minor and Gadsby helped Pon away, Vavasour following, till Drury called him back.

The master rated Gadsby and Monson as they went. It was not easy to see how they were to blame, for Gadsby's share in bringing about the fight was a secret locked in his own breast. But Mr. Mobbs had to take it out of somebody.

Tunstall sprinkled water in Merton's face, and with a long, shuddering sigh, Merton came to.

"Where am I? What's happened?" he asked. "Oh, I say, Tun, did I lick him? He was down, wasn't he? I couldn't see, but——"

"He was down all serene, old chap," said Tunstall soothingly. "An' he was licked. But—well, I don't know how it stands quite. Did Algy win, Langley?"

"Of course Merton didn't win!" snapped Monson major. "He was down, too, before Ponsonby was counted out. Matter of fact, Ponsonby wasn't counted out at all, by gad! I'd only got to five when Mobby came in."

"Mobby couldn't stop your countin', Monson," said Langley. "I should say Merton was winner."

"But he was down on his back, too—senseless—an' Ponsonby hadn't been counted out!" protested Monson.

"Because you stopped countin'!" said the skipper.

"But Mobbs was here! The fight couldn't go on with him here!"

"The countin' could have been done, though."

"Oh, that's rot! Anyway, Merton was down, too!"

"You would have got to 'Out!' before Merton slumped it you'd kept on. An' you ought to have kept on!" said Langley with decision. "What's Mobby matter to you? What do any of us care for the little snob? If you didn't go on it was because you didn't choose, and—if you want the straight tip from me—because you're a dashed rotten referee! I wouldn't have you to referee a dog fight that I had any interest in!"

"It's amazin', Franky—positively amazin'!" murmured the Caterpillar. "Here's Langley buckin' up now, an' talkin' as though he was really interested in somethin', by gad! The bacillus of vigour is workin' in the body of Highcliffe! Let's get out of this! It may attack me next!"

Monson major scowled. Some of the other seniors looked rather curiously at Langley. The Highcliffe skipper did seem to have woke up, and to them it appeared strange that a fight between two juniors should have stirred him thus. They knew, too, that he had lost money on Pon, whom he had backed at two to one with Beauchamp.

But Langley, with all his slackness and his liking for the wrong kinds of sport, had something sound at the core of him, and Merton's plucky fight had got to it

Smithson and Yates helped Tunstall to take Merton across the quad. They evidently regarded it as an honour, and would have been pleased to aid in carrying him. But Merton, though he could not see, could walk, and had no fancy for being carried.

Flip saw them go. Two or three minutes before he had seen Pon pass, and had let him pass without a word, because he did not care to say anything before Mr. Mobbs.

But he would have spoken to Merton, but that both Merton and Tunstall seemed to turn their eyes away from him in a very marked manner.

That nettled him. He did not know that Merton could not see him, and he did not guess how hot Tunstall's heart was against him.

It was not very reasonable, maybe. Certainly Flip was in no way to blame for Merton's having been knocked about so badly. On the contrary, he had done all that one fellow could do to avert the fight.

But Tunstall, guiding the uncertain footsteps of his sorely-damaged chum, was not in the mood to estimate things rightly.

Flip would have followed, but a crowd surged round him—a crowd that debated hotly a subject of great interest to Flip.

Drury had collared Vavasour.

"Pay up and look pleasant, if you can, Vav!" he said. "Anyway, pay up. I'll excuse you the rest, if you find it too dashed difficult, by gad!""

"Pay up? Not jolly well likely!" returned Vavasour sulkily. "Merton didn't win. All bets are off, by gad!"

"Rats! You heard what Langley said? I think that's dashed well good enough for anyone!" replied Drury.

It was scarcely the money Drury was really after. He could afford to let that go. But he did not feel that he could afford to let the chance of chipping Vavasour about it go so easily.

"Not good enough for me!" Vavasour said, with far more decision than usual. "Langley wasn't ref."

"No, dear boy. We'd have had a straight deal if he had been, an' you'd have had to shell out without arguin'. As it is——"

"I dashed well won't—absolutely!" snapped Vavasour.

Now Monson major came along, a burly, beefy brute, quite a choice combination of the nut and the bargee.

Vavasour appealed to him.

"Monson, there's a chap here who says that Merton really won. Who do you think won now—absolutely?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that there was an absolute winner. They were both on their backs. But, as you ask me, by gad, Ponsonby had the best chance. He might have scrambled up before I'd finished countin'. Merton couldn't have done—he'd fainted dead away."

"Rats! You stopped counting!" cried a voice from back in the crowd. "You could have got to twenty before Merton dropped!"

"Who's that?" roared Monson, in a fury.

"It was me!" replied Benson, coming forward, flushed but not funked. The days when Monson major could tyrannise as he chose over the Fourth were past. Frank Courtenay had cut his comb.

"I'll give you——"

"Think better of it, Monson, dear boy!" drawled the Caterpillar. "I won't say that whatever you give Benson will be returned to you with interest, for that would sound too dashed much like a threat, an' threats aren't truly gentlemanly—are they, dear boy? But I should like to remark that Benson was not the only one present who wondered that a member of the august Fifth Form should not be able to count beyond five, by gad! I read somewhere that the Australian aborigine can't; but I never heard that——"

"Chuck it, you sneerin' young rotter!" snapped Monson furiously.

"Oh, by gad, there's the aboriginal strain croppin' up again! I've noticed somethin' very like it in Monson minor, too. Have you a copy of your pedigree by you, Monson? I should be no end interested in seein' whether——"

"Here's Langley!" shouted Jones minor. "What do you say, Langley? Didn't Merton win?"

The skipper shook his head.

"Can't go so far as to say that," he answered. "But Ponsonby didn't, if that's any help to you in settlin' your bets, Jones!"

"I don't bet—it's a silly-ass game," returned Jones minor boldly.

"An' don't I know it!" murmured Langley in the ear of the fellow by his side.

"Then you don't think Vavasour ought to cash up to me, Langley?" asked Drury.

"Eh? You young idiots been——"

"Well, we're rather more likely to than Jones, anyway. But it was only a small flutter. Vav gave me ten to one in quids on Pon——"

"My hat! An' you call that a little flutter! Let's see—you're eleven, aren't you, Drury?"

"An' a few more," returned Drury, grinning.

"Well, by the time you're fifteen you'll be ripe for hangin', I should say. As for Vavasour, he ought to be in a lunatic asylum! Ten-to-one was an absurd price, an' if a chap must bet he'd better have some little notion of the game he's bettin' on, by gad!"

"Quite a brilliant little moral homily—eh, Franky?" said the Caterpillar, as the tall skipper strode away with the rest of the seniors.

But Frank Courtenay's face had a shadow upon it. Courtenay liked Langley—it was hard to do otherwise. But he saw that there was small chance for Highcliffe as long as Langley was the school's captain. He thought of sturdy, straight-going, uncompromising George Wingate, and he sighed.

Till the breakfast bell rang, hot dispute as to whether Pon, or Merton, or neither, had won went on.

Vavasour was chipped by Drury till he almost showed fight; and a small scrap between Benson and Blades, who supported Pon's claim, was actually in progress when the summons to the table cut it short.

Flip found himself beside Drury going in.

"Was Merton badly hurt?" he asked.

"Mean to say you didn't see the scrap?" inquired Drury, in a tone that Flip did not quite like.

"No, I didn't."

"Oversleep yourself—eh?"

"No. I didn't care to see it."

"Oh! I fancied Merton was rather by way of bein' a chum of yours, by gad!"

And now Drury was looking at Flip from under half-closed eyelids in a manner that made Flip wince, though he did not know why he should care what Drury thought, and he certainly did not feel that he had done anything to deserve contempt.

"So is Pon," he said. And to him that seemed to justify what he had done.

Drury looked down his nose thoughtfully for some three or four seconds. Then he said:

"Nobody's ever goin' to find it possible to be friends with both of them again, that's a dashed sure thing! If it weren't too late—but I should say it is—my advice would be to stick to Merton, Derwent!"

"Are you going to?" demanded Flip, speaking out as was his wont.

"That," drawled Drury, in his nuttiest manner, "is not the least in the world your bizney, dear boy!"

"Who said it was? And who asked for your advice, by Jupiter?" flashed Flip, badly nettled.

"Oh, you didn't ask for it, I grant you, an', of course, it was dashed impertinence on my part to give it to you. But I undertake not to err in that way again, Derwent. Don't shout at me any more; the Head's in there, y'know, an' the old boy ain't in very good health. Besides, you might shock Mobby, an' he's had enough for one day, I fancy, by gad!"

Gone Without a Goodbye!

NEITHER Merton nor Pon appeared at breakfast, of course. Tunstall was also an absentee.

He was with Merton, no doubt.

Flip felt strangely alone—more alone than he had done at his first breakfast at Highcliffe.

His place was between two fellows of whom he had never seen much.

The Caterpillar and Frank Courtenay were not far away; but they were not thinking of Flip. Gadsby, and Vavasour, and Monson minor, and two or three more of the nuts—but Drury was not one of them—were together; and they talked eagerly, with an occasional glance at Flip that was none too friendly. But he had never counted those fellows his friends, anyway; and he did not care what they thought or said.

Somehow, though, the difference in the manner of Smithson & Co. really hurt him. They were different—to Flip there seemed no doubt about that. It was not often he was specially sensitive to glances and whispers, and shrugs of the shoulders; it was little need he had ever had to be, for it had not been his way to cause them.

But now it seemed evident to him that in the eyes of Smithson & Co. he was as one tried and found wanting. They thought he ought to have stood by Merton.

And the nuts thought he ought to have stood by Pon. All but Drury—it was curious that Drury should take so different a view. But he had never followed Pon so blindly as Gadsby, and Monson, and Vavasour.

And Flip had stood by neither! That was what those fellows felt. In the hour of trial he had lacked the pluck to make up his mind—to declare on which side he had ranged himself!

No!

That was all wrong!

Flip knew that it was all wrong.

Honestly and manfully, he had done his best to compose the difference between the two. Because he counted them both as chums he had chosen to stay away from the fight; and he had a right to choose, surely?

And it ought not to matter to him what the fellows thought.

But it did matter!

He could not understand it. He was too young; his life had not known enough of ups and downs.

He did not realise that right up to now he had sunned himself in the rays of a general popularity, alike at home in Tasmania, and here in old England. Only a few rotters had disliked him—Gadsby, and fellows of his stamp. The rest had liked him and had shown it. The Sixth and Fifth had treated him like one of themselves when he had played for the first eleven; Frank Courtenay and De Courcy had never been otherwise than friendly, though they knew he was Pon's chum; their followers had shown him something like hero-worship, admiring him for his skill with fists and feet, and counting him hardly as of the nuts, though he had been pally with the nuts. And there had been Merton and Tun—a fellow could not have asked for better chums than they had been!

Was that all over?

The loss of general popularity he felt that he could bear, so that only Algy and Tun understood.

But would they understand? Could they?

He did not know how to make them. He was not good at explaining things, he knew.

Somehow he did not think much of Pon just then. Perhaps it was because he was was more confident that Pon did understand. Or, maybe, it was because the sight of Merton stumbling across the quad blindly had stricken him harder than the sight of Pon's damages.

He went up to No. 6 in the few minutes between breakfast and classes. But neither Merton nor Tunstall was there. And the empty table, upon which Cocky's cage had been wont to stand, made the little room seem very desolate. Flip came out in a hurry. He felt that he could not bear to stay there.

In No. 1 he found Gadsby and Vavasour. They did not look pleasant when he entered. But their surly looks mattered little.

"How's Pon?" he asked.

"Didn't know you took any interest in the matter, by gad!" snarled Gadsby.

"Oh, absolutely not!" chimed in Vavasour. Flip's hands clenched.

But it was not worth while. He could have licked the pair of them, but he was not sure that doing that would relieve his feelings.

"I suppose you can tell us how Merton is?" sneered Gadsby.

"I can't. I haven't heard. Have you?"

The question was eager. Gadsby grinned at it. Vavasour laughed a mirthless "He, he, he!"

"Have you heard?" demanded Flip, controlling his anger. "You might give a civil answer, I think!"

"Well, they do say that there's a dashed nasty chance of his never seeing again!" replied Gadsby.

He said it as if he would not have minded its being true. And, indeed, there was in it just that amount of truth that made it a lie more cruel than the lie outright.

Flip staggered, and his tanned face went for a moment as white as a sheet.

"What?" he gasped.

"It ain't certain," said Gadsby. "Of course, he may save the sight of one eye. But you know how it is when one's damaged—the other often goes. Oh, by gad, Vav, he's blubbin'!"

Flip was not blubbing. Tears had started to his eyes, it is true.

But in that respect Gaddy was put on a level with him next moment.

It was only a stinging slap of the face, but it did sting, and the eyes of Gaddy watered.

Flip was outside the door before Gaddy could say anything. As for doing anything—well, Gaddy didn't like scrapping with people who got in such savage rages about trifles. He considered it beneath him. He told Vav so, anyway. And Vav was not critical. He was glad Derwent had not smacked his face, too.

That morning in the Form-room was like a nightmare to Flip. He looked every moment for Tun's appearance but Tun did not come. Was it so bad as that? It must be pretty bad if they were letting Tun stay with Merton, he thought.

Again and again Mr. Mobbs dropped on to him. Flip gave him plenty of chances, and he took them all. But he did not cane Flip. There was something about the set look on the boy's face that made him think twice before doing that.

The three hours seemed like an eternity! But matters were no better when they had ended. No. 6 was still tenantless.

At last, almost in despair, Flip went to Frank Courtenay.

He had never been given to taking his troubles to anyone but Flap. But his troubles had been few, and his sister had always been close at hand. Now she was out of his reach for the moment. He would have to go over to Cliff House to see her, and he did not feel like leaving Highcliffe even for half an hour.

But he could hardly have done better than he did. Frank Courtenay had the brain and the heart to understand.

The Caterpillar went out, for the sight of Flip's strained, miserable face hurt him, and he knew that it was not his counsel that was sought.

"Look here, Courtenay, I don't know what to do!" said Flip. "I haven't had a word with Tunstall or Merton since last night. I wouldn't go to the fight because—well, you know, the fellows are both my pals, and I didn't want to see either of them licked. I suppose it sounds pretty weak. Perhaps I ought to have taken one's side or the other's. I don't know."

"I don't see why you should have done."

said Frank quietly. "I felt something like you did. Neither of them has ever been a chum of mine. I don't mind saying that I like Merton a good deal the best of the two, but Ponsonby's my cousin, and blood's thicker than water. There was no chance of my stopping it. I would have done if I could. You tried, of course?"

"All I knew how," Flip answered, with a lump in his throat. Not many fellows would have shown him the quiet sympathy that Courtenay was showing, and it touched him.

"And that didn't please either of them?"

"No. Pon was put out because I wouldn't see that Merton was wrong; and the other two reckoned that I was backing Pon up. I wasn't. He asked me to second him, and I said 'No!' Not sure I'd have said that to Merton. But he didn't ask me."

"I should ask to see Merton, if I were you," said the skipper of the Fourth. "There's nothing like going straight at it. A few words would put things right."

"But Gadsby says that—that Merton may never see again! I—Courtenay, I just can't bear to see the old chap like that! Poor old Algy! I—no, it might be a lie to say I'd rather it had happened to me. But that's how I feel just now."

Courtenay was startled. He had heard nothing of this. But he remembered how Merton had been led away, quite unable to see; and, though he doubted, he could not wholly disbelieve.

"Stop here for a few minutes, Derwent," he said. "I'll go and find out if there's any truth in that yarn. And if it's an invention of Gadsby's, my hat, he shall pay for it! It would be too putrid. I say, if De Courcy comes along, don't mind him. He—well, you know he talks out of the back of his neck; but if you can trust me you can trust De Courcy every time!"

Courtenay went. The Caterpillar wisely stayed away. Flip was glad of that. He did not want to talk to anyone until he knew the worst.

Frank Courtenay's face told him that the news was not good.

He waited for Frank to speak. The question that his mind formed could not be got past his lips.

"Pull yourself together, old chap!" said Courtenay. "My news isn't exactly good, but it isn't as bad as it might be."

He paused. Still Flip could not speak.

"There is damage to Merton's right eye. The doctor who came takes rather a serious view of it, but he says that only a specialist can tell whether it will be permanent."

"And—and if it is?" asked Flip at last in a husky whisper.

"If it is—but we're not going to believe that, Derwent. There's no use in looking for the worst."

"It's the worst I want to know. I reckon it's best to have that straight out. Will he——"

"He may lose the sight of the eye—yes."

"And then the other will go, I suppose?"

"Who told you that?"

"Gadsby. He hadn't any notion of letting me down easily, you see."

"Hang Gadsby!" snapped Frank. "That sort of worm isn't fit to live! Well, he's made the worst of it. But there is a possibility. Injury to the nerves of one eye does often affect the other gradually. Derwent, old chap, don't take on so! You weren't to blame."

"No—yes, I was! If I'd never come here this couldn't have happened!" said Flip, with his face buried in his hands.

He was not crying, but his shoulders heaved with tearless sobs.

"But that's rot! If any of the rest of us hadn't come here other things wouldn't have happened, and everything might have taken a different turn. They were saying in the Common-room that it all came about through Ponsonby's shoving himself in where he wasn't wanted. I don't want to shoulder the blame on to him, goodness knows! He's got enough to answer for at best. But he's a thousand times more responsible than you can be!"

"Could I see Merton before he goes? If he is going, that is. Perhaps they'll bring a specialist down, though."

"No, he's gone already. I shouldn't have thought it would have done him any good to travel. But he wanted to go, it seems."

Flip could not understand it. Merton believed himself blinded, and he wanted to leave Highcliffe for ever as soon as might be. But he might have remembered that there was another fellow besides Tunstall who would miss him sorely—he might have said "Good-bye!"

"I must go and find Tun," said Flip, rising.

"Sorry, but you can't, old man. He's gone with Merton. They both wanted it, and the Head agreed. Tunstall knows Merton's people very well."

"Didn't they leave any—any message for me?" faltered Flip. This was like a new knock-down blow to him.

"I don't know—I should think most likely. But, of course, I shouldn't have it. I went to the matron to find out what I have told you."

"I'll go and see," Flip said.

Telling the Story at Cliff House.

But there was no message. Not a line—not a word! They had gone off as if Flip had meant nothing to them.

He made excuses for them. Algy must have been in an awful state, of course; and Tun was thinking only of Algy.

But it did look as though he did not matter to them—as though they had cut him clean out!

He could not bear to talk to any of the other fellows—not even to Courtenay, though he was grateful to Frank for his sympathy. Capless in the bitter cold, without an overcoat, his jacket open, his hands thrust deeply into his trousers pockets, he took the road that led to Pegg, and to Cliff House.

He wanted to see Flap. Of her sympathy, at least, he was sure; and he could talk to her—could tell her what he felt. He could not tell anyone else that.

Flip's luck was out. The girls were on the hockey-field; but only a desultory sort of knock-about was in progress. Everyone seemed listless, and he looked in vain for Flap. She was not there.

He was going away, for he did not care to talk to any of the rest, when the clear, high voice of Phyllis Howell hailed him, and he had to stop.

Phyllis and Marjorie and Clara came towards him, together, and little Molly Gray followed them.

"Looking for Flap?" asked Phyllis. "Rough luck! She's laid up."

"But she never is laid up!" said Flip, in astonishment. "Flap and I never have anything the matter with us!"

"Well, I must say that you look rather as if there was something pretty serious the matter with you now!" Miss Clara replied, eyeing him searchingly. "You're quite pale, and——"

"I don't think it's serious, Flip," said Marjorie gently.

It was not often Marjorie Hazeldene cut short another's speech in that way. But she saw that Flip was looking restless and annoyed at Clara's comments.

"She was quite all right last night," Flip said.

"Yes; but now Miss Primrose has taken it into her head that Flap has influenza," explained Phyllis. "She was sent back to bed from the breakfast-table because she looked so queer. And none of us is to go near her until we know, for fear we should catch it. Rot, I call it!"

"Of course, it's rot!" said Miss Clara. "If Flap's going to have influenza, why shouldn't we all have it together, and be happily miserable in company? It's sure to go through the place!"

"I don't think it is influenza at all," Marjorie said. "I think—oh, Flip, you mustn't be offended—but has anything gone wrong with you? And was it—it seems silly, I know—but was it just about breakfast-time?"

"Well, if he did spill hot tea over himself, that wouldn't account for Flap's being taken ill, would it?" asked Miss Clara scoffingly.

"Dry up, Clara!" said Phyllis. "We know that there is more in this than we can understand. They're not twins for nothing—remember that fight at the junction, and how Flap knew about Gadsby's kicking Flip before we ever heard of it!"

Flip's face was haggard now. He had never thought of that. But he knew it to be true, though he understood it no more than the girls did.

If anything were seriously wrong with him Flap knew of it without being told. She might not know what it was—and, of course, in most cases she could not know that. But she knew that there was something!

It had been breakfast-time at Cliff House—where the first meal of the day was somewhat earlier than at Highcliffe—when Flip had stood in the quad and watched Merton led blindly past him.

The gloom that had fallen upon him then had affected Flap. She did not know to what the sudden feeling, so acute that it had made her really ill for a short time, was due; but she guessed that something was wrong with Flip. It was more than guessing—it was certainty!

"There was—there is—something wrong—and it was about your breakfast-time," answered Flip slowly.

Then he stopped.

"We don't want you to tell us if you'd rather not, you know," said Marjorie softly.

But Flip felt that, in Flap's absence, Marjorie was just the one to whom he could tell it easily.

And it had to be told.

Algy was their friend, too; Flip was not at all sure that they did not like Algy far better than they did him.

When he had told his story he felt sure they did.

But he was wrong there.

Those four all thought a heap of Flap's brother, though it might not be very evident to him then that they did.

"I shall have to tell you," he said, bracing himself up for an unpleasant ordeal. "You see, the chap's a friend of yours, and——"

Little Molly Gray pushed herself in front of the other three.

"Thomething'th happened to Algy!" she cried. "I know it'th Algy, or elthe Tunthtall, becauthe Flip wouldn't mind so much if it wath anyone elthe. Oh, Flip dear, what hath happened to Algy?"

That shook Flip all up afresh.

The small girl was in such deadly earnest. If Merton had been her brother she could not have been more agitated. It occurred to Flip—and not to him alone—that Merton must have been an uncommonly nice fellow at home to have made this small friend of his sister so fond of him.

"It is Algy," he said. "And it's beastly serious, too. I don't like telling you—I—you will think——"

"Oh, don't keep us waiting like that!" cried Phyllis Howell impatiently.

Marjorie laid a hand on her arm.

"Sorry, Flip!" Phyllis said. "We can guess how it must have upset you, of course. But what is it—has he broken a leg, or something?

"Worse than that!"

"You don't mean that—he's killed?" gasped Clara. On the faces of all four there was a look of awe. Phyllis brushed away a tear with the back of her hand, as a boy might have done.

"No. Not quite so bad—I'm not sure, though—I think I'd rather be dead myself—if it turns out as badly as it may do!"

"Flip! Why don't you tell uth?" almost screamed Molly Gray.

"He—he may be blinded for life!" blurted out Flip.

"Oh!"

For a few seconds, no one seemed capable of saying more than "Oh!"

Then Clara asked, brusquely, almost roughly—and that was not like Clara Trevlyn:

"How did it happen?"

"A fight," answered Flip.

"But—oh, it seems impossible! We saw you—you know that—Flap let it out—down on the beach there—but if we had know that anything so dreadful could have happened we couldn't have borne to look," said Phyllis, shuddering.

"It couldn't like that—with gloves, you know," Flip said. "This was with bare fists."

"Flip, you never fought with Algy—you couldn't—and make him blind—it wath too cruel if you did!" cried little Molly.

Three accusing faces were turned upon Flip.

Perhaps it was not strange that they should imagine for the moment that he had wrought that awful harm to Merton. But Marjorie did not share the doubt.

"He didn't—I'm sure he didn't!" she panted. "Tell them, Flip—I know you wouldn't—but tell them!"

"It wasn't me," said Flip, but even in saying it there was a note in his voice that told of self-blame. "I—well, it would have taken an awful lot to make me fight with Algy or Tun. I know I'm rather a quarrelsome beggar—I don't mind fighting—but not with those two."

"Then who was it?" asked Clara, in the manner of a hanging judge.

Miss Clara was prepared to be very severe

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors at The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, England. Subscription, 7s. per annum. Agents for Australasia: Gordon & Gotch, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Wellington, N.Z. South Africa, The Central News Agency, Ltd., Cape Town and Johannesburg. Saturday, December 22nd, 1917.

with everyone concerned. So were they all except Marjorie—Marjorie, who always found excuses for wrongdoers, who could hate the sin but seldom the sinner.

"I—I don't think I ought to tell you that," faltered Flip, trying to make up his mind to keep Pon's name back, and yet sure somehow that they would get it out of him.

"You would have told Flap, I suppose?" said Phyllis.

"Yes. She'd have insisted, you know."

"Well, we insist. It's exactly the same thing."

"I don't quite see that," replied Flip.

But he did. Flap would have told them. He knew that. And it could not be kept a secret long. The Highcliffe authorities would do all they could to prevent anything with such tragic possibilities becoming public property. But there were two places to which the story was bound to penetrate—Greyfriars and Cliff House.

"I know!" cried Molly. "It wath that nathty Ponthonby!"

Molly was sure. The rest read confirmation in Flip's face.

"Was it?" asked Phyllis.

Flip nodded.

Another brief silence fell. The girls' faces were flushed with anger now. It was curious how heartily they all disliked Cecil Ponsonby. The feeling amounted to more than dislike, indeed—there was a mixture of dread in it. Marjorie's brother had been led astray by Pon, and if Clara or Phyllis had had a young brother at Highcliffe, a fear that Pon would prove his evil genius would have made either really uneasy.

"And only last night he was here! How could you bring him, Flip, when you knew we barred him?" said Phyllis reproachfully.

"I didn't know—not then," said Flip slowly. He was afraid of telling too much. He did not want them to guess that, in a sense, Cliff House had been at the bottom of the quarrel.

Miss Clara took up his incautious admission sharply.

"What do you mean by 'not then'?" she asked.

"Look here, I shall have to cut!" said Flip. "Tell Flap about it, one of you, will you? Marjorie, you, please."

"You're not going yet, not if we have to hold you!" Phyllis said resolutely. "I know you're pretty strong, but four of us could hold you, and we jolly well will! There's something behind all this. I was afraid for a moment that you had done it. I might have known better than that. But you're ashamed of yourself, Flip Derwent, and you know it! And we want to know why!"

"And we mean to!" chimed in Miss Clara.

Marjorie's soft little hand fell on Flip's sleeve. Very bravely she spoke out, though she could not keep her voice from almost breaking once or twice.

"I don't believe Flip had anything to be ashamed of!" she said. "You wouldn't say that if Flap were here. But, Flip, we do want to know all about it, and you needn't hurry off like that. Merton—well, you said yourself he's our friend, too!"

"If Flip doethn't tell us I thall never thpeak to him again!" said Molly warmly.

"But it's such a mixed-up yarn!" pleaded Flip. "And I'm not dead sure I've a right to tell it all. If you get me started you'll have it all out of me, whether I like it or not."

"We've got you started, and we mean to have it out of you!" replied Miss Clara, with a slight snap.

"You can consider Marjorie as standing for Flap," said Phyllis. "I know it's no good any of the rest of us aspiring to that height. But Marjorie's different. Tell her. You needn't tell us. We'll only listen."

"And ask no questions?" said Flip, with a gleam of hope.

"You need not think you are going to get out of it like that, my boy!" snapped Clara Trevelyn.

Cold Comfort.

"WELL, what do you want to know exactly?" Flip asked warily.

He was on his guard for a reason they did not suspect. He did not want them to know how closely they were concerned with the trouble between Merton and Ponsonby.

"What did you mean by 'Not then'?" asked Miss Clara.

"Why, just what I said. What else could I mean?"

"Then you did not know till after the fight that Flap had specially asked you not to bring Ponsonby here?" questioned Phyllis.

"It wasn't after the fight."

"After what, then?"

"Oh, I say, what's that got to do with it?"

"Lots!" said Phyllis.

"Lots!" echoed Clara.

"Lotth!" Molly Gray said. She meant "lots," too.

"After we got back," said Flip uneasily. "You girls are like the Inquisition!"

"We're not torturing you yet!" said Clara, with a significant nod.

"But you had Flap's letter?" Phyllis asked.

"Yes; just to say it was all right-ho."

"I suppose it was too much trouble to turn over the page and look at the postscript!" Clara said sarcastically.

"There wasn't any postscript, I tell you!"

"But you say you saw it afterwards!" flashed Phyllis.

"So I did! But it wasn't there when I got the letter."

"Then it must have been torn off! I see."

"As a matter of fact, it was cut off, Miss Clara. And I can't see how that helps you to see much."

"Can't you? Boys are bright, aren't they? Why, any girl would know what I meant in half a tick! Someone cut that P.S. off and showed it to Ponsonby. Merton, I suppose. That's why they quarrelled. And I think he was jolly well right to show it!"

"You're dead off it! He didn't!" snapped Flip. "Algy wouldn't do a caddish thing like that!"

"Caddish! What are you talking about, Philip Derwent? If anyone was that, it was your dear friend Ponsonby, pushing himself in where he knew very well everybody hated the sight of him!"

"But you're wrong, Clara!" said Phyllis, who understood much better than Miss Clara the schoolboy code of honour. "Merton wouldn't have opened Flip's letter!"

"Why shouldn't he, when he knew it was only from Flap, and could easily guess what it was about?" replied Clara. "I shouldn't see any harm in it myself."

"Well, Algy wouldn't do it, and Algy didn't do it!" said Flip. "I don't know who did. But if you make faces at me for a blue moon you won't persuade me Algy did it, Miss Trevelyn!"

Clara was frowning; but Flip ought not to have accused her of making faces. It was injudicious, for it gave her a weapon against him at once.

"Now he's being rude to me!" she pouted. "And all because he doesn't want to tell us the truth!"

"Sorry! Didn't mean to be rude," Flip said. "But you did scowl, you know."

"Flip," said Marjorie gravely, "Ponsonby saw that P.S., didn't he?"

"Yes," admitted Flip reluctantly. "But what does the silly letter matter? I'm not blaming Flap, but it would have been heaps better if she had never written it."

"You needn't blame her. We persuaded her to," Phyllis said.

"And it was because of that they quarrelled?" went on Marjorie.

"Well, it was, and it wasn't. When they had their flare-up Algy knew nothing about it. But Pon knew."

"When did they have their—ahem!—flare-up?" inquired Clara.

"On their way back from here," confessed Flip. He would have preferred to keep that fact dark; but, apart from any moral objection he might have to lying, it was of small use to try keeping anything dark under such an examination as this. Flip felt much more like the prisoner at the bar than a mere witness.

"Then Ponsonby knew when he came here that we had said straight out that we didn't want him?" said Phyllis, with curling lip and flashing eyes that spoke boundless contempt for Pon.

"Well, yes, I suppose so. Yes, he must have done."

"And you consider that—that thing—a friend!" cried Miss Clara.

"Oh, go easy, Miss Trevelyn! Pon didn't take it all that seriously, I fancy. He wanted to show you that he wasn't such a bad sort after all."

"Did he tell you how much trouble he took to persuade Flap of that?" asked Phyllis meaningly.

"Oh, was that it? I thought he was trying to make love to her!" said Clara. "Of course we know Flap would hate it. But it would be quite in Cecil Ponsonby's line."

"Hang it, I wish you were a boy and up to my weight!" flashed Flip.

He was furious. That speech of Clara's seemed to him a slight—almost an insult—to Flap.

"May I get behind you, Phyllis?" gibed Miss Clara.

"Don't, Clara! How can you?" cried Marjorie. "Think of poor Merton!"

The reminder sobered Miss Clara at once.

"I beg your pardon, Philip Derwent," she said, in her most stately manner. "But I think you ought to know that I wouldn't say anything nasty about your sister, though there isn't anything too savage for me to say about your very dear friend!"

"How did Ponsonby know?" asked Marjorie. The others might be more noisy cross-examiners; but it was Marjorie who kept best to the subject.

She knew that nothing short of a full, true, and particular account would satisfy Flap.

"Some rotter put the P.S. on the mantelshelf in his den," Flip replied.

"And he thought it was Merton? But why did he think that, Flip?"

"How could Algy have done it? It thtands to reathon he couldn't," said Mollie Gray.

"But he could have done, if you come to that. I know he didn't, but he could have. He was up in our den before Tun and me, and when we came in he chucked Flap's note across, and offered to bet me that Miss Prim had cried off."

"You're quite sure that he didn't—just for a joke?" asked Phyllis. The circumstantial evidence had effected even her. She would have blamed Merton if he had done it; but not more than she blamed Cecil Ponsonby for his intrusion, knowing what he knew.

"It wouldn't have been a joke—fellows don't open other fellows' letters," said Flip, with high scorn. "We're not girls."

"But someone must have opened it," said Marjorie.

"Yes—some howling cad!" retorted Flip, looking daggers at Phyllis and Clara, who were inclined to believe Merton had done this thing.

"I gave it to little Wilthon," said Molly Gray, her smooth forehead all puckered up under her flaming red mop of hair. "I thall find out from him what he did with it!"

"He put it on the table in our den, of course," Flip said. "Wilson's a decent kid; he wouldn't play tricks."

"Then anyone might have gone in and seen it before you three came back?" suggested Marjorie.

"Yes. But who would have?"

"Someone who wanted to make trouble, I think. I don't know who, of course."

"How could he know it would make trouble between Pon and Merton?"

"He didn't. Flip, I think he wanted to make trouble between Ponsonby and you"

"Oh, I wish he had!" cried Phyllis.

Flip looked at her in amazement.

"Don't you see? You really are slow! You would have thrashed Ponsonby if there had been a fight, and then Merton wouldn't have been bli—hurt, I me n—I'm not going to believe that he will lose his sight—it would be too dreadful! And you and Ponsonby would never have been friendly again, and we should all have been glad of that. What a pity it was that mean creature's plot went wrong!"

"My word, you don't half jump at things!" said Flip. "You don't even know there is any mean creature. And if Pon and I did fight we should make it up all serene. Fellows don't bear malice about a scrap. I'm quite pals with Cherry now, and we fought hard enough."

"But Bob's so very different from Ponsonby," said Marjorie. "There isn't any malice in Bob, and he could never be mean. Flip, was that injury done in fair fight? It doesn't seem likely to me!"

Flip gasped. This was Marjorie—she was ready to believe that Pon would use foul means to inflict a dastardly injury upon his enemy. How much were the others capable of believing when Marjorie went to lengths such as that?

"Of course it was done in fair fight!" he said indignantly.

"You are quite sure? You saw everything?" asked Phyllis.

Now how had she come to suspect that he had not seen? Flip could not fathom it. He did not know much about feminine intuition.

"I wasn't there," he confessed reluctantly.

"You weren't there?" snapped Miss Clara. "When your best chum was blinded? Really, Philip Derwent!"

"Oh, hang it all, I didn't know he was going to be hurt like that—and we don't know that he's blinded yet—the doctor may be all wrong!" groaned Flip. "Pon's my friend, too. I didn't care to see either of

them licked. I rather fancied Pon would be—some of them say he was, only Mobby butted in, and the referee didn't count Pon out."

That was Greek to the girls; but they understood one thing clearly—Flip had stayed away when Algy was fighting!

There were four reproachful faces turned upon him now. Even Marjorie found it hard to excuse that.

None of them saw Flip's point of view at all. A woman's sense of the fair thing is a different thing from a man's. A woman—or a girl—wants the fair thing for the person she cares about; the other fellow may take care of himself!

They all liked Merton, these four; and they all disliked Pon.

It was nothing to them that Flip did not share their dislike of Pon. They were quite sure he ought to have shared it—ought to have backed up loyally his friend who was also their friend, instead of thinking about his other friend whom they held an enemy!

"Algy fought—and you weren't there?" said Miss Clara. "I thought I liked you no end, Philip Derwent! I thought you were a staunch pal, like Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull, and the rest of them. But——"

"And Merton was blinded—or nearly blinded!" said Phyllis, with a catch in her voice. "And you weren't there! If I were you, Flip, I think I should be sorry for that as long as I lived!"

Flip was not at all sure that he would not be. And yet he felt that this torrent of reproach was scarcely fair.

"I think you're horrid!" burst out little Molly Gray. "I did think that you were the very nitheth boy of them all—nither even than Algy, though of courthe I like him bethit. But now I think you aren't any good at all, and I will thank you never to thpeak to me again!"

And she went. Flip did not feel angry with her. She was only a kid, and it had hit her hard. But he was feeling angry with Clara and Phyllis. It wasn't reasonable that, just because they chose to hate Pon, he should be expected to come into line, he felt. And it really was not. Yet it would have been better for Flip if he could have seen Pon through their eyes.

Marjorie alone had not spoken. Flip turned to her. What Marjorie thought mattered most, as Flip was not there.

"I wouldn't second Pon, Marjorie," he said. "He asked me to. Algy didn't. You might tell Flap that; I don't want her to think me a traitor! I stayed away because I didn't care to see it; I never dreamed that it would be anything worse than a thrashing for one of them, and I thought that one would very likely be Pon. I'd been coaching Algy, and he's come on quite a lot in his boxing——"

"Yes, it would be like you to teach him things that could only get him into trouble!" snapped Clara. "Perhaps if it hadn't been for your precious coaching he would never——"

"That isn't fair, Clara!" said Marjorie. "But—I want to be fair, Flip, really—but—oh, can't you see? Merton's a friend worth having, worth sticking to—Ponsonby's not! It's as if you were blind!"

"And if I hadn't been blind poor old Algy might not be now—that's what you mean, I suppose, Marjorie?" said Flip bitterly. "That's the cruellest thing that's been said to me, and all of you have been pretty rough on a chap's who's down! I know you didn't mean to be unfair or spiteful, Marjorie; I'm not so sure about Phyllis and Clara. But it's what you said that has hit me hardest!"

He had gone before any of them could speak again.

All three stood looking after him. He did not once glance back.

There were tears in Marjorie's brown eyes, and Phyllis bit her under lip to keep her mouth from the trembling that had seized it. But Miss Clara stamped her little foot.

"It hurt just because it was true!" she said. "I almost think Ponsonby must have bewitched Flip! But perhaps his eyes will be opened now!"

She was not far wrong. But Flip did not realise the truth of what Marjorie had said yet. And there was a vein of obstinacy in his nature.

Obstinacy and loyalty alike forbade his throwing over of Pon to please anybody.

He would not do th t, whatever he did. What others said of Pon was nothing to him. Pon was his chum until he found him false!

That day was to come!

The Remorseful Ponsonby.

"I SAY, Derwent, Pon would like you to give him a look-in," said Monson minor, rather sulkily, to Flip after classes were over for the day.

"Right-ho! He's in sanny, I suppose? Shall we go along together?" said Flip.

"Oh, if you care about my company," replied Monson, with a stare.

"Don't see why I shouldn't. Come along!"

Flip, somewhat disposed to bar Gadsby and Vavasour, had never felt quite the same about Monson. The fellow was sulky and not over-pleasant; but he did not sneer as those two did, and his hostility was never more than passive.

"Pon's horribly down in the mouth, by gad!" said Monson, as they went along together.

"Yes. It's a rotten bizney," replied Flip.

"It wasn't Pon's dashed fault!" snapped Monson, halting.

"Who said it was, old chap? It might have been you or me—Merton himself knows that Pon never meant to do it, of course."

And Flip linked his arm in Monson's. He had never done that before.

Monson rather liked it.

There was somewhat more loyalty in the sulky Monson than in the rest of the nuts, and he, at least, would stick by Pon, whoever might be against him. He had not very acute feelings; but he was cut up about Merton. Gadsby and Vavasour were not in the least so.

Monson had found someone now to sympathise with both the doer of the deed and the victim; and he felt the better for it. He had never liked Flip half so well before.

Pon was pretty badly battered; but he could have come out of sanny, for his condition was by no means one of collapse. Dr. Voysey had ordered him to stay there, though, and he was not unwilling.

He wanted to feel sure about the reception he would get before he showed his face to Highcliffe in general again. And Flip made a good test. If he took the line that Pon was not really to blame, others would not be likely to hold him so, caring less than Flip did about Merton.

"This is an awful affair, old man," said Pon; and his voice seemed to have the ring of real concern to Flip. "I'd rather—well, almost rather—it had been me."

"It might have been, Pon," said Flip gravely. "Anyone ought to see that the thing was so entirely an accident that it might as well have been one of you as the other."

"You look at it that way, by gad?"

"Of course I do. It's the only way. A chum of my pater's killed a man in a fair fight once, up in the New South Wales bush. No one ever held it against him. He couldn't help it, and he felt sorry for it all his life. But an accident's an accident—no good blaming anyone."

"I didn't go specially for his eyes. An' I got about as good as I gave, apart from that," said Pon.

(To be continued next week. Those who are keen on this story must not miss "FLAP'S BROTHER!" in this week's "MAGNET.")

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"NUMBER NINE ON THE WAR-PATH!"

By Martin Clifford.

Levison major, Clive, and Cardew, the three chums of Study No. 9, are great favourites with most of my readers, I know. The news that next week's story shows them up prominently will therefore be good news.

Racke & Co. are not great favourites, but they are interesting. They, too, play a considerable part in the yarn.

Then there is Mr. Pepper, whom we have recently seen charged rent for his own barn. No one loves Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, but a good many find him interesting. It was fairly certain that some time before long he would try to get back the money he had so unwittingly contributed to the Cottage Hospital. It will amuse you to read how he tried it. The chance offered him by Racke and Cardew seems too good to be let slip.

You will also find more in this story about the St Jim's Parliament. Tom Merry as Premier, the one and only Arthur Augustus as Foreign Secretary, Figgins as Leader of the Opposition, Talbot as Speaker—they are all here! But I promise you that their speeches will not bore you.

"BALLADS OF THE FLYING CORPS."

This is the title of a book published at half-a-crown by Messrs. McBride, Nast & Co., of 2, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C. Some of you who have pocket-money to spare and are keen on ringing verses will be glad to have it, no doubt—especially when you know that the writer of the verses is "G. R. S.," who in days past contributed many poems to these pages and to those of "The Greyfriars Herald." Formerly a member of the staff here, G. R. S. like so many more of our men, got the call, and he is now a sergeant in the R.F.C.

You will like the verses, I feel sure. "The Fighting Spirit," which appeared in the GEM Christmas Number, is the first poem of the book, and a good sample of the rest. "Ballads of the Flying Corps" is quite a handsome volume, too; and, though it has not many pages, is good value for the money.

MORE OF THE "GEM'S" HISTORY.

When Tom Merry returned to St. Jim's he brought back with him little Joe Frayne, the waif from the London streets; and several stories after that dealt with Joe's troubles and trials at St. Jim's. Tom Merry was his friend, of course, and so was D'Arcy major. But it was not until D'Arcy minor—Wally of the Third—championed his cause that Joe got a fair chance. "No Class!" was the story in which this was told of, and Clifton Dane showed up well in that, protecting Joe against Crooke. At the end of it we find the London waif accepted as one of themselves by the decent fellows of his Form. "Fatty Wynn's New Wheeze" told how the genial Fatty tried to relieve himself of his superfluous adipose tissue—if you don't catch on to that, just think what Wynn has in all too great abundance, and you will be on the track. But Fatty didn't manage the trick. Then we had "Lumley-Lumley's Return," which was in the nature of a surprise. Everybody expected that the Outsider would be only too pleased to find himself received on a new footing, the past forgotten and forgiven. But Lumley-Lumley did not take matters quite as expected. He was very much the Outsider of old, and he managed to set Tom Merry and Jack Blake by the ears. The fine yarn "Tom Merry v. Jack Blake" told how this happened, and how they fought and Blake was licked. But public opinion generally was with Blake. Nearly everyone turned against Tom. But Wally and the Third backed him up, as was told in "The Faithful Fags."

"By Request of the Head" told of how Lumley-Lumley got his last chance and made good use of it. Then Joe Frayne came prominently into notice again in "The Runaway" a title which gives a sufficient clue to the story it headed. After that Joe became "Skimpole's Pupil" in Socialism. "Joe's Champion" was Wally, of course. There was a story about that the father of Joe was a certain notorious criminal. It was not true, and in "The Waif of St. Jim's" its falsity was made clear.

"The Rival Schools" told how the St. Jim's fellows were done brown by the Grammarians, and vowed war to the knife against them; and in "Saints v. Grammarians" there was war—not quite to the knife, but certainly war!

More soon!

Your Editor

22-12-17