RACKE'S REVENGE!

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

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CARDEW'S COOL CHEEK!

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RACKE'S REVENGE!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Cardew's Curious Purchase.

"COME along, Cardew!" said Ernest Levison impatiently.

"Yes, come along!" echoed Sidney Clive. "You don't want to spend the whole blessed afternoon gazing in at that window. Can't see anything a little bit interesting there myself."

"My dear man," replied Cardew imperturbably, "no one would expect a rough-an'-ready chap from the colonies to be interested in aids to beauty. I'm different, you know. I belong to the effete class which toils not, neither does it spin—except for an occasional yarn of doubtful veracity, of course."

"Is it rouge or powder you're after?" inquired Levison, grinning. "No good asking either of us to go in and get it for you, whichever it is."

"It is neither rouge nor powder. That is what has specially caught my eye."

Cardew indicated a pictorial advertisement in the window.

The three chums of Study No. 9 were spending an afternoon in Wayland. A visit to the cinema was part of their programme, and Clive and Levison wanted to be getting along.

But Cardew had halted in front of the local branch of a big firm of chemists, booksellers, and dealers in fancy goods, and he did not seem at all inclined to budge.

"Don't see much in it myself," said Clive.

"Shouldn't expect you to, dear boy! You have never been guilty of pollutin' your innocent lips with the noxious weed. It's different with you, Levison. I understand you have smoked on occasion."

"I have. But I don't smoke now, and I've no use for a smoker's dentifrice. Neither, as a matter of fact, have you, Cardew. So come along, and don't be a bigger fat-headed chump than you can help!"

"I'm naturally selfish, Levison; but I do sometimes think of others. Just now I'm thinkin' hard of the dear Racke. Don't you think that would be just the stuff for him? I have noticed that the dear Aubrey's teeth ain't always in the best of condition."

Sidney Clive looked at the picture, and grinned.

"The kid there ain't Racke's breed," he said. "Look at his apple-cheeks! He hasn't done much smoking, you bet. First time, very likely, and reckons himself no end manly because it hasn't turned his little inside up."

"I am glad that you have come to a proper interest in that work of art, Clive," said Cardew gravely. "I really think our friend Racke would be even more interested."

"Well, he'll see it, I suppose, if he happens along here," Levison said.

"But I want him to see it whether he happens along here or not," replied Cardew. "I think it would be rather annoyin' to Racke. An' I find in myself just now a distinct desire—vicious, possibly, but not unnatural—to annoy the charmin' Aubrey."

"He hasn't been over and above pleasant to you lately," said Clive.

"He's gone out of his way to be beastly unpleasant," Levison said sharply. "I told him yesterday that if he wanted a thick ear he was going the right way to get it. I'm fed-up with his sneers about Cardew and the capture of that submarine crew. He can't let the other thing alone, either—stopping the runaway horse, I mean. I don't believe in buttering a chap, and especially a chap in my own study; but when everybody else is saying that Cardew played up jolly well, and they didn't think he'd got it in him——"

"Everybody else would have done more politely to have left out that last clause, Levison," remonstrated Cardew gently. "A real live hero—like me, y'know—is entitled to his butter without a pill after it, surely?"

Cardew was a curious fellow. He liked to be in the limelight. Even George Alfred Grundy did not like that more. But he hated open praise of what he had done.

"Rats! You're not the modest bounder you pretend to be!" Levison replied.

"I hope an' trust that I am not a bounder at all. You chaps comin' in with me?"

They followed him, curious to see what he would do.

He lounged up to the counter where toilet requisites were displayed, and bought two or three trifles. He examined a safety razor with great interest, rubbing his smooth chin meanwhile. When he decided not to have it—at least, not yet—the young lady assistant who was serving him smiled, and exchanged glances of amusement with Clive and Levison.

Then he asked by its name for the smokers' tooth-powder. This was added to his small heap of purchases. But he had not finished yet.

"I say, do you know, I've taken a great fancy to that advertisement," he said, indicating another copy of the one he had been gazing at in the window.

"It is rather smart, isn't it?" replied the girl.

"I suppose they're—er—not on sale, eh?"

"Well, no. We are not usually asked to sell them. But if you want one for framing——"

"It isn't exactly one I want, y'know. I'd like a dozen or so."

Levison and Clive wondered at his nerve. The girl looked round at the picture, and smiled again. It represented a rosy-cheeked boy of fifteen or so brushing his teeth, with a tin of the smokers' dentifrice in his hand. He was glancing back over his shoulder with a knowing grin. As Clive had said, he seemed to fancy he had been doing rather a clever thing.

"It wouldn't do for a portrait, if that is your notion," remarked the girl. "It isn't in the least like you."

"I'm not goin' to send them round," Cardew replied, quite gravely. "What do you think your people would do me a dozen or twenty at? I don't mind if they stick it on a bit; that's all right. What's the good of money if it won't buy what a chap wants?"

"I will speak to the manager. I feel sure he won't mind letting you have one, and there may be one or two more about."

"If you have any regard for me at all, make it twenty or so, not a stingy two or three!" pleaded Cardew.

"Well, I don't see why you should expect me to have any regard for you, but I'll see what I can do," the girl answered.

She flitted away.

"Cardew, you ass!" said Levison.

"I never saw your giddy equal for cheek," Clive added.

"It's all right, dear boys. Miss Shoes regards me as a harmless lunatic, y'know. It doesn't hurt my feelin's a bit, an' it pleases her. She feels no end discriminatin' an' all that."

"How do you know her name?" asked Clive.

"I don't, dear boy."

"But you spoke of her as Miss Shoes."

"Merely association of ideas, old scout, that's all. I don't think she's a member of the family of the man who started these jolly shops, so I don't call her by his name. But Miss Shoes seems quite fittin', an' ever so likely."

"You are a mad chump!"

"Yaas, dear boy. But there's a method in my madness now an' then."

Miss Shoes came back, smiling agreeably. The manager had shown himself generous. Half a dozen discarded copies of the picture had been found among the wastepaper, and he had consented to allow Cardew to take also half a dozen new ones. He could not sell them, Miss Shoes said, as they were not counted as stock; but, though his request was an unusual one, he would not say "No" to a good customer.

"But you're not a regular customer there," said Levison, as they came away. "I don't believe you've ever been in the place before."

"I shall go again, dear boy. Gratitude, y'know, has been defined as a lively sense of favours to come. That's the way Mr.—er—Wellington looks at it, I suppose."

"Is the manager's name——"

"Of course it's not, Clive. That chump don't know his name. It's all his silly rot."

"I've a feelin' that it ought to be Wellington. An' the chap with the whiskers behind the pills-an'-potions counter—Highlow is his name. If it ain't it ought to be. The girl-kid with the pigtail in the cash-cell is probably Miss Slipper. An'——"

"Oh, dry up, do! Are we going to the cinema?"

"Yaas, dear boy, certainly!"

"Can you carry your parcels, Cardew?" asked Clive.

"Oh, yaas, thanks! The big one is extra special, y'know. You can put the small one in your pocket if you like—it

would bulge mine out. But I'll take care of the big one, for Aubrey's dear sake!"

CHAPTER 2.
At the Cinema.

THE chums of No. 9 were not the only St. Jim's fellows at the Wayland cinema that afternoon. When they arrived, just before the afternoon show began, they found Contarini, Smith-minor, and Roylance, the recent arrival from New Zealand, there before them.

The six sat together. Everyone liked the genial Jackeymo; Smith minor was the right sort; and, although the three had not yet seen much of Roylance, they liked what they had seen of him.

"Don't think much of this," said Cardew, when the first film was being shown.

"It's supposed to be funny," answered Levison. "Ought to suit you."

"My dear chap, I'm not funny. My nature's an uncommonly serious one—beyond everythin' in that way, y'know," yawned the dandy. "But it amuses Roylance no end. Ever seen a picture-show before, Roylance?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, of course!"

"But they don't have them where you come from, do they?"

"Of course they do! I suppose you'll find them everywhere now—at least, everywhere civilisation has reached."

"But New Zealand ain't civilised, surely?"

"Well, we think it is," Roylance said, smiling. "There aren't so many people to the square mile, and there's not so much smoke as in English towns; but we've got most of the things you have here."

"Oh, I thought it was no end wild an' woolly—grizzly bears an' glaciers an' tigers an' natives an' all that," Cardew said vaguely.

"He's pulling Roylance's leg now," whispered Clive to Levison. "A bit too bad, I think."

"All serene! Roylance don't mind. Hallo! Here are two of our beauties!"

Racke and Crooke had just come in. The seats in front of the St. Jim's contingent were filled; but there were two empty seats in the row in which they sat, and plenty more behind them.

Cardew was in the seat next the gangway, and was leaning forward to talk to Roylance across Clive and Levison. Racke and Crooke halted. They could not pass until Cardew sat up, and they had no notion of taking seats farther back.

"Are you goin' to shift an' let us past, Cardew, hang you?" snarled Racke.

But Cardew was as one who sees not and hears not—that is to say, as far as Racke and Crooke were concerned. He was giving all his attention to Roylance.

"There are glaciers down in the south—the New Zealand Alps district," Roylance said. "I never heard of any grizzlies, and I think you can safely cut them out of the picture. And, anyway, tigers and grizzlies are not found in the same country."

"Eh? Not, you say. Now, that's no end interestin'. Go on, dear boy!" murmured Cardew.

"Are you goin' to——"

"Don't be rude, Racke! I'm talkin' to Roylance. Run away an' play somewhere else!" said Cardew, without looking round.

"As for natives, they're common to all inhabited countries. As a matter of fact, I'm a native of New Zealand myself," went on Roylance.

"You don't say so! But you're not tattooed in the face."

Taking No Notice of Racke!
(See Chapter 2.)

"That's plain enough for anyone to see. Why should I be?"

"Are you goin' to shift, Cardew?"

"When I'm tired of sittin' here, Racke. The show is rather borin', I find; but Roylance is quite interestin'."

"Why don't you let the rotters through, old scout?" asked Sidney Clive, in low tones. "We don't want them near us; but, after all, they've a right to come if they choose."

"Not plain at all, Roylance. Quite a good-lookin' face, if you ask me," Cardew said pleasantly. He paid no heed to Clive's protest. "I thought the Red Indians——"

"Don't you mean the Maoris?"

"Yaas, that's it. Same thing, or pretty much so—what? I thought the Maoris tattooed their dials."

"I want to pass, Cardew!" snapped Racke.

"Well, I dare say Crooke will go nap, so there's no need to worry. What's that you say, Roylance? There are a couple of rude fellows here who make it very difficult for me to give you the full attention that politeness calls for."

"If you don't let us pass I'll speak to an attendant!" Racke snarled.

"I haven't the slightest objection, I assure you. Perhaps he—or she—may like your conversation. I don't. It seems to me lackin' in polish. May I trouble you to repeat your observation a third time, Roylance?"

"You silly ass! There will be a row," said Levison.

"Everybody's looking at us," added Clive.

"Well, there's really dashed little worth looking at on the screen, so far," replied Cardew blandly. "An' I never mind people lookin' at me, though I do rather bar bein' talked to by outsiders. You're not a Maori, Roylance? Really? You surprise me! Didn't you say you were a native?"

"Yes. I was born in New Zealand. That makes me a native, surely?"

"Oh, yaas, I see now! I was thinkin' of aborigines. You're a native of New Zealand, because you were born there, just as Racke's a native of Whitechapel, or Petticoat Lane, or wherever the paternal emporium was before the war shifted it—eh?"

It was rather thick, perhaps. Clive felt it so, and Smith minor had his doubts. But Levison was not concerned about Racke's feelings. And neither Roylance nor Jackeymo appeared to have any sympathy to spare for Racke.

An attendant came up.

"Seats here, gentlemen," he said, indicating empty ones just behind the six.

"I don't want them. I won't have them!" said Racke arrogantly. "We want those two in there."

"Well, it ain't quite the thing to come in after the show's begun, and expect people to move for you," answered the man. "You're creating a disturbance, too. If the manager sees you——"

"Hang the manager!" snapped Racke.

"That," said the attendant, "would be more than my place was worth. There's reason in most things, sir, but I must say that there don't seem too much in you."

"Don't you give me any of your impudence, fellow!"

"Oh, shurrup, Racke! Here's the manager comin'!" hissed Crooke.

"I don't care! I'm goin' to make that sneerin' bounder shift!"

"Think so, Racke? Now, I think not!" murmured Cardew.

The manager came up.

"What's the matter here, Robbins?" he asked testily.

"Young gent says he wants you hanged, sir. I told him it was more

than my place was worth. That's right, ain't it?"

"What?"

"Look here, you know, the man's all wrong. We——"

Robbins did not suffer Racke to finish his explanation.

"Did you, or did you not, say 'Hang the manager!'?" he asked solemnly.

"I dare say I may have, but——"

"Was you, or was you not, speaking to me?"

"Of course I was, you silly idiot!"

"Well, here's the manager himself. Ask him whether he'd let me hang him!"

The manager was forced to laugh, though he felt angry.

"Come, young gentlemen," he said: "those seats are as good as any in the house. I must ask you either to take them or to go out. You can have your money back if you ask for it."

"Oh, let's sit down, Racke! Hang all this foolery!" said Crooke sulkily.

They sat down. The manager walked away.

"Robbins!" called Cardew softly.

"Yessir!" answered the grizzled attendant.

"You're an old soldier, aren't you?"

"That's right, sir. Served in Egypt and was all through the little trouble in South Africa."

"An' you've a sense of humour, Robbins?"

"Why, as to that, sir——"

"Oh, there's no use in denyin' it! Have you—er—a throat, Robbins? An' are you a teetotaller, Robbins? An' do the Wayland—er—houses, licenced for refreshment—pubs, you know, Robbins—ever open these days? If so, an' accordin'ly, an' all that—please accept this trifle, old sport, an' be very careful you don't waste it drinkin' the healths of our friends behind!"

The trifle was a ten-shilling Treasury note.

"Thank you very kindly, sir!" said Robbins. "But I'm not saying that I think you were in the rights of it, and I'd sooner hand the note back than——"

"I was wrong, Robbins—absolutely an' completely! I admit it. But I was tempted, an' I fell."

Robbins failed to understand, maybe; but he went off with his unexpected tip.

Racke leaned forward.

"That was bribery, Cardew," he hissed.

"Wrong, Racke! I took no end of trouble to show Robbins that I had no notion of bribin' him."

"It was a bribe, though, you rotter!"

"Do you want a row here, Racke? Because I really don't mind!"

Racke thought there had been something nearly enough like a row already, and he subsided.

He was immediately behind Cardew, and he contemplated that youth's sleek head with a savage gleam in his eyes.

Crook's seat was behind Clive's, and presently, in thrusting his feet out, Crooke found the parcel which Cardew had brought along. Its owner had thoughtfully put it under Clive's seat, as likely to be less in his way there than under his own.

"What are you after, Crooke?" asked Racke, as his companion stooped.

"Shush, you ass!" replied Crooke, coming up with the parcel in his hands.

"What's that?"

"Strike a match. There's a name on it; but I can't see whose it is."

Cardew had scrawled his name upon the parcel in the shop.

The striking of a match was not likely to draw attention, as smoking was allowed in the picture palace.

Crooke peered at the scrawled name. Racke dropped the match and set his foot upon it. Then Crooke pointed to Cardew's back.

"His?" whispered Racke.

Crooke nodded.

"Bring it along, an' let's get out of this! I'm fed up!"

Crooke was not tired of the show; but he was always ready for a spiteful trick. He got up quietly.

But taking unnecessary risks was not in Crooke's line.

He thrust the parcel into Racke's hands.

"You'd better take it!" he muttered.

Racke took it. Taking it at all was not honest; and, regarded as vengeance for any offence Cardew had given him, it was very paltry indeed. But Racke's mind was a paltry one.

They passed out together, and Robbins noted their going. What moved him to follow them out into the vestibule he might not have been able to explain; but follow them out he did.

Outside they paused. The street was deserted, and the big man in uniform who stood just within the door had his back turned to them.

Racke tore open the parcel.

"Great Scott!" he said, in disgust. "What on earth did the rotter want with these things? Look at 'em, Crookey!"

"Chuck them away!" growled Crooke.

CHAPTER 3.

Cardew's Campaign Commences.

"ANY of you gents named Cardew?" asked the big man in the gold-laced coat, as the half-dozen came out together.

"One of us, that's all," replied Cardew blandly. "That is my—er—moniker."

"Robbins asked me to give you this?" said the big man, rather gruffly.

"Very kind of Robbins, I'm sure. But I wasn't expectin' a present. Can you give me an idea what's inside?" returned Cardew, without holding out his hand.

The parcel was not as clean as it had been when "Miss Shoes" had handed it to him.

"Ass! It's those precious pictures of yours!" said Levison, who had recognised it at a glance.

"Eh? Oh, I'd forgotten all about the things! How did my friend Robbins come upon them, may I inquire?"

"Picked 'em up in the street!" growled the big man.

"I scent a mystery! This is interestin' —not precisely thrillin', but interestin' in a mild way. How could my parcel have come into the street? Take it, Clive, will you? It's a trifle dirty."

"Take it yourself!" grunted Clive.

"I will do so, though I fear it is only encouragin' slackness. Now, how did it came there? It couldn't have walked out."

Contarini and Smith minor and Roylance passed on, grinning.

"You surprise me, Jotson!" murmured Levison.

"There's no mystery about it," said Clive, in his direct, uncompromising way. "Those two rotters behind us took it, of course. When they saw what was inside they chucked the thing away. Couldn't see any use in it. I can't, for that matter."

"But you will, Clive—you will! An' I fancy that the dear Aubrey will be inclined to wish that he had taken it down to the river an' basely drowned it, instead of castin' it down within range of the eagle eye of my friend Robbins."

"Stealing's a bit thick, even for Racke and Crooke," remarked Levison, as they moved away. "But there can't be any doubt that they took the things. What are you going to do with them, Cardew? You don't suppose that you can get at Racke by chipping him about smoking at this time of day, do you?"

"I think I can get at Racke, dear boy—yes, I think I can," said Cardew.

And that was all he would say.

But while they took their frugal tea at a Wayland tea-shop he put the parcel on a chair beside him, and looked at it now and then to make sure it was still there. The thing had been but an idle whim at the outset; but the trick Racke and Crooke had played made Cardew much keener upon it.

Back at St. Jim's, with some little time to spare before prep, the dandy left his chums in No. 9, and strolled along to the Shell passage.

He tapped at the door of Study No. 10, and the voice of Manners bade him enter

Manners, as it chanced, was alone, and also, as it chanced, not looking too cheerful.

Some of the marks of his fight with Roylance a few days before were still upon his face. But they had ceased to be painful, and he had never minded the pain of them so very much. It was defeat that rankled, and the feeling that he had made a fool of himself.

"Can I do anything for you, Cardew?" he asked, in a tone that did not sound welcoming.

"Yaas, if you will, old chap."

"What is it?"

"Only a bit of photography. I know you're dashed good at it!"

Manners was interested at once. Photography was his absorbing hobby.

"Want me to take a few of you in various poses, as the Boy Hero of the Captured Submarine Crew, or something of that sort?" he asked, with a grin. "I dare say the Sunday illustrated papers would be glad to have them. Don't mind if I sneak in a bit of an advert for myself, I suppose?"

"Oh, come off!" said Cardew. "It's no such silly rot as that! You can leave all that kind of cheap twaddle to Lowther. Not that you do it worse than he does—you couldn't, you know——"

Lowther and Tom Merry were approaching, and Cardew had recognised their footsteps.

"Hist, Tommy!" whispered Lowther. "Do my ears deceive me, or is someone taking my name in vain?"

They stopped. Cardew, who had paused for a moment, resumed.

"But we're used to it in him, an' we make allowances for his mental condition, y'know!"

"'Nuff said!" snapped Lowther.

And he would have hurled himself through the open doorway upon Cardew.

But Tom, laughing, held him back.

"He heard you coming, ass!" he said.

"That's no giddy reason why he should slander me, is it?" yelled Lowther.

"Chuck it, Monty!" said Manners. "Cardew's here on business. Wants me to photograph him as——"

"Rot! I don't want a photo of myself, chump! This is what I want you to photograph."

And he displayed one of the pictorial advertisements he had brought back from Wayland.

"What for? I don't see much in it," replied Manners, looking at the thing with much interest.

"Hanged if I do either!" said Tom.

Lowther chuckled.

"Don't you fellows know that these refined aristocrats often lend their names to this sort of thing?" he said. "Before Manners turns the camera upon it Cardew will write 'As used by the grandson of an earl' underneath. Then, quids and quids in Cardew's pocket!"

"He won't want it photographed for that!" objected Manners.

"He certainly wouldn't," said Cardew quite calmly. "No; it's quite another game. I can't let you fellows into it in advance, because that would rather spoil it. But I fancy you'll find it amusin' before I've finished. Will you do it for me, Manners?"

"Oh, I don't mind! One copy do you?"

"I'd rather have a hundred, if you will do them."

"Wh-a-at? Oh, you must be potty! Who'd want a hundred copies of this thing?"

"Waste in war-time!" said Tom, shaking his head.

"It's a sad, sad case!" murmured Lowther. "Better humour the poor chap, though, Manners! They sometimes get nasty if they aren't humoured. A word in your private ear—promise him, and put off doing it! Then they'll come and take him away, you know, and you will be released from your promise. It will cost you nothing, and it will be one of those little deeds of kindness about which some sweet and simple poet blethers in connection with little words of love. Tommy can speak them!"

"Oh, chuck it!" snapped Manners. "There's only one sensible word in all that rot you've spouted. It will cost a bit if you really mean a hundred, Cardew?"

"I do. An' I don't mind the cost a scrap, Manners!"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of charging you!" returned Manners, flushing. "But I'm no Crœsus, you know. I don't grudge it if there's any sort of good to you in it."

"There is, old chap, really!" broke in Cardew quite earnestly. "An' you must let me pay exes. I think our footin's friendly enough for that not to hurt your pride—what?"

Cardew could be very winning when he chose, and he was so just then. Manners' bruised face relaxed.

"All serene!" he said. "I'll get the job done to-morrow, an' tell you what the net cost is. It won't be a fortune. Do you really want a lot of the things, though?"

"I do—honour bright! But I think a hundred will be enough. Thanks, awf'lly, Manners! You're a good sort!"

Cardew went, leaving the Terrible Three mystified. He halted at the door of No. 7, and tapped upon it.

No answer came. Racke and Crooke were over in the New House paying a visit to Clampe.

Cardew entered.

He sniffed. A faint aroma as of Racke's special Egyptians still hung upon the aid, and there was a smell of scent, too. Cardew had been quite a confirmed smoker when he came to St. Jim's, and even now he was not superior to the occasional use of scent. But he sniffed as if he did not like the smell of the apartment which Racke and Crooke shared.

As Racke and Crooke were not at home, Cardew had a clear field. He did not want them to find him in their study, because that would have spoiled his jape; but he would not hurry. He went about his work in the most leisurely way.

The Terrible Three had failed to observe that he carried under his arm three more of the tooth-powder advertisement cards. They would have thought him still pottier for wanting the thing photographed if they had been aware that he had several copies.

But now that Manners had promised to photograph it he could afford to use these freely.

He took a picture out of its frame, and, with a little knife-work on the edge of one of the cards, persuaded it to go into the vacant place. This one he stuck up in a conspicuous position over the mantelshelf. Another he put into the drawer where Racke kept packs of cards and boxes of cigarettes. The third he disposed of behind a macintosh on the wall.

Then he looked round.

"Yaas! I think that will do!" he murmured. "They'll spot the framed one at once. The one in the drawer will present itself to their enraptured eyes when they want cigarettes. The one behind the macintosh may not be found for a day or two. But it's sure to be found. Now I think I'll trot up to the dorm."

The fact that he had no right in the Shell dormitory did not trouble him, of course.

He had to fetch two more of the cards, and Clive noticed him taking them. One of them he put in Racke's bed, the other in Crooke's.

"You seem jolly pleased with yourself," said Ernest Levison, when he had returned to No. 9, and stood smiling before the fire.

"It's some wheeze with those tooth-powder things," Clive said.

"Dear man!" purred Cardew. "With your extraordinary powers of observation an' deduction, you ought to be a detective!"

CHAPTER 4.
The Wrath of Racke.

RACKE and Crooke came in together to prep.

They were not in the sweetest of tempers.

"Interferin' cad, that fellow Figgins!" growled Racke.

"Somethin' ought to be done about it," said Crooke. "Why haven't we as good a right to visit a pal in the New House as any other chap on this side?"

"You didn't back me up!" Racke snarled.

"What was the use of it?" demanded Crooke warmly. "If we'd shown fight we should simply have been swamped. They'd have called in Redfern an' those other scholarship cads, an' Pratt an' Thompson an' Clarke, an' all the rest of the crowd. Besides, it was time to go, anyway."

Racke opened the drawer to get a cigarette.

"Oh, dash it all!" he said, glaring.

"What is it?" asked Crooke.

"Look here!"

Crooke looked. Then he grinned.

"So that was what Cardew wanted those things for?" he said. "Well, it's pretty cheap, I must say! Kid's game, I call it!"

"You potty ass! It was you who suggested chuckin' them down in the street. Now he's got the beastly things back. We ought to have slung them somewhere where he wouldn't have found them."

"Well, why didn't you?" Crooke inquired, quite naturally.

Crooke had a much better opinion of himself than St. Jim's generally had of him. But he was not so touchy and thin-skinned as Racke, who had never quite got over his disappointment at finding that money didn't carry a fellow all the way at St. Jim's.

"You idiot! It was you——"

"You've said that once! An' you agreed to the chuckin' away. I've never noticed that you were too polite to say 'No' when you thought differently from a chap. What's it matter, anyway? Cardew thinks he's goin' to get at you about smokin'. You ain't ashamed of smokin', are you? An' he's only dropped it about five minutes ago, so he hasn't a fat lot to chortle about. If you take no notice the whole thing will be a fizzle."

"Br-r-r-r!"

Racke found it impossible to be as philosophical as Crooke about the matter. Cardew had read Racke aright. He was not capable of turning this thing into a jest by disregarding it.

He swung round, and the framed pictorial advertisement over the mantelshelf caught his eye.

"Oh, hang it!" he hooted. "Look there! He's had the cheek to take out a picture an' put one of those dashed things in its place!"

"Well, it wasn't a very valuable picture," said Crooke. "I like this one just as well myself. Let it stay!"

"Let it stay? You—you——"

"Look here! I don't want any more of your abuse, Racke! I may be a potty idiot an' all that sort of thing; but it seems to me those pet names would just fit the chap who gets his wool off about a trifle like this."

"A trifle, do you call it?" Racke roared. "It's nothin' of the sort, an' you know it! It's the limit in dashed impudence!"

"Well, Cardew is about the limit in that way, an' everybody knows it. My point is that you'll only please him by makin' a silly fuss about it, because he did it to make you mad—see?"

"I want to know what he's done with that picture, an' I'm goin' to find out! Are you comin', or not?"

"Not," replied Crooke.

"It was your picture!"

"All the more reason why you shouldn't get your wool off about it. I didn't care about the thing. Cardew can have it if he likes—not that I'd say that if I thought the bounder wanted it!"

"He doesn't know which of us owns it!"

"Shouldn't think so," answered Crooke. "You can call it yours, if you like. I'll give it to you—or sell it—that would be best, as you're so dashed keen on it!"

"Rats! All I want is to charge him with bonin' the thing!"

"Well, if I was goin' to cook up a charge against a chap I barred, I'd cook up a better one than that," said Crooke coolly.

Racke lingered at the door.

"Are you comin', Crooke?" he asked. "Tacklin' all three of those cads is a bit above my weight."

"It's a bit above the weight of the two of us," Crooke said—speaking the truth for once.

But Racke was too furious to heed the dictates of caution. He snorted, and went.

He did not knock at the door of No. 9. He put his angry face inside without any such intimation of his coming.

The three looked up from their work.

"Always pleased to see you, Racke!" said Cardew cheerily. "So glad you feel friendly enough to dispense with absurd formalities like tappin' at doors, y'know."

"I didn't come on a friendly visit!" snorted Racke.

"Not? You surprise me! You look so merry an' bright that——"

"Shut up, you sneerin' cad! What have you done with my picture?"

"Eh? What picture's that?"

"You know well enough! You took it out of the frame, an' put this rotten thing in!"

Clive and Levison grinned. Racke's annoyance made them think the wheeze Cardew had planned a little less childish.

"Do you call that a rotten thing, Racke?" asked Cardew blandly. "I'm afraid your art education has been a trifle neglected. To my mind it is streets

ahead of the three-legged horse you had in the frame."

"It's intended as an insult!"

"As how?" asked Cardew, with the air of one seriously seeking information.

"You know well enough! You meant to get at me about smokin'!"

"But you do smoke, Racke, an' it's affectin' your teeth. I won't say they're mossy, but they haven't that pearly——"

"Dry up, you Pharisaical idiot! How long is it since you smoked last, I'd like to know?"

"An earnest desire for information is not a thing that I would seek to discourage, though the point hardly seems of real importance, Racke. I regret that I cannot give you the exact date. Perhaps Clive or Levison may be able to oblige. It is well known that they keep my conscience."

"Never mind that! You've boned my picture!"

"That's a dashed lie, Racke, an' you know it!"

"Oh, let's put the cad out!" growled Levison. "He butts in without tapping at the door, and then accuses one of us of being a thief!"

"Which is as bad as accusing the three of us!" chipped in Clive.

"Oh, if the cap fits, you can all wear it!" snarled Racke.

"I called you a liar, Racke—does that cap fit?" asked Cardew.

Racke had been tearing the offending card into shreds. Now he flung the shreds into Cardew's face.

"Bump him!" yelled Levison.

"No! Leave him to me!" snapped Cardew.

But Levison and Clive would not have that. There was no doubt of Cardew's ability to thrash Racke. But a fight did not suit them.

Two were enough for the bumping of Racke. Cardew did not touch him.

"Yaroooooh!" he howled, as he smote the linoleum.

"Shurrup, ass! You'll have someone coming!" said Levison angrily.

Bump! Bump!

"Yow! Yoooop! Chuckit!"

"Had enough?" grinned Clive.

"You shall all smart for this!"

"That will do him, I guess!" said Levison.

"Your valuable picture, Racke," drawled Cardew, "is in your cupboard. By the way, I was under the impression that the old master in question—is it a Raphael or a Titian?—belonged to Crooke."

"I'm not responsible for your impressions!" snarled Racke.

"Oh, no! An' you're only secondarily responsible for the impression which I seem to perceive upon the floor of the passage," replied Cardew sweetly. "Clive an' Levison, in their misjudged zeal, were the chief causes thereof. Next time you have occasion to bump Racke, dear boys, do go a bit easier with the floor!"

It was just as well for Aubrey Racke that his Housemaster could not hear the language he used as he stalked away.

CHAPTER 5.

Methods of Persecution.

"OF all the——"

"What are you raving about now, Racke?" asked Tom Merry.

"Dash the beastly thing! Hang Cardew! I'll——"

"No, no!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "You will never hang Cardew, Racke. You will never be hangman. You may come to know him one of these days, but——"

"Ring off, Lowther!" said George Gore. "Racke's got the centre of the stage. Go on, Racke! It's quite interesting. You might let us know after a bit what Cardew's done."

Racke had just drawn down the bedclothes and found the fourth copy of the hated picture. The third had been discovered by Crooke only a few minutes earlier behind the mackintosh on the wall. And, of course, Crooke had not omitted to call Racke's attention to it.

Crooke now discovered the fifth. He drew it out of his bed, grinning.

"It's only this," he said. "A kid's trick of Cardew's. I don't care a scrap, but Racke's awfully on his ear about it."

Racke scowled. He had turned his little present from Cardew face downwards. But Crooke was exposing his to the gaze of any who cared to look.

"Put the dashed thing away, Crooke!" growled Racke.

"Crooke wouldn't be allowed to do that, if he wanted to," said Dane.

"Does Cardew actually mean to insinuate that you two smoke?" asked Lowther, holding up his hands in pretended horror.

"Oh, no! Only that their teeth need brushing!" said Kangaroo, grinning.

"You don't really smoke, do you, Racke?" went on the humorist of the Shell. "If—as we must all earnestly hope, dear brethren—this is an unfounded charge, Cardew ought to hear of it again."

"Shouldn't wonder if he's heping to," remarked Gunn.

"It's nothing to make a silly fuss about," said Grundy, with his usual air of finality. "We know the rotters smoke. Well, then! I'm not gone on Cardew myself, but there's no harm in saying a thing is so when it is so. Drop that fuss, Racke, and get into bed."

"The court will now adjourn," said Lowther. "The matter at issue has been decided by the infallible Judge Grundy, and all will henceforth be peace."

"This will dashed well be pieces!" snarled Racke, as he tore up the fourth of the dozen cards.

"Take Cardew's tip, and clean your teeth, Racke!" said Kangaroo. "It won't do them any harm."

Crooke did not tear up his copy. When he looked round for it it had gone.

Gore had it, but Crooke did not know that. He did not care who had the thing, and he could not understand why Racke should be so bitterly incensed about the affair. But Racke's teeth were not a nice set. Perhaps that may have had something to do with it. That Cardew was the tormentor, however, was what annoyed Racke most. He hated and envied Cardew.

Two fellows in the Shell were very early astir next morning.

Before the rising-bell went Manners sat up and rubbed his eyes. He had lain in bed the night before chuckling at Cardew's plan, and he had made up his mind that its success should not be imperilled by any delay on his part. He would be up early to take that photograph, and would develop the negative as soon thereafter as possible.

It was still dusk in the dormitory, but a small light showed a few beds away, and the face of the fellow who held it could be plainly seen.

"Hallo, Gore! What's the merry game?" asked Manners sleepily.

"Shush! Hop out of bed, and hold this blessed candle-end for me. I want two hands for this job."

Manners hopped out. He saw now what the job was. Gore was affixing that obnoxious pictorial advertisement to the foot of Racke's bed, with the kindly thought of giving the unconscious sleeper something pleasant to gaze upon as soon as he awoke.

"That does it!" he chuckled. "What made you wake up, Manners?"

"Well, I'm in this, in a way, though I didn't know you were, Gore."

"How are you in it?"

"If you like to dress, and come down with me, you can see for yourself. I'm going to take a photograph."

"Not of Racke brushing his teeth?" asked Gore. "You won't get him, old scout! I've never noticed very particularly, but it's my belief now that he never does. That's why he's so wild."

"Yes, he does. I've seen him plenty of times. Didn't start young enough, perhaps. They are about the worst set in the Shell. But I'm not going to risk my camera near Racke in the wax he's likely to be in. Come along, and you'll see."

On the way downstairs the two ran into Cardew coming up.

He stared to see them together. Gore and Manners were not exactly chums.

"Been down to decorate Racke's study?" asked Gore.

"Yaas. How did you guess, Gore?"

"Oh, there was quite a rumpus in our dorm last night! If you'd told me about it beforehand, Cardew, I should have said that there was nothing in it."

"Ah! But you haven't studied the dear Aubrey as I have, Gore!"

"Now, I think it's a ripping good jape," went on Gore.

"Glad to have your approval, I'm sure, dear boy," Cardew said coolly.

"Gore's been helping," remarked Manners.

"Indeed! Dashed kind of you, Gore, really!"

But Cardew's tone was not very cordial.

"He got hold of Crooke's copy of the thing—don't waste them on Crooke, Cardew; he don't mind—and stuck it up at the foot of Racke's bed."

Cardew thawed.

"Good! Dashed good!" he said. "I owe you a good turn for that, Gore!"

"Not at all," said Gore. "Pleased to help. Racke ain't a fellow I love a lot. Now we're going down to take a photograph."

"The photograph?" asked Cardew.

"The photograph," replied Manners. "I'll come along."

The photograph was duly taken, and Cardew was delighted to hear that he might expect a supply of the resultant pictures before night.

"I shall be out of the cards before that, I fancy," he said. "I posted one to each of the bounders last night. They'll get them at breakfast. Sorry now I was so kind to Crooke, though. He doesn't seem to appreciate it."

Manners did not talk of the matter, so it must have been Gore who let it out. For nearly every eye in the Shell and Fourth was upon either Racke or Crooke, or both—for they sat together—when they came in to breakfast.

Crooke seemed to smell a rat. He was in no hurry to open his package, well disguised as it was. But Racke tore off layer after layer of wrapping-paper, apparently in natural eagerness to see what was inside.

"Oh, dash it!" he snarled as he saw.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

At the burst of laughter that came from all around the table, Mr. Linton, at the head, looked up from his egg.

"Really——" he began.

Then his eyes fell upon Racke, sitting with the tooth-powder advertisement-card in his hands, and scowling for a dozen.

"What have you there, Racke?" he snapped.

"Nothin', sir—I mean, it's private. It came for me by post," Racke mumbled.

"Oh, I have no wish to pry into anything of a personal nature. But, before you go out, Racke, I must insist upon your clearing up the litter you have made on the floor. I do not object to the reading of correspondence at breakfast; but there is a limit, and parcels should be left unopened till later. Let me hear no more of this unseemly merriment."

The unseemly merriment was not repeated; but Racke could not look up from his plate without finding somebody grinning at him.

As he was leaving with the rest, Mr. Linton called him sharply back.

"I told you to clear up that litter before you went, Racke," he snapped.

Racke looked mutinous. Everyone but Talbot had stopped.

Racke even attempted mutiny.

"Isn't that a job for a housemaid, sir?" he asked sulkily.

"Two hundred lines, Racke! Do as I tell you at once!"

Mutiny was nipped in the bud. It was no use kicking.

"Now, then! Why are you boys waiting?" rapped out the master of the Shell. They had to go then. But they went very slowly. Racke's scarlet face struck them as funny.

Outside, Talbot approached Cardew.

"I should like to have a word or two with you, Cardew," he said gravely.

"Not in a hostile way, I hope, Talbot?" returned the Fourth-Former.

"In quite a friendly way, of course."

"An' not as Sergeant Talbot?"

Talbot was forced to smile. He and Cardew had come to understand one another better now, and there was a friendly feeling between them which had not existed before.

"No; it isn't a matter under military law," he said.

"Then I'll come," said Cardew, and slipped his arm through Talbot's.

He had never done that before.

In the quadrangle, Talbot spoke.

"Don't you think you might drop it, Cardew?"

"Drop what, my dear man?"

"This persecution of Racke."

Cardew stared.

"I didn't know Racke was a pal of yours, Talbot," he said slowly.

"He's not. I don't mind owning that I detest him. There's a spark of good in nearly every fellow, so I suppose there must be in Racke. But he hides it well. I've never seen it."

"If your eyes can't see it, Talbot, it isn't there, I'll bet!" answered Cardew, less lightly.

He knew how Talbot had stood by Levison and Gore and other fellows who were, or had been, black sheep.

"That doesn't follow."

"Well, you've looked for it. Most of us haven't. Don't think about such trifles, y'know. I'd rather believe Racke a wrong 'un all through myself. Suits me best."

"But why?"

"Just the same way that I'm not keen on hearin' of any good deed done by a Hun—not that they ever do any! My friends—well, I believe in them, an' I don't get askin' myself much whether they are right or wrong. They are my pals—that's what matters. Same way with my enemies; I prefer to keep my sentiments about them quite unmixed, y'know. Racke's one of them. If I can see my way to annoy Racke properly in a manner that ain't off the rails, I do it. See? Sometimes I may get a bit off the rails; but that's only because I'm a poor judge."

"You think I'm butting in," said Talbot.

"Well—no, I don't! I wouldn't have said that a fortnight ago; but it's different now. Why do you want me to stop the—er—persecution, wasn't it, Talbot?"

"It's not entirely on Racke's account, though you are goading the fellow almost to madness, and I don't think that's worth while."

"Then it's partly on mine, I take it?"

"Yes. The whole affair doesn't seem to me worthy of you, Cardew."

"Talbot, old fellow, don't! I can't stand on a pedestal. Chilly, y'know, an' no end monotonous, by gad!"

"I didn't ask you——"

"Yaas, you did! But it's no go. I'm not a chap like you or D'Arcy or old Clive or Merry. You're different enough in some ways; but you all seem alike to me in one. It doesn't come natural to you to be—shall we say spiteful? Not exactly a nice thing to admit. But I'm a wild ass—always was—always shall be—an' wild asses have a spiteful way of kickin', y'know. It may not be good natural history; but it's true human nature—my sort. Racke's annoyed me; an' now I've found a way of gettin' at him I can't drop it all at once—even for you, old man!"

The last words were very friendly. They left Talbot with no more to say. He could not bring forward what might have been a strong argument if this had been another fellow instead of Cardew.

It was no use to tell Cardew that Racke, goaded to desperation, might seek for, and find, a joint in his armour—might deal him a wound through it. There were possibilities; Cardew's record at St. Jim's was not quite a white one!

CHAPTER 6.

Wally & Co. Take a Hand.

THE methods of persecution certainly did not stop.

Racke found one of the tooth-powder pictures in his desk in the Shell Form-room; and Mr. Linton, attracted to him by the exclamation he gave, got a glimpse of it, and insisted on seeing more.

"If this means that you are in the habit of smoking, Racke——" began the Form-master gravely.

"I don't know what it means. How should I?" broke in Racke rudely. "An' I don't see that you have any right to jump at a conclusion of that kind, sir!"

"I have, at least, a right to demand respect from my Form, and I mean to have it!" thundered Mr. Linton. "Stand out, Racke!"

Racke was caned. Nothing more was said about the smoking. But Racke's hands smarted and tingled all the morning.

There was another of the things there in the afternoon; but, taught by experience, Racke did not make a noise about it.

He wished now that he had not made a noise at first. Cardew's wheeze would have fallen utterly flat if he had taken it as Crooke had.

But it was too late for seeing that. The eyes of the Shell and Fourth were upon him. A pretence that he did not mind would take in nobody.

When he returned to his study after classes he found yet another on the mantelshelf. Cardew's visiting-card was pinned to it. Fellows in the Fourth did not usually have visiting-cards; but Cardew was an exception to such rules as that.

Racke was dancing on the torn fragments of the advertisement card, tearing the smaller pasteboard into minute shreds, and using strong and picturesque language, when Crooke came in.

Crooke grinned.

"Another of them?" he said. "Thought you were gettin' over it a bit, though. Well, there can't be many more, if that's any consolation to you, for I don't think there were a dozen in the parcel."

Racke threw himself into the arm-chair, and rested his angry head on his hands.

Suddenly he looked up. A gleam of triumph shone in his eyes.

"I've got him!" he cried.

"Eh? Who?" asked Crooke.

"Cardew, of course! Oh, I've got the rotter! That sort of chap should be a bit more careful how he treads on other fellows' corns. There's always somethin' that can be raked up against him, by gad!"

"I ain't so jolly sure that rakin' up things pays," said Crooke doubtfully. "If it comes to that, Aubrey, my son, there's a thing or two might be raked up against us. An' I wouldn't trust Cardew not to do it!"

"He won't know! We can get at him without his guessin'—or anyone's guessin', for that matter—where the blow fell from."

"Any risk in it?"

"Not a scrap!"

"Then you may count me in," said Crooke, with remarkable courage.

"Do you remember that number of Tom Merry's rotten 'Weekly' that Cardew brought out last term?"

"Oh, rather! Doesn't everyone? It was streets ahead of anythin' that the usual gang ever published. Those skits on Selby an' Ratty an' the Head——"

"That's where we've got him!" cried Racke exultantly.

"Eh? I don't see it, though; the whole thing's blown over now."

"It was hushed up, you mean."

"Comes to the same thing."

"Not a bit likely! Did old Selby ever see that article?"

"Of course he didn't, chump! It wouldn't have been his fault if Cardew hadn't got the sack if he had."

"Well, Selby's goin' to see it, an' Ratty, too!"

"My hat! That's a deep move, Racke! An' safe—safe as houses! There's no need to let them know anything about where the things came from. But it ain't so certain that Cardew will get in the neck, all the same."

"How do you make that out? He's bound to."

"No, he's not. Think again! Merry's the chap who will get pulled up for it."

"But it will come out that Cardew did it."

"It may. But it may not. Depends upon whether Merry lets on.

"Fathead! With his own skin to take care of——"

"Those fellows don't look at things quite the way you an' I do, you know, Racke. Cardew's the white-headed boy with them now. Ever since that blessed submarine affair they don't know how to make enough of him. Merry may——"

"Somebody else would let on, even if he tried to screen Cardew."

"I don't know which of them would, unless it was Cardew himself. He might. But most likely he wouldn't be let know."

Racke scowled.

"I don't say I'd be sorry to see Merry sacked," he said. "I'd be dashed glad! But Cardew's the chap I'm gunnin' for now."

A tap sounded at the door.

"Come in!" howled Crooke. Neither he nor Racke was smoking—for once.

Frank Levison, of the Third, appeared.

"Note for you, Racke!" he said.

Racke looked at him suspiciously.

"If this is any of your larks, young Levison——" he began.

"Oh, it's none of my larks, Racke!" said the fag.

He moved towards the door.

Racke slit open the envelope.

Out of it fell one of the photos Manners had taken that morning, and one of Cardew's cards.

Racke jumped up, with a howl of fury. Frank bolted.

Outside he joined Wally & Co. That famous fraternity was in full force in the passage.

Racke did not pursue far enough to see that. He kicked the door to angrily.

"I suppose there's a copy of that rag about, Crooke?" he said.

"Hanged if I know! Didn't you save yours?"

"I thought I did, but I don't know where to lay my hand on it at the moment."

"Well, I never dreamed the thing was going to be any use. How should I?" Crooke said. "But someone's sure to have kept one."

"Yes, by gad! An' if we go nosin' round for it we shall have the bounders suspectin' somethin' at once!"

There came another tap at the door. Curly Gibson was the tapper. He did not wait for an invitation to come in, but slid inside the door, threw a note on the table, and bolted in haste.

"Confound that fellow Cardew!" snarled Racke. "Am I never to have a moment's peace?"

And he tore the envelope across without even opening it.

But that did not matter much. He knew what was inside.

"I'll have a look in the cupboard for the thing," Crooke said

Racke's scheme was beginning to appeal to him. It seemed so safe, and it was so spiteful.

The number of "Tom Merry's Weekly" for which they were searching was one for which Tom and his staff had not been responsible.

It had been part of a queer bargain made by them with Cardew.

They had wanted funds to help an old friend in urgent need. Cardew had supplied the funds on condition that he was to be allowed to edit one issue of the "Weekly" just in his own sweet way, without interference from anyone.

That issue had had to be suppressed at once. Cardew had written most of its contents himself, though Ernest Levison had also had a hand in it. Had it come under the notice of authority at the time there would have been the biggest kind of a row. Cardew could hardly have escaped expulsion, and Levison might have had to go, too.

Even now, when some months had passed, all that was necessary to cause an explosion was that Mr. Ratcliff, of the New House, or Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, should set eyes on a copy. For Cardew had dealt with far more freedom than discretion with those two gentlemen.

The two black sheep were both at the cupboard, when the door opened softly, and the grinning face of Raymond Hobbs of the Third appeared.

Hobbs dropped another note on the table, slipped back to the door again, and yelled at the top of his strident voice:

"Letter for you, Racke!"

Racke turned furiously, and hurled a book. But it struck the door.

"Hang it all, why don't you use your own books?" snapped Crooke. "That's my lexicon, an' you've knocked it out of the covers."

He was stooping to pick it up, when the door opened again.

"Letter for—— Ow!" yelled Reggie Manners, and he tumbled fairly over Crooke.

"Collar the young cad!" howled Racke.

Crooke grabbed at Reggie. Reggie hit out, and got Crooke nicely in the eye. Racke rushed across and grabbed Reggie. Manners minor, who was not too scrupulous in his methods, butted Racke in the waistcoat.

Racke floundered on top of Crooke, and Reggie scrambled out of the door, with a howl of triumph.

"Yow-ow!" gasped Racke.

"Gerroff me, you chump!" yelled Crooke.

Once more the door opened.

"'Allo! Wot do you chaps call that game?" asked Joe Frayne affably.

Joe took care not to get within reach. As Racke hurled himself at him he disappeared, and from the other side of the door came his voice:

"Sha'n't bring your letters for you any more, Racke, if you try on them games!"

On the floor, in an envelope, lay another copy of the photo Manners had taken.

Racke fairly gnashed his teeth.

"It's a silly kids' game!" growled Crooke. "If you'd only keep your wool on——"

The ferocious face that Racke turned upon him made him shut up. The wheeze might be a childish one, but it was getting home.

Outside, Wally and Jameson debated the question as to who should go next.

"It's getting jolly hot," said Jameson. "They'll be on the look-out now, you bet."

"That's why you'd better go next," answered Wally. "It's the chap who goes last who will run the biggest risk, and that's me."

"Not so jolly sure of that!" said Jameson.

"Are you funked, Jimmy?" inquired Reggie Manners.

"Do you want a thick ear, young Manners?" retorted the New House fag.

"It will have to be you, Jimmy, because it's quite time you were getting across to the dog-kennel you call a House," said Frank Levison.

"It will have to be Jimmy, because I say so," said Wally autocratically.

"I suppose Jimmy may have something to say in the matter?" demanded Jameson.

"Then there's something jolly well wrong with your supposer!" Wally snapped.

"Well, here goes! I'm not going to have a kid with a face like a brass monkey saying I'm funked!" replied Jameson. And he opened the door with dramatic suddenness.

An arm shot out as the envelope containing the sixth photo was flicked into the room.

"Yaroooh!" howled Racke, as Jameson brought the door to sharply. "You young fiend! You've broken my arm!"

"No such luck!" yelled Manners minor.

The door closed with a savage bang. Inside, Racke nursed his bruised arm, and made grimaces like a Hun.

"Now you, clever!" said Jameson to Wally.

"Just you cut off, or you'll have old Ratty coming to fetch you, my son!"

"Rats, D'Arcy minor! I'm giddy well not going till you've done it!"

"Do you think I'm afraid?"

"I dunno! How should I?"

"I'll show you!"

And Wally turned the handle of the door, but it refused to open. Racke and Crooke had fastened themselves in. They might have thought of that before but that they wanted to catch one of the fags.

"You're done!" chortled Reggie.

"Bet you I'm not!" retorted the undaunted Wally.

CHAPTER 7.
Racke's Scheme.

"WE'LL make the cad smart for this!" snarled Crooke.

Crooke had not suffered to quite the same extent as Racke, whose arm was badly bruised; but he had taken one of Racke's boots under the chin when his dear pal had fallen on him; and, though Aubrey Racke wore light and dainty boots, it had hurt.

"Draggin' those little brutes into it!" fumed Racke.

"Oh, I don't reckon they wanted a heap of draggin'. Pity there were so many of them. If there had only been two we could have lammed them all right. Only thing's to wait till we can catch them one at a time, an' jolly well give them gip!"

"The only thing to do now is to find that Merry rag," Racke growled. "The kids can wait."

"Well, if you saved your copy it's a rummy thing you can't find it. We're up the tree if it don't turn up. I don't suppose there's another about. Those bounders took no end of trouble to collect and burn them."

They went back to the cupboard.

"Eureka!" cried Racke a few minutes later.

"That's only a bit of it," answered Crooke, looking very disappointed.

It was certainly only part of the extra special issue—four pages, and those very dirty.

"Never mind. The Selby article's here," said Racke; "and if we can't find any more I know a dodge for gettin' round that. Let's have a good look, though."

They ransacked the cupboard from top to bottom. They turned out drawers. By the time they had finished the study looked rather as if it had been ragged. But no complete issue of the paper and no more pages came to light.

"You ought to have thought of it at the time," Crooke said sulkily.

"Not any more than you ought. Matter of fact, I did think of it, but it seemed a bit too risky. It's safer now, when the bizney's almost forgotten."

"An' now it's safe it's imposs!" said Crooke.

"Nothin' of the sort! Don't I tell you I've got a dodge?"

"Well, we could use this, I suppose. It's part of the thing, anyway. But there's only the Selby stuff here that matters, an' old Selby don't count for much. It would be a heap better to get Ratty in."

"We can get Ratty in all right," replied Racke confidently.

The two stood with their backs to the window. At this moment the lower sash began slowly to rise.

The window had been shut. Racke and Crooke were not fresh air fiends, and the evening was a cold one. But it had not been latched.

Wally was not to be beaten!

Study No. 6 was empty. It was there that Mr. Ratcliff had set up his wonderful safe. The door had not been locked since, and Wally happened to know this.

Under the study windows ran a deep string-course of masonry, almost like a gutter. Baggy Trimble had hidden from Grundy on this once.

Where the clumsy and timid Baggy could venture it was nothing for Wally of the Third, fearless and active, to go.

So Wally had crept out, and was now about to deliver the seventh photo.

"How?" asked Crooke. "I don't see ——"

"You never do see!" snapped Racke. "I know a printer cad at Wayland who ——"

Wally D'Arcy was not the fellow to play eavesdropper. He had caught a few words, but they conveyed no special meaning to him, and he did not want to hear more.

"Letter for you, Racke!" he yelled, and the envelope fluttered from his hand to the floor.

Racke and Crooke wheeled round in alarm.

"Who was t-t-that?" stammered Racke, gazing in amazement at the missive.

"Sounded like young D'Arcy," answered Crooke. "But—— Oh, I know! The little cad's crept along——"

"Wrong, Crookey! There ain't any cads in the Third, except your pal Piggott!" came a voice from the window.

Racke and Crooke made a simultaneous rush, collided violently, and sat down together.

"You utter idiot!"

"You silly chump!"

"Right this time!" sang out Wally. "You're all that, and a bit more! Ta-ta, you bounders!"

And Wally went.

Within three minutes the seven had presented themselves to Cardew in Study No. 9 on the Fourth passage, to tell him that the task he had set them was accomplished, and to take the reward promised.

"We'll spend this in bloaters," said Wally, as they made their way to their own quarters. "There ain't anything that goes farther at the present prices, except anchovy paste, and that makes a chap so thirsty. Cut off, young Jameson, or you'll get in a row over the way!"

"Yes. And what price my share of the bloaters?" demanded the New House fag.

"We can't get them to-night, can we, fathead? I'll take care of the cash till to-morrow."

"Oh, all serene! Look after him, Franky, and see he don't do a bunk with it!" said Jameson. And he departed in haste.

In Study No. 7 of the Shell, Racke and Crooke looked at one another in some alarm.

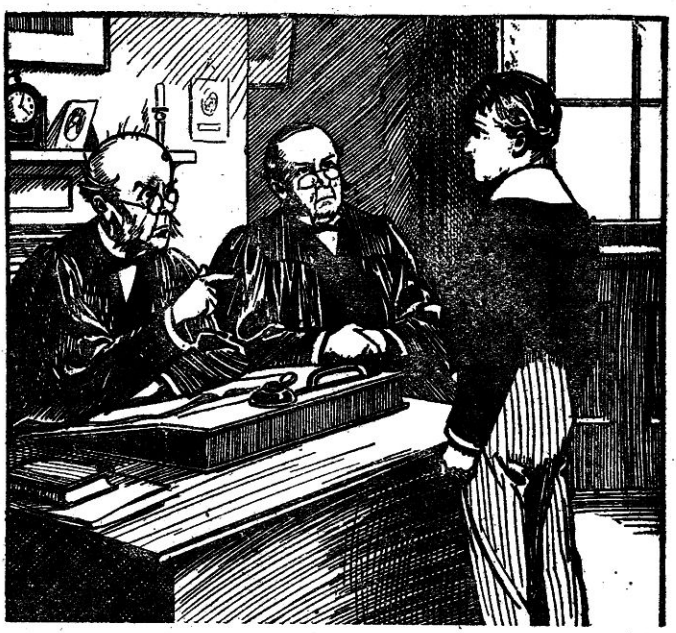
"How much did that wretched kid hear?" asked Racke.

"Oh, not enough to tell him anything, I guess," replied Crooke. "He would never tumble to what we were jawin' about."

"Well, I suppose not," said Racke doubtfully. "All the same, I'd rather he hadn't heard. D'Arcy minor is pretty cute."

Crooke shot the catch of the window.

"We'll have no more of that, anyway," he said. "Now, let's hear the rest of it, Racke. What's the game? I



Tom Before the Tyrants!
(See Chapter 11.)

begin to get on to it, but I don't quite see to the bottom of it yet."

"You're dead slow! Can't you see how easy it will be to get a complete issue of this rag printed? These four pages will do for what the lawyers call corroborative evidence. Four pages of the copy we use will be just like them—see? That brings Selby in, because the interview thing about him is strong enough for anythin'. The other four—well, there's no limit to the hot stuff we can put into that! I remember some of the things that were said about Ratty, and we can think of plenty more to say. We might stick in a nasty par or two about the Head an' Linton an' Lathom an' Railton while we were about it."

"But they'll disown it," said Crooke, shaking his head.

"They can't! There will be four pages that they were responsible for, an' if Cardew owns to them he can't deny the rest! Besides, it's possible he'll never see more than those four pages. We ought to be able to work that."

"Safer to stick to what Cardew really was responsible for," said Crooke.

"But there ain't a word about Ratty here, an' we simply must have him in!"

"Selby's a regular old Hun. He'll raise enough row to get Cardew the giddy push-out, you bet!"

"We ought to have Ratty in, an' I mean to have him in!" said Racke obstinately. "Besides, this thing, as it stands, looks suspicious. It ain't a paper; it's only a scrap. It would look much more like a cooked-up affair than the one I shall get done will. There are only the headlines to prove that it's a part of the 'Weekly' at all, an' they're not enough. It would be easy to get any sort of rot printed, an' put 'Tom Merry's Weekly' on top of each page."

"But anyone who would tumble to that would be on to the dodge of gettin' a whole blessed number faked up," objected Crooke.

"I don't fancy so. It simply wouldn't occur to them if they saw the complete number."

"You're jolly set on your dodge, Racke! But it seems to me takin' risks that we needn't take. It may get Cardew sacked; but it may get us sacked—depends on how things work out. But if we just use this, we get Selby on Cardew's track without bringin' ourselves in at all—see? It ain't so complete as if Ratty was in it, too; but then, it ain't so rotten dangerous!"

Racke meditated.

"There's somethin' in that," he said, after a long pause. "Yes, there's somethin' in that, Crooke. Nothin' like havin' a chap with a high regard for his own dashed skin in a wheeze with you, I must say. I'll think it over."

"I never remember a time when you put consideration for anyone's skin before consideration for your own, Aubrey, dear boy!" answered Crooke sarcastically.

CHAPTER 8.
In the Third Form-Room.

MOST of the Shell and Fourth appeared at breakfast next morning in khaki. The St. Jim's Cadets were getting another day off classes—or, rather, a morning, for it was a half-holiday—for special training.

So the two Forms generally were in the highest spirits.

But there were some exceptions to the rule of cheerfulness.

Over in the New House Leslie Clampe and Cyril Chowle had to stand no end of chaff. They almost wished now that they had stayed in the corps.

In the School House contingent of the two Forms there were five "civilians"—Racke, Crooke, Scrope, Mellish, and Trimble. They caught it, too.

It was not the Shell and Fourth alone that were affected. A number of the Third had been allowed to join the

Cadet Corps. Wally & Co. were all in it, and so were Butt and Harvey and Hooley and Kent and Watson and Hankey.

So the Third would muster short that morning. But there would be a make-weight. Last time the Cadets had had a day off the seven "civilians" of the two higher Forms had been handed over to Mr. Selby's charge, Messrs. Linton and Lathom making holiday. And the same thing was to be done again evidently, for at breakfast the Shell and Fourth masters were distinctly in holiday mood, while Mr. Selby glowered even more than usual.

It was not known that Mr. Lathom had offered to take the Third and the addition thus made to it for morning classes, considering it only fair that Mr. Selby should share in these occasional masters' benefits. But Mr. Selby had refused—without thanks. His feelings towards the Cadet Corps were of the sourest description.

Directly breakfast was over the corps mustered in the quad.

Racke and Crooke and the rest of the "civilians" turned out to sneer. But they found little chance of using their undoubted talents in this direction, for the rest of St. Jim's had turned out with quite other intentions, and the malcontents found silence the only safe policy.

"Look quite a hefty lot, don't they?" remarked Baker to Monteith.

"Rather! They put us in the shade a bit, I must admit. The O.T.C. has never done what it might. And that hasn't been Kildare's fault, either."

"We'll have to buck up," said Lefevre of the Fifth. "By rights we should be with them to-day. But here we are, with the cast-offs and the disgruntled."

"With, but not of, them," Darrel amended. "I decline to be classed with Racke and Trimble, for my part."

Racke heard, and scowled. Trimble, also hearing, only sniggered. Marching and carrying a pack and a rifle, and being drilled and digging trenches, did not appeal to Baggy; and, though he might talk of his pride, he accepted with far more resignation than anyone else the relegation to the Third Form-room.

The lance-corporals, now appointed, were wearing the single stripe of their grade for the first time that day. Clive was one of the four, as he had hoped to be. The other three were Kerr, Noble, and Gunn.

"Hurrah!" yelled some enthusiastic Second-Former as the platoon received the word of command to march. And before they realised what they were at, the seniors found themselves cheering also.

But the seven "civilians" and Piggott did not cheer. And six of the seven went along to the Third Form-room a little later with scowling faces and unwilling footsteps.

"Before we begin our work," said Mr. Selby acidly, "I have something to say to you boys from the Shell and the Fourth. On the last occasion when I took charge of you your behaviour was of the worst possible description. Unless there is a distinct improvement this time I shall punish you without mercy. My Form is already lazy enough without having a bad example set it by the older boys. I have no means of preventing those who have enrolled themselves in the Cadet Corps from spending the day in what seems to me no better than idleness; but I will take care that you who are not so enrolled shall not be idle."

"Old beast!" whispered Mellish to Chowle. "He's down on the Cadet wheeze, so he ought to go easy with us, anyone might think. But not he!"

"Mellish, you are talking!" rapped out Mr. Selby.

"Oh, no, sir! You are quite mistaken!" answered Mellish.

"Come here, Mellish!"

Swish, swish, swish!

Mellish retired moaning. The rest of the cheery seven grinned. It was not their style to waste sympathy on one another.

But Mellish soon had companions in misfortune. Within five minutes Baggy was called out, and the howls of Baggy made the Form-room resound. The fat junior had not been doing anything in particular, and he felt his fate unjust. But not doing anything in particular was no defence. Had not Mr. Selby pointed out that they were expected to work hard?

Baggy sat next to Racke, with Mellish on the other side.

Mr. Selby set the seven a stiff page of Virgil to prepare for construe, and turned his attention to his own Form, for whom the lesson was English history.

"Lucky you brought that crib, Crooke!" whispered Racke.

The precious pair shared the crib between them. By its aid they were able in twenty minutes or so to get what they thought a sufficient grasp of the page to pass muster. It was another matter whether Mr. Selby would share their opinion as to that.

A page of Virgil was a distinctly stiff proposition for Baggy Trimble, who hated Latin as he hated the truth. For a while he struggled with the lexicon. But a lexicon is of little use to a fellow whose notions as to declensions and conjugations are of the vaguest type; and, though Baggy, spurred on by fear of Mr. Selby, picked out a word here and there and arrived at the meaning of it, there was no single sentence in the whole task of which he had got at the meaning.

"Oh, dear!" he moaned, under his breath. "It's awful stuff! 'Rari nantes in gurgite vasto'—what on earth can the silly ass mean? 'Vasto' must be 'vast,' I suppose, and 'nantes' is something about swimming; but, I say, Racke, let's have a squint at that crib of yours. there's a good pal! I know jolly well it's a crib you've got there!"

Racke brought his heel viciously against Baggy's shin.

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" he hissed.

"Ow-yow!" wailed Baggy.

"Racke and Trimble, come here!" thundered Mr. Selby.

They went. Racke returned, scowling like a Hun, and Trimble howling like a dog whose tail had been trodden upon.

Mellish was working away quite hard. When Racke had partially got over the effects of the caning he noted this, and began drawing upon a sheet of exercise-paper a gross caricature of "the studious Percy." It did not bear any striking resemblance to Mellish, but the words underneath showed for whom it was meant. And the drawing amused Racke.

It failed to amuse Baggy, who merely snorted when he saw it. Baggy had given up P. Virgilius Maro as a bad job, and was looking around him for something to occupy his time.

He chanced to glance down, and saw a paper protruding from Racke's left-hand trouser pocket.

Racke was paying no heed to Baggy, being intent on his caricature. Baggy, who could be light-fingered at times, whisked out the paper without his knowing it had gone.

At first sight Baggy was disappointed. Four pages of an issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly" did not promise much entertainment of the kind he cared for.

But a second glance showed something. This was not part of any ordinary issue. It was the special Cardew number!

"My hat!" muttered Baggy to himself. "I thought those chaps had collared all these and burned them! Here's the bit about old Selby. I never had a chance to read all that. Wonder what Racke's doing with the thing?"

He settled down to read, with a kind of fearful joy, the bogus interview with the tyrant who stood within a dozen yards or so of him.

"But at a second eye-shot I perceived that the ruby glow proceeded from the nasal organ——"

Thus far Baggy had read when he looked up to see whether Mr. Selby's nose really was so red as to throw out a glow, and found the awful eyes of Mr. Selby upon him!

"Trimble!"

"Ye-ye-yes, sir!"

"Bring that paper to me at once!"

It would have been a relief to Baggy if the earth had opened at that moment to engulf him. But it didn't.

"He'll kill me when he sees it!" he thought.

Obtuse and clumsy as he was, Baggy could think and act quickly enough at times. When his own skin was in danger his brain sometimes got really going. It did so now.

He marched up to Mr. Selby with a paper in his hand. But that paper was not the guilty sheet he had been reading. It was Racke's caricature of Mellish, which the artist had thrust aside in haste when Mr. Selby's voice boomed out.

"You fat rotter!" hissed Racke, spotting Trimble's dodge just too late.

Then he saw that it might have been worse. The folded and dirty sheet from the "Weekly" lay on the floor. He recognised it at once, and his heart was in his mouth.

But he sat still and waited his chance. While Mr. Selby was glaring at Baggy with a glare that would have done credit to a basilisk Racke stooped, snatched up the sheet, and thrust it under the lid of the desk at which he sat. He did not dare to put it back in his pocket at the moment.

"Oh, so that is how you waste your time, Trimble?" roared Mr. Selby, snatching at the caricature. "And that is how you pour contempt upon another boy who—it surprises me extremely, but let credit be given where credit is due—shows signs of devotion to his studies! Hold out your hand!"

"I—I never—I—I mean, I didn't do it, sir! I was only looking at it!" wailed Baggy.

"For wasting your time to the extent of even glancing at this abominable scrawl you deserve a caning, Trimble; and you shall have your deserts while you are under my charge, whatever may be the case in the Fourth Form-room! Racke, you, I persume, are the artist—artist, forsooth! Come here!"

Racke had to go. It was no good denying the offence—Baggy had practically given him away. It was no good arguing—it never was any good arguing with Mr. Selby.

The master of the Third might be—and was—a dyspeptic. But he was no weakling. He laid on the cane with exceeding vigour.

But that was not all. When the blubbering Baggy and the raging Racke turned to go to their places, he called them back.

"You will stand here by the blackboard for the rest of the morning!" he snapped.

CHAPTER 9.
Lost!

"YOU idiot, Crooke! Why didn't you collar the thing?" asked Racke angrily.

"Idiot yourself! How should I imagine you'd be such an ass as to take

it into the Form-room, you chump? I didn't see you shove it into the desk."

"Well, we've got to get it back—that's a dead sure thing!"

"It's not goin' to be so easy," said Crooke gloomily.

Racke had been marched out of the Form-room with Mr. Selby's hand gripping his collar, at the end of the morning, Crooke being ordered to bring along his books. Outside, Mr. Selby had dismissed Racke with a cut of the cane across the back, and had returned to Trimble. The two had angered him excessively by their fidgeting.

It did not seem to occur to Mr. Selby that it was asking rather too much of human nature to demand from it the maintenance of an absolutely motionless upright position for the space of one hundred and fifty minutes!

"It's simply askin' for it to march in there an' open one of the little beasts' desks while the other little beasts are about," said Crooke, after a brief silence.

"Of course it is! I wasn't thinkin' of anythin' so dashed silly!" snarled Racke. "But I'm not goin' to let the dodge drop—don't you think that! There were a dozen of those rotten photos, all in separate envelopes, for me by post this mornin', an' there's a whole heap more by the second post! Confound that fellow Cardew!"

"Well, he's only wastin' his stamps," said Crooke.

"What does that matter to him? A few measly bobs! Besides, I'm bound to open the rotten things; they're in all sorts of different envelopes, with no two addresses in the same hand, an' I can't tell what may be among them."

"You're an ass to worry about them!" said Crooke bluntly. "But the other thing does matter. Some way or another we're bound to get it back, or there'll be trouble!"

The day had turned out wet after a fine early morning. The Third, who had no Common-room to gather in, were making a bear-garden of their Form-room. For Racke and Crooke to appear among them upon what would look like a raid on a desk would indeed be asking for it, in Crooke's eloquent phrase. And explanations were impossible.

One or the other hung about the passage till dinner, waiting a chance. But no chance presented itself; and Crooke, who had had the longest spell of sentry-go, was feeling very fed up.

"If it clears up this afternoon they'll leave the place empty," said Racke.

"If!" grunted Crooke, with a baleful look at the pouring rain.

It did not clear up, and sounds as of a cheerful menagerie came continually from the Third Form-room. Racke and Crooke gave up their sentry-go, and waited moodily on events.

Racke occupied his time by writing abusive pars for the fake issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly." All the doggedness of his nature was aroused, and he snarled at any suggestion from Crooke that the scheme might be given up.

Crooke gibed at his chum's efforts in the literary line. They were even worse, he said, than the caricature of Mellish—which was saying a lot. But in spite of all his jeers Racke kept on, and, after a while, Crooke was seized with the notion of trying his hand. A par in which Mr. Ratcliff was compared to a laughing hyæna pleased him greatly. Racke also condescended to approve of it, and thereafter they went on scribbling in comparative peacefulness and amity.

About half-past four a diversion occurred. The Cadet Corps came marching in. Everybody was wet, everybody was muddy, but everybody was cheerful.

"There may be a chance now," said Racke, and he bolted off to the Third Form-room.

Leggett and Willersby sat together before the fire. No one else was present. Leggett, who stuttered, was reading something to his chum.

"'Five letters t-t-to his n-n-name'—that's old Selby you k-k-know!—'and the s-s-same lul-lul-likewise to the designation and description of the Fuf-fuf-form over which he r-r-rules so Ca-ca-cainfully'—that's us, of course——"

"Oh, let me read it myself, Leg! You're so blessed slow!" pleaded Willersby.

"What have you got there?" demanded Racke, appearing suddenly.

He thought it would be best to carry matters with a high hand where that simple pair were concerned.

"That's no bizney of yours, Racke! You just clear out!" retorted Willersby defiantly.

Racke caught him by the ear. It was bad enough to be cheeked by Wally & Co., but to be defied by a youngster in his first term, who was hardly known by name to most of St. Jim's, was beyond bearing.

"Collar it, Crooke!" snapped Racke.

"Don't let him have it, Leg!" shrilled Willersby.

Crooke snatched at the paper. But Leggett dodged him. Crooke pursued. Leggett went on dodging.

"Rescue, Third!" he yelled, without a stammer.

Crooke shot out a foot and tripped him.

"Look out, you silly goat!" howled Racke. "The kid's in the fire!"

It was not quite as bad as that. But Leggett had fallen into the fender, and has hair was singeing. And something was in the fire—the sheet from which he had been reading!

"Ow—yow! I'm bu-bu-burning!" yelled Leggett dolefully.

Crooke yanked him up, shaking him savagely.

"You ain't hurt, confound you!" he hissed.

"I am! I'm bu-bu-burned ful-ful-frightfully! Rescue, Third!"

"Rescue, Third!" echoed Willersby.

The tramp of hurrying feet sounded in the passage, and a little army in soaked khaki rushed into the room.

"Go for the Shell bounders!" shouted Wally.

Before the rush of Wally and Levison minor, Frayne and Hobbs, Gibson and Manners minor and Harvey, the intruders went down like ninepins.

They writhed and struggled; but each moment added to the pile on top of them. For every arrival hurled himself at once on to the heap.

The soaking khaki steamed, for the heap of squirming humanity was dangerously close to the fire. Wally & Co. howled with triumph. Racke and Crooke howled with rage and pain.

"Gerroff, fatheads!" gasped Wally, at length. "You're choking me! It don't matter about these two cads; but I'm not jolly well going to be choked! Gerroff!"

A dozen or so of the fags got off. But there still remained a sufficient number to keep down the enemy.

"Now what's all this about?" asked Wally, in his most magisterial tones.

"These beastly Shellfish came in and chucked young Leggett on the fire!" said Willersby.

"Bit of a stretcher, that, ain't it, kid?" said Wally. "Leg ain't burned much."

"My hair's sus-sus-singed, anyway!" claimed the victim.

"So it is—about a ha'porth, I think. Well, they're here, and they haven't any right here. We don't allow Shellfish ——"

"Yes, they have, Wally," chuckled Frank Levison, from his seat on the chest of Crooke. "Don't you know that Racke and Crooke are Third Form now? They've been turned down!"

"Promoted, you mean, ass!" snapped Wally. "Well, I'm not going to have bullying in this Form. Get some ink, Harvey! Buttercup, scrape some ashes up—not too many hot ones!"

"You dare!" raved Racke.

"Oh, I dare!' returned Wally. "You'll see!"

Ink and ashes were brought to his call, and Leggett obligingly added a bottle of gum—belonging to Willersby.

"Grrrrrrugh!"

"Stoppit, you young fiends! I'll ——"

A stream of gum choked Racke's threat.

Grundy put his head in at the door. He was still in khaki. Even wet khaki had charms for Grundy; he would have worn his uniform day in and day out had he been allowed.

"What's all this row?" he asked authoritatively.

Wally drew himself up and saluted.

"Only Racke and Crooke being attended to for bullying, corporal," he said.

"Oh, all serene! You don't need any help from me," replied Corporal Grundy. "But don't make too much row."

"No, corporal," Wally answered, saluting again.

"Pleases the old ass, and don't hurt me," he explained, as the heavy tread of the great George Alfred died away down the passage. "And, after all, he ain't half a bad old sort. Let those rotters up, you chaps! I think that's enough."

Racke and Crooke had faces like Huns when they were suffered to get to their feet once more. But they went without trying to get their own back. Any attempt to do that would have been far too much in the nature of a forlorn hope for those two.

"Jimmy will be pretty sick about missing this," said Wally to Frank, as they went upstairs to change. "That's what comes of belonging to a dog-kennel like the New House!"

CHAPTER 10.
The Plot Put Through.

"THERE you are, Crooke!" said Racke triumphantly.

Crooke looked up.

"Mean to say you've got it done?" he asked, in surprise. "I thought you'd chucked the whole bizney."

He seized eagerly the papers Racke had flung on the table in front of him.

Nearly a week had passed since the last known scrap in existence—known to Racke and Crooke, that is—of the extra-special issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly" had met its end in the Third Form-room fire.

"Likely, after I'd taken so much trouble about it, wasn't it?" returned Racke. "You don't catch me chuckin' a thing like that, my son! An' you

know dashed well that I was at work on it after we lost those pages through your rotten clumsiness. What did you think I was doing that for?"

"Oh, just to comfort yourself a bit, I supposed!" Crooke said, grinning. "One way and another, we didn't get a fat lot of change out of findin' those pages. An' we could have done just as well without them. This is dashed hot stuff of yours, Aubrey—my hat, it is!"

Racke grinned.

It was hot stuff, beyond a doubt!

Cardew had let himself go when he perpetrated that issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly." He had written utterly reckless and exceedingly rude things.

But Racke had gone further than Cardew, having a much nastier mind. With all his faults, Cardew was a gentleman; and, with all his money, Racke was not and never would be one.

"Hot stuff!" repeated Crooke. "This par about Ratty being convicted as a boy for robbin' a missionary-box, an' spendin' three years in a reformatory, is the giddy limit!"

"I don't say he did that, you know, Crooke. I only ask whether the stories to that effect are true."

"Same thing! But it occurs to me, old chap, that if there should be a copy of the real thing in existence, after all, an' it's compared with this——"

"Well, what then?" asked Racke coolly.

"It will give the whole show away, that's all! There aren't two pars alike in that an' this."

"Who is goin' to compare them?"

"S'pose Ratty an' Selby do?"

"Cardew's number's up if they ever get a chance to!"

"But your number's——"

"Ours, you mean, Crooke!"

"Not likely! I——"

"Oh, don't get into a blue funk! There's no possibility of us bein' found out."

"There is, though, Racke! Suppose the Merry gang see both?"

"Well? What can they do?"

Crooke slapped his knee.

"Nothin', by gad! Nothin' in the wide, wide world! For if they started in to explain, Cardew's goose is cooked! You've got 'em in a cleft stick, Racke!" he cried. "I only hope they won't guess that it's us, though."

"I hope they will!"

"Eh? Are you potty?"

"I want them to guess! I know they can't prove it; but I'd like them to guess. Cardew may be sorry then that he ever played tricks on me!"

And Aubrey Racke gritted his teeth. The annoyance had not ceased even now. Not a post failed to bring Racke at least one photo; and the envelopes which enclosed them were addressed in different hands, and posted in different places, so that he could not well help opening them. Sometimes, by way of variety, an envelope would be slipped under the study door. That would get torn up without having been opened. But it did not matter, for these envelopes were what Cardew called "blanks"—they did not contain photos.

"How are you goin' to make sure that Ratty an' Selby see the thing?" inquired Crooke.

"Unless the postal arrangements break down, I think they are bound to," replied Racke drily.

Crooke looked at him with something like admiration.

"I didn't think you'd got it in you, Aubrey!" he said.

"Neither did Cardew, I fancy," answered Racke, with a malevolent grin.

"When will they get them?"

Racke looked at his watch.

"They ought to have them by this time—delivered by the evenin' post."

"I say, let's go down to the Common-room! Merry's safe to be sent for as soon as trouble begins."

"Right-ho! Just as well we should show up."

Most of the Shell and Fourth were in the Common-room when the precious pair entered. Prep was over.

Crooke wondered how long Racke had had those two copies of the faked "Weekly," and why he had not shown them before. He suspected that Racke had meant to force his hand by keeping them back.

But Crooke did not worry much about that. He was quite prepared to deny that he had known anything about the scheme. It was absurd, he thought, that Racke should make him out an equal partner in guilt. But, in Crooke's eyes, guilt began when discovery was made. It would be time enough then to deny everything.

"Been detained cleaning your teeth, Racke?" asked Kangaroo, as the two joined the crowd about the fire.

"No; sharpenin' them!" replied Racke, with a wolfish grin.

Just then Figgins came in—a rare visitor at that hour, when any exchange of visits between the two Houses was against rules, as far as junors were concerned.

"What's the matter, Figgy? Has old Spot kicked the bucket, or is your long face due to the prevailing scarcity of butter?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't be a funny ass!" snapped Figgins. "Tommy, old son, you're wanted. A row—a big row, or I'm no prophet! It's Ratty——"

"Well, I don't see why I should go," said Tom Merry coolly. "Ratty's not my Housemaster."

"There's no escaping it, old scout! Selby's with our Hun, and they look as near like Hindenburg and Tirpitz as they jolly well know how. It seems to be about the 'Weekly.' Anyway, they've got copies of it on the table in front of them."

"Not a word about either of them—not even a veiled jape—in the last number, or for ever so long, so that's all right," said Tom.

"But there was in a number not so very long ago. If they've got hold of that——"

"Don't look at me as if you thought I should faint, Figgins!" said Cardew. "If they have—well, this is where I throw in my hand, that's all. Rough luck after all these ages, but it can't be helped."

"If they have there's been foul play somewhere," said Talbot slowly.

"That's so. We reckoned every blessed copy of that thing had been destroyed," Manners said.

"Well, I suppose I shall have to go. If I don't return you'll know what's happened to me," said Tom. "Come along, Figgy!"

"Is this where you score, Racke?" they heard Cardew ask as they departed, and there was nothing in his mocking voice that betrayed any fear of consequences.

CHAPTER 11.
Judgment Suspended.

"WISH I could come in with you, Tommy," said Figgins, as the two hurried across the chilly quad together. "But it's no good. I was only sent to fetch you, because Ratty thought it would annoy me more than another chap, I fancy."

"I'm all right, in a way," Tom replied, "but I'm a bit worried about Cardew. If those old Huns really have got hold of a copy of that number, there's trouble coming for him."

"If they have, somebody's done it out of spite. Talbot was right there. And I think I can guess who."

"Don't get guessing, Figgy! The thing would be so black that we haven't any right even to suspect anyone of it without evidence."

"But Cardew was on to it," grunted Figgins, as they parted.

Tom entered Mr. Ratcliff's room with his chin up. He did not feel defiant, but he was not going to show fear, and, short of lying, he was resolved to do all that he could to screen the reckless Cardew.

If anything could have been more basilisk-like than the glare of Mr. Ratcliff, it was the glare of Mr. Selby. Both turned faces of concentrated fury upon Tom.

"You sent for me, sir," Tom said quietly.

He could see the paper which lay before Mr. Ratcliff, and at first glance it seemed to be unmistakably a copy of the famous "Weekly." If it was—and it must surely be—a copy of the suppressed issue, heavy trouble impended.

"Yes, I sent for you, Merry," said the New House master grimly.

"This abominable——"

"Kindly let me speak, Mr. Selby!"

"Do you expect me to maintain silence in face of this absolutely unparalleled outrage, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"As you have handed the matter over to me——"

"I have done nothing of the sort, and you know it. I merely came to you as a fellow-sufferer with me from these disgraceful and libellous attacks. I did not propose to relinquish my rights of judgment or——"

"Very well—very well, indeed!" snorted Mr. Ratcliff. "I would only point out to you, Mr. Selby, that our both speaking at once can merely make confusion."

"Then why talk so much? Why not let me speak?" snapped the master of the Third.

"I will do so, as you seem unable to recognise the claims of my superior position," said Mr. Ratcliff, very ungraciously.

"This is your paper, I believe, Merry?" thundered Mr. Selby. "What do you mean by printing in it scurrilous attacks upon me?"

"And upon me—me!" struck in Mr. Ratcliff.

"I haven't done anything of the sort," replied Tom.

The two masters stared at him in incredulity. And if that paper before them was Cardew's extra special number, their unbelief was fully justified, as was their anger.

Tom saw that, and he went warily. But, for the sake of the reckless dandy of the Fourth, whom he had come to look upon as his chum, he was bound to put up the best bluff he could. It would be easy to clear himself at Cardew's expense, but it would not be playing the game.

"But we have the most positive and unmistakable evidence of it here!" hooted Mr. Selby, thumping the paper with his fist, and in doing so giving Mr. Ratcliff's hand a shrewd knock.

"Really, Mr. Selby, you might be more careful!" said the New House master, in his most acid tones.

"Nonsense! I could not have hurt you. What have you to say, Merry?"

"Yes, Merry, what have you to say? I am a patient man. I have borne with much. But when it comes to a statement that three of the years of my boyhood were spent in a reformatory——"

"And that the railway company has requested me to give them my services during the war in order that I may be of use as a signal-post, my nose representing the red light and my right eye the green!" raved Mr. Selby.

"And that I am strongly suspected of being in communication with Germany with a view to bringing about a premature peace——"

"Poof! It is a matter of common knowledge that you have pacifist tendencies, Mr. Ratcliff, and from that to——"

"How dare you, Mr. Selby! However, you have been abused in even greater measure, for I cannot really believe you have advocated conscription for all over the tender age of nine in preference to the raising of the age limit to an extent that would make you liable——"

Tom's heart beat fast. He saw a distinct gleam of hope.

Nothing at all like any of those innendoes had appeared in Cardew's number. He had read every word of it, and he was sure of that.

So it could not be the perilous issue. And if it was not, Cardew and he and his staff—all concerned—were clear of guilt, and could prove their innocence. But he must be careful. A single slip might raise awkward queries.

"There hasn't been a word of anything like that in the 'Weekly,'" he said. "Of that I am quite certain."

"Do you mean to tell me that this is not the infamous sheet which you edit, forsooth?" snarled Mr. Ratcliff, flourishing the guilty journal. "It should have been suppressed long ago, in my opinion. But now, trading on long impunity, you have gone too far, and have sealed your own doom. What are you doing, boy?"

Tom had the paper in his hands. He had got it by something very like a grab, which might be rude, but was excusable, for it was absolutely necessary that he should see it.

"Hand that paper back at once!" roared Mr. Selby.

Tom hardly heard him. He was turning over the pages, his head almost swimming.

It was a very close imitation of his own paper—so close that at first he was bewildered. But as his eyes scanned paragraph after paragraph he saw that the matter was all new to him. There was an attempt at rewriting the Selby interview which had been quite the worst feature of the model; but it was a pretty poor attempt.

It showed Tom clearly that the perpetrator of this practical joke must have seen the special number, however.

Then he saw other signs. Mr. Tiper had never printed this thing. Tom had learned something about the differences in founts of type, and he saw that this work had been done by someone employing brevier and bourgeois founts of broader face than those Mr. Tiper used. The title was quite markedly different from the original.

"Hand that paper back!" repeated Mr. Selby hotly.

Tom handed it back then.

"I have never seen this before," he said. "Neither I nor any of my staff—the fellows who help me, I mean—had anything whatever to do with it. It is a practical joke by someone who has tried to make us responsible, that's all."

"What?" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Don't lie, boy!" howled Mr. Selby.

"I'm not in the habit of lying," Tom answered, "and it would be no use in a case such as this, for I know you will make full inquiries. They won't show us guilty, though, for we didn't do it. And I can tell you this. Mr. Tiper, who prints the 'Weekly' for us, had nothing to do with the printing of that thing."

"Now you are giving yourself away completely!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Quite so! Take note of that admission, Mr. Ratcliff. It may prove important. How can you possibly know that, Merry, unless you know who did print this—or—vile and atrocious sheet?"

"Simply by the difference in types, sir. I know Mr. Tiper's by this time. If you will let me fetch a copy of a genuine issue of——"

"No need—no need at all. I have one here," said Mr. Ratcliff sourly.

He brought one from a drawer. Tom wondered why he had treasured it. But that did not matter much.

The heads of the two masters were bent together over the true and the false "Weekly" sheets, when the New House page came in with a telegram on a salver.

"Sent over special from Wayland, sir," he said.

Mr. Ratcliff, with a snort of impatience, tore open the envelope.

"Dear me! I am called away at once, Mr. Selby!" he said. "It is worse than annoying at such a time. And I really do not know how long I may be absent. This matter must wait till my return. I must——"

"This matter will do nothing of the sort!" snapped the master of the Third.

"But it must. It is impossible that ——"

"Do you think I am an utter fool, Ratcliff? Am I not capable of——"

"Oh, dear me! You are really the most unreasonable man I ever met, Selby. The inquiry positively must wait. And if I am to get away by the late train from Wayland to-night, as I must do, it is necessary that I should see Dr. Holmes at once to make arrangements. You can go, Merry. Do you think I require your presence here while I am discussing my private affairs?"

"Stay here, Merry!" ordered Mr. Selby furiously.

But Tom went. It was Mr. Ratcliff's room, and he certainly did not want to hear any discussion of that gentleman's private affairs.

* * * *

There was a buzz of comment and questionings and excited speculation throughout the school when Tom had told his tale. It was no use, as he saw, to attempt to keep it secret. Everyone expected the biggest kind of a row next day.

But the next day Mr. Ratcliff was absent, and, while the Head took the Fifth in his stead, Wingate was taking the Third. Mr. Selby had gone under to a bad bilious attack, complicated by a chill.

And for fully a fortnight the New House master remained absent, and the Third saw nothing of their tyrant.

Racke had to wait for his revenge. Judgment was suspended, and the rest had to wait for the clearing up of the mystery. There was a lot of talk at first, but the tension subsided after a bit; and through it all the fellow who seemed less excited than any of those who might be dragged into the trouble was Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Kismet, as the cheery old Turks say," he remarked to Levison. "If it comes, it comes. If not, not. Anyway, where's the use of worryin'?"

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"FOES OF THE SCHOOL HOUSE!" by Martin Clifford.)

CADET NOTES.

THE minimum number required to entitle a Cadet Corps to recognition is 30 members. It is known as a company, though, correctly speaking, it is not a company at all, according to the definition of the Drill Book. The proper number of members to form a company is 250, and, technically speaking, it would be more correct to speak of this unit as a platoon, the numbers for which are 60. The word "company" came to be used before the present military organisation of the Army was set up. The reason such small numbers are permitted is to allow corps to be formed near where Cadets live so as to save them a long walk after a day's work.

* * * * * * *

Once a corps is formed, it must be submitted for approval to the County Territorial Association in the county where it is located. There must be a competent officer at the head, and ample proof that there are facilities to run it on proper military lines, so that the uniform of the British Army shall not be brought into bad repute.

* * * * * * *

The practice being followed in some counties, especially in Essex, is to form corps in connection with each Council School, so that boys, when they leave, can keep up their association with their old school. Besides, it is convenient to have the use of the playground and school-building for drill and training purposes. If boys have not got a corps in their neighbourhood, a good idea is to approach their old headmaster and get him to help to form a unit, with the school as its headquarters.

* * * * * * *

In pre-war times cricket and football were everything, and schools competed with each other in leagues. Now the whole idea is that every school should have attached to it its Old Boys' Cadet Corps, and that there should be competitions in bayonet-fighting, shooting, and sport. The Lord Roberts Shield is already given to Cadet Corps with the best shooting team. But this is for the whole country, and does not go far. Each town should have its local competition.

* * * * * * *

Cadets, however, will have to have a large horizon, even in their own school or the city in which they live. As the county is the area recognised by the War Office as the basis of Cadet organisation, Cadets must get hold of the county feeling. In the days of county cricket matches boys watched the welfare of their county team as if it was a matter of life or death. Now they will have to take the same interest in their County Cadet Brigade. During the last few weeks many of the county magnates have taken up their cadets with enthusiasm for the first time. This especially applies to the West Riding of Yorkshire.

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One of the greatest concessions made by the War Office is to permit Cadet Corps to be affiliated to their local Volunteer Battalion so as to have the advantage of their headquarters. Some of the Volunteer Battalions are showing practical interest in the junior branch by giving substantial financial assistance. For instance, the 17th Battalion County of London V. Regiment has given £100 to provide uniforms for a new Cadet Corps now being formed in Greenwich. The headquarters of the new unit is: The Gymnasium, Royal Hospital Schools, Greenwich.

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The Bristol Volunteers have set a very good example of taking the Cadets under their wing, and a big meeting was organised, with the Lord Mayor in the chair. This is as it should be, and the mayor of every city should always give the prestige of his patronage to the Cadets. Who knows but, following the story of Dick Whittington, the Cadet of to-day may be the lord mayor of to-morrow!

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The Potteries are not behind in Cadets, and Staffordshire, where they make the china and crockery, is busily forming new Cadet Units.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 2.—The Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

PERHAPS of all the St. Jim's fellows only Tom Merry is a more general favourite among readers than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Some of them, it is true, misunderstand him. They think him conceited and foolish. But these are usually either very young or very new readers.

If you cannot look below the surface you may easily mistake Gussy for a somewhat empty-headed fellow with a good deal of self-conceit, altogether too much concerned about his clothes, very easily spoofed, the butt of friend and foe alike, and inclined to brag about "feahful thwashin's" that he is quite unable to administer.

In all this there is a certain amount of truth. But look deeper!

D'Arcy is simple because he is so open and single-hearted and loyal, and because he is apt to credit with his own sincerity people who are as unlike him as anyone can be. He is not a very good judge of character; but he has the great gift of charity—he is ready to believe in others as long as they will let him. Is it a reproach to him that he is more honest and more honourable than most? I think not. Is it his fault if he is often taken in? Possibly, to some extent; but better the fool than the rogue, better the crystal clear nature that is easily deceived than cunning suspicion of everyone! There is a happy mean between the two; but Gussy is not the man for happy means—he tends rather to extremes.

He has a very good opinion of himself. Granted! So have many fellows who are not worthy to black his boots. Most boys nowadays seem to have excellent opinions of themselves; and some of them are justified—not by any means all. I think our Gussy is better justified than most.

His chums are continually chipping him—true! But if you cannot understand the spirit in which they do it, you miss much of the humour of the stories. It may surprise some of you to know that Blake and Herries and Digby—and the rest, too, all of them worth considering—have an even higher opinion of Gussy than he has of himself. For his opinion is based on qualities partly imaginary—such as tact and judgment and acuteness. But theirs is based on qualities that matter much more and that are real—on Gussy's pluck, Gussy's loyalty, Gussy's abounding generosity, Gussy's honour and chivalry.

Without Arthur Augustus the chums of Study No. 6 would find this world a greyer and a sadder and a duller one. If they lost him something would have gone out of their lives that could never be replaced. They are very good chums, the four of them; and they don't think about which of them is nearest and dearest to any of the others. But I am not at all sure that Gussy does not really come first with Blake and Herries and Digby alike, although they may not realise it.

They cannot live up to his standard of politeness. They do not try to. They certainly do not desire to live up to his standard of dress. For this is a real weakness Gussy's. No one needs to be quite so much concerned about trouser-creases and fancy waistcoats and ties and gloves as he is. But, after all, it is a very harmless weakness, though annoying to friends in a hurry. Take it as a hobby. One fellow's hobby may be the collection of various scraps of printed paper which he knows as more or less rare postage stamps; another may pore over long columns of figures which are interesting to him because they are cricket averages, but which the philatelic merchant would regard as the limit of dulness; one may keep white mice or rabbits, and another drown worms and call it fishing; and there is room in the world for them all. Gussy's hobby is "clobbah."

Everybody chips Arthur Augustus about his tact and judgment. It is a fact that he is generally vainest of these qualities when they are by no means in evidence as rulers of his words and deeds.

Yet he is no fool. He often does the right thing when his head and his heart run nicely in harness together. His notion of a "wound wobin" on Outram's behalf was a first-rate one. It is grossly unfair to think of it as a mere fluke because it was his idea. There was real judgment, too, in the dodge which had so much to do with bringing Ernest Levison to his bearings. Gussy saw—what others failed to see—that the one way in which the black sheep of the Fourth could be strongly influenced was through his minor. And he put Frank Levison up to the dodge of pretending to become a juvenile bold, bad Blade. And it worked—worked to admiration! Give him credit for that.

It is when that very tender heart of his runs away with his head that he goes farthest wrong. And when farthest wrong there is in what he does so queer an element of right that it often puts the men in authority, who understand him, in a quandary as to what shall be done with him. His worst escapades seem somehow to redound to his credit, looked at from one point of view.

And this can easily be explained. He never acts from selfish motives, from spite, or from hatred. Once, indeed, a prey to jealousy, he was unfair to Dick Brooke; but it was so utterly unlike him that one can only account for it by the excuse that jealousy is akin to madness. Can you pay a fellow a much higher compliment than to say that if he behaved like a cad he must have been temporarily insane?

Miss Sylvia Carr was the root of the trouble that time, though it was in no sense her fault. She is only one of the many fair maidens who have made fleeting conquest of the too, too susceptible heart of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was Miss Courtney, the niece of Dr. Holmes. She was six years or so older than Gussy, and engaged to a captain in the Army. She promised to be a sister to him. He must have quite a lot of sisters of this sort, though he has no sister by blood. There was Miss Lightfoot, the daughter of Professor Lightfoot, who had lodgings next to the draper's shop. Gussy used to go and make extensive purchases at the draper's because of the nearness of his inamorata; and he took music lessons from her father so as to get nearer still. And Miss Priscilla Fawcett had to be called in to talk him out of it in the long run. She did it by appealing to his generosity—an appeal that cannot fail to move Gussy. And there were Miss Bunn and the girl from the stores, and the circus lady, and others. But the best of all was when he fell deeply in love with "Ann Jane"—who was Kerr in disguise! A longer catalogue might be given; but these few samples should be enough. Gussy was always in dead earnest. He never had any thought of a mere flirtation. The lady in the case was the queen of his heart. Fortunately none of the attacks of heart trouble did him any real harm!

But chivalry, though the worship of fair ladies was an important part of it, meant much besides that; and Gussy is the soul of chivalry. No knight of the great old knightly times was more chivalrous than he—not Lancelot du Lake or Tristram, not Sir Walter Manny or Sir John Chandos, not Bayard or Du Guesclin—how the names ring to those who know what they mean! Chivalry meant care for the weak and the helpless, readiness to right wrongs. Who is readier to stand by anyone who has the crowd against him than Gussy? He stood by Valentine Outram, and little Joe Frayne, and many another. He cannot hear a tale of woe, true or false, without wanting to do something to relieve the burden.

And hospitality was no small part of chivalry. It was reckoned the act of a churl, unworthy of a knight, to refuse it, even in an undeserving case. Gussy cannot be rude even to Bunter or to Trimble under his own roof. "Noblesse oblige"—whatever they may be, it is for him to be himself, grudging not, suppressing his own wishes. When Crooke and Mellish suborned a shady loafer to enact the part of Gussy's Canadian cousin, Gussy bore with the loafer's vagaries, much as they distressed him. He was spoofed, of course; but the discredit lay with those who spoofed him—he came out of it well.

He is always being spoofed. It is dead easy to take him in. Gordon Gay did it when he transformed himself into "D'Arcy's Double." That was one of Gussy's doubles; the other was a mechanical image made by that inventive genius Bernard Glyn. Others have spoofed Gussy in almost every way imaginable; but he is still open to be spoofed again.

Of his many attempts to be and to do only one or two can be mentioned here. He became a detective once, with Skimmy as his assistant; and the innocent pair went in search of a kidnapped child, and Gussy was spoofed by a rascal, and put down a dry well. He took lessons from Bunter at half-a-guinea a lesson, and imagined himself a ventriloquist on the strength of them. He ran away from school, and was engaged as interpreter at a big hotel.

But he can do things. He can ride—not merely well, but finely. He won a steeplechase once. He can play footer—don't be deluded by the chaff of his chums into believing that it is a matter of indifference to them whether he is or is not in his place on the wing! Speedy and very accurate of kick, he is a real asset to his side there. In the cricket-field, too, he is valuable, despite all the chaff about ducks' eggs that he has to suffer. He has made at least one century, and has helped to win many a match. He can run as well as most—not as well as the best, maybe. There are fellows who can lick him, with the gloves or without; but there

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are more whom he can lick. He lacks the physical development of Tom Merry or Blake or Talbot—not to compare him with the burly Grundy or the muscular Kangaroo—but he would stand up to any of them without a tremor, and would cause some damage before he went under. He does not often fight, for his threats of "fealiful thwashin's" are not very serious, and his nature is very pacific.

He can be very obstinate at times. There have been rifts in the lute in Study No. 6, and Gussy has discarded Blake and Herries and Dig "for evah," has gone down to do his prep in the cold Form-room, and has pointedly avoided the chums of his heart when he met them. It has usually been through some wound to his sensitive pride, as when they were made to believe that he had been betting, and he was too proud even to inquire closely into what they were driving at. But all has come right again.

His obstinacy was shown when he insisted in going over to Rookwood to play with the team, though he had been detained by Mr. Selby. He was chased in a motor-car by that ill-tempered gentleman, and matters would have gone ill for him but that he rescued Mr. Selby from drowning at very considerable risk to himself. The Third Form-master was grateful at the time, though his gratitude did not last long.

Gussy's curious manner of talking is not affectation. It is due to an inability to sound the letter "r" properly. Many other people share this inability. This does not account for his "Bai Jove!" of course; but that is at least as fitting as "Crumbs!" or "My hat!" and distinctly preferable to "My only maiden aunt!"

We are often asked why his name is D'Arcy when his father is the Earl of Eastwood. But his father's family name is D'Arcy; the other is his title. The Duke of Norfolk's family name is Howard, and the Duke of Bedford's Russell. A title and a family name are different things. And another frequent question is as to why he is "The Honourable" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Well, the eldest son of an earl has the courtesy title of "Lord"—as is the case with Lord Conway, Gussy's elder brother; and the other sons are "Honourables"—see now?

Simple, yet no simpleton—proud, without a touch of snobbery—brave and tender-hearted—a very human boy, and yet a great gentleman, in the best sense of that word, which may mean so much or so little—so may Arthur Augustus D'Arcy be summed up!

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of Merton's eyes in a fight with Ponsonby. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon, and the rest of the nuts, and, without any real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He has been to the Cliff House hockey field to see his sister, Flap, but has not seen her. On the way he has fallen in with Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars, and they walk back together. Bunter accidentally lets out something. Gadsby gets Vavasour to go and meet the new post-girl, in order to intercept an expected letter from Tunstall to Flip.

(Now read on.)

The Fascinating Vavasour.

"IF you touch me you'll get a smack of the face!"

Vavasour desisted. The girl seemed to mean it. He found her difficult to understand.

"Do you know a fat chap at Greyfriars—name of Button, or something like that?"

"Bunter, you mean, I fancy. Yaas, I know him."

"Friend of yours?"

"Absolutely not!"

"Ah, that's right! Well, next time you see him give him a punch on the nose for me. I don't like the fat beast!"

"Has he been annoying you, Gwennie?"

"He has that!"

"Then I'll slay him—absolutely!"

The girl giggled.

"Yes, do!" she said. "You might get a good price for him from a pork butcher; and we'll go halves. Here's the letters. Hope you're to be trusted with them safely. So-long, old top!"

It was not a sentimental leave-taking. But Miss Gittins was not really sentimental at all. She liked being admired, and she loved chocolates—that was all.

She turned and smiled at Vav from the safe distance of a chain or so. Vav kissed his hand, and she kissed hers in return.

Then she swung off with a stride that carried her along at a man's pace.

Vavasour watched till she was out of sight. Vav was smitten, but, vain as he was, he could not quite feel sure that Miss Gittins was also smitten.

He looked down at the letters she had handed over.

One was for Langley. To Vav's practised eye it looked like a bookie's missive, though the eyes of authority at Highcliffe would not have detected that. Another was for Reedman of the Fifth; that looked like a letter from his mother. The third was for Frank Courtenay, and the address was in the handwriting of Harry Wharton. Something about footer, probably, Vav thought.

There were two for Derwent. The first was addressed in the hand of an elderly lady, and came from some remote village in the Midlands. That had no interest for Gadsby's confederate.

But the other was plainly from Tunstall.

Vavasour drew a long, deep breath.

He was more than half afraid. This tampering with fellows' letters was a dashed dangerous thing, he thought. Should he let it go?

It would hardly be fair to the Gittins girl to collar it, either. She had her own notions of fair play, larky as she was. She was never spiteful. It was easy enough to believe that, though it would not appear to have been a family trait, judging from her brother and her uncle, and what she had said of her mother.

She had impressed Vavasour. Probably the impression would not have lasted long, in any case. But it was given no chance.

"Got it?" asked the voice of Gadsby.

Gadsby had come up unperceived. His chum turned with a start.

"You scared me, Gaddy—absolutely!" he said.

"You're dashed easily scared!" growled Gadsby. "But you always were, for that matter. Here, I'll have that!"

The fifth letter was whipped out of Vav's hand. Gadsby's eyes gleamed with a lurid light.

"Here, I say! I don't know so much about that!" protested Vavasour. "It ain't quite the cheese, Gaddy, y'know."

"Why, you silly idiot, you put me up to it!" roared Gadsby.

"Did I? Can't remember it. I say, Gaddy——"

"Oh, shut it! I'm not goin' to dashed well crawl out now; an' I'm not goin' to let you, either!"

Gadsby was looking his ugliest. He was by far the stronger of the two.

Sullkily, uneasily, Vavasour gave way.

"Well, I didn't give it to you. You collared it," he said weakly.

"Don't be a worm!" rapped out Gadsby.

He moved off towards the school. Vavasour followed.

"There's Derwent comin'," said Gadsby. "Wait for the cad an' give him that other letter you've got for him. Tell him any dashed lie you like. You can tell 'em, Vav, y'know."

"I don't see waitin' for him. He may smell a rat."

"Not he! He's as unsuspicious as they make 'em—a dashed softy about anythin' like this! I'm off, anyway."

And Gadsby went, whistling an air from "Maritana," with Tunstall's letter to Flip in his pocket.

Tunstall's Letter.

"HERE'S a letter for you, Derwent," said Vavasour, as Flip came up.

"Hallo! Turned postman, Vavasour?" asked Flip.

But he took the letter eagerly, not waiting for an answer to his joking inquiry.

His face fell as he saw the handwriting of his aunt. Vavasour noted that, and it made him feel uncomfortable for the moment.

He hastened to speak, lest Flip should ask him whether that was the only letter. If he had not already been well aware that it was for the other Flip was waiting so impatiently, he would have known now.

"Not exactly," he said, with a nervous giggle. "It isn't a postman now, you know, Derwent; it's a post-girl. Good-lookin' girl, too—absolutely!"

Flip thrust his aunt's unopened letter into his pocket. He did not want Vavasour to see how disappointed he was. He rather resented the interest Vav and Gaddy showed in the question whether he would hear from Tunstall or not.

"Same girl Bunter's been talking about, I suppose?" he said. "Licks me what asses some of you chaps make of yourselves over girls."

"Oh, Bunter's been talkin', has he?" said Vavasour. "If you see your friend Bunter again, Derwent, you might tell the rotter from me that he will get his dashed head punched next time I see him, by gad!"

Flip stared in surprise. Vav as a fighting-man rather tickled him.

But it did not need anything great in the way of fighting-men to give Billy Bunter a hiding, of course.

"Bunter's no friend of mine," Flip said. "Can't think how those Greyfriars fellows stick the chap! What's he been doing?"

"Oh, never mind! I'm goin' to punch his dashed head, that's all."

"But that won't be all if he shows fight. There's some weight there, you know, Vav."

"I don't care! It's up to me to give him a lickin', an' I mean to do it—absolutely! He's been insultin' Miss Gittins!"

"That's the post-girl, ain't it? He told me he asked her for a kiss. I suppose she told you?"

"Yaas; an' I'm not goin' to have it!"

"Well, Bunter didn't get it, as far as I can make out, so you're on a level footin' so far. Cheer up, Vav! I believe you can give that fat ass a start and a licking when it comes to the spoony game. Ha, ha!"

"He isn't dashed well goin' to insult the girl!" Vavasour said doggedly.

"He ought to be stopped at that. It's pretty thick asking a post-girl for kisses, I reckon!"

Vavasour scowled at that. Flip could guess that Bunter was not the only one. But he refrained from saying so. It was not worth while to quarrel with Vav.

He hoped that when—if ever—it came to trial of battle between the Greyfriars porpoise and the Highcliffe dandy, he would have the luck to be there, though.

In spite of his worry, the very thought of that dread conflict amused him.

They passed in through the gates together. Flip went to his lonely study, and Vavasour to No. 1, where he found Gadsby.

"It's a bit thick about that letter, Gaddy, y'know," he said weakly.

"You fat-headed chump! Shut the door before you begin to talk secrets!" snarled Gadsby, shutting it himself.

He took a letter from his pocket.

"Here, read it!" he said, and he thrust it at Vav.

That bold youth shrank away.

"I don't want to, by gad!" he said. "I'd rather have nothin' to do with it, absolutely!"

"Why, you put me up to the dodge!" snorted Gadsby. "It was you who handed the letter over to me! You can't dashed well slink out now, Vav. Besides, it's interestin'."

Vavasour took the letter. His hand shook, and his lips twittered. He was afraid; and also, deep down in his heart, he had a feeling that Derment was a nicer fellow, and by far a better chum, than Gadsby. He did not like Flip; he hated him in a weak way. But he saw that. Perhaps Miss Gwendolen Gittins, who was never spiteful, and did not believe in doing things that were not straight, had helped him to see it.

It was on the tip of his tongue to say: "Let's chuck it, Gaddy!"

But the words were not spoken. The lurid gleam in Gadsby's eyes prevented that. Gadsby was more in earnest in his plotting against Philip Derwent than he had ever been about anything in his life before.

Vavasour read the letter, and Gadsby stood watching him as he read.

"Dear old chap"—thus it ran.—"Awfully bucked to hear from you. I won't deny that it did seem both to Algy and me that you were giving us the chuck for Pon, and old Algy took it rather hard that you didn't turn up to the fight. But we understand better now; and, after all, it was too much to expect, perhaps, that you should throw Pon over at once.

"Things aren't so bad as they might be. The specialist does not say Algy will lose his sight; but he is confoundedly cautious about what he does say. I fancy he believes that it will all come right again, but won't plunge on it. There is serious injury, and he says he has never seen the like of it from the same cause; but perhaps he hasn't seen much in the pugilistic way.

"Algy has to be jolly careful; and so have we all, for that matter. He is blindfolded; but what's it matter about being in the dark for a week or two, as long as you escape being in the dark for the rest of your life? He keeps pretty cheerful, on the whole.

"He doesn't bear any grudge against Ponsonby for the accident; it was an accident, and that settles the matter. But neither he nor this child feels like ever being chummy with Pon again. I won't say too much about that, for it looks like telling you to make up your mind what you will do before we come back—if we ever do come back. And if Algy does not, I sha'n't—that's flat! I think I should get my people to send me to St. Jim's. That's only if a thing happens that would make Highcliffe too dashed miserable a place for me, though—and I'm not going to believe it will happen till it does!

"See here, Flip, can't you go to the old bird and screw a week-end leave out of him? He would grant it, I feel sure; and we should be so pleased to see you. I mean Merton's mater and the girls, as well as us two. It was Mrs. Merton who suggested it. Molly Gray has written to the kids here about you and your sister; there were never such nice people before or since, according to the red-headed kid! Let me know at once, if you can; there isn't any too much time.

"Thank the fellows for their messages—all of them, though I fancy some mean them more than others. Thank Courtenay and De Courcy particularly. Courtenay wrote to Algy, and was ever so decent. And the Greyfriars chaps, too; we have heard from Wharton, and he sends all sorts of nice messages. And, above all, the girls at Cliff House. It was Phyllis who wrote; but she said she was writing for them all, and Clara and Marjorie and Flap had all scribbled messages for themselves on the last page. I will write some day; but this has rather taken it out of me—longest letter I ever wrote—and there's lots to do, reading the war news to old Algy, and keeping up the pecker of the girls and their mother. Algy hasn't a father, you know; and, of course, that makes it harder for Mrs. Merton, who is one of the best.

"Yours ever, old chap,

"F. G. TUNSTALL."

It was the sort of letter that Flip would have given anything to get—Vavasour knew that. Vavasour's heart was a dried-up and small organ, but that letter touched it for the moment.

"I say, y'know, Gaddy——"

"Put it away, you utter idiot, an' shut up! Here's Pon comin'!" hissed Gadsby.

Vavasour thrust the letter into his pocket as Ponsonby entered.

"Hallo! What are you two plottin' now, by gad?" asked Pon.

"Nothin'," answered Gadsby readily. Vavasour could not have spoken; his mouth was too dry. "We were only thinkin' about a game of banker to-night."

"Banker's off," said Pon. "Flippy won't play it. Says there's nothin' in it; an', of course, it really is pure chance."

"Depends upon how it's played, by gad!" Pon looked narrowly at Gadsby.

"Are you suggestin' that I should help to rig the game against Derwent?" he asked, with a touch of hauteur.

"No. He ain't the only pebble on the beach, I suppose—is he?" replied Gadsby sulkily. "We might get someone else in, an' your dear pal could help us to skin them. I don't mind divvyin' up with him, as long as he don't get any of my share."

"You idiot! Don't you know him better than that?" snapped Pon.

Vavasour quietly strolled out. He did not feel safe in Pon's neighbourhood with that letter in his pocket. It struck him as queer that he should be feeling like that about Pon, the arch-plotter. But he knew that this particular plot would not please Pon just then, though he did not see why it should not.

He was going to destroy the letter, but something made him hold his hand. He went upstairs to the dormitory, and hid the thing at the bottom of his box, under many fancy waistcoats and well-creased trousers.

Meanwhile, Gadsby and Pon had not missed him.

"If you mean, don't I know that he isn't really one of us, an' never will be, I do!" sneered Gadsby. "What you're at licks me, Pon! I know you've a fancy for the chap's sister, but that's settled for good an' all now. She hates the sight of you after what you've done to Merton. Not so dashed sure that she didn't hate the sight of you before that; but, anyway, that's settled it!"

"Have I asked you for your advice, dash you?" snarled Pon.

"No. It's a free gift, old top!"

"Keep it till it's asked for! You're gettin' a bit above yourself, Gaddy, let me tell you!"

And Pon strode out and slammed the door.

Ten minutes or so later Gadsby met Vavasour.

"Hand over that letter, Vav!" he said. "It will be safer to burn the thing."

"I've done that already," answered Vav.

Gadsby looked at him searchingly.

"Sure?" he said.

But Vavasour was no novice at lying. There were not many things he was as expert in as that.

"Absolutely!" he replied.

Rivals Meet.

"I'VE seen that chap Chiker again, Vav!" said Gadsby the next afternoon.

"You're welcome, absolutely. But I'm dashed if I want to see him!"

Mr. Chiker was not a gentleman who appealed much to the dandy. In the footerfield Mr. Chiker was a dashing and brutal back, as Flip Derwent, Frank Courtenay, and Rupert de Courcy had all learned by experience. Out of it he was a well-paid munition worker, with a craze for gambling that swallowed up most of his money, hail-fellow-well-met, with all the shady rascals of the Courtfield neighbourhood, and the uncle of the fair Miss Gittins and her brother Gehazi.

"Don't be a dashed donkey! He put me up to somethin'."

"I ain't sure that you need puttin' up to anythin', Gaddy. You're up to a dashed sight too much now!"

"Rats! This wasn't anythin' in the plottin' line. Chiker knows of a new place at Courtfield where a fellow can get a game, an' the chance of winnin' a whole pot of chink! Better class than that show we went to once—where we saw him, you know."

"By gad, it's got to be if I'm go there!" said Vavasour. But his eyes gleamed. The gambling spirit was strong in him. "That was no class at all—beastly low! But this can't be anythin' if they'll have Chiker there!"

"Don't talk dashed rot! The cad's got money to burn. Of course they'll have him! You're spoonin' with that niece of his. It's hardly the thing to bar the uncle."

Vavasour grinned feebly. His spooning had not made much headway that morning. Miss Gittins had thanked him very nicely for a big box of chocolates, but seemed to have taken them on the deferred payment system. And there had been no chance to press for payment. Langley and Beauchamp had hove in sight, and Vav had deemed it prudent to bolt.

"Where did you see him, Gaddy?" he asked.

"At the Cross Keys. I slipped in there to clear up a matter with Hawke. Awful shark that chap is!"

"What was the munition-worker—chap that's doin' every bit as much as the bounders in the trenches, accordin' to some of the wise men—doin' at the Cross Keys between twelve an' one in the daytime?"

"Off work with a bad hand or somethin'. Any way, he's off work for a bit. Hawke's in this Courtfield bizney."

"Then it's sure to be a dashed swizzle—absolutely!"

"Sure to be a bit that way in any case, Vav," replied Gadsby calmly. "These fellows ain't in it for the good of their health, any more than we are when we get hold of somethin' soft."

"Worst of it is we shall be somethin' soft for them," remarked Vavasour, with unusual acumen.

"Not if I know it! See here, Vav, not a word to Pon; but how would you like to stand in with the bank?"

Vavasour reflected. He had no moral objection. But it seemed to him too good to be true. At roulette and all kindred games, whatever is doubtful, this much is sure—the bank will win! One hears tales of breaking the bank, but the breakage seems to be one that can be mended with a speed that the cleverest of our surgeons cannot emulate with a broken limb. When the bank is said to be broken, all that the phase really implies that those in charge think it advisable to knock off for the time being. They cannot lose everything on their system. The would-be breaker of the bank can, whatever his system may be in theory.

Gadsby was in funds. Probably Mr. Hawke had discovered this, and was playing his fish discreetly. As for Vavasour, he was seldom really hard-up, though he often pretended to be.

"I suppose it means puttin' in capital, Gaddy?" he said.

"Well, somethin' of that sort. You can't expect a dividend without any investment, old scout."

"Oh, no, absolutely! But I don't trust Hawke much, y'know. An' there would be the merry dickens of a row if it came out!"

"How could it come out, fathead? They're bound to keep thinks dark, for their own sakes, ain't they?"

"Yaas. So are we. If they boned our chink we couldn't go for them, y'know."

Vavasour seemed more wideawake than usual. But Gadsby was not surprised at that. Vav had a way of waking up when anyone proposed to touch his pocket.

"Well, think it over," said Gadsby. "I haven't got all the details yet, of course. But it looks to me like quite a good thing; an' anyway I mean to keep in touch with Chiker.

"Oh, by gad, there's that cad Bunter! I've got something important to say to him."

Down the road, his fat face full of discontent, came William George Bunter.

William George had had a trying day. He had chanced his prep the night before, in spite of Peter Todd's warnings; and Mr. Quelch had put him up first to construe. Even if Bunter had done his prep, the result would not have been glorious, for it was as much as Bunter could do to distinguish a noun from a verb in Latin. But the result had been to show that he knew no more about the passage he should have studied the night before than he did about Browning's "Sordello" or the Japanese Samurai, both of which he would probably have taken for foreign foods if anyone had mentioned them to him.

Mr. Quelch had given him three across each hand. He had also told him to write out the passage ten times, with a translation each time.

Then Wingate had caught him listening at a study door, and had treated him to a dose of ashplant. And Peter Todd had convicted him of the theft of a box of sardines, and had used the cricket-stump. That was all before dinner. Since dinner Bunter had fallen foul in succession of the Famous Five, George Bulstrode, and Mauly.

It seemed to him the very irony of fate that his lazy lordship, who so seldom troubled about anything, should have roused himself to give Bunter a licking. Delarey and Vivian were responsible; they had put it to Mauly that it was his duty to lick Bunter for ransacking his desk. They had refused to act as deputies for Mauly, too, and had kept him up to the mark by staying to witness the execution, as they called it.

(To be continued next week.)