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No. 560. Vol. 12.

THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE SHELL!

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

THIRD FORM v. SHELL!

2-11-18

A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE SHELL!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
The Knight Grundy!

"THERE she is, by gad!" said Crooke.

Racke looked round quickly, and saw Cousin Ethel coming across the quad.

Classes had been over about half an hour, and nearly everyone was at footer. But the two black sheep of the Shell had hung about ever since twelve as though waiting for someone.

They were, in fact, waiting for someone; but it was not for anyone who wanted to see them.

It was for Ethel Cleveland they waited.

Only twenty-four hours earlier they had been ducked in the fountain by the fags of the Third, led by Wally D'Arcy, for annoying her. That should have been a warning to them. But it had not seemed to be one.

Racke was full of spite against the girl who had snubbed him, as he held, and had listened to slander of him from Manners, as he believed. He contended that he had a right to know what Manners had said to her, as he could get no satisfaction on the subject from Manners himself.

But he did not expect now that she would tell him anything. All he wanted to do was to annoy her by forcing his company upon her.

Crooke disliked Cousin Ethel as heartily as Racke did. She knew something of his dealings with Talbot. Perhaps Marie Rivers had told her. Certainly Talbot had not. However that may have been, she could not conceal her dislike of Crooke. She would never speak to him if it could be avoided.

Now, on the face of it, the two black sheep were doing nothing that was wrong when they bade Cousin Ethel "Good-morning!" They were St. Jim's fellows; she was a visitor at the school, and a close friend of many of the fellows in the Shell and Fourth. They could not exactly be considered as outside the pale—in theory, at least.

But in practice they were so considered, and they knew it. That was what galled them. They could even persuade themselves that they were being unfairly treated, though certainly Cousin Ethel had a right to choose her own friends.

They advanced towards her now, smiling.

She glanced round. But there was no one in sight but those two at the moment.

"Good-mornin', Miss Cleveland!" said Racke in his sweetest tones.

"Beautiful day, isn't it?" Crooke said.

She bowed to them; but she did not answer. She quickened her steps, but they ranged alongside.

Then she stopped.

"I don't know whether you consider that I owe you an apology——"

So Racke began, but she cut him short.

"That is for you to judge. All that I know is that I do not care to receive an apology from either of you, and that I would really rather you should not speak to me!"

Her fresh young voice rang out bravely; but there was a troubled note in it for all that. She hated to have to speak like this to any fellow at St. Jim's.

Racke stole another glance round. He saw nobody, and that made him bolder.

"Excuse my plain speakin', Miss Cleveland, but I really think you are a bit rough on me, by gad! It isn't pleasant for any fellow to know that he has been slandered to a lady by——"

"No one has slandered you to me, Racke, and you have no right to assume that I would listen to slander! I——"

"Good-morning, Miss Cleveland!"

It was George Alfred Grundy who spoke.

Racke and Crooke stared at him in bewilderment. He seemed to them to have sprung suddenly from nowhere.

But Grundy had only come from behind one of the big elms in the quad.

"Nice morning for a walk, May I come with you, Miss Cleveland?" asked the bold Grundy, before the girl had time to get out a word.

Racke and Crooke stared still harder. No one had ever thought of Grundy as a likely sort of person to get spoony about a girl. Yet at the moment there seemed no other way of accounting for his proposal.

The girl's ready smile gave answer before her words.

She did not know Grundy nearly so well as she knew many fellows; but she liked him well enough, and she was very glad to see him just then.

"Certainly, if you care to, Grundy," she said graciously.

The great George Alfred turned to Racke and Crooke. He spoke but one word; but a long speech might have said less.

For that one word was:

"Scat!"

It was not an elegant way of expressing what he meant. Cousin Ethel must have seen that, for a roguish smile dimpled her cheeks. But it did express what he meant, and that was the main thing.

Racke and Crooke were bowled out. They could not force their company upon Ethel Cleveland in the presence of Grundy, and with that burly youth quite ready to force them to obey his command if they showed any signs of demurring.

Grundy may not have been capable of starting a rough-and-tumble before a young lady; but Racke and Crooke were by no means certain of that, whereas they were quite certain that any possible trouble of the kind would be much more troublesome to them than to the burly George Alfred.

So they stood and watched him walk off with his prize. Crooke's mouth gaped, and there was an evil glint in the eyes of Racke.

"By gad! Who'd ever have thought it?" gasped Crooke. "Grundy spoonin' a girl!"

"Rats! It's nothing' of the sort, you idiot!" snapped Racke.

"Well, what else——"

"To annoy us, that's what else—an' out of that silly, rotten notion that the Cleveland minx is superior clay, not to be breathed upon by outsiders like you an' me!" answered Racke fiercely.

He was not far wrong. Grundy would not have gone out of his way to annoy those two unless they had annoyed him. He despised them too much for that. But it was chivalry—though one would hardly have expected that in Grundy—which had stirred him.

"Oh, by gad! The knight Grundy!" sneered Crooke.

Grundy would have been very angry indeed had he heard that. Grundy was down on sentiment and romance and all that kind of thing. He often told his chum Gunn, who had at times a tendency that way, that it was awful rot. Nevertheless, it was the true knightly spirit that animated Grundy.

It was so far from being spooniness that he really felt rather like a fish out of water when he found himself outside the gates in Cousin Ethel's company. The same effect of something like dumbness might have been produced by quite a different cause. Fellows in love have been known to find themselves tongue-tied in the presence of the enchantress.

But Grundy was not at all in love. He liked Ethel Cleveland very much, and he was not going to have her worried by cads—that was all.

Having freed her from them, he did not know in the least what to say to her.

She saw that he was not at ease. A glance at his rugged face was enough to tell that.

"It really is a lovely morning for October, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes, beastly—I mean, no, of course not—you're quite right—beautiful time of year for the weather, isn't it?" floundered Grundy.

"Of course, you are looking forward, like all of us, to the Head's birthday?" said Ethel, after a slight pause, during which Grundy was wondering what on earth a fellow could say to a girl.

"Oh, yes, no end! He ain't half a bad old stick!" replied Grundy.

That seemed an easy topic. But he saw at once that he had not said quite the right thing. Ethel Cleveland was not so silly as to be shocked by hearing Dr. Holmes spoken of as "an old stick," but the expression did not exactly please her.

Grundy had meant no harm. He had some respect for the Head, and he would have had much more if the Head had appeared to entertain a proper respect for George Alfred Grundy. But in nearly every interview they had had the Head had made it all too evident that he looked upon the said George Alfred Grundy as little better than a fool. These interviews had generally followed one of Grundy's attempts to set the little world of St. Jim's right on his own lines; and possibly there was some reason for Dr. Holmes' opinion that Grundy was a well-meaning ass!

"You are giving him a present, I suppose?" said Ethel. That seemed a ques-

tion that even Grundy could answer without getting tangled up.

"Oh, yes, everybody's doing that, you know. Wilkins and Gunn and I are giving him one from the three of us. They share my study, you know—Wilkins and Gunn do. Not bad chaps, though rather asses about some things. I say, Miss Cleveland, I might turn back now, I think. You won't be annoyed again!"

It was scarcely the way it should have been put. Grundy ought not to have said anything about her having been annoyed. But it was in keeping with that emphatic "Scat!" And, remembering that, Cousin Ethel rather liked it than otherwise.

"Not unless you wish to, Grundy," she said, graciously, wondering, though, whether it would not be kinder to him to let him go.

"Oh! You mean you really don't mind walking with me?" returned Grundy, as if surprised. For once he was quite modest.

"I shall be pleased!" said Cousin Ethel.

Grundy beamed, and the awkwardness fell from him. He began to talk to her just as if she were a new boy chum, telling her about what asses Wilkins and Gunn were at times, when they set up themselves against his better judgment, but what decent fellows they were, on the whole—for Grundy was really fond of Gunn and Wilkins, though he seldom gave any sign of it—and what a great man he himself was, and how he was misjudged and undervalued by his Form, and so on.

Cousin Ethel listened. Some of what he said amused her, of course. Some of it rather saddened her; it seemed a pity that a fellow so good-hearted as Grundy should be so silly and wrong-headed. But none of it made her feel that she disliked him. It would have taken a good deal to do that after his knightly deed!

CHAPTER 2.
Arthur Augustus in Arms.

"HE, he, he! Rather rich, I call it! Fancy old Grundy getting gone on Cousin Ethel!"

It was Baggy Trimble who spoke those words, with the cackling laugh that often made fellows feel disposed to take him by the throat and choke him.

A dozen juniors looked round at once. George Figgins was not there, for it was in the junior Common-room of the School House that Baggy addressed all whom it might or might not concern on the subject of Grundy's alleged spooniness. If Figgins had been there his face would have flamed, and Baggy's ears might have smarted. They were in danger of that even as it was.

"You fat lout——" began Tom Merry wrathfully.

"Pway let me speak, Tom Mewwy!" put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth. "Miss Cleveland—I am quite suah that she would not caah to heah Twimble speak of her as 'Cousin Ethel'—is my welative, you know, an' I considah——"

"Right-ho, Gussy! But don't get claiming any monopoly of Cousin Ethel! You're her cousin, it's true; but lots of us are her chums, and proud of it, old top!"

"Quite wight, Tom Mewwy! But I have pweviously warned Twimble that I will not have him takin' libahties with her name. What do you mean by it, Twimble, you fat wuffian!"

"Well, I never said she was gone on him, did I?" whined Baggy, trying to get behind Levison and Clive and Cardew, who stood together hard by—a

Grundy Chips In!
(See Chapter 2.)

move with which the three did not appear to be in sympathy, as they moved whenever Baggy did, leaving the way of Gussy open to him.

"You had bettah not, bai Jove!"

"I'm not going to. I don't suppose she is, though you can never tell what sort of a chap a girl will take a fancy to."

"You can tell the sort that no decent girl ever will, though, and that's your sort, Baggy," said Monty Lowther. "Feminine taste is queer at times, but never so queer as all that!"

"Oh, you don't know, Lowther! I could tell you things that would open your eyes," smirked the egregious Baggy.

"You will be good enough to tell me, Twimble, what you mean by your extwemely impertinent speech just now," said Arthur Augustus, glaring upon the fat junior through his monocle.

"Oh, not much, really! But they went for a long walk together this morning. I know that!"

Everyone was surprised. It did not sound like Grundy, and Baggy was known to be no great respecter of the truth. But there was a good deal of confidence in the way in which he made this statement.

"Weally, Twimble, I must say——"

"'Tain't my fault what Grundy does, is it?" You fellows are always so down on a chap. I never said Cousin Ethel was——"

"Miss Cleveland, if you please, Twimble, unless you wish me to administah to you a feahful——"

"Oh, Miss Cleveland, if you'd rather have it that way! I don't care. She's welcome to take up with Grundy if she likes, I'm sure! I don't care twopence about her!"

"I thought she was dear to you to the extent of a shilling at least," said Lowther.

"She ain't, then! Cardew made me—I mean, I put it in the Red Cross box. 'Tain't likely I'd keep money forced on me by a girl, is it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everyone but Arthur Augustus joined in the roar of laughter.

All the Shell and Fourth knew about the shilling that Baggy had wheedled out of Cousin Ethel by a quite fictitious story of the present he wanted to buy for the Head. They all knew, too, how Cardew had dealt with him in the matter.

Any of them who had fallen into such an open trap as that would have had a good deal of chaff to stand from the rest. But it was different in the case of Cousin Ethel. No one thought of chaffing her, or even of telling her the story. But there were a couple of dozen or more of them who had made up their minds that Baggy should not even get near the girl again if they could prevent it.

It was because he was too angry that Arthur Augustus did not laugh.

"Cease this wibald mirth!" he said severely. "I am supwised at you all! Twimble, if you pwevawicate any longah, you will awouse my angah extwemely. What is this widic yarn of yours about Gwundy and my cousin?"

"What's Baggy been saying about old Grundy?" asked George Wilkins, who had just come in.

"Says he's spoony on Miss Cleveland," replied Kerruish of the Fourth.

"Rats! He only went with her——"

"Then he did go for a walk with her?" chipped in Blake.

"Well, I suppose you'd call it so. He only——"

"There you are, D'Arcy!" bellowed Baggy.

"Shut up, you ugly fat lout!" snapped Wilkins. "I'll tell you chaps why Grundy did it! Racke and Crooke were annoying her again, the rotters! Old Grundy only chipped in to——"

"What?" roared Tom Merry.

"There's nothing to blame Grundy for in that, is there?" asked Wilkins, with

wide-open eyes. "I think it was jolly decent of him, especially as the old ass doesn't a bit know what to say to a girl! I know—I've seen him with my sisters, and with Gunny's sister Maude. He's like a fish out of water!"

"Chump! It's Racke and Crooke they're blaming—not old Grundy!" said Kangaroo. "My hat! It's going to be warm for those two, I guess!"

Wilkins blinked. Half the fellows in the Common-room had started to make for the door during his speech, though he had failed to observe it at first.

Tom Merry and Talbot, Manners and Lowther, Levison and Clive, Blake and D'Arcy, Herries and Digby, Cardew and Durrance, Roylance and Lumley-Lumley—all these were among them. There were others, too, fellows who knew comparatively little of Cousin Ethel, but who knew Racke and Crooke only too well. The general feeling against the two black sheep in this matter was very strong indeed.

"Here, you can come back!" called Wilkins. "It didn't go far enough to earn them a ragging—not that I've any objection to the rotters being ragged. But Grundy told them to scat, and they scatted before they'd had the chance to say twenty words!"

The throng at the door broke up, and the fellows who had been in it gathered round Wilkins again. This was decidedly interesting—a new development in Grundy, and one with which they had much more sympathy than they had with most of his new ideas.

"He told me all about it himself," went on Wilkins. "Of course, he didn't admit that he was more than half-scared when he found out he had kind of let himself in for taking Miss Cleveland for a walk—made out he liked it. Well, I dare say he did, in a way — anybody would. But, for all his cast-iron cheek about most things, old Grundy would never have had the nerve to offer if it hadn't been that he saw she wanted those two rotters sent to the right-about."

"Tom," said Talbot, "my opinion is that Grundy deserves a vote of thanks."

"Hear, hear!" said Bernard Glyn heartily.

"That's my notion, too," said Kangaroo. "For once in his silly-ass existence the old chump has certainly done the right thing at the right time."

"Grundy's an old brick," said Tom, never behindhand in generosity. "But what do those two rotters deserve?"

"What they're getting, and will get," replied Talbot quietly—"the contempt of every decent fellow! They're trading on the fact that we seem to intend keeping our hands off them for the present. They fancy that because old Manners here doesn't care to meet Racke they are safe from any of us."

"They had better not trade on it, then!" snapped Jack Blake. "I've nothing to say about Manners; that's his bizney. But they're not jolly well safe from us, I can tell you that!"

"Where's Gustavus?" asked Digby.

But Arthur Augustus had gone. He was the one member of the crowd at the door who had not turned back when Wilkins called to them.

With his heart burning hotly within him he had gone to seek out Racke and Crooke.

And as it chanced he met them in the Shell passage.

"Wait a moment, you two wottahs!" he said fiercely. "I have a word to say to you!"

Crooke would have passed on, but Racke stopped. Racke was much quicker in mind than Crooke. It occurred to him at once that a row with Arthur Augustus might suit his book.

"I don't stand that kind of language from anyone, by gad!" he snarled. "You had better be careful, D'Arcy!"

"An' you had bettah be caahful, Wacke! I have just heard somethin' about you for which I intend to call you to stwict account!"

"Oh, come on, Aubrey!" said Crooke. "What's the use of takin' any dashed notice of that silly tailor's dummy?"

"Vewy well, Cwooke, vewy well indeed! I will settle with you when I have given Wacke the feahful thwashin' that——"

"Oh! Do the legion of the loyal allow you to fight, D'Arcy?" sneered Racke.

"What do you mean, you low wottah?"

"The legion of your fair cousin's admirers, of course. They wouldn't let Manners, y'know. But if you are on a different footin' I am quite prepared to take you on."

Crooke stared. He had never known Racke to continue in a warlike mood so long before.

Arthur Augustus was very much of the same calibre as Manners. If the two had fought either might have won. And Manners was generally considered very much more than a match for Aubrey Racke.

Then Crooke saw Racke's drift, and a cunning smile flickered over his face as the guileless Gussy fairly walked into the net spread for him.

"You will be good enough to keep my cousin's name out of this, Wacke!" he said hotly.

"Oh, all right! I don't mind that in the least. What's your complaint against me?"

"You an' Crooke have had the wotten cheek an' the w'etched bad mannahs to persecute my cousin——"

Gussy stopped short. It became plain to him that he could not bring his charge against those two without talking about Cousin Ethel. And, angry as he was, he did not want to do that. His chivalrous feelings rebelled against the notion of a row in which she would inevitably be mixed up when it came to be discussed, as it was certain to be.

It was true that the matter was even then being talked of in the Common-room. But that was not quite the same as two fellows fighting about Cousin Ethel. Gussy understood in a flash now why Manners had refused to meet Racke.

"I rather thought we had agreed to keep your cousin's name out of this, D'Arcy," said Racke coolly. "But go on! I don't mind, if you don't. Neither Crooke nor I mind answerin' for anythin' we're supposed to have done. We've done nothin' to be ashamed of!"

"Unless wishin' a girl a polite 'Goodmornin'' is objectionable!" said Crooke, with a shrug of the shoulders and a leering grin.

"You wottahs! I——"

"Here, hold on, Gussy! What's all this about?" demanded Tom Merry, coming up with quite a crowd behind him.

CHAPTER 3.
Not to Be Done!

"I HAVE a mattah to settle with Wacke an' Cwooke, Tom Mewwy!" replied Arthur Augustus loftily.

"It's not worth while, old top! Leave the rotters——"

"Oh, but I think this really needs settlin', by gad!" said Racke, with his most unpleasant smile. "It is a bit rough on me, I think, that the visit of the queen of hearts—which seems such good value for the rest of you—should only mean trouble for me, isn't it?"

"We've had enough of that sort of thing, Racke, and we're not standing any more," said Talbot, quietly but very meaningly.

"What sort of thing?" snarled Racke.

"This continual attempt to drag Miss Cleveland's name into squabbles that really don't concern her at all, of course!"

"I didn't mention her name, though I suppose my lips wouldn't soil it, by gad!"

"I'm not so dashed sure of that, d'ye know!" said Cardew.

Racke glared at him ferociously. No one could plant a barb in Racke's fairly thick skin more easily than Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"On second thoughts, I will not pwess the mattah furthah," said Arthur Augustus, cooling down somewhat. "I will only warn Wacke an' Cwooke that a wepetition of——"

"Hold on a moment! I suppose I've a right to be heard?" broke in Racke. "There's a dead set bein' made against me, which doesn't say much for the sense of fair play you fellows make out you have. To begin with, Manners slanders me to Miss Cleveland."

"That's a lie!" snapped Manners. "I said no more than half a dozen words, and they were true!"

"Keep my cousin's name out of it!" said Gussy angrily.

"Very well! Manners, having slandered me to—er—D'Arcy's cousin—no offence in that, I hope?—funks fightin' me."

Racke paused, and gave Manners a look that made his blood boil. It was hard to bear that direct charge of cowardice. But Manners bore it, though his nails made red marks in his palms as he clenched his hands in wrath.

He might not have been able to bear it but that he knew well no one there believed he was funking Racke—not even Racke himself. It was difficult for them to understand; but at worst they did not believe that.

"We'll let that pass. Sooner or later, I take it, Manners will screw himself up to fightin' pitch, an' try to take it out of me for what I've said. But that's not all. Along comes D'Arcy, breathing fire an' slaughter on account of some supposed insult to his fair cousin——"

"Be vewy caahful, Wacke!"

"By myself an' Crooke. We deny that we've insulted the young lady, or said a word to her that wasn't polite an' proper. An' now, after tongue-lashin' us, D'Arcy withdraws, on Merry's order!"

"You've forgotten one of your grievances, Racke!" said Ernest Levison sardonically.

"What's that?"

"Why, the ducking you and Crooke got from the fags because you didn't know that it was uncivil to bar a lady's path and force her to talk to you when she didn't choose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke's face went livid.

"It's a lie!" he roared. "Miss Cleveland——"

"I warn you again to be caahful, Wacke!"

Arthur Augustus had lost his momentary access of coolness. With each speech of Racke's he had grown hotter. Now he pushed close up to him, and his right hand went up as if to take him by the throat.

He did not actually touch him, for Racke was beforehand with him.

Racke's fist drove straight into his face.

There was a gasp of surprise and disgust. No one had expected such hardihood from Racke. His new combative spirit was carrying him very far.

Gussy staggered back.

Next instant Racke was on the floor, with Herries on top of him.

George Herries was sometimes thought

rather slow; but there had been no slowness about him then.

"That was a foul blow!" he roared.

"Rats!" gasped Racke. "The fellow was tryin' to get hold of my throat!"

"Get up, you cowardly lout!" growled Crooke, who saw that the action of Herries was not approved by quite everyone in the crowd.

Racke had struck first, but it would be easy for him to argue that he had only struck in self-defence. And Herries had certainly butted into a quarrel not his own.

Yet the sympathies of the majority were with Herries.

"Bai Jove! Get up, Hewwies, an' let me attend to the wottah!" roared Gussy, with his right hand to a bruised and swollen cheek.

"Better get up, Herries, old chap," said Talbot, laying a hand gently on Herries' shoulder. "This isn't the sort of thing that can be settled that way."

"I don't see why not," Herries growled. "I'm willing to settle it this minute, if Racke's on!"

"Well, you can't fight Racke with both of your knees on his waistcoat, old top!" said Blake.

"There does seem some objection to starting a battle with one combatant in that position," agreed Lowther. "But it is, after all, purely a sentimental one—depends entirely upon how one feels about it. And, as the other combatant's Racke, I don't feel that I have any personal objection."

"That's the sort of fair play you fellows brag about, by gad!" snarled Crooke.

But Herries was getting up.

Arthur Augustus seized him by the arm. The prompt action of Herries had touched Gussy, but had not wholly pleased him.

"You are not goin' to fight Wacke, Hewwies, deah boy!" he said. "It is my place to do that."

"Neither of you is going to do it!" said Tom Merry firmly.

Blake and Herries and Dig looked at him with surprise, and Gussy in speechless wrath Even these four did not know why Manners had refused to meet Racke.

"I say, you know, Tommy——" began Blake.

"You'll agree when—— But never mind that now," broke in Tom.

"It's all very well for you Shellfish to manage your own affairs," growled Herries. "That's not to say we are going to let you manage ours."

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus, recovering his momentarily lost speech. "I am goin' to thwash Wacke. I have nothin' to say about what Mannahs may choose to do or wefwain fwom doin', an' my wespect for Mannahs continues unabated. But I cannot allow Tom Mewwy or any othah Shell fellow to be the wulah of my conduct, an' I——"

"You're not going to fight Racke!" Tom said firmly.

"I say, Tommy, this won't do, you know!" said Blake warmly.

"I should think not! Why, the rotter punched Gustavus in the face!" added Dig.

"You fellows haven't started a Racke Protection Society, have you?" inquired Cardew blandly.

"Shut up, you idiot!" snapped Levison, one of the few there who had an inkling of what was behind all this.

"Are you ready, D'Arcy?" sneered Racke.

"Yaas, bai Jove!"

"Come along to the gym, then!"

But Tom Merry's hand fell on Gussy's shoulder, holding him back.

The swell of the Fourth struggled under it, and Blake and Herries and Digby began to look wrathful. There seemed likely to be civil war unless explanations were forthcoming.

Then Tom whispered a word or two in Gussy's ear, and Talbot spoke quietly to Blake. Blake nodded to Herries and Dig, and the four moved away with the Terrible Three and Talbot.

Tom turned.

"Will you come along, too, Levison?" he asked. "Oh, and Clive and Cardew, too. No good separating you three."

The chums from No. 9 followed. It occurred to Manners that he would rather have had Dick Roylance taken into the secret than any one of those three. Perhaps Talbot might have preferred Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn. But neither Talbot nor Manners said anything. Tom was leader, and at a time like this they were not going to buck against him.

"Then you're a funk, D'Arcy, as well as Manners!" howled Racke after them.

"Chuck that rot, Racke!" snapped Kangaroo. "Neither of them funks you, I'll go bail for that. Clear off, gentlemen! The entertainment's over, and the bell for classes will be going in five minutes!"

"Which may account for Racke's willingness to go to the gym at once," said Lumley-Lumley. "He knew he couldn't stay there long."

"Five minutes would be quite as long as Racke would stand up to D'Arcy, I fancy," said Clifton Dane.

Tom Merry and those he had summoned had disappeared into Study No. 10, and the excitement was obviously over for the time being, though it hardly seemed possible that the affair could be at an end.

The crowd melted away. But when all the rest had gone one still remained. That one was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 4.

Why It Was Not to Be Done!

THE gathering in No. 10 looked at one another. There was doubt in the faces of most of the Fourth-Formers, and of the Shell fellows present none seemed in a hurry to begin the explanation that had to be made.

"Will you talk to them, Talbot?" said Tom.

"I think it had better be you, old man," replied Talbot.

"Right-ho, if you say so. You chaps won't expect any eloquence from me, I know. Not sure that you won't condemn what I'm going to say as being a bit soft."

"It's only your heart, Thomas," put in Cardew. "We know that's soft."

"But I don't think you'll say I'm wrong when I've got through. Figgy ought to be here, really. But I don't think he'd be keen on taking on the chinwag. The situation is just this. At present it's quite out of the question that any fellow who is among Cousin Ethel's special chums should give those cads what they are spoiling for."

"I see!" said Cardew. "Then it's for us three to attend to it. I begin to perceive why we were called in, by gad!"

But Levison looked doubtful. There had been a time when Levison had certainly not been among Cousin Ethel's chums, when her feeling towards him had been very much what her feeling towards Racke now was, and when he had deserved her dislike. But even then she had been nicer to him than he had had any claim to expect; and now she had quickly seen the marked change in him, and had gone out of her way to show that she regarded him as a friend. And little Frank was a great favourite of hers, which fact also had its influence with Levison.

He was ready enough to fight in her cause, but he did not want to be chosen her champion as one outside her immediate circle.

"You're all wrong, Cardew!" said Tom. "It's just because I fancied you fellows might be butting in that I wanted you here. You've got to stand in with us, that's all about it."

"The inference is so extremely flatterin' that I cannot argue the point," replied Cardew. "To be considered as one of the royal circle around Queen Ethel I would forgo more than merely punchin' the nose of the dear Racke, though I yearn to do that."

"Ass!" growled Levison. But though the manner in which Cardew had put it would have been impossible to anyone else there, except Lowther, perhaps, he voiced pretty fairly what both Clive and Levison felt. As for the four chums from No. 6, their fealty to Cousin Ethel was not to be doubted.

"Figgins & Co. are in this, then?" said Clive.

Tom nodded.

"Anyone else?"

"Only the fellows here."

"I'm blessed if I can see that we're in it yet!" growled Blake. "I don't know what Tommy's driving at."

"You can't guess why Manners refused to fight Racke?" asked Tom.

"Blessed if I can! I know there was some jolly good reason, as it was old Manners, but I don't know what it was."

"Thanks, Blake," said Manners, with a friendly nod.

"No need for that. If we fellows don't understand each other by this time we ought to. But I'm blessed if I understand Tommy!"

"You're going to," said Tom. "Cousin Ethel asked Manners not to."

"My hat!"

"Whew!"

"Well, I don't see how you could after that," said Herries. "But she hasn't asked me or Gustavus, so that's all right."

"But it's not," answered Tom quietly. "She has, practically."

"How do you make that out?" asked Dig.

"She has a double objection to anything of the sort. She hates any of her chums being mixed up in a fight just now, when the Head's birthday's so near. And, though she doesn't say much about that—for she's leaving it to us, you know, and that puts us on our honour about it—she also hates having her name bandied about as if she were the cause of a fight."

"Which is exactly what that ruffian Racke wants!" said Cardew.

"I begin to see," Blake said slowly.

Dig's face showed plainly that he also began to see; and Levison and Clive did not lag behind in apprehension. But Herries and Arthur Augustus still looked doubtful.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, Cousin Ethel is a deah good gal; but in mattahs of this kind feminine judgment is vewy apt to go astway. You know vewy well that no one would have a gweatah objection than I should to her bein' mixed up in anythin' of the sort—I should wegard it as disgwaceful But I weally do not see——"

"That's because you have your monocle in your eye, Gussy," Lowther put in. "I've often noticed that you can see better without it. Take it out!"

"Wats, Lowthah! This is not a time for wibald jestin'. My suggestion is simplay this, Tom Mewwy. In the old duellin' days——"

"Call that a suggestion?" inquired Lowther. "It sounds rather more like the beginning of a story."

"And we haven't time for stories just now," said Talbot. "The bell will go in a moment."

"In the old duellin' days," persisted Arthur Augustus, "a fellow who wanted to fight anothah fellow about a lady, but wouldn't have her name dwagged into it

simplay put an affwont upon the othah fellow—thwew a glass of wine in his face, or somethin' of that sort. Then they had their duel——"

"And everyone asked what woman was at the bottom of it all!" said Levison sardonically. "They didn't hide much that way."

"We haven't any wine!" said Digby, with a grin.

"A bottle of ink would do quite as well," said Gussy seriously.

"Ink wouldn't prevent the talk," Clive said. "It's that we've got to avoid most."

"If the dear Racke an' the beloved Crooke will let us," remarked Cardew.

"There's one thing no argument will get round," said Talbot. "If we are to do as Cousin Ethel wishes, none of us must row with those cads. And I, for one, am going to accept her wishes as commands."

That was just the kind of sentiment to go straight home to the impulsive, chivalrous heart of Arthur Augustus.

"Bwavo, Talbot!" he said. "Hewwies, deah boy, we must not lag behind the west. But did Cousin Ethel weally ask you herself to keep off Wacke, Mannahs?"

"She spoke to Figgy, and asked him to speak to me," replied Manners.

"Oh!"

There had been a time when Arthur Augustus was furiously jealous of Figgins, and even now his countenance clouded for a moment. But it cleared again directly.

"Not time for much more jaw," said Tom. "The bell's late in going as it is. Do you fellows all agree to keep this dark, and to keep off those rotters?"

"For ever an' ever?" demanded Cardew.

"My hat, no! Only till Cousin Ethel has gone."

"For this relief, much thanks!" breathed Cardew.

And the faces of most of those present showed that they also were thinking of vengeance when that time came.

"I agree," said Levison, with a very grave face. "But there's one point you seem to me to have overlooked, Merry."

"What's that?"

"Well, there are enough of us in the secret—fourteen or so, as I make it. I'm not asking for any more to be let into it, though I feel——" Levison hesitated, and his face flushed. "Oh, dash it all, I feel it an honour I should be taken in——"

"Same here!" said Cardew. "I speak also for Clive, whose emotions have overcome him!"

"Silly chump!" snapped Clive.

"But there aren't enough in it to make sure of its being all carried out as you want it. There are lots of fellows besides us quite ready to go for anyone who dares to say a word against Cousin Ethel."

"That's so," admitted Tom. "But——"

"Noble, Dane, Glyn," said Talbot. "Gore, too, I'm sure."

"Roylance would," said Manners.

"Don't forget my Cousin George," put in Cardew. "No end chivalrous chap, my Cousin George."

"And Julian and that crowd," said Clive. "They are up in arms about it."

"Old Grundy, too," said Manners.

"Well, you couldn't take Grundy into a secret," objected Lowther. "His bullbellow would give it away at a hundred yards."

"Do not sneeah at Gwunday, Lowthah! I have the vewy highest wespect for Gwunday, an' I mean to tell him so," said Arthur Augustus reprovingly.

"Won't he be pleased!" murmured Cardew.

Tom looked rather worried.

"Well, we can't exactly take half the two Forms into our confidence," he said. "Though I'd trust any of those fellows all serene, including Grundy. There's one thing, though—if any of them do get on to Racke and Crooke, it won't be quite the same as any of us doing it."

"No; it won't be half so satisfying!" snapped Herries.

"Still, there will be some measure of satisfaction in it," remarked Cardew. "Anythin' calculated to make things unpleasant for Racke an' Crooke is all to the good."

"It's not—it isn't what we want just now," said Tom. "But only let the rotters wait! We'll make them sit up later on!"

The bell went at that moment—some minutes late. The council broke up. But as Tom made his way to his desk in the Shell Form-room he was wondering whether Levison would prove a true prophet. Levison was shrewd about matters of this sort—no bad judge of human nature. And others had agreed with him. Tom himself could think of other fellows besides those mentioned who were likely enough to take up the cudgels if Racke and Crooke went too far. There was Lumley-Lumley; he had a very high regard for Cousin Ethel. There were Redfern & Co.; those three could always be counted on for the decent thing.

But he never thought of the fags; and in the event, though Levison was right, it was one of the fag tribe who was to make Aubrey Racke smart most for his caddish behaviour.

Baggy Trimble had heard most of the conversation—through the keyhole, which was Baggy's favourite manner of gathering information. But approaching footsteps had warned him away before the discussion aroused by Levison's speech had begun.

"This ought to be worth something to Racke and Crooke!" muttered Baggy to himself, as he made tracks. "Puts them safe. They can do as they jolly well like, knowing that they won't get it in the neck for it! Yah! I guess Cardew would wish he hadn't meddled with me if he knew!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Views of Grundy.

AFTERNOON classes had come and gone, and the fine morning had been succeeded by a wretched afternoon. The rain was pouring down; the old elms in the quad dripped with it; they sky was one mass of leaden grey.

There was no temptation for anyone to stir out, and Grundy & Co. were at home in Study No. 3 on the Shell passage.

Grundy sat in the armchair, wrapped in profound meditation. Gunn was conning over his part in the revue. Wilkins, who had a thinking part in that, was busy with lines.

Suddenly Grundy looked up and spoke.

"Wilky," he said, "you never were much of a fighting-man, were you?"

"What on earth are you maundering about now, you potty chump?" growled Wilkins, looking up.

"Can't you answer a plain question, you idiot?" roared Grundy.

"I don't see why I should answer potty questions, anyway," replied Wilkins. And his pen began to scratch again.

"Stop that! Listen to me! Don't you know that I never talk idly?" roared the magnificent George Alfred.

"Brrrr!" was the only reply Wilkins seemed to consider suitable to that query.

"Are you going to answer me, George Wilkins?"

"Oh, let me get on with these lines, you burbling chump! I've got to show them up to Linton to-morrow."

Gunn looked up now.

"Hang it all, Grundy, that is silly rot, you know," he said. "You don't want Wilky to fight you, do you? He ain't up to your weight, anyway."

"I should jolly well think not, William Gunn! Why should I want to fight him, even if he was?"

"Well, it sounded rather like it."

"Ass! Burbling maniac! It's Racke he's to fight, of course. Or it might be Crooke But I think it's more likely to be Racke. He's at the bottom of it all."

"Wilky, my old hero, you're going to fight Racke!" said Gunn, with a grin.

Wilkins had been trying again to get on with his lines. But he pushed the paper away from him as he looked up now, and snorted:

"I'm jolly well not!"

"Eh?"

Grundy seemed quite surprised.

Wilkins and Gunn were not particularly surprised. They were used to weird things from Grundy. But this really was rather specially weird.

"I tell you I'm not! I don't say I bar fighting altogether. A chap has to fight sometimes. But I'm not quarrelsome, and I don't have to very often," said Wilkins. "I've no use for Racke or Crooke; but as long as they leave me alone I'm not going to scrap with them. Why should I?"

"I don't think Gunny's quite hefty enough," said Grundy thoughtfully. "He would do for Scrope or Clampe, if they came into it, or Mellish or Chowle; but they're hardly likely to."

"See here, you cackling ass," said Gunn hotly. "I'm no more quarrelsome than Wilky is, and I'll own that he's a bit above my mark with the gloves; but I'm jolly well not going to be put down to the level of a worm like Mellish!"

"That's right," said Grundy approvingly. "I thought I could strike a spark of spirit out of one or the other of you. I don't see why you shouldn't take on Racke, as Wilky funks him."

"You silly idiot! You boss-eyed baboon!" roared Wilkins. "Who says I funk Racke?"

A distinct spark of spirit seemed to have been struck out of George Wilkins now. He arose, and he looked very like making an onslaught on his great chief.

"Nobody, if you say you don't," replied Grundy mildly.

"Well, I don't, then; you ought to know that!" Wilkins growled.

"But what for? What's the sense of it?" inquired Gunn.

"Those two rotters aren't up to my weight," said Grundy.

"Oh! Have they challenged you? I don't see why you shouldn't let 'em have their way, if they have. You could lick the two of them together, old top," said Wilkins.

"Of course they haven't challenged me, chump! They wouldn't dare!" hooted Grundy.

"Then I can't make out what all this is about," Gunn said, bewildered. "I thought perhaps one of them had, and that you'd conscientious objections, same as Manners. Can't make Manners out, but I know it's not funk. Then they'd go about saying you funked them, same as Racke does about Manners. There's D'Arcy, too, now, they say. Well, I ain't sure I shouldn't go for either of them if I heard him call you a funk, Grundy. Must keep up the credit of the study, you know."

"I'd do that, too," said Wilkins. "Grundy's a silly ass, but he ain't a funk!"

"You blithering idiots! You potty maniacs! You raving lunatics!" roared

Grundy. "You haven't the sense of a blessed baby in arms!"

This was not exactly illuminating, and Wilkins and Gunn only stared the harder. Always ready to fight, Grundy had not hitherto shown any craze for promoting combats between other fellows.

"If you'd only tell us what it's all about," said Gunn. "We can't get on to it."

"Don't you know what happened this morning?" snapped Grundy.

"You went for a walk with Miss Cleveland. Is that any reason why we should fight with Racke and Crooke?" asked Wilkins.

"Ass! I didn't go for a walk with her—at least, I didn't go for a walk with her just to go for a walk with her. Is that clear enough for you?"

"Clear as mud!" grinned Wilkins.

But Gunn understood now, and the grin faded from his face. Gunn was a bookish fellow, with a tendency to romance, which he usually took a good deal of trouble to hide. He was by long odds the most sensitive and the most sentimental of the three.

"I see now," he said. "You stepped in between her and those cads, and you think it may want doing again. They won't fight you, because they haven't the pluck to stand up to you; but it may be necessary for someone to take them on. I'm in that all right."

Grundy gave Gunn a clap on the back that nearly took the wind out of him.

"Good man!" he said warmly.

"So am I on," Wilkins growled. "I should have been from the first if only that silly ass had made it plain what he was gassing about. I don't know that Miss Cleveland has ever taken any special notice of me—or of you, Gunny—or of old Grundy, till to-day, for that matter. But that's not the thing. Any decent chap would stand up for a ripping girl like that, even if he'd never spoken to her."

Grundy beamed upon them both. The fire of chivalry was still alight in Study No. 3, it was plain, though perhaps the Shell generally would hardly have thought of seeking it there.

Tap!

"Oh, come in!" howled Grundy. "Mind, not a word about this, you two!"

Arthur Augustus came in. He was dressed in a manner that suggested doing honour to an occasion of importance, and he had his monocle in his eye. He had also a beaming smile upon his noble face, and he advanced upon Grundy with a slim right hand extended.

"Shake, Gwunday!" he said heartily.

"What for?" growled Grundy.

"Because of what you did this mornin', deah boy; that's what for!"

"I don't remember doing anything that was any particular bizney of yours," replied Grundy, still withholding his hand.

"Weally, my deah fellow, did you not pwotect my Cousin Ethel fwom——"

"Oh, that!" said Grundy. "Well, I don't mind shaking hands with you, if you want me to. But you needn't imagine for a moment that I did it for your sake."

The smile on Gussy's face was fading, and the grip of his hand was somewhat less hearty than it would have been a few seconds earlier. He felt that Grundy was hardly taking this in quite the proper spirit.

"I congwatulate you on your weadiness to do the wight thing at the wight time, Gwunday," he said. "Pewwaps it was wathah more than most of us would have expected of you; but——"

"What?" hooted Grundy.

"I wepeat that it was possibly wathah——"

"Don't repeat it, then, if you want to get out of this study without a thick ear!"

"Weally, Gwunday——"

"Don't be such a sickening, patronising ass! After all, it's only an accident that Miss Cleveland's your cousin, and not——"

"I will say no more, Gwunday. I am onlay sowwy that you cannot take a fwiendly advance in a fwiendly spiwit," said Arthur Augustus, between sorrow and anger.

And he turned to go.

"Look here, D'Arcy, you ain't a bad little ass!" said Grundy, with great condescension. "But you fellows don't know how to handle an affair of this sort. Better leave it to me!"

Gussy did not reply to that. He did not even seem to realise that Grundy meant to be complimentary, for he banged the door behind him as he went out.

CHAPTER 6.

The Attitude of Roylance.

"HE, he, he! I can tell you chaps something you'd like to hear!"

It was Baggy Trimble who spoke, looking into Study No. 7, where Aubrey Racke and George Gerald Crooke sat together, each with a cigarette in full blast.

"Not dashed well likely!" growled Crooke.

"But I can—I can, really! You'll say so when you hear it."

"May as well listen to the fat cad, Gerry," yawned Racke. "There's nothin' else much doin', as Scrope hasn't come along for that little game."

"Hand over one of those fags, then," said Baggy importantly.

Crooke, with a grunt, gave the fat junior a cigarette, and Baggy lighted up with a very knowing look on his podgy face.

"You chaps stand on velvet, though you don't know it," he said, puffing away.

"What do you mean, you fat idiot?" asked Crooke politely.

"If you'd heard what I heard in Tom Merry's study just now——"

"Where were you to hear it? Under the table?" gibed Racke.

"No, I wasn't, then! I was at the keyhole—I mean, I happened to be passing. Of course, I'd scorn——"

"Don't tell us you'd scorn any dirty trick, for we sha'n't believe you, by gad!" snarled Crooke.

"Well, you wouldn't, either! Here, stoppit! Wharrer doing? Yow!"

"Leave him alone, Crooke!" said Racke irritably. "I fancy the image has somethin' worth tellin', for once in a way."

And it appeared that the image had, for he departed ten minutes later the richer by a pound note. As Racke, the bestower of the note, was notoriously close-fisted, there could be no possible doubt that the news had pleased him.

Crooke did not seem so pleased. He was hardly as deeply involved as Racke, and two or three recent events had caused him to see the red light.

"We shall never get such a chance as this again, by gad!" said Racke, rubbing his hands together. "They'll stick to what they say, y'know, an' see what that means! Merry, Talbot, Manners, Lowther, Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, Cardew, Levison, Clive, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn—not that Wynn matters—all pledged on honour to keep their hands off us!"

"Plenty left, though," growled Crooke.

"Nobody that matters much, I fancy."

"What about Noble, Grundy, Redfern——"

"Oh, they won't meddle! Why should they?"

"Grundy meddled this mornin', didn't he? An' I'm dashed sure there's a beastly catch about it somewhere! Shouldn't wonder if they were only lurin' us on."

"How could they guess we should hear all about it?"

"Well, no, they couldn't know that. Oh, come in!"

Crooke hurled his cigarette into the fire as he snarled that invitation, and Racke's followed it.

Roylance appeared.

"Crooke made a mistake," said Racke, showing his teeth in a grin that was by no means friendly.

"You both make quite a lot of them," replied Roylance coolly.

"When I said 'Come in!' I hadn't any idea you were at the door," said Crooke.

"Never mind! It's only one more mistake. You've been making quite a lot of them lately. This one isn't important, as I should have come in anyway," the New Zealand junior said.

Dick Roylance was a very cool customer, and a very hefty one. He had had a row with the two black sheep during his first term at St. Jim's, and he had very rarely spoken to them since. They counted him always as among the enemy, and his would have been the next name Crooke would have mentioned had not Racke interrupted him a minute or two earlier.

"Can't you take a hint, dash you?" snapped Racke.

"I think I can—when it suits me. Can you?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"A good deal. In fact, practically everything. I came here to give you a hint. I won't say a friendly one."

"Well, you ain't welcome, by gad, so you'd better go!" said Crooke.

"I should be sorry to be welcome here. Kind of thing that would let any fellow down horribly," answered Roylance, still quite coolly.

Crooke blinked. Racke had an answer ready.

"You've nothin' in that way to worry about, I assure you," he said. "We don't care for the smugly righteous in this study. There's the door!"

"It will stay there all right till I've finished, I fancy," said Roylance. "I've something to say to you two before I go, though."

"You've nothin' to say that we care to hear," returned Racke.

"Quite right! I don't a bit believe you'll care to hear this. But you're going to!"

"You must have forgotten that we're two to one, I fancy, Roylance," blustered Crooke.

"Not at all. I don't mind about trifles like that."

"Well, say what you have to say an' do the departin' act," said Racke, pretending to yawn. "I'm gettin' tired of you. Serious society rather bores me, y'know."

"You two have been going about saying that Manners funks Racke," said Roylance.

"Well, doesn't he?" sneered Crooke.

Thus far the Colonial junior had kept his temper wonderfully. But now he fired up.

"No, you lying hound!" he rapped out.

"He declines to fight me, anyway," drawled Racke.

"I don't doubt that he has his reasons for that."

Cadet Notes.

A further privilege has now been conferred by the Army Council upon those lads who have served in the ranks of duly recognised Cadet Corps or units throughout the country. We have mentioned in previous issues the authority which has been given for such lads to secure admission into the R.A.F. as pilots or observers. The new Order, issued last week, extends this privilege to the Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, and the Machine Gun Corps, the three specialist units of the Regular Forces, which offer splendid opportunities for training and advancement, and will prove of immense popularity with the members of Cadet Corps.

The Order provides that N.C.O.'s and privates of these units of the Cadet Force which are trained in specialist duties will in future, on being called up for military service, be considered for posting to those arms for which they have been trained as Cadets. This means in effect that boys who have served in the Royal Engineers Cadets, or in those units attached to the Artillery or Machine Gun sections, will have the privilege of being sent to the same arm of the Regular Forces when they are called up instead of being attached to the ordinary infantry battalions. This ought to have the effect of stimulating recruiting for these specialist corps, of which there are several of the Royal Engineers and the Machine Gun Corps in London, and others attached to the Royal Artillery in various parts of the country. Full particulars of these or any other corps will be sent to readers wishing to join the Cadet Movement on application to the Central Association Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Law Courts, Strand, W.C. 2.

"An' of course you know what they are?" sneered Racke.

"I don't. But I'm perfectly satisfied that they are good ones."

"Oh, I thought that you'd be sure to know, bein' such a chum of his!"

"I am a chum of his, Racke, I'm glad to say. That's why I can feel sure without having it all explained to me."

"Queer thing Roylance hasn't been enlisted in the Cleveland Legion, ain't it, Racke?" gibed Crooke.

Roylance turned on him so fiercely that Crooke shrank in his chair.

"You'll keep that name out of this!" snapped the New Zealand junior.

"He's really one of them, you see, Crooke," said Racke.

"I don't quite understand you; but, as far as I can get it, I fancy every decent fellow here may be counted in," Roylance replied. "But I didn't come to talk about that. I came to say this—if I hear either of you rotten cads say again that Manners funks, or even if I hear that you have said it, I'll make you eat your own foul lies with a sauce that you'll hardly fancy!"

A more direct challenge could not have been given. Roylance, who had proven himself Manners' superior, and had only gone under to Tom Merry after one of the hardest tussles in the annals of St. Jim's, was not exactly the sort of fellow either of the black sheep was keen on tackling. But Racke's new-found martial spirit could not stand this straight talk.

"Oh, come for him, Crooke!" he howled.

"Keep your distance!" snapped Roylance. "If you come within hitting range you'll get knocked down!"

And he put up his fists.

Spluttering with rage that he should feel so confident that he was equal to thrashing them both, the two came on.

Together they should have been overweight for him. They fancied that they were. And they might have been had he allowed them to get to grips.

But that was not his game.

Crooke hung back—ever so little—the mere hesitation of a second. But that second was long enough for Roylance. He let drive full at Racke's chest—all his weight and muscle put into the blow.

It sent Racke reeling backwards, to fall with a crash and a yell.

Roylance took a couple of strides forward. Crooke was backing now. But the study was not big enough for that game.

Again Roylance struck. The blow smashed clean through Crooke's clumsy guard, and he sank back in a huddled heap into the armchair, his arms dropped by his sides, his face gone lead-coloured.

"That's to go on with," Roylance said quietly. "I think everyone knows that I'm not a quarrelsome fellow. But I'm ready to take on you two cads, singly or together, any time you like! And, whether you fight or not, you'll get it in the neck if there's any more of your rotten sneering about Manners. I haven't marked your faces this time; I won't promise not to next, though. And I shan't intrude upon you here again unless you force me to; but if you give cause for complaint I shall come, for I consider these little disciplinary measures should be put through in private. I don't like your talky-fighty system!"

With that he went, before either could get out a word in reply to the longest speech they had ever heard him make. He meant every word of it, they could see that; and even Racke no longer felt quite so bucked by the good tidings Baggy Trimble had brought.

Racke struggled up from the floor, and stood glaring at Crooke, who sat with his hand on his heart, groaning dismally.

But it was no use blaming Crooke. Racke had already made up his mind whom he had to blame for this.

"Yow!" groaned Crooke. "I knew that brute could hit hard; but, by gad, if it had been a little harder I think it would have settled me! It was right over the heart!"

"Rotten prize-fightin' cad!" snarled Racke. "He's the strength of a horse; a fellow hasn't a chance against him! But you can see what's behind this!"

"It's all I've any use for, without anythin' behind it," replied Crooke dolefully.

"It's a put-up job! Manners an' that lot sent him. An' I shouldn't wonder if they gave Grundy the tip this mornin', too."

Crooke shook his head.

"Not Grundy," he said with conviction. "He doesn't take tips from anybody. He was on his own. An' I don't feel dead certain that this was anybody's move but Roylance's. We may find out, though."

"I've put it down to Manners, an' I mean to be even with him for it!" snarled Racke.

"I haven't any objection, I assure you, though I'd rather be even with Roylance. Anyway, don't try gettin' even with your mouth, Aubrey! Seems somehow that doesn't pay. We shall have Blake along next, warnin' us that D'Arcy's not to be called a funk at any price."

"Blake's one of the non-combatant brigade, remember!"

"Don't I wish Roylance was!" said Crooke feelingly. "The more there are of them the better. Well, if Julian or Lumley-Lumley comes along on the same game the two of us ought to be able to mop him up. I hope it won't be Noble or Grundy, though. Pity they ain't in the league!"

Roylance had come at nobody's instigation, and he did not even tell anyone what he had done. As he walked away from No. 7 Clifton Dane looked out from No. 11.

"I heard a big thump just now," remarked the Canadian junior.

"So did I!" replied Roylance.

"Where was it?"

"In Racke's study."

"Oh! Thieves falling out—eh?"

"Might easily have been that," said Roylance. And he walked on.

Yet Dane was one of the fellows whose aid he might readily have enlisted in the campaign he had started.

But Roylance did not feel in need of any aid; he preferred to play a lone hand, and to play it in his own quiet, cool way.

CHAPTER 7.
D'Arcy Major and D'Arcy Minor.

"THAT'S something like it!" said Tom Merry, with immense satisfaction.

The third rehearsal of the revue which was to form a very special item in the celebrations in connection with the Head's birthday had gone swimmingly.

There were many actors; but nearly everyone had been word-perfect. This may have been because Monty Lowther, who had written the greater part of the revue, had provided few "fat" parts. In fact, only Monty himself and a few of his most particular chums, who had been urgent with him in the matter, had anything that could be so styled.

Harry Wharton's sketch, which was included in the revue, had been taken twice that evening. It needed to go with a rush, and Tom Merry and Blake, who were acting as joint stage-managers, had done all they could to impress that fact upon those taking part in it.

Nearly everyone looked happy. But there was one discontented face in the crowd. It was a smaller crowd than it had been, for only those in the sketch were still left. The rest had cleared off to prep—deferred by permission till later

In the evening than usual, on condition that there should be no scamping of it. Both Mr. Linton and Mr. Lathom were very keen on the success of the revue, as was Mr. Railton. But Mr. Ratcliff had with great difficulty been persuaded to give the fellows in his House any relaxation in the matter of prep; and Mr. Selby was reported to look with a jaundiced eye upon the whole affair.

The one discontented expression was on the noble countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Gussy had not had a good day. The ukase which kept him from administering a fearful thrashing to Racke still rankled somewhat. He saw that it was right he should not fight; but he liked it none the better for seeing that.

Then he had been snubbed by Grundy. Gussy would not have allowed that it was possible for Grundy to snub him; but practically it had come to that.

Lastly, he had played the Crown Prince in Harry Wharton's sketch to applause.

Arthur Augustus had as big an appetite for applause as most fellows, but somehow this had failed to please him.

Nothing that anyone could say seemed to do that.

"You did it jolly well, Gustavus," said Blake.

"I am awaah of that fact, Blake!" was the frigid reply.

"It was ripping!" remarked Lowther.

"I appwehend that no one heah is likely to dispute my histwionic abilities," said the swell of the Fourth, sticking his monocle into his eye, and surveying the assemblage with lofty disdain.

"Not likely!" said Manners.

"What's the old ass mean, Franky?" asked D'Arcy minor of Levison minor. These two leading members of the Third Form were in the sketch.

"Say he can't act," Frank translated briefly.

"Crumbs! Why doesn't he talk English?"

"They are not in question," went on Gussy. "I am suah that I could play Macbeth or Hamlet in a mannah——"

"That would fairly bring down the house with laughter!" chipped in Lowther.

"Bai Jove, Lowther, you weally are widic! I believe that you pwofess to be a student of Shapespeah? Suahly you are awaah that Hamlet an' Macbeth are most sewious an' twagic parts?"

"Yes, old top—that's why!" answered Monty.

"Dry up, chump!" said Tom Merry sharply. "Just leave our Gussy to us. He can jolly well lick your silly head off in any part he chooses to take on!"

But even that testimonial failed to bring a beaming smile to the face of Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy has great natural advantages for his present part," said Lowther slyly. To tell Lowther to dry up and to get him to dry up were not quite one and the same thing. Just now he knew that prudence counselled letting Arthur Augustus alone; but he would listen neither to prudence nor to Tom Merry.

"That's it!" said Wally D'Arcy eagerly. "It's an awful thing to have in the family; but I must say that old Gus is just as like that Prussian rotter as one giddy Hun is like another——"

"You'll be put out in a jiffy if you aren't jolly careful, young Wally!" snapped Jack Blake.

"But hardly to the same extent as his major is!" murmured Lowther.

"Don't you see, fathead? They want him to stick to the part," whispered Frank Levison to Wally. "He'll chuck it for certain if he gets any more chipping about it."

"Oh, all right, clever! Think I don't know that?" retorted Wally.

Come Inside!
(*See Chapter* 8.)

But he dried up.

"Tom Mewwy——"

"No time for jaw just now, old chap!" said Tom cheerily. "Don't expect to have, either—not till this bizney's over."

"Tommy and Blake are like twin Atlases supporting the world," said Lowther.

"But, Tom Mewwy, I pwotest——"

"Can't listen, Gussy! I've no fault whatever to find with you. It's your modesty——"

"Nothin' of the sort—I haven't any—I mean, that is weally not the question at all. What are you gwinnin' at, Blake, you wuffian? Dig, you sillay ass—Hewwies, you uttah idiot—Lowthah, you chortlin' chimpanzee — Mannahs, you cwass chump—heah, I say, come back, all of you!"

But they paid no heed. Not only those upon whom he called in so endearing a fashion, but everyone else left also made for the door. What was the use of staying to listen to Gussy's protests, when their minds were made up to regard those protests as mere air?

Only the two fags were left.

Upon them Gussy glared ferociously. A quiet grin overspread the face of Frank Levison. Frank was generally among the peacemakers; but he could not resist the temptation to chaff the swell of the Fourth just then.

"Don't you like your part, Gussy?" he asked.

"Weally, I think you will send me distwacted among you all!"

"Well, Gus, you won't have far to go—that's one comfort!" said Wally philosophically.

"I uttahly wefuse to take the wotten part! I have made that quite cleah on several occasions, an'——"

"But you are taking it," said Frank. "And you do it jolly well, too!"

"Wats! It was an agweed thing that I should not take it. I have, it is twue, wehearsed it, but——"

"Three times," put in Frank.

"And if you don't call that taking it——"

"Bai Jove, I will not stop to talk with you cwass young asses!"

"Half a jiff, Gus! I've something serious to say to you."

"Anothah time, Wally! I weally have not the leisuah to attend to you at the pwesent moment."

"Oh, haven't you? Well, you've jolly well got to, and that's all about it!"

Arthur Augustus glared upon his minor through the celebrated monocle. But Wally did not blink in the least.

"At anothah time, when I am less pwessed, I will do my best to give you the benefit of my advice in any juvenile twouble in which you may have landed yourself, Wally! Now——"

"Whatdyecallit trouble be blessed!" snorted Wally. "I suppose it's because you're so pressed for time that you can't fight Racke—eh?"

The monocle fell to the floor, as Arthur Augustus gasped:

"Wha-a-at?"

"That's what I've got to talk to you about, old top!" said D'Arcy minor. "I'm not going to put up with this sort of thing, you know!"

"You are not goin' to put up with—— Oh, am I mad, or am I dweamin'?"

"You ain't dreaming! As for being mad, you always were a trifle potty! I didn't mind that so very much, though it ain't all violets to have a potty major! But that's a heap better than having a funky major!"

"Do you mean to insinuate, Wally, that I funk Wacke?" demanded Arthur Augustus, majestic in his wrath.

"I don't mean to insinuate anything—I'm talking to you straight—man to man, you know! And I say it's a beastly disgrace to the family!"

"A disgwace to the family!" gasped Gussy.

"Yes! Can't you see that, you fat-

headed chump? You'd see it fast enough if I funked anyone!"

That was true. Arthur Augustus was very anxious that Walter Adolphus should live up to the family standard, as set by himself. He often took his minor to task for wearing collars of something less than immaculate whiteness, for speaking impolitely, and for behaving like "a young wuffian!" And he would most certainly have been annoyed by any suspicion that Wally fell below the high honour and high courage that were the birthright of the D'Arcys.

But that he should be taken to task by Wally!

"I am not funkin' Wacke, Wally!" he said in half-choked tones.

"Looks jolly like it, I must say! Doesn't it, Franky?"

"I don't think Gussy would funk anyone," said Frank Levison. "Not that sort, any more than Manners is. And you don't say that Manners funks Racke, Wally?"

"That's not my bizney," replied Wally doggedly. "I don't rub it into young Reggie about his major, but he's started to rub it into me about mine, and that shows he doesn't like the way Manners major is going on. Not that young Reggie matters!"

"Well, I'm jolly sure that Gussy has some good reason," said Frank, who was very fond of the swell of the Fourth, and who saw him looking troubled and angry.

"Then he can give it to me, I s'pose?"

"I can't, Wally; an' you have weally no wight to wequest anythin' of the sort. It is not for you to sit in judgment on my actions!"

"I ain't sitting in judgment, you silly idiot—I'm only telling you what I think about you!" roared Wally. "And as for your actions—it's the way you don't do things I'm down on. Oh, you'd better stick to your rotten Crown Prince part; it suits you! You're as big a funk as that beastly Hun is!"

And Wally stamped away.

"Come back, Wally!" cried Arthur Augustus. "You weally must listen to weason!"

"I won't listen to anything! Either you give Racke the thrashing he needs, or—well, I shall know what to do! Come along, Franky!"

"I'll try to soothe him down, Gussy!" said Levison minor as he went.

"Not on my account, Fwank, I pway," replied Gussy, icily. "I have done with him for evah! I wenounce him!"

"He's jolly well welcome!" said Wally bitterly, when Frank told him that.

"But what are you going to do, Wally?" asked Frank.

"You'll see—and soon, too!"

CHAPTER 8.

Skimpole Makes an Offer.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS, with a thunderous look upon his noble brow, had just reached the door of the concert-room when the lean and bony form of Herbert Skimpole of the Shell appeared thereat.

"D'Arcy, my dear fellow——" began Skimmy.

"I weally cannot speak to you just now, Skimmay! I am quite in a fluttah, an'——"

"You are alone, I perceive! I had rather expected to find Tom Merry here!"

"If you have any biznay to twansact with Tom Mewwy, Skimmay, I must entweat you to postpone it till to-mowwow. I have myself to see him upon a most important subject—in fact, upon two important subjects, an' I'm goin' to him now!"

"Then I will come with you, my dear fellow!"

"Oh, deah!" groaned Gussy. But, harassed as he was, he could not so far forget his Chesterfieldian politeness as to make his hint to Skimmy plainer.

He hurried out of the concert-room, and Skimpole followed, blinking.

Upstairs they went, and to the Shell passage. But Study No. 10 on that passage was dark and empty.

"They are not heah!" said Gussy.

"The room is certainly vacant; therefore the deduction that the person or persons you seek is or are absent would seem an obvious one!" said Skimpole, in his precise manner.

That manner jarred badly upon Gussy just now.

"Oh, go away!" he said crossly. "I cannot—I positively cannot—enduah twivial wemarks at the pwesent moment, Skimmay!"

"My dear D'Arcy, do not allow your irritation to overcome you! There is nothing more highly unphilosophical than that! I——"

But Gussy broke away, making for the Fourth passage.

Skimmy followed.

The door of No. 6 refused to yield to Gussy's pressure.

"Who's there?" yelled Blake.

"It is I, of course, you duffah!"

"No 'of course' about it, old bean! It might be anyone," answered the voice of Lowther.

"Hook it!" growled Herries.

"Scat, Gussy!" called Dig.

Arthur Augustus fairly quivered with wrath. He felt as though the very foundations of society were suffering upheaval.

He had been taken to task by his minor. There was a conspiracy to force him to play an absolutely detestable part in the revue. And now he was shut out of No. 6!

The Terrible Three were there. Had not Lowther spoken? Herries and Dig were there. Gussy had the highest regard for Herries and Dig; but he had never regarded them as persons on the same plane of importance as his noble self.

Unlike as they were in most respects, the two now standing at the door of No. 6 had one point in common. Skimpole was quite sure that he had the best brain at St. Jim's; and Arthur Augustus was absolutely certain that his equal in tact, judgment, and general all-round ability was not to be found within the walls of the ancient school.

"You're a wude wuffian, Hewwies!" Gussy roared. "As for you, Dig, I will not lowah myself to say what I think of you!"

"I shouldn't," chuckled Dig. "If you've started thinking, old chap, keep the results to yourself—don't waste 'em on me!"

Gussy thumped upon the door viciously.

"Am I to be kept out of my own studay?" he roared.

"Looks a bit like it!" replied Blake heartlessly.

"Wats, Blake! I simplay will not be kept out!"

"Come in, then!" shouted Dig.

At that the ire of Gussy rose to such a pitch that he did a thing for which he was sure to suffer repentance later.

He kicked at the door.

"Who else is outside there?" asked Lowther.

"Nobody—at least——"

"There must be someone else. No Vere de Vere would 'lowah' himself by kicking a door!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But there is someone else — I am here!" spoke up Skimmy.

"Are you, Skimmy? Well, you're welcome to stay there!" said Tom Merry.

"Shut up, you two, and let us get on with the washing!" growled Manners.

"You insuffewable wottahs! I insist, Blake, upon bein' given admittance to my own studay! You would not wish me to appeal to Wailton, I take it?"

No answer was vouchsafed to that threat.

"It would really appear, D'Arcy, that they have some reason for not desiring your presence," said Skimpole mildly. "But my time, my dear fellow, is valuable, and their exclusion of you does not necessarily argue that they will not admit me. May I therefore request you to stand aside while I ask permission to enter?"

"Bai Jove, Skimmay——"

"Go away, both you silly idiots!" shouted Manners.

"It would almost seem that they do not desire my presence, either," said Skimmy, with a look of surprise. "May I inquire why you are being kept out, D'Arcy?"

"Because the sillay wottahs know vewy well that I have positively wefused to play the Cwown Pwince in the wevue, an'——"

"But I really fail to perceive——"

"Oh, I do not expect you to undahstand, Skimmay! You weally are such a tewwible ass about such things as this, you know! I have been wehearsin' the w'etched part on the distinct undahstandin' that someone else should be found to take it in the actual pwoduction. But no one has come forward, an' those boundahs wefuse to listen to my pwotests. They are twyin' to pin me down to keepin' the loathsome wole!"

"Is that so? It is a very curious and quite improper proceeding, I consider. But I think that I can aid you in the matter, D'Arcy."

"Oh, wats! I weally beg your pardon, Skimmay, but——"

"Will you allow me to explain, my dear D'Arcy? It is my intention to offer myself for the part."

"Oh, bai Jove!" said Gussy faintly.

It had been suggested by someone that, apart from Gussy, Skimpole was the only junior at St. Jim's who was naturally fitted for taking the part of the Crown Prince. Gussy had considered that an aspersion on his figure, which he did not regard as at all resembling Skimpole's. But neither he nor anyone else had seriously thought of Skimmy's assuming the role.

"The proposition appears to cause you some astonishment, D'Arcy," said Skimmy.

"Oh, bai Jove!" repeated Gussy. It was all he could say.

"The invocation of a heathen deity, D'Arcy, is scarcely an intelligible answer to my remark."

"Oh, but weally, you know, deah boy, you couldn't, you know! It's uttahly impos!"

"I entirely fail to see the impossibility, my dear fellow. In fact, I may say without vanity that I regard myself as a person for whom impossibilities do not exist!"

Skimmy had raised his voice somewhat, and those within No. 6 heard that statement.

"Entirely without vanity!" murmured Monty Lowther, grinning.

"Shush!" hissed Blake. "What's the potty old donkey gassing about?"

"But—but you nevah have done anythin' whatevah in that line, you know, Skimmay," said Arthur Augustus weakly.

"That is not to the purpose. I have already shown that I can excel at cricket

without all the laborious practice that is necessary for those of inferior mental endowments. Brain, my dear D'Arcy, governs in these matters as well as in those of real importance. I once made as many as twenty runs, which is regarded, I understand, as a very high score."

"Oh, bai Jove!" said Gussy again.

"He's thinking about footer," remarked Dig, inside No. 6.

"I took up boxing, and rapidly digested the hints given me by our friend Talbot. I apprehend that I could now, with consummate ease, beat any member of your Form and all but three or four of my own at that exercise."

"Listen to him!" growled Herries.

"As for acting, I have hitherto considered it a thing beneath my notice. I am not sure that in a properly constituted state of society there would be any place for the theatre. But that only makes it the easier for a really powerful brain. I apprehend that I could, if I lowered my mind sufficiently, attain any measure of success in the art histrionic that I might desire."

"You weally think so, Skimmay?" gasped Gussy.

"I am quite convinced of it, D'Arcy. I have just been looking through the part of Hamlet. I regret to say that it has not increased my respect for Shakespeare, who had, I fear, but a second-rate brain. There are very silly and extravagant things in it. But I am confident that I could sustain the role of the melancholy Prince of Denmark in a manner that would astonish everyone."

"That's very likely indeed, I should say," commented Lowther.

"Oh, bai Jove!" said Gussy again. The mighty brain of Arthur Augustus was almost tottering to its fall.

"Is the part of the Crown Prince at all like that of Hamlet, D'Arcy?" inquired the astounding Skimmy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The burst of laughter that came from within No. 6 made Skimmy stare.

Tom Merry popped his head out of the door.

"Come in, you two!" he said cheerily.

"I have a vewy gweat mind to do nothin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy! I do not fancay bein' invited into my own study in this off-hand mannah."

"Well, I must say you're not a very easy chap to please, Gussy," said Tom, with a sigh. "You didn't seem to like it a bit when you were kept out."

Skimpole passed in. Gussy now followed him, but did not leave his look of haughty ire behind in the passage.

"Skimmay says he will play the Cwown Pwince," he announced. "It is vewy good of him, no doubt, but I am not at all suah—"

"That you want to give up the part? That's all right; we'll let you keep it if you'd rather," said Blake cheerily.

"I am not suah, Blake, that Skimmay is capable of sustainin' the part."

"Well, if you could do it——" growled Herries.

Arthur Augustus favoured him with an icy stare of disdain.

"Do you want to keep the part, or don't you? Tlfat's the question for you to decide!" said Manners sharply. "We'll judge what Skimmy can do or can't do."

"I do not wish to keep the part, Mannahs! I absolutely wefuse to keep it! But——"

"Right-ho! Put Gussy down for the dead-body act," said Lowther. "After that let him be silent, as behoves a well-conducted corpse."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Silence in the court! Skimmy is now about to deliver his oration!"

"I have no intention of the sort, Lowther, my dear fellow, I assure you. The matter is really too trivial for that. But the respect I bear the Head—though rather as a man than as a thinker, I admit—has impelled me to come hither and say that I propose to take the part of the Crown Prince in this—er—revue, I believe the trifle is called."

"With our consent, I suppose?" snapped Tom Merry. Skimmy's intellectual arrogance really was a little too much even for the genial Tom.

Skimmy blinked at him in surprise.

"That, my dear Merry, is surely the merest formality?" he said.

"Bai Jove, though, Skimmay, you weally have a most colossal nerve!" gasped Gussy.

"You can't act, you know," said Dig.

"And you're a most awful ass!" growled Herries.

"I assure you that you are completely mistaken, Digby!"

"He doesn't assure Herries of that," murmured Lowther. But Skimmy had not heard Herries.

"Well, you never have acted, anyway."

"That I admit. But that is quite another matter. You have a confused and inferior mind, I fear, Digby!"

"Skimmy's like the young man who was asked whether he could play the violin," remarked Lowther.

"What did he say?" asked Dig.

"Said he didn't know—he'd never tried."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody but Skimmy laughed—even Gussy, who had not yet recovered his temper, and Herries, who did not always see a joke readily.

"He made a very proper answer," said Skimmy. "In the history of human effort——"

"My dear young friends——" put in Lowther, with a very creditable imitation of Skimmy's pedantic manner.

"Let's see, Skimmy, what was your part before?" asked Tom.

"He was a dead body, of course," said Dig.

"That is scarcely accurate, Digby, for I was to have been a programme—er—dispenser."

"Well, that would suit Gustavus all right," said Blake thoughtfully. "He wouldn't have to think. Hard lines to have to think, and nothing to do it with!"

"Why, you sillay ass! You uttah idiot——"

"He'd be a bit rocky on the change, though," said Dig. "Might manage it, as it would be all in sixpences, but——"

"I shall positively be a wavin' lunatic if this goes on, bai Jove!"

"Be a dead body, old top! Much more peaceful," said Lowther soothingly.

"You can have a shot, Skimmy," said Tom. "I hope you're a quick study. Here's your part."

"I do not quite apprehend your meaning, Merry; but I am confident that I can assimilate my part within the next twenty-four hours."

"I will coach you, Skimmay," said Gussy generously.

"Thank you, my dear D'Arcy. I will acquaint you, without fail, of my need of your assistance should any such need arise."

But it was evident that Skimmy did not expect any such need to arise.

He went off with the part under his arm.

"The old ass will forget all about it before to-morrow evening," said Manners.

"I'll ask Talbot to keep an eye on him," Tom replied.

"There is anothah mattah on which I wish to speak to you, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus.

"No time now, old chap. We're on honour to do our prep, you know."

"But I must speak—I must, weally! I demand to be welieved of the pwomise I have made not to fight Wacke!"

"Wh-a-at?"

"I know vewy well all the objections that can be waised; but——"

"Gussy, you shock me! Would you be behind others in the way of chivalry?" asked Lowther solemnly.

"Of course I would not, Lowthah! But how would you like it if your minah accused you of bein' a funk?" pleaded Gussy.

"As I have no minor, and no forgone combat, the contingency may be considered an impossible one," answered Lowther.

"You can't do it, Gustavus!" snapped Blake.

"But, weally, Blake——"

"You can't, Gussy. A vow is a vow."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Who's your minor more than anyone else that he shouldn't call you a funk?" said Herries. "We agreed that that was to make no odds, whichever of us it was."

Gussy stared blankly at Herries. The bluff common-sense of that speech somehow got home to him. After all, who was Wally that he should be able to goad Gussy to a combat he had agreed to forgo?

But Arthur Augustus gave vent to something very like a dry sob as he went out of the room. Wally's scorn had hit him hard.

CHAPTER 9.

An Amazing Challenge!

"IT works all right, by gad!" said Crooke, with a grin. "I barged against Lowther coming out of classes to-day, and he only called me a clumsy idiot, though he must have known I did it on purpose!"

"Did you tell him so?" asked Racke. Barging against Lowther did not strike Racke as quite so big an achievement as Crooke seemed to think it.

"Well, no; it wasn't necessary. I told him he was another."

"If that's all you can do——"

"I thought you were so full of dashed crafty schemes!" gibed Crooke. "Can't say I've heard any of 'em yet, though."

"I've one that might be worth thinkin' over, old bean! Have you heard that it was settled last night that Skimpole is to take the Crown Prince part that that bounder D'Arcy shied at?"

"No, I hadn't—— But I can't see what——"

"It will go a long way to muck up their rotten show if we can keep the footlin' ass out of the way."

"More likely to muck it up if he's in it," replied Crooke, with a sardonic grin.

"No. It's the kind of tripe that doesn't need actin'. The bigger the duffer the funnier it will be, because all his bloomers will be supposed to be part of the humour."

"But if we can get hold of Skimmy it will only mean that D'Arcy will take it on. An' if a duffer's best, you can't beat that ass!" replied Crooke nastily.

"D'Arcy won't, by gad! If anythin's certain, that is. He's fallen out with the whole crowd over somethin'."

"It might be worth doin'," said Crooke. "An' it would be dead easy. Skimmy's a lonely old bird. Some chaps are a dashed trouble to catch alone, but not Skimmy. An' he ain't suspicious."

"There's another wheeze," said Racke, lowering his voice. "A bit more

risk in this; but I think it's worth doin'."

"I'm not on for anythin' too dashed risky," answered Crooke uneasily.

"You needn't tell me that at this time of day! But this can be done all right, if it can be done at all, I fancy."

"What is it?"

"You've heard of that precious enlarged photograph of Manners'?"

The very tone in which Racke spoke Manners' name told of bitter spite. It was Manners whom Racke hated above everyone else at St. Jim's just now.

"Yaas, I've heard of it, Aubrey. What about it?"

"If we could get hold of that!"

Crooke slapped his thigh.

"By gad! That would be a score!" he said. "They're countin' no end on pleasin' the Head with that gadget, though."

"Well, you aren't so keen on pleasin' the Head, are you, Gerry?"

"I hate the old beast!" replied Crooke. "I'd like to muck up the whole dashed show! I've had too much of his chin-music!"

"So have I," said Racke. "An' I think we can do a bit towards muckin' up the show. The beauty of it is, too, that no one can suspect us when we're giving the old hunks such a handsome present on our own account."

"I sha'n't grudge the oof spent on that so much if we can put a spoke or two in his dear, admirin' pupils' wheel on the great day!" Crooke said spitefully.

And the two young blackguards leered at one another. Yet they had had from Dr. Holmes nothing but long-suffering mercy far beyond their deserts.

Tap!

"Hang it all, can't we be left alone for a minute, by gad?" groaned Racke. "Oh, come in!"

Cigarette-ends were hurled into the glowing fire, and Frank Levison entered.

"Oh, get out, you pious little prig!" snarled Crooke.

"I've got something to say first," said Frank quietly. "And you'd better not try on any of your games. There are half a dozen of our fellows in the passage, and we'll rag you bald-headed if you do!"

"Say what you've got to say an' bunk!" snapped Racke.

"I've come with a challenge to you," Frank answered.

"What—from Roylance?"

"No," said Frank, in surprise.

"Your rotten major, then? But he's one——"

Racke pulled himself up short. He had nearly let slip his knowledge of something he was not supposed to know—that Ernest Levison was one of the band whom he and Crooke sneeringly called "The Loyal League."

"My major's worth a thousand of you cads!" flashed Frank. "But it's not from him. He knows you're below his weight."

"Who, then?"

"D'Arcy minor."

"D'Arcy minor? By gad!

"Oh, my aunt!"

"Ha, ha! This is funny, Gerry!"

"Funniest thing I've heard for a dog's age, Aubrey!"

"I don't think you'll find it funny," said Frank. "Wally can box."

"Which of us is it to?" asked Crooke.

"Need you ask?" chortled Racke. "To both of us, of course—both at once! Oh, my stars an' garters!"

"No; it's to you, Racke. Wally's going to fight you instead of his major," explained Frank seriously.

"Well, that's keepin' it in the family," replied Racke. "There's one little hitch in the dashed arrangement, though, I don't fight with Third Form fags, y'know!"

"Wally said you'd say that. He says you're a cheap sort of funk, anyway, and you'd be sure to think of that way out."

"An' what does the mighty Walter Adolphus propose to do about it?"

"Slap your face!" said Frank.

"Then he'll get the hidin' of his life, by gad!"

"Oh, no, he won't; because he won't take it, you see!"

"An' you think I'm goin' to be forced into a fight with a Third-Former, to be the laughin'-stock of all St. Jim's?" hooted Racke.

"You can't sneak out of it, not any way I can see."

"Ha, ha, ha! You'll have to keep out of D'Arcy minor's way, Aubrey!" jeered Crooke.

Racke's face was a study.

Naturally, he believed himself able to thrash Wally. But he was not at all sure that he could do it easily. As Levison minor had said, Wally could box. There was a difference of a head between the two, and, of course, there was a difference in weight; but Wally's strength was at least equal to Racke's, for Racke was weedy and unfit.

"This is silly rot, by gad!" growled Racke.

"You won't find there's any rot about it," said Frank.

He turned to go.

"Here, I say, kid, you haven't fixed up date and place!" jeered Crooke.

"We'll fix that up all serene!" Frank replied cheerily.

"My hat! You talked to 'em jolly well, Frank!" the two black sheep heard Curly Gibson say as the door closed.

"Ha, ha, ha! Isn't it a joke, Aubrey?" chortled Crooke.

But the expression on the face of Racke suggested that he hardly thought it such a joke as he had done at first.

CHAPTER 10.
No Way Out!

"TOLD you so!" said Crooke.

He and Racke sat on a stile in Rylcombe Lane smoking.

Cousin Ethel had just turned the corner of the lane. She was walking briskly, as if on some errand of importance, and she looked as if St. Jim's agreed with her in every way, for her face was touched with a charming colour, and she smiled as she came.

But the smile faded from her face as Racke and Crooke detached themselves from the stile and she saw them.

It was Crooke who had proposed waiting there, as a safer place than the quad. He had felt sure she would come along, he said.

The black sheep had no intention of doing or saying anything which could be made cause of complaint to the authorities. They saw no reason for it, while the mere sight of them in her path was enough to give the girl annoyance, and any attempt of theirs to engage her in conversation would be hateful to her.

They told each other that they had as good a right to speak to her as anyone else at St. Jim's. It was not their fault if her special chums had poisoned her mind against them.

Cousin Ethel halted. Then she did what was quite the best thing to do in the circumstances.

Without giving any sign that she saw them, beyond the action itself, she turned and walked back.

"By gad!" said Racke, flabbergasted for the moment.

"Oh, confound her!" snarled Crooke.

"Look here, we can catch her up if we hurry, old top! We needn't even speak to the minx; it will put her in what her precious Cousin Gussy calls a 'fluttah' to hear us behind her. An' the road's as free to us as to her!"

"Right-ho, Aubrey!"

They followed quickly. But within twenty yards they pulled up short.

Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn had just rounded the bend!

To pull up thus was the most foolish thing the two could have done. It gave away their game even to so slow a brain as that of Grundy.

"The cads!" he growled. "They were dogging her! Here's your chance, Wilky!"

"I'm on!" said George Wilkins at once.

Cousin Ethel had smiled graciously upon the three as she had passed them, and if Wilkins and Gunn could have felt any doubts otherwise that smile would have dispelled them.

"So am I!" said Gunn.

Racke and Crooke turned.

"Hi!" yelled Grundy.

Racke and Crooke paid no heed.

"Stop, you rotters!"

Racke and Crooke stopped suddenly.

But that was not on account of Grundy's command. On the whole, it was much safer to disobey Grundy than to obey him.

They stopped because around another bend of the winding lane had just come seven Third-Formers—D'Arcy minor, Levison minor, Manners minor, Frayne, Jameson, Hobbs, and Gibson.

Racke was between two fires. And now that it came to the pinch Crooke really did not find it quite so funny as he had expected to. Of course, he could lick any of those kids; and Wally, by long odds the most hefty of them, was after Racke. But he didn't want to get mixed up in a row with them.

As for Racke, he would have given quite a lot of money to have been well out of it. To have met Wally & Co. alone would not have pleased him. He was trying to dodge Wally. But to meet them before fellows from his own Form was ten times worse.

"Here they are!" roared Manners minor, in high delight. "Come and have your ugly mug smacked, Racke!"

The seven came on; the three came on. There was no way of escape for Racke and Crooke.

The three got there first.

"You cowardly rotters have been annoying Miss Cleveland again!" howled Grundy.

He had no evidence, of course; but he had no doubt.

"It's a lie!" snarled Crooke. "Why, we didn't even speak to her! We weren't within a dozen yards of her, I swear!"

"She turned back because you rotters were here," said Wilkins.

"Take that, Racke!"

Wally had walked straight up to Racke. He had not heard what Grundy and Wilkins said, being too keen on his own personal quarrel to pay any heed.

"Hallo!" gasped Grundy. "My hat! What's this?"

"He says my major's a funk!" cried Wally. "I sent word to him that I meant to fight him, and I'm jolly well going to! I don't believe old Gus is a funk; but I'm not going to have that sort of thing said about a chap in my family, whether it's true or not!"

"Great Scott! Here's a bantam game-cock for you!" said Grundy. But he looked at Wally as if he fairly loved him.

"Don't be an ass, young D'Arcy!" said Wilkins. "I'm going to take on Racke!"

"You? What on earth's your dashed quarrel with me?" snorted Racke, turning away from Wally. He meant to have

revenge sooner or later on the fag leader; but he felt that he would much rather fight Wilkins.

"For annoying Miss Cleveland!" said Wilkins coolly.

"I did nothing of the sort, an' it would be no dashed affair of yours if I had! But come on!" hooted Racke.

"Come on, Crooke!" said William Cuthbert Gunn. "You're my mark——"

"Well, I'm dashed! If this——"

"Stop it, Wilkins!" roared Wally. "I'm going to take on Racke! Ain't I, Grundy?"

Grundy could not resist that appeal. He liked Wally's pluck; and he liked having himself appeal to as arbiter. But he still doubted a little.

"You ain't big enough, young D'Arcy," he said. "A fag can't fight with a chap in the Shell, you know."

"I should think not!" said Racke hotly.

He would have done better to keep silence. Grundy looked from him to the eager-faced Wally, sturdy and resolute, and from Wally to Wilkins; then Grundy said:

"You can put your jacket on again, Wilky! The kid must have his way, and I'm blessed if I don't believe he'll win! You can take on Crooke, if you like."

"Hanged if he shall! Crooke's mine!" cried Gunn.

Crooke was amazed. He had never known Gunn to fight, and had very rarely even seen him with the gloves on. But Gunn evidently meant it!

"I don't want Crooke!" growled Wilkins. "But——"

"Shut up! I don't know whether I ought to allow this; but I'm going to. Peel, Racke!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort, hang you!"

"Then you can fight as you are! You're going to stand up to young D'Arcy, or you're going to have me about your ears like a blessed tornado!"

Even that dire threat would not have moved Racke had he seen any possible way of getting out of the combat.

But there was no way, other than that of submitting to a ragging by the seven fags, with Grundy & Co. as hilarious witnesses. Better to thrash D'Arcy minor than that, though all St. Jim's might cry shame upon him for the achievement.

Slowly and reluctantly he peeled. Frank Levison produced sponges and towels from a bag he carried. It seemed that the seven had gone out with the hope of meeting Racke and Crooke from the preparations they had made.

"My hat! There's nothing slack about you kids, I must say!" remarked the great George Alfred. "Here come into this field; there's a decent pond to dip sponges in. You'll second Racke, of course, Crooke?"

"Who says I will? I'm not so dashed keen on bein' mixed up in a scrap between a chap in our Form an' a dashed kid in the Third!"

"If it's good enough for me it's good enough for you, you sweep!" roared Grundy.

"I ain't so jolly sure it is good enough, old chap," said Wilkins, rather anxiously. "D'Arcy minor's a hefty little beggar, and no end of a good little sport; but this is rather thick, I must say. I don't like having a hand in it."

"Can't say I do, much," said Gunn.

"Are you two setting up your silly fat-headed opinions against mine?" hooted Grundy. "Just you come on! Crooke, are——"

"Oh, all right! As long as you take the blame of it, Grundy——"

"I should like to see anyone have the blessed cheek to blame me for doing what I think the right thing!" said the magnificent Grundy.

He was very likely to see it and to hear it if Wally were licked; and by no means sure not to if Wally came through triumphant. But he did not dread public opinion in the least; in fact, he hardly recognised its existence. Grundy was a law unto himself.

CHAPTER 11.
The Black Sheep Shorn!

WALLY stood up confidently. Racke was grumbling about the absence of gloves. But Wally said he did not want gloves, and Grundy said Racke would have to get along without them—which, of course, settled it.

Frank Levison seconded his chum, and Grundy acted as referee and timekeeper.

"Two-minute rounds — one minute intervals!" he said.

"Oh, don't bother about rounds, Grundy!" pleaded Wally.

"Dry up! We ain't heathens, are we? Ready? Time!"

Wally dashed in like a young tiger.

He knew the game. Had Racke had courage and nerve enough his longer reach would have enabled him to stall his youthful opponent off—to keep him out of punching distance.

But Wally was within Racke's guard before his opponent realised what was doing. With head well down, he thumped away at Racke's chest with all his force.

There again he used the right tactics. Racke's chest was a better mark for him at present than Racke's face, and the weedy waster would soon feel the effects of those lusty jabs.

"Bravo, Wally!"

"Go it, kid!"

"You'll lick him in a couple of rounds!"

"Stick to it!"

So yelled some of the fags. Only Frank and Joe Frayne were silent—too tensely excited even to yell.

The honours of the first round were undoubtedly with the Third Form champion. At its end Racke was gasping for breath, while Wally had hardly taken a single punch.

But if Racke had fought little he had seen plenty of boxing, and he already saw his error.

Wally was not suffered to close in the second round. Racke kept his arm out, clumsily enough, but to some effect. He did not hurt Wally much: but neither did Wally hurt him, and Wally had a feeling of being baffled and held off that took the edge off his early exultation.

He was a far better boxer than Racke, however, and he played his game with skill. That stiff arm of Racke's was not going to keep him off long.

It did not. At some risk to his face he got inside it by a feint and a whirlwind rush. Racke's right smote him heavily on the forehead; but he got his left in on Racke's chin with a lot of powder behind it, and the older fellow staggered, and all but fell.

"Good for you, young 'un!" said Grundy approvingly, at the end of the round.

"Don't be in too big a hurry, Wally," whispered Frank. "He's blowing. You can wear him down, and I know you don't mind being hurt, though I hate the brute punching you!"

"I'm going to lick him, unless he can knock me out!" said Wally doggedly. "Of course I don't mind being hurt. But he hasn't hurt me much yet."

During the next three or four rounds, however, Wally did get hurt a good deal. More by luck than by judgment Racke got home a punch very near the point of the jaw, which sent the youngster to grass, and made his head buzz and sing for quite a time afterwards.

But Racke was getting hurt, too, and Racke did mind. He had no notion that those small fists could hit so hard and so straight. He began to wonder when the end would come, and to try his hardest for a knock-out blow. As yet he refused to recognise the possibility of an end which should find him vanquished.

"We can't let this go on much longer, Grundy," said Wilkins, to his mighty chief.

"We? What in the world have you got to do with it, George Wilkins?" snapped Grundy.

But he was getting anxious, too. If Wally were beaten perhaps even the great George Alfred would own for once that he had made a mistake. He felt that he could not bear to see the plucky kid licked.

Did the possibility of defeat ever present itself to the staunch mind of Walter Adolphus—bar accidents, that is? Surely it must have done; but he never looked as if it did.

Not even when he was on his back, gasping, and Grundy had counted up to eight while he strove hard to rise. Racke's face wore a sneering grin of triumph then, and the fags were silent and downcast; but Wally went on striving to get up, and at "Nine!" he staggered to his feet.

Racke rushed in to finish him off. Wally swayed unsteadily.

"Time!" called Grundy, with a voice that was not free from the suspicion of a shake.

"Rats, you cheatin' cad!" howled Racke.

But Grundy was not a cheating cad. The round really had drawn to an end. But for that Wally must have gone under.

Very tenderly Frank sponged his face, saying no word. It was Reggie Manners alone who spoke, and there were tears in Reggie's voice, though there were none in his eyes.

"Buck up, old chap! You're bound to lick him, you know! You've got pluck enough for ten!"

Racke got some heavy punishment in that round, and he did not fancy it a little bit. He was blowing hard now, and he knew that his chest must be one mass of bruises. His face had received less punishment than Wally's, but it was not without decorative effects.

Wally looked the fresher of the two at the end of the round. Racke puffed and groaned, and Crooke's sneers did not help him. Crooke was not sure he wanted Racke to win. There might be less trouble if D'Arcy minor came out on top. That there would be trouble Crooke felt sure.

"I'm going all out for him this time, Franky!" said Wally, as he was called up to the scratch again.

And he did. A lucky punch on Racke's nose set the ruby flowing; a second smote him in the right eye. Racke gave ground. Wally pressed on.

Biff—biff! Right—left!

His fists thudded on Racke's body. Racke threw up his arms, reeled, and sprawled

He had got it on the mark, and he lay dead to the world while he was counted out.

The fags crowded round Wally, shouting their joy. Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn patted him on the back. Crooke, as soon as Racke stirred and groaned in coming to, got up from his knees and began to slink away.

"Here, come back!" hooted Gunn. "I've something to say to you, Crooke!"

"Stop him, you chaps!" roared Grundy.

Four figures had appeared at the gate

of the field—those of Roylance, Durrance, Julian, and Kerruish.

They barred Crooke's way. There was no getting past them. The job of stopping Crooke seemed to be quite to their taste.

Grundy & Co., followed by all the fags except Wally and Frank, went towards the gate.

"What's this show, Grundy?" asked Julian.

"Young D'Arcy's just given Racke a hiding," replied Grundy coolly.

"My hat! You let that kid fight Racke!" gasped Roylance.

"I knew he would lick him," said Grundy. "I'm never wrong in matters of this sort, you know. Comes of knowing——"

"All about everything!" chipped in Kerruish. "Well, judging from the look of Racke, you can't very well do much slaughtering to him to-day, Roylance, old top!"

"There's Crooke, though," said Julian.

Crooke scowled at him.

"Crooke's mine!" said Gunn.

"Eh?"

"I'm going to fight Crooke," Gunn said valorously.

"Oh, I wasn't—only going to give him a thrashing," replied Roylance. "I won't stand in your way, Gunn."

"Oh, good!" said Gunn.

"What are you makin' trouble with me for, Roylance?" snarled Crooke.

"I warned you. You can't deny that. And you can't deny, in the face of these fellows, that you and that other sweep were sneering at Manners again last night. Durrance told you to shut up, and Julian offered to go into the gym with you."

"Sneakin' hounds!" snapped Crooke. "Well, come on, Gunn, if you are so dashed keen on a lickin'!"

Crooke thought he had a chance of beating Gunn. Anyway, it was better than either standing up to Roylance or taking a thrashing from him. Even the black sheep could not quite make up their minds to accept lickings in this way.

Gunn was not sure, but he was keen on trying. He had the honour of being seconded by Grundy, while Roylance took on the duties of the referee. Kerruish seconded Crooke, though it went much against the grain with him to do it. Racke had slunk off alone.

In the first round Gunn was knocked down, and Crooke thought he had won. In the second round Gunn again went to grass, and Crooke exulted openly, and Grundy said hard things to William Cuthbert Gunn.

"I'm not done yet!" said that hero.

He had the best of the third and fourth rounds, though the fighting was of a scrappy and unscientific nature. In the fifth he floored Crooke, and then everyone knew the combat was over. Crooke stayed on his back till he had been counted out, and then got up, put on his jacket, and departed without a word to anyone.

"He's got off cheaper than if he had stood up to you, Roylance," said Kerruish.

"He wouldn't have stood up to Roylance," said Julian.

"Gunny's won!" hooted Grundy, bestowing upon Gunn's back a hearty and painful thwack. "He never won a fight before in all his life, but he's made a start now!"

"Oh, dry up!" snorted Gunn. "I don't want praising, I'm sure. What about young D'Arcy?"

Wally did not want praise, either; but he got lots of it.

Something like a crowd had gathered by the time they reached the gates. Wally would have hung back, but there was no chance of that. His condition had been sighted from afar, and his major came to meet him.

"Wally! Weally, you are in a tewwible condition! What is this tale I heah about your fightin' Wacke?"

"Have you seen Racke's face, Gus?" demanded Wally, with a grin that hurt his swollen mouth.

"Yaas, but——"

"Well, ain't you satisfied?"

"But the vewy ideah of a kid like you——"

"Well, you wouldn't!"

"But—— Oh, weally, Wally, you don't undahstand! I nevah heard in all my life——"

"Well, you've heard it now, anyway. Let go of me; I've got to attend to my dial before dinner."

"Wally licked the cad," announced Grundy. "And Gunny here licked Crooke. I rather fancy those two will be a bit more careful after this!"

And Grundy looked as if the whole credit of teaching the black sheep a lesson belonged to him—as very likely he thought it did.

Tom Merry's face was very grave. He could not feel that a fight between a Shell fellow and a Third-Former was right. But what could he say? The Third-Former had won!

"We're all proud of you, kid!" he said.

"Eh? All my kind uncles—eh?" returned Wally, with another ghastly and painful grin.

"Three cheers for D'Arcy minor!" yelled Reggie Manners. And everyone present joined in the cheering

Racke and Crooke, busy with repairs, heard them, and scowled at one another. Cousin Ethel heard, and wondered what they meant. But she did not learn that until later.

The general opinion in the Shell and Fourth was that those two black sheep, after so thorough a shearing, would lie low for a time; and the Third were sure of it.

But everyone was wrong. Racke and Crooke, when they came to take counsel together, agreed to leave Cousin Ethel alone in future. But there were other ways of getting home on their enemies, and they began to scheme fresh plots at once.

THE END.

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

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"IN HONOUR OF THE HEAD!"

By Martin Clifford.

In last and this week's stories some of the happenings to which the visit of Cousin Ethel to St. Jim's and the approaching celebrations in honour of the Head's birthday gave rise have been recounted. Next week you will read of the birthday celebrations themselves, and of other troubles in connection with them.

Racke and Crooke, finding that persecution of Cousin Ethel and talk of funk on the part of the fellows who decline to fight them really do not pay, try other measures. What success they have you will learn next week. But other people besides Racke and Crooke come prominently into the yarn, the Terrible Three and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy among them.

THE WAR AND THE BAD BOY.

We have heard a good deal lately about the increase of lawlessness and petty crime among boys in consequence, as many hold, of the absence of their fathers in the Army.

I suppose there is no doubt that there has been such an increase, and I suppose part of it may be put down to the cause assigned. But I doubt whether the larger part of it should be.

After all, the average boy is scarcely as much under fatherly control as that comes to. He may get a thrashing now and then; the strap may whirl about his back, or a stoutly-soled slipper sting through his trousers; but I don't think that the fear of this sort of thing happening keeps the high-spirited boy out of mischief to any considerable extent. And the bad boy of to-day is usually one whose spirits run too high.

I am not excusing him, but I have no wish to condemn him unreservedly. Not many readers of the GEM get into the police-court for hooliganism and theft, I fancy. For the hooligan and the thief have not learned fair play, and the GEM does help to teach that.

The human boy is rather a lawless animal, and is apt to be proud of his lawlessness. He is in a state of chronic revolt against what he thinks is the unjust oppression of grown-ups in general. Of course, he is wrong in the main; but I don't think one can ever quite convince him of that.

What I think he can be convinced of in most cases is that the kind of thing which takes fellows into the courts is not worth while, because there is really nothing plucky or manly about it. Hooligan attacks, for instance. What courage does it need for a fellow to join with ten or twenty others against one? It's cowardly, and cowardice is never worth while. Depredations on stalls, shops, orchards, gardens, and so on, again—where is the pluck of these? It's stealing, and stealing is never worth while.

I don't think grown-up people are so oppressive as they are undiscriminating. The effect of making a crime out of a harmless bit of mischief is likely to be the driving of the boy responsible for it nearer to crime. He is getting his standards of conduct mixed up when that sort of thing is done. I would not mind seeing a hooligan gang birched; but I should be very loth to punish a boy for fighting. The other fellow will probably have done all needed in that way; and, in any case, to fight is not a dreadful sin, even if you are in the wrong, as long as you fight fairly.

It is often hard to draw the line between proper and decent conduct and priggishness, between ordinary, more or less innocent mischief and wickedness. We don't want our boys prigs or criminals; we know that there are likely to be lapses in the good conduct of the fellow who is on the whole doing his best. But some of us grown-ups are much more ready to admit that as a general theory than to see it in individual cases.

Don't run away with the idea that I think all your wrong-doings are the fault of your elders, my friends! There is nothing that saps the will to be manly more than the "can't help it" attitude, the disposition to find anyone but yourself to blame for your errors. Shoulder them yourself; if you think you are treated unfairly, try not to brood. And always remember that when your conscience tells you a thing is dead off the voice in you that tells you it is a fine, dashing thing to do is a lying voice!

Your Editor

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors at The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, England. Subscription, 8s. 10d. per annum. Agents for Australasia: Gordon & Gotch, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Wellington, N.Z. South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd., Cape Town and Johannesburg. Saturday, November 2nd, 1918.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 22.—Koumi Rao.

KOUMI RAO is Jam of Bundelpore, one of the small principalities of India.

To the schoolboy mind there is naturally something very ticklesome about the notion of a human being as a "Jam." But it is not really funny at all. Just as "pain" has quite a different meaning according to whether it occurs in English or in French, so "Jam" in Hindustani means something very different from the same word in English. Its meaning is "prince" or "ruler." Ranjitsinhji, the great cricketer, is a Jam, you know.

Some of my younger readers have inquired why Koumi Rao does not talk like Inky. They apparently believe that Inky's weird and wonderful language is the current speech of the land of Hind. Not a bit of it! It is due only to the fact that Inky had the very best native masters—masters of what I do not know; certainly not of the "tongue which Shakespeare spoke." I rather doubt whether they knew their own language particularly well. But no more needs to be said about that, except to make it clear that Inky's lingo is as puzzling to Koumi Rao as to any other comparative stranger, and much more puzzling than it is to anyone at Greyfriars.

Not that Inky and the other dusky prince can now be considered as even comparative strangers. On the contrary, since a certain thing which befell at Greyfriars one Christmastide there are strong links to bind them. Few of you who read will have forgotten how Koumi Rao lied for Inky's sake, telling the men who had been sent on a desperate and deadly mission against Hurree Singh that he was the Nabob of Bhanipur. They had grown chummy before that, as was but natural when two of an alien race from a far land found themselves together among a crowd of Britons, though each had his own good friends among that crowd. But after that it was more than common friendship that bound them. Inky will never forget!

There is a lot of difference between the two. Inky is far better-tempered than the St. Jim's fellow. He is far less disposed to arrogance and pride of birth. Indeed, there is not so very much besides his queer talk and his dusky skin to mark Inky out from his chums. It is only now and then that the East shows in him to any extent.

This is hardly the case with Koumi Rao. He has settled down at St. Jim's now; but his life there has more than a touch of loneliness about it. Possibly he does not feel this; he may prefer it, indeed. He has friends—fellows who think quite a lot of him. But he is not much in their company. It is for Figgins & Co., and, after them, Tom Merry, that he cares most; but he has comparatively little share in their doings.

He was a passionate, undisciplined, half-savage youngster when he arrived at St. Jim's. He did not take chaff well; but that was not surprising—he had never been used to it, of course. Figgins & Co. were more than decent to him, and, though he broke out at times, he was grateful to them, and really fond of Figgy. But it looked as though he would never be persuaded to regard Tom Merry as anything but an enemy; and his enmity was by no means of the passive kind.

Tom's uncle, General Merry, had been mixed up in the affairs of Bundelpore during his distinguished Indian career. To Koumi Rao the very name of Merry was like a red rag to a bull. When he found that Tom was the general's nephew he wanted vengeance at once. Nothing could convince him that, whatever trouble there had been in the past, it was neither Tom's affair nor his. In the East feuds are handed down from one generation to another, and Koumi Rao, fresh from the East, was not to be shaken in his faith that this was fitting and correct.

He fought Tom, and was beaten. He fought foul, and was taken to task by Figgins & Co. The feeling against him was very strong, and generous, good-hearted Tom Merry could not see any way to set matters right, though he was willing enough to do so if but a way could be found. Perhaps the stories he had heard from his uncle of what happened in India had made him better able to understand Koumi Rao's point of view than Figgins was. Anyway, the feud was no choice of Tom's.

There came an end to it in an unexpected and dramatic manner. Tom and the new fellow had fought again, alone, and Koumi Rao had tried to use a dagger. It was wrested from him, and the fellow whom he had tried to stab defended his life against the scoundrel sent all the way from Bundelpore to kill him. Such generous courage as that was too much for Koumi Rao to hold out against.

But that incident was by no means the end of the troubles into which Koumi Rao's passionate temper got him. Figgins & Co. did their best to instruct him in the ways of British school life; and if plenty of chaff could

have made him leave off minding about being chaffed they certainly deserved huge success. They did not deserve blame, anyway, for their chaff was of the good-natured sort, and the Jam had to be broken in. One of Kerr's favourite dodges was to talk to him in what he pretended to be Hindustani—something after this kind:

"Bang-wallop chuckalucky puff-puff! Bang-bang-wallop bumpetty-bump snooker chucka-biddy tooralooral! Snooker-pool tooralooral dum-dum chutney!"

The Jam did not so much mind that. He could stand a fair amount from Kerr. But when Crooke called him a nigger he wanted to kill Crooke. He still retained his Oriental ideas about killing. The lords of Bundelpore had always been masters of life and death, and in his own land Koumi Rao would have had no objection in shortening Crooke by a head. But that sort of thing was obviously impossible at St. Jim's. Crooke added to his offensiveness by suggesting the use of the Jam as a guy in the Fifth of November procession. And the Jam added to his list of those who ought to be killed the names of Levison and Gore and Mellish, who had been prominent among his persecutors.

Kerr told him that if he killed Crooke he would have to go to prison for the rest of his life; and, that being so, he might as well kill the other three also, having only one life to spend in durance. Kerr suggested the borrowing of Taggles' chopper for the purpose. As there appeared to be some difficulty about getting the chopper, Buck Finn's bowie-knife was obtained instead—at least, the sheath was, for Mr. Linton had taken away the blade, and Buck had fastened the handle to the sheath, as an ornament to his study wall. Supplied with this not too dangerous weapon, but, of course, quite unaware of its harmless character, Koumi Rao was encouraged to do some killing. It was meant as a lesson to him as well as a joke; but it was a doubtfully good joke, and not a very successful lesson. Playing with a temper of this type is very like playing with fire.

Then Crooke was struck down senseless by a stone in the dark quad, and suspicion pointed to Koumi Rao. He was quite innocent; Gore had done the cowardly deed, mistaking Crooke for someone else. But the evidence seemed conclusive, and Koumi Rao was sentenced to expulsion. It hit him hard; not only the disgrace of it, but, now that it came to the pinch, the leaving those who had been his friends. He wanted to run away before he was turned out, and Fatty Wynn helped him to bolt. But he was caught, and collared by the juniors for the Guy Fawkes procession. They would hardly have dealt with him so had they understood half of the rage and despair that tore him. As it was, Figgy, though believing him guilty, spoke up for him; the Jam never forgot or could forget that. Then Gore owned up, and all was put right.

More trouble came later. It was very serious trouble. Koumi Rao had been got at by a Hun spy, with the design of using him as an instrument in the stirring up of disaffection to the British rule in Bundelpore. Figgins was the chief agent in foiling the Hun rascal's plans. Fatty and Kerr and several others helped, especially towards the finish; but Figgy was foremost. That was not because he was cleverer than the rest, or saw farther; it was only because of the very real affection the Jam had for him. It was more than affection, indeed—"an overwhelming gratitude and devotion that astonished Figgins. Figgy was not much given to deep thinking, and he did not understand Koumi Rao; he regarded him as rather a queer, foreign sort of beggar, as he would have expressed it; but he liked him, and treated him as a pal in his rough-and-ready manner. There could hardly have been a greater contrast between the deep, subtle Oriental and the honest, frank, simple-natured Figgins. But they pulled together well."

Figgy found Koumi Rao sitting alone in his study in the dark, and the Indian confessed that he was brooding over the fact that Bundelpore had had to submit to the British Raj, and was thinking of the chances that the war might give to India to break loose. Figgy guessed that someone had been putting such thoughts into his mind; but Koumi Rao would not say who the tempter was. Figgy took him up and carried him off to a tea-party in spite of his struggles; but he would not join in the paper-chase the next day. He did come, actually, for Figgy forced him to; but he gave his chum the slip on the way. It was Fatty Wynn, taking shelter from the rain in an old shepherd's hut, who learned about Herr Hermann Schultz. Fatty heard a good deal, and he knew that Koumi Rao, though sorely tempted, had not quite given way. The thought of Figgy kept him from deciding. He could not bear to imagine what would be his chum's feelings towards him if he consented.

Fatty tried to capture the Hun, but failed. The trying was plucky enough; but Fatty has never lacked pluck. He made a prisoner of Koumi Rao, and led him back to St. Jim's, closely gripped by the arm, through the rain. The Jam wanted to know if he was going to tell the Head what he had heard.

"I'll speak to Figgins first," said Fatty.

"I'll leave it to Figgins." And at that the Jam's face cleared a little.

But while Fatty was speaking to Figgins the Jam bolted. Figgy & Co., the Terrible Three, and Blake & Co. followed him. By accident they had got upon the trail of Herr Schultz. He was keeping a tobacco-shop at Wayland.

The Jam had not come to say that he agreed, however. His words were straightforward and noble.

"I have decided. That is what I have come to tell you. I cannot betray those whose bread I have eaten. I have a friend who trusts me, and I cannot break faith with him."

So honest, simple George Figgins, who had wrought better than he knew, had won the day! Nothing else could have held Koumi Rao; but the bond of friendship for Figgy was strong enough.

Schultz had not played his last card, though he did not hold the ace of trumps, as he fancied he did. He told Koumi Rao that he meant to send him to Germany, drugged, and packed in a box. At Potsdam the Jam must hear reason and toe the line. But if he did not he would simply disappear, and the people of Bundelpore would be told that he had been made away with by the British.

The Jam, though he had no knowledge that aid was at hand, defied the rascal, and even went for him. Then, at the critical moment, the St. Jim's juniors poured in.

"Figgins, you are still my friend?"

"Your pal for life, old son!"

"I am sorry—I am ashamed."

"All's well that ends well, Jammy!"

"Figgins, my friend, some day, when I am in my kingdom, you shall be my Minister, and ten thousand spears shall do your bidding. While the stars shine and the rivers roll Koumi Rao will be faithful to his friend and to the British Raj!"

One fancies that, for all his wayward, passionate nature, Koumi Rao will keep that vow. He is a fine fellow, through so very un-British. And he can hold his own in the playing-fields. He no longer dreams of trying to bribe Tom Merry with a diamond to let him have a place in the team; but he is a good footballer and an excellent cricketer. He is also one of the best junior chess-players. You will remember how he played against Manners, and could not stand the air-raid which left his opponent unmoved.

THE END.

HERRIES' UNCLE HARRY.

By the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—This is a story of No. 6 from an inside point of view.—T. M.]

EVERYONE who knows anything at all about St. Jim's knows about Study No. 6; our fame has spread far and wide.

All the seniors know us, and take a lot of notice of us. Even when I was quite a new kid a senior spoke to me. He said:

"There are some awful young asses, aren't there?"

"Yaas, wathah!" I answered. He then smiled and walked on.

I have often wondered whether he meant anything in particular.

The juniors, naturally, always look up to us, and most come to me for advice when they are in difficulties. I don't a bit know why it is they so seldom have the sense to take it, though.

There are four chaps in our study—Blake, Herries, Digby, and myself.

Blake is a good sort, and quite useful at games; Herries is a good sort, and also quite useful at games, though not so useful as Blake; Digby is a good sort, and about as useful as Herries.

Having fully described Blake, Herries, and Dig, I must give a few words to myself, though modesty prevents me from doing the subject real justice

I have brains—that is universally admitted. Even Lathom, our Form-master, has admitted it. Without vanity I say that I have a figure. And I know how to do that figure justice in the matter of clothes.

My tact and judgment are——

[Seven pages of three hundred words or so each have been deleted here from the author's MS. Seemed to me he was not exactly going on with the story.—T. M.]

It was a rather cold, wintry November afternoon, and we four were sitting in our study wondering what on earth we could find to do.

Footer was off, owing to a match having been scratched.

We had seen the pictures for the week at the Wayland Picture Palace, and they were not worth seeing again. There seemed nothing in the wide world to do.

Then Toby, the School House page, poked his shock head into the study.

"Letter for Master Herries!" he said, with a grin.

"Oh, good!" grunted Herries. "Buzz it over!"

Toby handed the letter to Herries, and departed.

Herries tore open the flap in a rough way that made me shudder.

"It's from my mother," he said.

Herries read the letter through. He always takes a long time reading a letter.

"My Uncle Harry's coming," said Herries.

"When?" asked Blake. "Not this afternoon, I hope, because there's nothing for tea. Tea in Hall to-day."

"But it is to-day," replied Herries. "And the mater says he's going to stay here. Perhaps he's coming as a master."

"What a lark!" chuckled Blake.

"What's he like?" asked Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!" I murmured. "What is he like, deah boy?"

"Never seen the ass!" said Herries disrespectfully.

"Never seen him?" asked Blake. "Where does he live?"

"Oh, Australia! I know I've got some relations living over there. There was an Uncle Jack, but he died. This one's Uncle Harry. Mother says 'he will most probably be in your Form——'"

"That means he'll take the Fourth!" grinned Digby. "What a jape!"

"Weally, Digbay," I ventured to remark, "it is suahly undahstood that we must tweat Hewwies' uncle with the utmost wespect!"

"Jolly handy when we're stony!" grinned Digby.

"Weally, Dig——" I remonstrated.

But Blake broke in:

"Don't be an ass, Gussy!" he said. "What are uncles for, if not to shell out tips?"

"Can he lay it on hard?" asked Digby.

"How do I know, ass?" growled Herries. "Don't I tell you I've never seen the chump?"

"We'll ask him to tea," muttered Blake. "Better get up a collection at once. I dare say he'll be hungry."

"We want to make a favourable impression to begin with," said Digby thoughtfully. "May as well do him well. Suppose we get up a bit of a celebration?"

"Yaas, wathah!" I agreed. "Just what I was thinkin'. I'll get the fellahs——"

"Tell you what!" broke in Blake very rudely. "We'll get a crowd of the Fourth to come down to the station. Make a giddy procession of it!"

"Jolly good idea!" said Herries. "Nunky ought to be frightfully bucked if a heap of us toddle to the station to meet him."

"Good!"

"I'll go and get the fellows together," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake," I said, fixing my monocle into my eye and giving him a frigid stare, "you are aware that I am leadah of this studay——"

"I'm jolly well not!" said Blake, with what I considered unnecessary emphasis. "I'm leader of this study!"

"Wot!" I said firmly. Firmness is a great characteristic of mine.

But Blake merely grins in a silly way when I am firm. He did so now.

"You shouldn't say 'wot,' Gussy! It shows lack of breeding," he said, wagging a reproving forefinger at me.

I gasped. For Jack Blake to lecture me on breeding was—well, the limit!

"You sillay ass——" I began hotly. But Blake wasn't listening. He had gone out of the study to recruit the crowd for the station.

When he had gone Digby, who had been thinking hard, looked up, and remarked:

"Blessed if I knew Lathom was going away!"

We stared at him. It certainly was a fact that we had heard nothing about our Form-master having a holiday. We knew he wasn't leaving; we should have heard of that.

"He may have gone, though," suggested Herries. "We haven't seen him since lessons."

"Well, your mater said most distinctly that your Uncle Harry was coming into your Form."

"That must suahly mean that he is coming as a mastah," I said, after some thought. "A chap's uncle couldn't——"

"Of course, ass!" snorted Herries. And they went to find Blake. I followed them.

Blake seemed overjoyed at the prospect of having Uncle Harry as a Form-master.

The majority of the Fourth seemed very keen to take part in the procession that I was leading to the station, most of them being under the impression that the first thing the master would do would be to stand treat to the Fourth; and we couldn't work that notion out of them.

We all lined up outside, and I prepared to take the lead, as usual.

"Hallo, Gussy! What do you want?" asked Blake, who was at the head of the crowd.

"Weally, Blake! Suahly you undahstand that I am leadah——" I began.

"Leader your aunt!" growled Blake.

"Here, I'm leader!" Herries said, coming up. "Ain't it my uncle?"

By that time we had naturally come to regard his uncle as our common property. But Herries got so fierce about it that we had to give way. It was rather mean of him, I thought, to threaten to monopolise his uncle. But we had to let him lead. So I gave way gracefully.

We reached the station in safety, nothing happening to call for leadership. The little exit door made rather a good imitation of a triumphal arch. And we lined up on either side of it.

The train came in at last, and some passengers alighted. One came out of the station with a run, evidently in a hurry. He was an officer, and not likely to be Herries' uncle.

The other one, with his hat on at a rakish angle, was dressed in Etons, and carried a large brown leather bag. He certainly couldn't be Herries' uncle.

He came out, and stopped, staring at us.

Herries had mumbled "Auspicious occasion," and we had begun to cheer, as arranged. But we stopped, and we stared, too.

"Is this a welcome for me?" the stranger said, beaming.

"No!" hooted Blake.

"Well, it's a novel way of greeting a new chap, I must say!"

"Are you a new kid?" asked Figgins, staring at the chap. "We didn't know that there was one coming."

"Oh!" said the new boy. He was, as far as I could judge—and I am rather a good judge of ages—about fourteen or fifteen. "Yes, I'm a new boy. Is my nephew here?" And he looked round with a grin.

"Your what?" gasped three or four of us.

"My nephew George—George Herries!"

Somebody held up Herries. He needed holding up.

"My hat!" said Kerr.

"What d'ye mean?" stuttered Herries. "My uncle! You silly ass!"

"Be careful how you speak to your uncle!" said the new boy, with a grin. "I'm Harry Medland."

"Harry Medland! Uncle Harry!" gasped poor Herries.

Of course, when one thought about it, it was quite poss. Herries was a bit older than his uncle, that was all; but it seemed funny at the time.

"Then—then you're not the master of the Fourth?" gasped Figgins.

"Great Scott, no! I'm going in the Fourth with George, though. How are you, George?"

By this time Herries had begun to understand. Herries is not very quick, you know.

"All right, uncle!" he murmured, amid a general laugh.

Of course, had it been my uncle, I should have seen through it directly. But Herries is rather dense.

Herries' uncle wasn't at St. Jim's long, though. His father died, and he had to go back.

THE END.

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