

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER—FULL OF GOOD CHEER!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 828.
Vol. XXIV.
December 22nd,
1923.

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RATTY IN THE LINE OF FIRE!

The School House invaders find an unexpected target for their snowballs. (An exciting incident from the grand long complete Christmas story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's contained in this issue.)

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Hip-hip—HOORAY!



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A Splendid Christmas Yarn This, Boys!

DARCY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY!

Ralph Reckness Cardew cannot sink his animosity towards Tom Merry even though they are guests of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at Eastwood House. A Grand Christmas Story of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. By popular

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Awkward!

"CHRISTMAS is comin'!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form confided that circumstance to Blake and Herries and Digby in Study No. 6. Blake & Co. stared at him.

They were, as a matter of fact, quite aware that Christmas was coming—especially as they had talked of hardly anything but the Christmas holidays for some days past.

Arthur Augustus had been sitting in deep thought for some time, and he made his statement seriously and solemnly, as if it were the outcome of deep reflection.

"You don't mean it?" asked Blake.

"Christmas generally does come at the end of December," remarked Herries. "I am quite awah of that, Hewwies. But I am feahfully wowwied."

Arthur Augustus looked worried. There was a deep line in his noble brow, showing that his powerful intellect had been given some unusual exercise.

Blake & Co., on the other hand, looked anything but worried. They looked particularly cheerful. The coming of Christmas certainly did not have a worrying effect on them.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Blake. "Anything gone wrong at home?"

"Nothin', deah boy."

"Pater and mater all right?"

"Wight as wain."

"Has Lord Eastwood changed his mind, and doesn't he think he would like you to bring three nice chaps home with you for the vac?"

"Nothin' of the kind."

"Then there's nothing the matter," said Blake. "It's all right, Gussy. Don't worry."

"But it's not all wight, Blake!"

"Blessed if I see what's wrong, then. Isn't cousin Ethel coming for Christmas?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Has your tailor sent in a specially big bill?" asked Digby sympathetically.

"Wats! I am fwightfully wowwied. You see—"

"I don't!" remarked Blake.

"I have asked Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah for Chwistmas—"

"That's all right. They can behave themselves," said Blake. "If they put on any Shell swank we'll jolly soon take them down a peg."

"Yes, rather!" said Herries and Dig together. "That's all right!"

"But it is not all wight," said Arthur Augustus distressfully. "Because I have asked Cardew and Clive and Levison also."

"Oh!" said Blake.

"It was all awwanged long ago," said D'Arcy. "I weally considahed that it was goin' to be a vewy pleasant Chwistmas-partay. And now Tom Mewwy and Cardew are in da gaggahs dwwawn."

"Hum!" said Herries thoughtfully.

"Cardew is a distant wvlation of mine, as you are awah," continued Arthur

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Augustus. "The pater expected me to bring him. When the arrangements were made there had not been any wov. Since then Cardew has bagged Tom Mewwy's place as juniah captain of St. Jim's, and they are on fwightfully bad terms. I must admit that Cardew tweeked Tom Mewwy vewy wottenly."

"He did!" grunted Blake. "And he treated this study rotterly, too."

"As a matter of fact, he's a bit of a rotter," said Dig. "That accounts for it."

"I do not approve of Cardew's conduct," said Arthur Augustus. "His election methods were wathah thick. As juniah captain, he has not played up in a way I can approve. Tom Mewwy took it vewy well, and backed him up as skippah, and Cardew seems to have gone out of his way to make himself unpleasant to Tommy. At the Wook-wood match, f'winstance—"

"We know!" growled Herries. "Cardew made out he was playing me in goal, and let me down at the last minute."

"And dropped Tom from the team!" growled Blake. "And all of us!" said Dig. "After making out that the whole study would be wanted for the match."

"It was wotten!" said Arthur Augustus. "I don't think Cardew meant any harm, weally; but it was vewy thoughtless and inconsiderate, to say the vewy least."

"The vewy, vewy least!" assented Blake. "Tom Mewwy vewy natuwallly wesented his conduct," went on Arthur Augustus. "They do not speak now."

"That's so." "That is why I am fwightfully wowwied," continued the swell of St. Jim's. "They are booked to spend Chwistmas at Eastwood House with us, and they are not on speakin' terms. It's feahfully awkward."

Blake nodded. "I suppose it is a bit awkward," he assented. "You had better drop Cardew out, Gussy."

"Imposs, deah boy! Some of his wvelations will be there—Lord Lilburn, and peewraps his old gwandfathah. And my patah is a sort of second uncle twiced wemoved, or something, to Cardew, and he expects to see him at Chwistmas."

"You can't drop Tom Merry." "Wathah not! Besides, I don't want to! Tom is goin' to bring ovah his old gwernness, Miss Fawcett, on Chwistmas Day, and it would be weally imposs to say anythin' to upset that estimable old lady. It is all fixed, and cannot be altahed without makin' a feahful lot of people feel dweadfully awkward and uncomfortable. And yet how can two fellows who are not on speakin' terms stay at the same house?"

Blake grinned. "They can stay without speaking," he suggested. "Weally, Blake—"

"After all, Tom Merry isn't so gone on talking as you are, Gussy. He can shut up a bit."

"You utah ass!" "And Cardew might be induced to hold his tongue," went on Blake. "They can be civil, I suppose?"

"Yaas; but it is feahfully awkward, and I am howwibly wowwied. Besides, Chwistmas is the time of peace and good will, you know, and fellows ought not to be on bad terms. Cousin Effel will notice that there is somethin' up, so will Levison's sister, Dowis. And it was awwanged to fix up a football match one day if the weathah permits, and on football mattahs Tom Mewwy and Cardew are vewy likely to get as fah as punchin' noses."

"My hat! What an entertainment for Christmas!" said Blake. "You seem to have landed yourself, Gussy. The only thing I can suggest is that you take them under your wing—Tom Merry under one wing and Cardew under the other—and exercise all your tact and judgment."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, and jammed his celebrated eyeglass into his eye, and regarded his grinning chums more in sorrow than in anger.

"You fellows do not seem to know how to take a sewious mattah sewiously," he said. "It is a fwightful wovwy, and there is only one way out. Tom Mewwy and Cardew must make fwiefs befoah Chwistmas."

"Not much time, as we break up to-morrow," remarked Blake.

"I shall twy to do my best as peacemakah," said Arthur Augustus. "Aftah all, a fellow of tact and judgment ought to be able to bring about a wewconciliation."

He moved to the door of Study No. 6. "Hold on!" exclaimed Blake, in alarm. "Better let them alone, Gussy. You know what an ass you are."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Yes, you ought to know that by this time," assented Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"They can be civil to one another without speaking," said Blake. "But if you butt in, Gussy, you'll make matters worse."

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus walked out of the study, evidently bound upon a peace-making mission, with the noble object of bringing about peace and good will between Tom Merry and Cardew—a state of affairs highly desirable at Christmas-time, and indeed at all times.

Blake & Co. looked at one another and grinned. "Good old Gussy!" sighed Blake. "Always putting his cheery old foot in it!"

"They won't make friends," said Dig. "Hardly!"

"What do you think will happen, then?" "A fight, most likely."

"Oh, my hat!" "Let's hope for the best," said Blake cheerfully. "Let's hope, at least, that Tom Merry and Cardew won't take a black eye each to Eastwood House for Christmas."

And there was a chortle in Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 2. Follow Your Leader!

CRASH!

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. He sat down suddenly in the snow.

There was snow in the quadrangle of St. Jim's, snow ridged on the old walls and the ancient chimneys. The leafless branches of the elms were gleaming with it. Tom Merry and Manners and Lovther of the Shell came up the path towards the School House, tramping in the newly-fallen carpet of white. And suddenly, from somewhere, a volley of snowballs whizzed, raining on the Terrible Three. Tom Merry caught one with his nose, one with his chin, and one with each ear. He sat down.

There was a roar of laughter, and a shout in the well-known tones of Figgins of the New House.

"Give 'em socks! Down with the School House!" "Whiz! Whiz! Whiz!" "Look out!" gasped Manners.

Figgins & Co. of the New House rushed from their ambush. There were Figgins, and Kerr, and Fatty Wynn, and Redfern, and a dozen more fellows. They rushed down on the School House trio, hurling snowballs as they came. Figgins & Co., apparently, were bent on winding up the term with a House row.

Tom Merry scrambled up. "Collar them!" roared Figgins. "Roll 'em in the snow!" "Give 'em socks!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"Hook it!" said Tom breathlessly. "They're too many for us!"

The Terrible Three ran for the School House. Behind them came the New House crowd, whooping and whizzing snowballs.

"Rescue, School House!" shouted Tom Merry. "Back up, School House!" came a roar from a dozen quarters. And School House fellows rushed to the rescue.

From one direction came Levison, Clive, and Cardew of the Fourth; from another, Talbot and Kangaroo of the Shell. Julian and Kerruish, Hammond and Reilly appeared from somewhere and rushed into the fray. The Terrible Three halted and turned on their pursuers.

In a moment a battle was raging. Snowballs whizzed and crashed, and overturned juniors rolled in the snow and yelled.

Out of the School House a crowd came pouring—Wally of the Third and a crew of fags, Fourth-Formers, and Shell fellows. Blake and Herries and Digby, hearing the alarm in Study No. 6, dashed downstairs, and out into the quad without waiting for caps or coats. In a couple of minutes the odds were against the New House enemy, and Figgins & Co. retreated in their turn.

"After them!" roared Blake. "Down with the New House!" "Hurrah!"

Tom Merry led the rush at the enemy. He was manfully backed up by the School House crowd. The air was thick with snowballs, and ringing with yells and howls and cheers.

From the window of his study Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, looked out with a smile. Mr. Railton looked out of his window, and laughed. There was no harm in a snow battle between the juniors of the rival Houses, especially at the end of the term, when the bonds of discipline were relaxing. Kildara and Darrell and the other prefects heard the shindy without heeding it. Only one prefect—Knox of the Sixth—who had a genius for interfering where



Cardew stood up grasping his whip. "Stand off," he shouted angrily. Unwittingly, the juniors fairly dragged the horse to the side of the road. The reins were torn away from Cardew, and Tom Merry simply tied them to a fence. The whole came down with a crash across Tom Merry's shoulder. (See page 11.)

interference was not needed—sailed out with an ashpitant. And Knox of the Sixth—perhaps by accident—was overwhelmed by a rush of the juniors and rolled in the snow, and trampled over, till he hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels, and wished from the bottom of his heart that he had stayed in his study. And the snow battle went on vigorously, and Figgins & Co., outnumbered but plucky, were driven back towards their own House, disputing every foot of the way.

"Down with the New House!"
 "Yah! School House cads!"
 "Give 'em beans!"
 "Hurrah!"

Tom Merry led the rush fairly up to the steps of the New House. Under a rain of whizzing snowballs, Figgins & Co. were driven into the shelter of their own House. And then Tom Merry sighted a thin, acid face in the doorway—the face of Horace Ratcliff, Housemaster.

"Hoo! it!" he called out.
 And the attacking party backed. They did not want trouble with a Housemaster.
 "Follow on!" shouted Cardew.
 "Yah! School House cads!" came a howl from the enemy. "Go home! Funks!"
 "Come on!" shouted Cardew. "Follow your leader!"
 "Ratty's there!" panted Tom Merry.
 "Hang Ratty!"
 "Look here, Cardew—"
 "Hold your tongue!"
 "What?" roared Tom Merry.
 Cardew gave him a mocking look.
 "You seem to have forgotten that you're not junior captain now, Tom Merry! Allow me to remind you!"
 "You cad!" burst out Tom

"That's enough! Back up, School House!" shouted Cardew. "Follow your leader!"

And he led the way in a rush up the New House steps, much to the amazement of Figgins & Co., and still more to the amazement of Mr. Ratcliff, who had expected the mob to melt away at his appearance on the scene.

There was a momentary hesitation in the School House ranks. But Tom Merry did not care to stand back where Cardew went forward. He rushed on, with Manners and Lowther, and Blake & Co. followed, and Levison and Clive and the rest.

They came swarming up the New House steps, and in at the wide open doorway. Snowballs whizzed right into the House.

"Boys!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff furiously.
 Mr. Ratcliff was not heeded. Cardew dodged round him, and a rush of his followers sent the Housemaster spinning against the wall. Mr. Ratcliff staggered there and gasped.
 "Back up!" roared Figgins.

"Figgins—Merry—boys!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.
 The New House rallied, and met the School House invaders manfully. The last snowballs whizzed, and the rivals of St. Jim's came down to their fists. In the hall of the New House a terrific combat raged, amid tremendous excitement. But in their own domain the New House had the advantage, and the School House were driven out at last, and driven down the steps.

Then Monteith and Baker, and several other New House prefects, came on the scene with their canes, and the School House crowd hurriedly retreated. Even Cardew, reckless as he was, did not seem disposed to enter into combat with prefects of the Sixth Form. As the crowd broke up Mr.

Ratcliff sallied forth, like a lion from his lair, his eyes glinting with rage. His grasp fell upon Tom Merry's collar. "You are the ringleader in this," he panted. "I—ow!—I shall see that you are properly punished!"

"Let go!" gasped Tom.

"Come with me!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

He fairly dragged Tom Merry into the New House. Properly speaking, Mr. Ratcliff had no right to cane School House juniors; they were under the authority of their own Housemaster. On this occasion Mr. Ratcliff, stretched a point. The invasion of his House enraged him, and he supposed—without inquiry—that Tom Merry was the leader in the raid. He propelled the Shell fellow into his study. There he grabbed up a cane.

"Hold out your hand, Merry!" he shouted.

Tom Merry kept his hands down. In the first place, he was not guilty, as Cardew had led the attack on the New House against Tom's judgment; in the second place, Tom had no intention of submitting to any Housemaster but his own.

"Do you hear me?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

He did not wait for an answer. He caught Tom by the collar again, and brought down the cane over his shoulders.

"Oh!" roared Tom.

Whack, whack, whack!

Tom Merry tore himself loose, and leaped out of the study.

"Come back!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

The Shell fellow did not heed. He scudded for the door, and dodged a clutch made at him by Monteith of the Sixth. A few moments more and he was in the quad, sprinting for his own House. A crowd of fellows in the doorway of the School House greeted him.

"Ratty bagged you, old bean?" asked Blake.

"Yes," gasped Tom.

"Must be an ass," drawled Cardew. And Cardew of the Fourth walked away as Tom turned on him with flashing eyes; and what Tom Merry would have answered remained unuttered.

CHAPTER 3. Gussy Butts In!

"TOM MEWWY, dear boy!"

The elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared in the doorway of Study No. 10 in the Shell. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were at tea there—the last study tea of the term. On the morrow St. Jim's was breaking up for Christmas, and the chums of

the Shell were discussing that matter when D'Arcy appeared in the office.

"Trot in, old man," said Tom. "Just in time. There's some of the cake left."

"Thank you vewy much, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus, coming in. "I have not come to tea, howevah. I have had tea. I suppose you chaps wemembah that Chwistmas is comin'."

"We had a sort of vague idea that it was," said Monty Lowther gravely. "But it's good of you to remind us. We might have forgotten."

"These little things do slip the memory!" remarked Manners, with a nod.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Have you trotted along to remind us that it is Christmas-time, Gussy?" he asked.

"Not entiahly, dear boy. But bein' Chwistmas-time, no doubt you chaps are awah that it is a pwopah time for peace on earth and good will to men, and so forth—what?"

"Peace be with you, Gussy!" said Lowther solemnly.

"Also good will!" added Manners.

"May your shadow never grow whiskers," went on Lowther.

"I am speakin' sewiously, dear boys—especially as wegards Tom Mewwy. I am, in fact, goin' to speak a word in season to Tom Mewwy."

"Little me!" exclaimed Tom in surprise. "My hat! Are you winding up the term with a sermon?"

"Not exactly, Tom Mewwy. But—"

"Keep it for the House supper to-night!" suggested Manners. "You'll have a bigger audience."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"And the whole House will listen with rapt attention—perhaps!" said Monty Lowther.

"Pway don't wot, dear boys. It's about Cardew, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry's brow darkened.

"The less said about Cardew in this study the better, D'Arcy," he answered curtly.

"That is quite a mistake, Tom Mewwy. I have come heah specially to speak about Cardew."

"Then ring off before you get any further," suggested Tom.

"Cardew is not persona grata here," explained Monty Lowther. "Put the brake on the giddy exuberance of your verbosity, old bean."

"Wats! About Cardew, Tom Mewwy—"

"Blow Cardew!"

"I admit that he has acted wottenly."

"He has acted more than rottenly," said Tom, his eyes gleaming. "I want to have nothing to do with him, and nothing to say about him. I know you mean well, Gussy, but don't butt in."

"I am bound to butt in, Tom Mewwy, in the circs," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I want you to make fwriends with Cardew."

"Rats!"

"Bein' Chwistmas-time—"

"Have you come from Cardew with the olive-branch?"

"Oh, no! I have not spoken to Cardew. I am goin' to."

"Then go and do it," said Tom. "If he wants to make friends with me it's easy enough. He will have to leave off acting like a cad, and he will have to resign the junior captaincy, which he got hold of by treachery, and has abused since he got hold of it. In a word, he will have to become a decent fellow—and as that's impossible for Cardew, it's no good talking."

Tom Merry spoke with unusual heat. Manners and Lowther glanced at him, slightly surprised. It was not like Tom to nourish wrath; but he was angry with Cardew, and he did not feel that he was wrong to be angry. Tom had lost the junior captaincy to his rival, simply because he disdained to combat Cardew with his own weapons. He had backed up the new captain loyally till Cardew made it clear that he was using his new position to humiliate the fellow who had previously held it. The raid on the New House that afternoon had been the finishing touch. Tom Merry was feeling much more inclined to seek Cardew in his study and give him the thrashing of his life than to make friends with him.

Arthur Augustus coughed. He seemed to have started rather badly on his peace-making mission.

"Howevah—" he said.

"Oh, chuck it!" said Tom. "I tell you I want nothing to do with Cardew. Isn't that enough?"

"Yaas; but—"

"Well, chuck it!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I hoped that you would be willin' to come along with me to Cardew's study, and give him the wight hand of fellowship!"

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MYSTERY NOW ON SALE! ADVENTURE



Tom Merry entered the ball-room with a face that was far from bright, and looked round for Ethel. His brow grew almost black as he saw her in the throng with Cardew. His eyes gleamed as he stood behind a mass of ferns watching. (See page 17.)

"I'll come to Cardew's study, if you like—"
 "Good!"
 "And give him my right hand—"
 "Vewy good."
 "On his cheeky mouth!" added Tom. "Is that what you want?"
 "Oh cwumbs! No! Not at all! Weally, Tom Mewwy, I—"
 "If the fellow were a match for me in a fight, I'd go to him and make him put up his hands," added Tom. "But he's not—and that's the only reason why he hasn't seen me already. Let it drop, Gussy."
 Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass thoughtfully. Considering the way in which Ralph Reckness Cardew had won the junior captaincy, and his conduct since to Tom Merry and Tom's best chums, Tom's feelings were not to be wondered at. They were quite natural, in fact. But certainly they were of no use to the self-constituted peace-maker.
 "You have disappointed me, Tom Mewwy," said the swell of St. Jim's, at last.
 "Sorry!" said Tom. "Have some cake?"
 "Thank you, no!" said D'Arcy with dignity. "I did not come heah for cake. I came heah for peace!"
 "Piece of cake?" asked Monty Lowther.
 "Certainly not, you ass! When I say peace I mean peace, not piece! Pway do not make wotten puns. I twust, Tom Mewwy, that if Cardew should come to you to make it up, you will not wepulse him."
 "On the terms I've stated," said Tom, half-laughing, "Cardew isn't likely to play up."
 "I am goin' to speak to him vewy sewiously."
 "Poor chap!" said Lowther.
 "Wats!"
 Arthur Augustus walked very thoughtfully out of Study No. 10. Tom Merry went on with his tea, with rather a

flushed face. Tom Merry had had his enemies, but he'd never been anybody's enemy himself. It was seldom, or never, that he allowed the sun to go down on his wrath. But at the present time, undoubtedly, the mere mention of Ralph Reckness Cardew was enough to rouse his ire.
 "It's a bit awkward," Manners remarked after a long pause. "We're meeting Cardew, I understand, at Gussy's place for Christmas."
 "I know it's awkward," said Tom. "I've thought of telling Gussy I can't come. But Miss Priscilla would want to know why—and Lord Eastwood, too—and old Conway."
 "We sha'n't go if you don't!" said Monty.
 "Well, you must go. Your uncle will be there, Monty. And Manners' sisters are coming for Christmas Day. It's awkward all round. But I suppose in such a crowd as there will be I can keep clear of Cardew without anybody noticing anything."
 "Will Cardew let you?" said Manners.
 Tom breathed hard.
 "Well, I suppose Cardew won't want anything like a scene in another fellow's house," he said.
 "No, he would draw the line at that. But it would be just his way to provoke you into a scene, if he could."
 "I know. I shall take care to keep clear of him. I don't see how I can possibly keep away now—unless Gussy should give me a hint, of course." Tom set his lips. "Besides, I'm not going to allow Cardew to make any difference to my plans. He's given me enough trouble at St. Jim's, with his dirty tricks! I'm not going to let him muck up my Christmas holidays!"
 "I say, Tom Merry!" Baggy Trimble put his fat face in at the door of Study No. 10. "I say—"
 "Oh, hook it!" snapped Tom. He was not in a humour for Baggy Trimble just then.
 "I say, the fellows say that Cardew is going to speechify

at the House supper this evening," said Baggy, blinking at Tom. "Some of the fellows think you ought to do it, as you were captain. Cardew's only been captain a couple of weeks. I hear that Cardew says—"

"Bother what Cardew says!"

"Yes, but he says that if you butt in he will shut you up fast enough," said Baggy, grinning.

Tom Merry crimsoned.

"Shut up, you fat mischief-maker!" growled Manners.

"Well, I'm only putting Tom on his guard," said Trimble.

"I say, Merry, what will you do if Cardew shuts you up?"

Tom Merry did not answer the question. He jumped up and caught hold of Baggy Trimble's collar.

"Here, I say—" roared Trimble in alarm.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Baggy Trimble roared as his bullet head was knocked thrice on the door of Study No. 10.

"Yow-ow-ow! Oooop! Leggo! Oooop!"

* * * * *

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS - WEEK

ISSUE OF YOUR OLD

FAVOURITE NEXT WEEK, CHUMS—

* * * * *

Tom Merry, with a swing of the arm, pitched Trimble into the passage. Baggy sprawled there with a wild roar.

He seemed disposed to follow the fat junior out and help him along the passage with his boot. But he restrained himself, and closed the study door with a slam.

"Yah!" Trimble's voice came through the keyhole. "I'll tell Cardew! Yah!"

Tom Merry made a movement, but Lowther caught him by the arm.

"Nuff's as good as a feast, old bean!" murmured Monty. "What's the good of taking any notice of a worm like Trimble? Most likely Cardew never said anything of the kind! You know Trimble! He loves making trouble!"

"It's like Cardew!"

"Yes, but—"

"I've a jolly good mind—" Tom paused.

"Don't let's wind up the term with a scrap," urged Manners. "Keep clear of Cardew till school breaks up. It isn't long now."

"You're right," said Tom.

He dropped into his chair again. But his brow was clouded over tea. Tom Merry was angry, and, like the ancient prophet, he felt that he did well to be angry. But it was not a happy or comfortable frame of mind for any fellow to be in.

CHAPTER 4.
Peace-Making Extraordinary!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW rose from the tea-table in Study No. 9 in the Fourth, sat down in the arm-chair, and took a gold-tipped cigarette from his pocket. Meeting the rather grim glances of Levison and Clive, he smiled, and tossed the cigarette into the fire.

"Forgettin' again," he remarked.

"It's time you remembered," said Ernest Levison rather gruffly.

"High time!" said Clive.

Cardew nodded agreeably.

"You fellows are always right," he said. "That, I suppose, is why you bore me so," Cardew sighed. "Are you fellows looking forward to Christmas at D'Arcy's place?"

"I am," said Levison.

"It's jolly decent of him to ask us, I think," said Sidney Clive. "I'm glad to go!"

"We shall have to be on our best behaviour," sighed Cardew. "That won't come hard to you fellows, I suppose. Though from what I've heard, Levison, it would have come rather hard to you once upon a time."

"Oh, let that rest!" granted Levison.

"Tom Merry and his crowd will be there, too," said Cardew, with a mocking gleam in his eyes. "That may turn out entertainin' in some ways. There's such a pleasure in pullin' Thomas' innocent old leg."

"Weally, Cardew!" murmured a voice in the doorway of Study No. 9.

"Dear old Gussy!" said Cardew, turning to smile and nod at the swell of St. Jim's. "How good of you to give us a look in. We were just discussin' your jolly old Christmas

party, and I was warnin' Levison that he must be careful to keep clear of his wild old ways."

Arthur Augustus looked severely at Ralph Reckness Cardew. But Cardew's beaming good-humour was not to be withstood, and D'Arcy's severe expression melted.

"I twust you fellows will find it all wight at my place," he remarked.

"Top-hole, I'm sure!" said Cardew.

"Tom Mewwy will be there."

"Yes, that makes it all the more interestin'. I've such a high opinion of Thomas, though unfortunately we've had our little differences lately," said Cardew gravely.

Arthur Augustus smiled cheerily. He had found Cardew in a more promising mood for peace-making than he had found Tom Merry. At all events, it seemed so to him.

Levison and Clive looked glum. "It was all very well to pull Arthur Augustus' leg, but this was neither a proper time nor a proper subject, in their opinion. But Ralph Reckness Cardew was quite indifferent to their disapproval.

"I am vewy glad to heah you speak like that, Cardew!" said D'Arcy.

"Such a pleasure to confer pleasure!" murmured Cardew.

"The fact is, I have come heah in the wole of peace-makah."

"Oh gad! I mean, just so! Fire away!"

"I want you and Tom Mewwy to make fwriends," said Arthur Augustus genially. "It ought to be quite easy, I think."

"You think so?" smiled Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah! You see, all the w'ong is on your side, Cardew, so you have nothin' to forgive."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And Tom Mewwy has weceived all the injuwies, but he is a wathah forgivin' chap," continued Arthur Augustus brightly. "All you have to do is to express some wegwet for havin' acted wottenly. See?"

"I—I see!" gasped Cardew, while Levison and Clive stared blankly at the swell of St. Jim's, almost overcome by this sample of tact and judgment.

"I am suah that will set it wight," continued Arthur Augustus. "In fact, I have already seen Tom Mewwy, and he actually said that he willin' to make fwriends if 'ou would leave off actin' like a sad."

"What?" ejaculated Cardew.

"I twust I, make myself cleah."

"Oh! Oh, yes! Keep on! You're puttin' it so tactfully!" gasped Cardew.

"Yaas, I wathah pwide myself upon my tact and judgment, you know," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "I have no doubt I shall be able to awwange this little mattah satisfactorily. Tom Mewwy is p'wpared to make fwriends if you will be a decent chap, Cardew."

"Is—is he?"

"Yaas. In fact, he said so."

"Oh!"

"He considahs that it is impossible—"

"For me to be a decent chap?" gasped Cardew.

"Yaas. But it is up to you to show him that it is fah fwom impossible," said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

Cardew sat and stared at the swell of St. Jim's. Gussy had many interesting and curious manners and customs of his own. But this method of peacemaking was amazing.

* * * * *

— FILLED FROM COVER TO

COVER WITH GOOD THINGS.

IT WILL PLEASE YOU ALL!

* * * * *

"Is it all wight?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Can I go back to Tom Mewwy and tell him that you are p'wpared to speak to him?"

Cardew's eyes glittered.

"You can tell him that I shall be in the Common-room presently, and that if he's there I shall be glad to speak to him," he said.

Arthur Augustus' kind face beamed with satisfaction.

"That's wight, deah boy!"

He walked out of Study No. 9. Cardew sat silent, his brow wrinkled in thought. There was an unpleasant gleam in his eyes.

Levison eyed him rather uneasily.

"What are you thinking of, Cardew?" he asked at last.

"Dear old Thomas, and his flatterin' opinion of me," said Cardew, with a smile. "So kind of Gussy to come and tell me how he speaks of me behind my back."

"Gussy meant nothing of the sort."
"I know that—he's an innocent old bird. But he was stavin' the facts."

"Rot!" said Clive abruptly. "Tom Merry's said nothing to Gussy that he wouldn't say to you, and you know it."

"I know. That's why I'm goin' to ask him."
"If you mean that you're going to wind up the term with a row with Tom Merry—"

Cardew yawned, and rose from the chair.
"I'm goin' down," he remarked. "No prep this evenin', thank goodness. Let's get down to the Common-room and have a jaw with the fellows."

"Look here, Cardew—"
The dandy of the Fourth left the study. Levison and Clive, with troubled looks, followed him. Obviously, Arthur Augustus, with the best intentions in the world, had not succeeded in pouring oil on the troubled waters. Rather he had added fuel to flame.

There were a good many fellows in the junior Common-room, discussing the House supper or the break-up or the coming holidays. The Terrible Three were not present just then, and Cardew joined in the chat, with a smile on his face that gave no clue to the thoughts in his mind. It was a little later that Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther strolled in, and crossed over to the fireplace, taking no heed of Cardew.

A gleam came into Cardew's eyes, and he followed them. Levison gave him a look, but he did not heed.

Cardew leaned against the mantelpiece, a few feet from the chums of the Shell. Tom Merry glanced at him, but made no sign. He had heard from Arthur Augustus that Cardew was prepared to speak to him, but he was not at all keen on a talk with Cardew. The less they had to say to one another, in Tom's opinion, the better it would be.

Something in Cardew's manner, though he was still smiling, drew a good many eyes upon him. There was something like trouble in the atmosphere of the Common-room just then.

"So you've shown up at last," said Cardew, in quite a pleasant tone.

Tom looked at him again.
"D'Arcy's kindly told me what you were pleased to say about me—in my absence," continued Cardew.

Tom's eyes gleamed.
"I've said nothing in your absence that I'm not prepared to say in your presence, Cardew," he answered. "Do you want me to tell you what I think of you?"

"Well, that would be better than runnin' a chap down behind his back, wouldn't it?" smiled Cardew.

"That's not my way," said Tom, his lip curling. "What I said to D'Arcy I've said before, and I'm ready to say again. I forget the exact words, but my opinion of you is that you are a tricky cad, that you don't even try to be decent, and that a decent fellow naturally would not want to have anything to do with you."

Manners and Lowther chuckled.
"Straight from the shoulder!" said Manners. "Hear, hear!"

"Passed unanimously!" added Lowther.
Cardew still smiled.

"If there's anything else," said Tom Merry, "you've only to remind me, and I'll repeat it fast enough. Yes—I remember I said that you got hold of the junior captaincy by treachery, and that you've made a rotten use of the job since you got hold of it. I said that, and I repeat it. I'll repeat it as often as you like."

"And I'll give you an answer!" said Cardew.
He stepped forward and struck full at Tom Merry's face. Quick as the blow was, Tom's movement was as quick. His arm came up like lightning, sweeping the blow aside. The next second his knuckles rapped on Cardew's nose, and the junior captain of St. Jim's went to the floor with a crash.

In those very moments Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was coming down the passage with Blake and Herries and Digby in a highly satisfied mood.

"It's all wight, you chaps," he was saying. "Quite all wight! They're both in the Common-woom now, and they're goin' to make it up."

"I don't think!" murmured Blake.

"Little mattahs of this kind, deah boy, can always be awwanged by a fellow of tact and judgment," said Arthur Augustus, reassertingly. "Just come in and see— Oh cwumbs! Bai Jove!"

The chums of Study No. 6 entered the Common-room. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass fell from his eye in his startled amazement. They were just in time to see Ralph Reckness Cardew scramble up furiously from the floor and spring like a tiger at Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 5.
Hand to Hand!

"STOP them!"
"You fellows—"
"A fight! A fight!"
"Bai Jove! This is weally wotten!"

There was a rush of the fellows round the combatants at once. Tom Merry and Ralph Reckness Cardew were fighting fiercely.

Tom's eyes blazed with anger; and it was easy to see, by the look on Cardew's face, that all the evil in his nature was aroused.

There were no rounds and no rests in that sudden fight; it was hammer and tongs all the time.

"Go it, Cardew!" squeaked Baggy Trimble.
"Give him beans, Tommy!" gasped Lowther.
"Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!"
"Stop it, you fellows!" exclaimed Talbot of the Shell.
"Separate them!"

"Rats! Let 'em fight it out!" said Grundy. "It's about time that cheeky cad Cardew had a licking!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo.
"It was bound to come," said Blake. "Put your beef into it, Tommy!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, you fellows—"
"Cave!" shouted Wildrake from the door. "House-master!"
"Look out!"

But Tom Merry and Cardew were too angry and excited to heed, or even to hear. They were still punching furiously as Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, walked into the room.

"Stop that at once!" rapped out the Housemaster.

And he strode at the combatants, grasped one in either hand, and swung them away from one another.

"Good!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry panted for breath. His face was flushed crimson and his eyes flashing. But he made an effort to control himself, as he saw that it was Mr. Railton who had intervened.

Cardew staggered back from the Housemaster's powerful grasp. He found it less easy to control himself. He made as if he would spring at Tom Merry again, and Mr. Railton stepped quickly between them.

"Cardew!" he exclaimed sternly.
Levison caught his chum's arm.
With a great effort Cardew calmed himself.
"Excuse me, sir," he said, "I am afraid I was a little bit excited. Sorry!"

"How dare you fight in the Common-room, either of you?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "And on the last day before break-up, too! Are you not ashamed of yourselves?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Railton," said Tom, with an effort. "I lost my temper."

"I shall not punish you," said Mr. Railton severely. "But I require you both to promise that this shall not recur."

"Very well, sir," said Tom.
"Certainly, sir!" said Cardew at once.

Mr. Railton eyed the two juniors. Both of them were very flushed, and both bore traces of the encounter, brief as it had been. Cardew's handsome Greek nose did not look quite Greek now. It had, as Monty Lowther whispered to Manners, a list to port.

"I accept your word," said the Housemaster after a pause.
"See that there is no more of this."

And he left the Common-room.
"Dear man!" remarked Cardew lightly. "He was bound



to come buttin' in! I suppose he's saved somebody from a lickin'."

"Not much doubt who the somebody is," said Manners. "Little me?" smiled Cardew. "I think not! But I suppose we mustn't put the matter to the test, now we've promised our kind master to be good little boys. Still, if you're keen on it, Merry, I'll stretch a point and oblige you."

Tom gave him a scornful look. "I shall not break my word to Mr. Railton, if that is what you mean, Cardew," he answered.

"High sense of honour, and all that," smiled Cardew. "Very convenient sometimes—what?"

Tom breathed hard. "Let's get out of this, you fellows!" he said to his chums. "I can't keep my hands off that cad if I stay here."

"Hold on!" said Cardew coolly. "There's somethin' else I've got to say, dear boy. I hear you've been bullyin' Trimble."

"What?"

"Trimble complains that you've banged his head on a study door."

"That's true."

"I'm bound, as junior captain, to put a stop to bullyin'," said Cardew. "Mind you don't do anythin' of the sort again."

"I shall do exactly as I please, without any sort of reference to you, Cardew."

"Then you'll find yourself up against trouble," smiled Cardew. "I don't want to have to report you to the prefects for bullyin', but if you make a habit of it you give me no choice in the matter. I'm just givin' you a friendly warnin'."

Tom Merry's eyes blazed, and he made a stride towards Cardew. Manners and Lowther caught him quickly.

"Come on, Tom!"

"Railton, old chap—"

Tom nodded, and dropped his hands and walked out of the Common-room with his chums. Arthur Augustus called to him as he went, but Tom did not answer. Perhaps he had had enough of Gussy's peace-making.

Cardew remained in possession of the field of battle, so to speak. But what satisfaction he felt vanished when he looked into the glass and saw the dark bruise on his handsome nose—no longer handsome. Blake was watching him, and he grinned.

"You'll have an ornamental boko over the Christmas holidays, Cardew," he remarked.

Without answering, Cardew left the room, evidently to attend at once to the damage, in the hope of reducing it. The dandy of the Fourth was particularly careful about his personal appearance—and a bruised nose was the last thing in the world that he desired to take with him to a Christmas party.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus to his chums, in great distress. "This is uttably wooten!"

"What did you expect, when you butted in?" asked Blake. "I was goin' to make peace, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah, deah boys. I veward it as vewy awkward and fivghtfully unfortunate."

"Yes, it's a bit awkward and unfortunate, Railton butting in like that," said Blake, with a nod. "Cardew would have had the hiding he's been asking for so long."

"I do not mean that," said Arthur Augustus.

"I do," said Blake.

"In the circs, deah boys, I do not see how I can vewy well do anythin' more! I shall have to let them wip."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "That's a jolly good idea of yours, Gussy. Why didn't you think of that sooner?"

To which Arthur Augustus only rejoined:

"Wats!"

CHAPTER 6. A Row En Route!

"**R**OTTEN term!" said Monty Lowther. It was a bright and breezy morning. There were banks of snow along the lane down which the big motor-car rolled from St. Jim's. The old school was breaking up for Christmas, and among the earliest to depart were some of our old friends.

In the big car were packed more fellows than it had ever been designed to hold, large as it was. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were there, and Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy. Also there were D'Arcy's young brother, Wally of the Third, and his special pals Manners minor and Levison minor. Wally was in front with the chauffeur, but

the rest were packed somehow into the big car. It was the first contingent of D'Arcy's Christmas party, and the swell of St. Jim's was taking them direct to his home in the family car.

Levison, Clive, and Cardew were to come later. Arthur Augustus could not help feeling glad that they were not coming direct to Eastwood House at break-up. Perhaps the car might have held them, with some skilful packing; but it was a great relief not to have Cardew and Tom Merry travelling together.

D'Arcy's peace-making having proved such a ghastly failure, he had, fortunately, given up any further attempts in that direction. He had left matters worse than he had found them, but no doubt he could have made them worse still by the exercise of a little more of his inestimable gifts of tact and judgment.

But as peace had not been made, and Tom Merry and his rival were on worse terms than ever, it would have been decidedly awkward to pack them in the same car, to arrive on the same day.

By the time they met at Eastwood House Gussy hoped that wrath would have cooled on both sides.

Certainly, Tom Merry looked very bright and cheerful now. He seemed to have forgotten the unpleasant existence of Cardew of the Fourth.

Monty Lowther pronounced that it had been a "rotten" term, and most of his companions agreed with him. Lowther was not thinking of the school work, and the number of marks that might have been gained, and hadn't been gained. He was thinking of the more important matter—from his point of view—of the junior captaincy and the football.

"Rotten!" agreed Manners. "But we'll make a change next term. Of course, there will be a new election."

"Oh, of course!" said Blake.

"I fancy the whole show will be fed up with Cardew," said Manners.

"All the same, a junior captain ought to belong to the Fourth Form," remarked Blake in an argumentative sort of way.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What utter rot!" observed Manners.

"Piffle!" concurred Lowther.

"Weally, you know—"

"Bosh!" said Wally of the Third decidedly, looking round. "There!" grinned Lowther. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! Even the Third know that a Fourth Form captain isn't any good."

"That's so," said Wally cheerfully. "What the school really wants is a captain belonging to the Third."

"You cheeky young ass!"

"Weally, Wally!"

"Hear, hear!" chortled Frank Levison and Reggie Manners together.

"Hallo, there's Cardew!" sang out D'Arcy minor. And he yelled: "I say, Cardew, where did you dig up that nose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The car was overtaking a trap, in which sat Cardew, Levison, and Clive. Cardew was driving, and he glanced round at the car. His nose was showing signs of the trouble in the Common-room of the day before—very plain signs. Possibly it was painful; but Cardew cared nothing for the pain. For the appearance of his handsome nose, however, he cared a great deal, and he was not in a good temper.

"Where did you get that boko?" howled Wally, as Cardew glanced round at the car behind.

"Dwy up, Wally!"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!" implored Wally of the Third.

"You young wapsallion, wemembah that Cardew is our guest for Christmas!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"He isn't our guest till he comes to Eastwood, I suppose?" retorted Wally. "When he's there, I'll tell him his nose would take a prize in a beauty show, if you like. Just at present he's only a measly Fourth Form bounder, and I'm going to chip him, see?"

"You are to dwy up at once!"

"Bow-wow! Are you going to have it amputated, Cardew?" roared Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew looked straight ahead now, without heeding, though his face was flushed with anger. Levison and Clive smiled. If a fellow chose to butt into unnecessary trouble, and get his nose punched, it was his own lookout if his nose looked ornamental afterwards; that was how Cardew's chums looked at the matter. His deep annoyance on the subject did not win any sympathy from them.

The chauffeur was tooting his horn incessantly for the trap ahead to make room for the car to pass. Cardew kept steadily to the middle of the road, and the car had to slow down. There was no room to pass unless Cardew drew in.

"Clear the road there!" shouted Blake.



"Hallo, Tom Mewwy, old bean!" The two rivals were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Doris Levison and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Cardew stopped suddenly and dropped his hands, and stood quivering with passion, while Tom Merry stood motionless. (See page 17.)

"Cardew, deah boy, would you mind lettin' us pass?" called out Arthur Augustus politely.

Cardew seemed deaf. Levison touched his arm.

"Let them pass, old fellow," he said.

"Rot!"

"You can't keep them hanging up like that all the way to Wayland," urged Levison.

"Can't I?" grinned Cardew.

Hoot, toot, hoot, snort! came from the motor-horn.

"Drive on, and push 'em out of the way!" shouted Wally in great excitement. "Yah! Road-hog!"

"Pull to one side, Cardew!" shouted Tom Merry. "You know we've got a long run ahead of us."

Cardew drove steadily on. He was driving to Wayland, to take the express at the junction there, while Tom Merry & Co.'s way lay through Wayland for the road to Hampshire. All the crowd in the big car stared after the trap in great exasperation. The trap was going at a fair pace—for a one-horse trap—but it was a crawling pace for the car. Evidently Cardew was pleased that morning to make himself as annoying as he possibly could.

The chauffeur drew close to the right, to make an attempt to pass, but it was impossible. He had to dawdle behind the trap.

"Look here, we're not standing this!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "It's just Cardew's check. Let's shift him!"

"Good egg!"

"Bai Jove, it's weally wotten!"

"Stop, driver," said Tom Merry.

The car stopped and the party turned out. With a rush they came at the trap. Two or three fellows hung on behind, two grasped at the horse, and one or two grasped handfuls of snow, and whizzed snowballs at Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Cardew's hat was knocked off by a well-timed ball, and another crashed in his neck. He stood up, grasping his whip.

"Stand off!" he shouted angrily.

Unheeding that angry shout, the juniors fairly dragged the horse to the side of the road. The reins were torn away from Cardew, and Tom Merry coolly tied them to a fence.

"Now we can pass!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew brandished the whip.

"Let that horse loose!"

"Rats!"

The whip came down with a crash across Tom Merry's shoulders. The chauffeur was already tooling the car past the trap. Tom Merry sprang away from the horse as the whip lashed at him, and as he did so, Cardew struck again. The next moment Tom, with a furious face, was scrambling into the trap, and a moment more, and he and Cardew were rolling out of it, struggling.

"Bai Jove, this is weally howwid!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy—Cardew—weally, deah boys—"

"Punch the cheeky cad!" roared Wally of the Third.

Cardew wrenched himself loose from Tom Merry and sprang back. He was close to the ditch at the side of the road, and as he sprang back he slipped over the edge. There was a crash as he went through frozen rushes and landed in the ditch. A thin crust of ice cracked, and Cardew sat in water and mud.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter from the car party as Cardew sat down, with muddy water and fragments of ice floating round him up to the arm-pits.

The anger faded out of Tom Merry's face, and he chuckled.

"That will do!" he gasped. "All aboard!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. took their places in the car again, and the big car rolled onward. Cardew struggled frantically out of the ditch, anxious to get to close quarters with his rival again. Levison and Clive watched him without a helping hand. Squelching out water and mud, Cardew scrambled into the road and gave his comrades a furious look. The car was vanishing in the distance.

"Why didn't you help me out, you grinning fools?" yelled Cardew.

"We've had enough rowing," said Clive coolly. "Better for the other party to get clear, I think."

"Much better," said Levison, with a nod. "You asked for that, Cardew, and now you've got it I hope you like it?"

Cardew stared after the car. It turned a corner and vanished as he stared.

"Better, get on," suggested Clive. "You'll want some cleaning before you can take the train, Cardew."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"You got what you asked for. What are you grumbling at?" asked Levison.

"Are you fellows my friends or Tom Merry's?" asked Cardew between his teeth.

"Both," said Levison.

"Well, you can't be both. I'm up against him all the time, and all along the line," said Cardew savagely. "If you're not with me you're against me. You can't run with the hare and hunt with the hounds."

"Rats!"

"What?" shouted Cardew.

"Rats! When you're cooler you'll forget all that," said Clive cheerfully. "Look here, are you coming on? We've got a train to catch at Wayland."

Cardew choked down his rage and mounted into the trap again. His face was savagely set as he drove on to Wayland, reeking with mud. There was once more a rift in the lute among Levison & Co. But it was not for the first time, and it was not likely to be the last.

CHAPTER 7. Gussy's Christmas Party!

TOM MERRY & CO. enjoyed the long run through the frosty air. The encounter on the road was soon forgotten—or, at least, left unmentioned. As Cardew was due at Eastwood House a few days later the situation was rather awkward for Arthur Augustus, and his comrades felt that it was so. D'Arcy minor did not feel the same concern as his noble major. His opinion was that Cardew had asked for, and got it; and the row on the road had had a rather cheering effect on him. Indeed, Wally confided to his Third Form chums that if Cardew put on any "swank" at Eastwood House he would not find all the members of the D'Arcy family so long-suffering as the polite and polished Arthur Augustus. Wally of the Third was prepared to show Cardew of the Fourth who was who, and what was what; at least, he told Levison minor and Reggie Manners so emphatically.

Tom Merry was not feeling wholly comfortable. In so large a party as the gathering at Eastwood House it would be easy enough for two fellows who weren't on good terms to keep out of each other's way. That was Tom's intention. But he doubted very much whether it was Cardew's intention. And Tom realised, rather ruefully, that when it came to trickery he was no match for his rival. He knew very clearly that Cardew would give him all the trouble he could, and he could only resolve to be on his guard.

But he forgot Cardew when the party arrived at Eastwood House. Lord Eastwood and his lady greeted them with urbane hospitality; and they found Lord Conway—Gussy's elder brother—there, and Monty Lowther's uncle and guardian, Mr. Lowther, M.P., J.P., as well as two uncles of Cardew, Lord Lilburn and Commander Durrance. Cousin Ethel had not yet arrived, but was due in a day or two with Aunt Adelina. Arthur Augustus marched his numerous guests off to their rooms, and with great care saw that they were comfortably bestowed. Nothing could have exceeded the polished urbanity of Arthur Augustus. He was an ideal host.

In that respect, his happy minor did not come up to the standard set by the Honourable Arthur Augustus.

Wally of the Third marched his special guests—Frank Levison and Manners minor—off to the stables, to show them round there—that spot being the most interesting part of the Eastwood establishment from Wally's point of view. Moreover, he was anxious to see Pongo. Pongo showed great delight at seeing his master, and clambered over him, and clambered also over Reggie Manners and Frank Levison in the exuberance of his spirits. Frank did not mind, but Reggie Manners did—strongly; and an argument was the result, and before long Wally of the Third and one of his guests were busily engaged in punching one another's noses.

However, they were good friends again when they met at supper. Incidents of that kind were not unusual in Third Form friendships. But Aunt Matilda turned her tortoiseshell glasses on Wally.

"Dear me! What has happened to your nose, Walter?" she inquired.

"Ran it against something in the stables, auntie," answered Wally cheerily.

And Reggie Manners chuckled.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass very severely upon his minor. Wally closed one eye at him.

A couple of days later Levison and Clive arrived. Cardew was expected to arrive with them, but he sent an explanation instead.

Nobody, probably, was disappointed at the postponement of Cardew's arrival.

"Waiting to get his jolly old boko mended before he shows it to the giddy party!" Monty Lowther remarked to Tom Merry and Manners.

That was probably the reason for the delay. Levison's sister Doris came with Levison; and the same day Manners departed, to return, accompanied by three sisters. The next day the Terrible Three motored to Huckleberry Heath to fetch Miss Priscilla Fawcett. That kind old lady and her inseparable Hannah arrived with the three Shell fellows, all smiles, feeling that life was really worth living with her dear Tommy at her side. They reached Eastwood House in time for tea, and found that Cardew was there.

Tom Merry looked at Cardew as he came in, wondering whether the dandy of the Fourth would display any sign of the ill-feeling between them. Cardew was not likely to be guilty of bad form; but Tom did not trust him. He would have been best pleased if Cardew had ignored him and allowed him to return the compliment. Somehow to his surprise, Cardew made it a point to be very cordial.

The dandy of the Fourth seemed to be in great spirits. He contrived to seat himself next to Miss Priscilla, and looked after that old lady with a kind and gentle attentiveness that quite won her heart. She could not help observing that Cardew's nose showed signs of damage. In spite of the care he had lavished on it, the lapse of time had been too brief. Nobody could look at Cardew without knowing that he had recently been engaged in fisticuffs. Miss Priscilla certainly did not think of fisticuffs; she supposed that there had been some sad accident.

"What a very nice boy!" Miss Priscilla murmured to Tom Merry, while Cardew was gone away with her teacup.

"Mmmmmmm!" was Tom's reply.

"Is he a great friend of yours, Tommy?"

"Oh, we—we're in different Forms, you know," said Tom.

"He speaks of you very nicely. He seems to have a great admiration for you."

"Does he?" said Tom grimly.

"I think he would be a very nice friend for you, Tommy. His manners are so kind and gentle, and he seems so open and frank."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He seems to have been hurt in some accident," pursued Miss Priscilla. "Was it at cricket?"

"We're not playing cricket in the winter, you know," said Tom, with a smile.

"Dear me! Of course not! I suppose it was at football. I have heard of dreadful accidents to the wicket-keeper. Does Cardew keep wicket when you play football?"

"Oh! Ah! No! Not quite!" gasped Tom.

Cardew came back with the teacup. He gave Tom Merry a curious look, as he received a sweet smile from Miss Priscilla. He had evidently heard some of the old lady's remarks.

"I hope you've not let out that I got this nose fighting old bean," he remarked.

"Dear me!" said Miss Priscilla, shocked. "My dear, dear little boy, surely—surely—"

"Not my fault, madam," said Cardew. "I'm the most peaceable fellow at the school, as Tommy—dear Tommy—can tell you. But as it happens, I came up against a very ruffianly chap."

"How very horrid!" said Miss Priscilla.

ANSWERS

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"A perfect beast," went on Cardew. "I felt bound to lick him, as he had been bullying a fellow—chap named Trimble. I simply had to do it. I hope you don't blame me, madam."

"My dear boy, it was brave, noble of you!" said Miss Priscilla, without noticing the expression on Tom's face, which was rather extraordinary at that moment. "It is just like what we read of in those nice books for young people. I hope you defeated that dreadful bully."

"Well, I should have given him the licking of his life only a master came in and he sort of skulked behind him," said Cardew. "But he had enough, I think."

Tom Merry felt like choking. "Was not that very noble of Cardew, my dearest Tommy?" said Miss Priscilla.

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Very!"
Tom Merry moved away and went to talk to Manners' sisters. He felt that if he had any more of Cardew, there was danger of his punching Cardew's nose again, in the presence of the distinguished company assembled for tea in Lady Eastwood's drawing-room. Which certainly would never have done.

**CHAPTER 8.
Cardew's Little Game!**

"COUSIN ETHEL is comin' this afternoon." Arthur Augustus made that remark to the Terrible Three the next day. He was looking a little thoughtful.

"If you fellows would like a little wun—" he went on. "Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"Count us in!" said Manners.

"Ethel awwives at Easthorpe Station with Aunt Adelina at two-thirty," said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, a cab will be sent to meet them. If you fellows cared to go in the cab—"

"Hear, hear!"
"That's awwanged, then," said Arthur Augustus, with satisfaction.

The Terrible Three were quite pleased at the idea of meeting cousin Ethel at the station and escorting that popular young lady to Eastwood House. Moreover, Tom Merry had fallen into the way of concurring with every suggestion made by Arthur Augustus. Gussy, with deep diplomacy, was labouring to keep the rivals of St. Jim's as far apart as possible, and had not the slightest suspicion that his little manoeuvres were perfectly palpable to both parties.

Having arranged with Tom Merry & Co. to use up that afternoon looking after cousin Ethel, and having already arranged that Cardew was going on a motor-drive with Levison and Clive, Arthur Augustus felt that he had been very diplomatic indeed.

Of course, he felt that he could rely upon the good manners of his two guests. Nevertheless, it was only tactful to keep them out of each other's way as much as possible.

After lunch that day, the Terrible Three joined a party skating on the frozen lake, till it was time to start for the station. Blake and Herries and Digby seemed to find plenty of entertainment in leading Manners' three sisters through the mazes of skating, and Sidney Clive was equally occupied in looking after Doris Levison. Cardew was strolling by the lake, not skating, and the Terrible Three passed him when they left.

He gave them a curious look and smile when they passed, which Tom Merry remembered later.

"Levison, old bean!" called out Cardew.

Levison came off the ice. Clive looked round, but shook his head with a smile. Apparently he preferred skating to motoring that afternoon, possibly because Doris Levison was skating.

"I suppose you're comin'?" said Cardew.

"Right-ho!" said Levison. "Leave Clive to it—he wants to stay."

"That's all right."

"They've lent us a four-seater," said Cardew, as the two juniors walked to the garage. "It would hold five all right—"

"Are you taking some of the other fellows?"

"Oh, no!" said Cardew, with a smile. "I was just thinkin', as Clive's standin' out there will be plenty of room."

"Lots, I should think, for two."

"Might pick up some passengers," said Cardew carelessly.

Levison looked puzzled. They were soon in the car, with the chauffeur toiled down the drive to the gates. The other car, in which the Terrible Three were going to the station, stood waiting. Cardew glanced back at it and smiled.

"The dear boys are indoors, puttin' on their best bibs and tuckers," he remarked.

"Yes; they're meeting cousin Ethel at the station," said Levison.

"Are they?"

"Gussy said so."

"Let her out," said Cardew to the chauffeur, and the four-seater began to hum.

In a few minutes the car was through Easthorpe, and keeping on towards Redmay, the next village.

"Where are we going?" asked Levison.

"Redmay."

"No farther than that?"

"There's a station there," said Cardew.

"My hat! We're not motoring out to look at a country railway-station, are we?" asked the perplexed Levison.

"Why not? The two-thirty at Easthorpe stops there for three minutes, at two-twenty."

"Does it?"

"It's the station before Easthorpe, you know," said Cardew.

"I've looked it all out in the jolly old time-table."

"What on earth for?"

"My dear chap, you know my thirst for knowledge. No end of information to be extracted from a railway time-table."

"Fathead!" said Levison, and he gave it up. He knew that Cardew had something "on," and he knew, too, that Cardew did not intend to tell him what it was, yet.

The car ate up the distance between Easthorpe and Redmay. The chauffeur drew up at the little station. Cardew alighted.

"Going in there?" asked Levison, in surprise.

"Yes; only a few minutes. Wait in the car, old bean!"

"All right!"

Cardew disappeared into the station, followed by Levison's puzzled glance. Levison looked at his watch; it was a quarter-past two. It came into his mind that Cardew was there to see cousin Ethel in the train, which stopped at Redmay. But why?

Cardew strolled on the platform, with a smile on his face. His cheeks were ruddy from the rapid run through frosty air, and he looked very handsome, save for the disfiguring mark on his nose. A few minutes later a train came in and stopped.

One glance along the carriages, and then Cardew stopped at a window and raised his hat to Ethel Cleveland and Aunt Adelina.

"How do you do, Miss Cleveland? How do you do, madam?" Cardew opened the carriage door. "The car's waitin' outside."

"Dear me! Are we at Easthorpe already?" asked Aunt Adelina giving Cardew a gracious nod and smile.

"No; this is only Redmay," said Ethel. "Has Arthur sent the car to this station?" She looked at Cardew.

"Car's outside," said Cardew easily. "Did you expect to be wet at Easthorpe?"

"Yes. But—"

"Dear me! If the car is here, we had better get out," said Aunt Adelina, gathering up her muff and other articles, of which the good lady carried a goodly number. "Dear me!"

Cardew politely relieved the old lady of most of her impedimenta. Cousin Ethel alighted from the train without a suspicion: it was rather unusual for a guest at Eastwood House to be met at Redmay; but she supposed that there was some reason for the arrangement.

Levison, waiting in the car outside, started, as Cardew issued from the station, with Miss Cleveland on one side of him and Aunt Adelina on the other, and a porter following carrying several bags.

Levison was so astonished that he almost forgot to raise his hat. But he jumped from the car and saluted the ladies.

"You know Levison, of course," said Cardew. "Put the bags here, porter. I hope you'll find the car comfortable, madam—that's a nice cushion—and I had a hassock put in for you—yes, there it is!"

Aunt Adelina had an impression that Cardew was an exceedingly nice boy. Certainly he made the old lady very comfortable in the car, without failing in attentions to cousin Ethel. Levison hardly spoke a word—he just looked on blankly.

He knew that, by this time, Tom Merry & Co. would be waiting at Easthorpe Station for cousin Ethel. He understood, at last, what Cardew had planned; but he could say nothing. His look, for a moment, showed Cardew what he thought of his trick; but it was impossible to speak out in Ethel's presence. Moreover, it was quite certain that nothing would have made Cardew give up his little scheme.

(Continued on page 16.)

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Here's a Feast
of Fun—

—and Frolic for
you, chums!



EDITORIAL.

By TOM MERRY.

It is with a keen thrill of pleasure that I wish all my reader-chums, near and far, a Merry Christmas! It is an old, old wish, oft-expressed, but it comes from my heart.

Christmas is the most glowing and glorious festival of the year. What a dreary world it would be without the Christmas dinner, and the Christmas greetings, and the Christmas carols—to say nothing of the Christmas ghost!

And what a sin of omission it would be if the "St. Jim's News" didn't bob up with an extra-special number to celebrate this festive season!

As soon as Christmas began to loom on the horizon, I instructed my contributors to get busy. They have risen to the occasion in grand style. My friend Talbot—possibly the most popular fellow at St. Jim's—has served up a thrilling and exciting Christmas story. Baggy Trimble has also given us a story, and you will all agree that our plump Falstaff is an expert at "telling the tale!" Dick Redfern has blossomed forth into poetry, and the mirth-making Monty Lowther contributes some "Christmas Chatter."

Of course, all the St. Jim's fellows are on holiday at this merry season. The old school stands silent and deserted, and no sounds of happy schoolboy laughter echo down its corridors. But at Eastwood House, the home of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, a goodly company of guests has assembled, and all is merry and bright. We are devoting our time to footer, skating, gorging, pulling crackers—also Gussy's leg-dancing, and other delights too numerous to mention.

Our one hope is that all our readers will have as good a time as we are now having.

Before I close, Baggy Trimble wishes me to issue a word of warning to all my chums. Baggy says: "Tell them not to eat too much Christmas dinner, or they will know all about it on Boxing Day! And tell them to spare a kind thought for a poor, famished fellow who never gets enough grub to keep body and soul together!"

I have informed Baggy that our readers are well able to look after themselves, and that the only person likely to make a beast of himself on Christmas Day—if he gets the chance—is Baggy Trimble!

My last word to you all must be the time-honoured wish: "A Merry, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!"

TOM MERRY.

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THE GHOST OF TRIMBLE HALL.

By DICK REDFERN.

I am the Ghost of Trimble Hall—
Tremble!
And I am feared by great and small—
Tremble!
I'm mantled in a shroud of white,
I wander in the pale moonlight,
And make weird wails at dead of night!
Tremble!

When I go gliding through the gloom—
Tremble!
I enter Baggy Trimble's room—
Tremble!
I stand just where the moonbeams fall,
And in a fearsome voice I call:
"I am the Ghost of Trimble Hall!
Tremble!"

I hear a movement from the bed—
Tremble!
My victim wakes, with yelps of dread—
Tremble!
I utter deep and dismal groans
That freeze the marrow in his bones;
Then croak in terrifying tones:
"Tremble!"

His hair is standing up on end—
Tremble!
A sleepless night he now will spend—
Tremble!
And even when I disappear,
The wretched Trimble seems to hear
My distant echo, faint but clear:
"Tremble!"

CHRISTMAS CHATTER.

By Monty Lowther.

BAGGY TRIMBLE bitterly derides the time-honoured custom of hanging up a stocking on Christmas Eve. He intends to hang up an empty coalsack! Baggy assures us that he's not greedy, but he likes a lot!

FATTY WYNN found the following couplet in a Christmas cracker:
"At Christmas-time, a good tuck-in
Delights the heart of David Wynn!"

Everybody seems extra polite at Christmas-time. We hear of people "saluting" the happy morn, and in the hall at Eastwood House I actually saw the "mistle-toe bough!"

The sour, ill-tempered Mr. Ratcliff wishes all the St. Jim's fellows a "snappy" Christmas!



MY CHRISTMAS DINNER.

By BAGGY TRIMBLE

I found myself, dear readers, in a large banquetting-hall. Fat, well-fed butlers were gliding to and fro with laden trays. An orchestra was playing at the end of the hall, and a grate company of people was gathered together to enjoy the finest funkshun of the year—the Christmas Dinner!

I had a table all to myself. Three butlers had been specially told off to wait on me. And I kept them jolly busy, I can tell you! I had been starving myself for this big event, so that I should be able to do full justice to it when it arrived.

It was a twenty-course dinner. Space will not allow me to tell you what all the courses consisted of; but I will describe a few of them.

To kick off with, we had mock turtle soup. Personally, I never "mock" turtle soup. I'm always very civil to it, bekwase it's jolly delishus!

Then we had some fish. By my halibut, but it was lovely! I enjoyed it so much that I made one of the butlers bring me three more helpings.

Oh, I forgot to mention that before we had the fish, they served a mixed sort of dish, called "horse doovers." It's a French dish, I believe. They evidently eat horses in France, as well as snails and frogs; and I must admit that the "horse doovers" were very tasty and palatable.

After the fish, they served what they call an "ong-tray." Then came several more courses, followed at length by the roast turkey and stuffing. I did the "stuffing" myself!

No words of mine, dear readers, can describe the delights of that divine Christmas Dinner. Perhaps the plum-pudding was the best part of all, for, instead of containing threepenny-peaces it was full of half-soverens! I collected all those that I didn't happen to accidentally swallow; and I became rich in about five minnits!

To finish up with, there were jellies and blommanges and all that sort of thing; and at last I had to stick a placard on my chest, like they stick on the London busses:

"FULL INSIDE!"

I was sitting back in my chair, with my hands crossed in the region of my lowest wastecost button, when a loud gong boomed through the banquetting-hall.

BOOM!

I awoke with a start, to find that it was all a dream. I had been taking forty winks on the sofa at my Aunt Agatha's, where I was spending the Christmas vack.

A CHRISTMAS EVE ADVENTURE!

By Reginald Talbot.



T WAS Christmas Eve, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's, was swinging gaily along the road, in the direction of Eastwood House, his father's stately mansion, at which a whole crowd of St. Jim's fellows were spending the vacation.

Gussy was walking on a carpet of snow. It was a couple of inches thick on the road, but it was hard and firm, for which the swell of St. Jim's was thankful. Soft, melting snow would have taken the lustre from his patent-leather shoes.

Gussy hummed a merry tune as he strode along. There was joy in his heart, for this was to be a gala night at Eastwood House.

Whiz! Suddenly, from somewhere, came a snowball. It was aimed with deadly accuracy, for it removed Gussy's "topper" as clean as a whistle, and sent it spinning.

"Bal Jove!" Arthur Augustus stopped short in his stride, and spun round. Like Moses of old he looked this way and that way, and there was no man.

Whiz! Another snowball zipped through the air, and crashed upon Gussy's aristocratic nose. Then another, which crashed upon his aristocratic chin. Then a whole volley of snowballs was fired from some mysterious ambush. It seemed, in fact, to be raining snowballs!

"Yawooooop!" yelled Arthur Augustus, dancing wildly to and fro, and gouging snow from his eyes and mouth. "You awful wottahs! If only I get hold of you I will administrah a faithful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" A merry peal of laughter came from behind the hedge. Gussy recognised the shrill laugh of his minor, Wally, and the somewhat coarser laugh of two village boys—the brothers Binks.

Arthur Augustus frowned. He was annoyed. Not mildly or slightly annoyed, but very considerably annoyed. His wrath was kindled against Wally.

It was bad enough to be snowballed by a younger brother; but when that younger brother had been solemnly ordered not to mix with the scamps of the village, and when he openly defied that order—why, it was almost a crime!

"Wally, you young wascal!" shouted Arthur Augustus, making a sudden dart towards a gap in the hedge. "I will thrash you most severely for desavin' my ordahs!"

"You've got to catch me first, Gussy!" came the cheery reply.

And that was where Arthur Augustus found himself in a fix. For Wally and the two scapegraces of the village had taken to their heels. They declined to be caught.

Gussy abandoned the hopeless pursuit. He picked up his "topper," and brushed his clothes with his hands, and went on his way to the House. But he no longer hummed a merry tune. His brow was dark and stormy.

Wally D'Arcy had escaped a "scabful thwashin'"; but only for a time. He would not be able to keep out of the way of his increased major for ever.

As a matter of fact, Wally was fairly caught at tea-time. When he entered the hall at Eastwood House, it was to find Arthur Augustus waiting for him, with a

malacca cane in his hand, and a frown on his brow.

"Come heah, Wally!" commanded Gussy sternly. "I propose to thrash you for settin' my ordahs at defiance, an' for snowballin' me in the lane!"

With a gasp of alarm, Wally turned to flee. He saw that his major was in deadly earnest, and he had no wish to get within range of that malacca-cane.

Wally darted through the doorway of the dining-room, with Gussy hard on his heels.

Panting and breathless, Wally D'Arcy dodged round and round the table, with Gussy gaining on him rapidly. Presently Wally felt an iron grip on his collar, and then the malacca-cane came into play.

Swish, swish, swish! "Yaroooooh!" yelled Wally, at the top of his lungs. "Give over, you beast! If the pater comes in and catches you bullying me you'll get it in the neck! Ow-ow-ow!"

Arthur Augustus desisted at last, and Wally, his face very white, his eyes gleaming defiantly, walked rather unsteadily from the room.

It didn't take very long for Gussy's anger to simmer down. His wrath endured, but as the twinkling of an eye. Late that night, when he tossed sleeplessly on his bed, listening to the mellow Christmas chimes which sounded from the church tower in the village, he began to regret having been so heavy-handed with Wally. True, the youngster had kicked over the traces; but, dash it all, it was Christmas-time, when allowances ought to be made for the misdoings of young brothers.

After a good deal of reflection Arthur Augustus slipped out of bed, and put on his clothes.

"I'll go along to Wally's woom an' make it up!" he murmured. "I'll tell him I'm feahfully sowwy I lammed him so hard. Then we'll shake hands, an' be good twiends again, an' all enjoy a weally mewwy Chwistmas together!"

But when Gussy reached his minor's room, behold, there was no Wally. The bed showed signs of recent occupation, but it was not occupied now.

"Bal Jove!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's, in astonishment. "What's become of Wally, I woudnah?"

For a moment he stood blinking at the empty bed. A clock downstairs chimed the midnight hour, and then it dawned upon Gussy in a flash where his minor had gone. He had stated his intention of taking part in a midnight adventure with the brothers Binks. They were going tobogganing on the Downs, by moonlight.

Arthur Augustus had warned Wally not to go; but the foolhardy youngster, more defiant than ever after the thrashing he had received, had once again set his major's orders at defiance.

"The silly young duffah!" muttered Gussy. "He'll be breakin' his neck if he's not careful! I don't trust those village scamps. They are leadin' Wally astway. I'd bettah wake Tom Mewwy an' the othahs, an' we'll go an' find him."

He did so, and the juniors set off together.

It did not take them long to reach the Downs. They ascended by a steep and winding path, until they reached the summit. But the side they ascended was not nearly so steep as the far side, where there was no path at all, and where accidents might easily happen.

From time to time the juniors raised a shout, but there was no response.

It was snowing hard, and the night was bitterly cold. But the members of the

search-party were warm as toast, owing to their exertions.

"Fancy those silly young sweeps being out on a night like this!" said Tom Merry.

"And tobogganing down the steepest slope they could find!" said Lowther. "It's madness!"

At long last, the searchers were rewarded. They came upon the brothers Binks, who stood, white-faced and shivering, on one of the highest points of the Downs.

"Where is my minah?" was Gussy's first question—or, rather, demand.

"He—he's come a cropper!" faltered one of the village scamps. "He went whizzin' down in his toboggan, an' he never come up again!"

"Down where?" asked Tom Merry quickly. The elder Binks pointed rather vaguely towards the gloomy abyss below.

"He's down there somewhere," he said. "He ain't broke his neck, 'cos he keeps hollerin' for help. Listen!"

From far below came a muffled cry.

"Help! Help!"

Arthur Augustus turned quickly to Tom Merry.

"Tie the wope round my waist, deah boy," he said "an' lowah me down!"

This manoeuvre took some little time, but eventually the would-be rescuer was lowered down the steep slope. He was able to obtain a foothold here and there; all the same, it was a perilous descent, and Gussy reflected that his minor must indeed have been mad to undertake it in a toboggan.

At length, guided by the shouts from below, Arthur Augustus found his brother.

The unfortunate Wally was half-buried in a snowdrift at the foot of the Downs. He was numbed with cold, and he could not possibly have held out much longer. He uttered a sobbing cry of relief as Arthur Augustus approached him.

"Gussy!"

"Wally, deah boy! Are you hurt?" asked Arthur Augustus anxiously.



D'Arcy landed at the foot of the hill, where he found Wally.

"No; but I'm pretty nearly perished with the cold."

"Let me fix this rope round your waist. Then I'll give the signal for the fellows to haul you up."

The rescue was accomplished without mishap. First Wally and then Arthur Augustus was hauled to the summit, and the party hurried back with all speed to Eastwood House, for Wally was in grave danger of contracting a chill.

On reaching home the foolhardy youngster was wrapped in warm blankets, and laid before a blazing log-fire. He was also regaled with hot cocoa, and his spirits quickly revived.

Tom Merry & Co. went back to bed, leaving the brothers together. Nobody ever knew what passed between them; but it was observed that they were on the most affectionate terms with each other next day. The breach had been healed, and the guests at Eastwood House revelled in a right Merry Christmas!

THE END.

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"D'ARCY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY!"

(Continued from page 13.)

"Jump in, Ernest, old bean," said Cardew lightly. Levison followed the others into the car.

The engine throbbed, and the four-seater moved off. The chauffeur had already had his instructions from Cardew, and he took a roundabout way back to Eastwood. Aunt Adelina settled down comfortably in her furs and wraps among the cushions. Ethel looked out of the car rather curiously. Cardew understood her look and answered it.

"It's such a rippin' afternoon, I thought you'd like to run round the country for a few miles before gettin' in," he said. "Say the word, of course, and I'll tell the chauffeur to head right home at once. Otherwise we're gettin' in for tea."

"Oh, I shall like it!" said Ethel, with a smile. "Do you mind, auntie?"

"Not at all, my dear!"

Cardew chatted cheerily while the car ran on, eating up the miles. Levison sat almost silent, and must have seemed rather dull beside his lively companion. Cardew could be very entertaining when he liked, and cousin Ethel was soon laughing merrily at his drollery, and Aunt Adelina smiling sweetly. The minutes flew by, and it was half-past four when the four-seater turned in at last at the gates of Eastwood House.

At the door Arthur Augustus was standing, to meet the new arrivals. He ran down to the car.

"Bai Jove, I'm jolly glad to see you!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid somethin' must have happened!"

"Why, what could have happened?" asked Ethel.

"It is weally vevy puzzlin'. You must have left the twain befoah weachin' Easthorpe—that is the only way of accountin' for it!" said the perplexed swell of St. Jim's. "Did you happen to meet Cardew?"

"Did you not send the car to Redmay for us?" asked Ethel, equally perplexed.

"Eh! Tom Mewwy is in the othah cah, at Easthorpe, waitin' for you now!"

"Then—I do not understand—"

"Come, my dear, the wind is very cold," said Aunt Adelina gently, and explanations had to be postponed.

Levison gave Cardew a grim look when they were alone. Cardew gave him a cheery smile in return.

"Dear old Thomas—still hangin' up at the station!" he murmured. "What a life!"

"Do you call this playing the game, Cardew?" asked Levison after a pause.

Cardew nodded.

"Yes—my game!" he answered, and he walked away cheerily.

CHAPTER 9. Coming to a Crisis!

TOM MERRY was feeling puzzled and rather worried. The two-thirty at Easthorpe had come and gone without landing cousin Ethel and Aunt Adelina. The Terrible Three decided that the newcomers had lost their train, and would come by the next. The next was due in an hour, and the chums of the Shell walked about the village for an hour, and returned to the station in good time for the train. It came in without bringing the expected guests.

"It's jolly odd!" said Tom Merry. "It's not like cousin Ethel to lose trains. I wonder if Gussy made a mistake about the time?"

"Just like Gussy!" remarked Lowther.

"I think I'd better telephone."

Tom Merry called up Eastwood House on the telephone from the station. Arthur Augustus came to the phone, and could only say that he was quite sure of the train Ethel had been coming by, and that he couldn't account for the delay.

"All serene!" said Tom. "We'll hang on, then!"

And the three Shell fellows "lung on" and waited for the next train, which was at four-thirty. That train also came in without the expected arrivals.

"Well, this is a jolly afternoon!" said Manners. "Is it any good kicking our heels about here any longer?"

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Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"We can't hear of any accident on the line," he said. "They may be coming down by car, after all, and there's some mistake somewhere. Hallo, this Johnny wants to speak to us!"

The rubicund station-master of Easthorpe came out and came over to the car, by which the juniors were standing.

"Call from Eastwood House, sir!" he said. "Master Arthur's sent a message."

"Oh, good!"

"He's asked me to tell you that the ladies have arrived at Eastwood House, sir."

"Oh! Thanks!"

In a puzzled and perhaps slightly exasperated frame of mind the Terrible Three got into the car and drove back to Eastwood House. They arrived there, and Arthur Augustus met them in the hall with a slightly distressed expression on his noble face.

"It's weally too bad, you fellows—" he began.

"All serene, if it's all right," said Tom. "I suppose they came down by car—what?"

"Oh, no! It is vevy perplexin'," said Arthur Augustus.

"They got out of the twain at Wedmay, befoah weachin' Easthorpe, you know."

"What on earth for?" asked Manners.

"Cardew was out in a cah, and he met them there and brough't them home," said Arthur Augustus.

"Cardew!"

"Yaas, wathah! It seems that he was unawah that it was awwanged for you fellows to meet them at Easthorpe."

"He was not aware of it?" said Tom Merry quietly. "He knew it perfectly well!"

Arthur Augustus looked more distressed than ever.

"It's wathah wotten," he said. "Cardew seems to have acted in good faith—at least, I trust so. Of course, he ought to have known that a cah would be sent to the station for cousin Ethel and Aunt Adelina. It does not seem to have occurred to him. I must say it was fwightfully thoughtless of Cardew!"

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"But it's not a long run from Redmay," he said. "They should have been here long before three o'clock, and you could have let us know."

"It's fwightfully unfortunate. Cardew had the idea of takin' them for a wun wound the country, and gettin' in to tea, you know. So, weally, they have only just awwived."

"So as to leave us kicking our heels in Easthorpe, waiting for nothin'!" remarked Manners.

"Bai Jove! Do you weally think so, Mannahs?"

Manners grunted. Cardew's scheme was clear enough to him, and, indeed, to Arthur Augustus too, only the swell of St. Jim's hated to realise it or admit it to himself.

"I can only apologise, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus after a long and painful pause. "It is fwightfully wotten!"

"All right, old man," said Tom. "It's not your fault. Anyhow, there's no harm done."

"Not at all," said Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three got away to their quarters, having made as light of the incident as possible, in order to soothe the troubled spirits of their host. In Tom Merry's room, however, they looked at one another grimly.

"Cardew's keeping up the feud—here, in Gussy's house, under Lord Eastwood's roof!" said Tom Merry. "This is going to be a merry Christmas, if this goes on."

"I suppose we can't punch him here?" said Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Hardly! And we can't go. I couldn't possibly give Miss Priscilla any reason."

"And my sisters," said Manners.

"And my jolly old uncle," said Lowther ruefully. "It seems to me that Cardew has us in a cleft stick, and can do as he jolly well likes. We'll take it out of him next term at St. Jim's."

"Let's get down to tea!"

The Terrible Three found all the party assembled when they came down to tea. They were rather late. Cardew made it a point to address some cheery and cordial remarks to them, apparently oblivious of the fact that the Shell fellows were yearning to take him by the scruff of the neck. It was not even possible to avoid Cardew. He persisted in being agreeable, and, with cousin Ethel and Doris Levison and others within hearing, it was impossible for the Terrible Three to answer him as they would have liked to answer. The mocking gleam in Cardew's eyes showed that he read their thoughts clearly and thoroughly enjoyed their discomfiture.

Arthur Augustus glanced at them once or twice anxiously. With all his diplomacy, and all his tact and judgment, Arthur Augustus could not help feeling that matters were getting strained.

Arthur Augustus felt that it was decidedly "wotten," for he had, as a matter of fact, other and more important matters on his noble mind that day. For it was Christmas Eve, and there was to be a dance that evening, and on such occasions Gussy, as the best-dressed fellow at St. Jim's, felt it his duty to turn out looking a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

With such tremendous considerations to be pondered over and determined, it was really hard lines for Gussy's attention to be drawn away to more trifling matters.

But it couldn't be helped. In the midst of weighing the pros and cons, the rival claims of the pearl and ruby studs, Arthur Augustus found himself wondering whether there would be open trouble between Tom Merry and Ralph Reckness Cardew before his Christmas-party came to an end. He shuddered at the thought and almost forgot the important subject of his appearance at the dance—but not quite!

CHAPTER 10.
The Limit!

"MY dance, I think?"
A string band discoursed sweet music. In the ball-room at Eastwood House all was merry and bright. Light feet glided to merry music; bright and happy faces exchanged glances and smiles.

Cardew, very handsome in his evening clothes, his good looks marred only by that unforgotten mark on his nose, bowed gracefully to cousin Ethel. Ethel glanced at her programme.

"No; this is Tom's dance," she said.

Cardew smiled.
"In me you behold an unworthy substitute," he said.

"Tom Merry has been called away."

Ethel raised her eyebrows.
"I heard him asking Gussy to make his excuses," smiled Cardew, "so I came first to avoid the crush, if you'll excuse the expression. There'll be a rush when it gets out that you've got this dance free."

"You're sure that Tom—"
"A message came in for him," explained Cardew. "He didn't confide the matter to me—"

Arthur Augustus slid gracefully up.
"Ethel, dear gal, Tom Mewwy is fearfully cut up, but—"

"I've just explained to Miss Cleveland," said Cardew airily. "She is givin' me the dance."

Ethel hesitated a moment, and then inclined her head. A moment more and Ethel and Cardew were gliding with the dancers. Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass a little more firmly into his eye and gazed after them. Then he shook his head thoughtfully and glided away to seek his own partner.

A good many admiring eyes rested on Cardew and cousin Ethel. There was no doubt that Cardew was an excellent dancer. He excelled Tom Merry in that respect. Ethel liked dancing, and a partner like Cardew made a dance very enjoyable. Her face was bright. Tom Merry came back into the ball-room with a face that was far from bright, and looked round for Ethel. His brow grew almost black as he saw her in the throng with Cardew.

A surprised glance from Lowther, who passed him with Doris, recalled him to himself, and he remembered that a Christmas Eve dance was no time or place for black looks. He composed his face, and stood back behind a mass of ferns, watching. His eyes gleamed as he watched.

The dance ended, and Cardew led cousin Ethel back to her seat between Aunt Matilda and Miss Priscilla. Tom Merry joined them, and Cardew gave him a cheery smile.

"Cussy told you—" Tom began, speaking to Ethel, without looking at Cardew.

"Yes," said Ethel.

"I had a message from Lord Eastwood, asking me to come to the library at once and speak to him," said Tom. "I hoped I should get back in time for our dance. I wasn't more than a minute—"

"I—I didn't understand—"

Cardew, with a cheery smile on his face, bowed to Ethel and retired, as her next partner came to claim her. Tom Merry stood for a moment or two, and then followed Cardew.

Lord Eastwood, after opening the dance, had retired from the ball-room, and Tom, receiving that unexpected message, had supposed that something was "up," and obeyed the message at once.

He joined Cardew, and slipped his arm through that of the dandy of the Fourth. Cardew stared at him.

"What's this game?" he asked.

"I want to speak to you," said Tom, in a choking voice.

"Not here, I think."

"Will you come along, then?"

"No. Let go my arm."

"I'll speak here, or in private, as you choose," said Tom Merry with a blaze in his eyes.

Cardew breathed hard. He made a motion with his head of assent, and they passed through the ferns, and then through french windows to the terrace.

"Now, will you let go my arm, or do you want a hooligan row in D'Arcy's house?" asked Cardew in suppressed tones.

Tom released his arm and faced him.

"A servant brought me a message," he said.

"I know."

"I went to the library, and found Lord Eastwood there. He told me he had sent no message."

"Indeed!"

"It was a spoof message, to dish me and make me lose my dance with cousin Ethel."

"Surely a servant here would not play such a trick?"

said Cardew airily.

"Not unless he was put up to it by a treacherous cad,"

said Tom.

"Dear me! I advise reporting the bad man to his employer."

"Never mind the footman," said Tom. "You may have deceived him, or bribed him—I don't know and don't care which. My quarrel isn't with him."

"I!" said Cardew. "What have I to do with it?"

"Do you deny it, then?"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Will you give me your word that you had nothing to do with it?"

"I decline to say anything about it."

"That's good enough," said Tom. "You've got to the limit, Cardew, and you've got to stop. Any decent fellow would have chucked rowing, when we're both Gussy's guests. You've kept it up all the time, and in a way I can't deal with without making a scene."

"You are rather handicapped in the way of brains, aren't you?" assented Cardew.

"It's got to stop!" said Tom between his teeth.

"Didn't you tell Gussy that it was impossible for me to be decent?" grinned Cardew. "What's the good of askin', then?"

"I'm not standing any more," said Tom in a choking voice. "If we were at St. Jim's, now, I'd knock you spinning for your dirty tricks!"

"But we're not at St. Jim's—we're at Eastwood House,"

said Cardew, laughing. "And you've got to stand it, dear man, unless you'd like to vary the entertainment at Gussy's Christmas Eve dance with a scrap?"

And Cardew laughed mockingly.

Smack!

Tom Merry's open hand struck him across the face, and Cardew's laughter died away suddenly.

He staggered back.

"What—you—you—" he panted.

There were steps on the terrace, and a well-known voice was heard.

"Yaas, it is wathah warm; pway walk on the tewwace for a few minutes, Miss Dowis. Hallo, Tom Mewwy, old bean!"

Cardew was springing forward with clenched fists and blazing eyes. He stopped suddenly and dropped his hands, and stood quivering with passion.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon them alternately, and there was a curious expression on Doris Levison's face. Tom Merry muttered something indistinctly and walked away to the ball-room. Arthur Augustus gave Cardew a look, and walked on with Doris.

Cardew remained alone. His face was white, save for a deep red mark on one cheek. He was still standing there, motionless, when Arthur Augustus and Doris re-passed. He did not seem to see them; but Arthur Augustus glanced at him, and the look on Cardew's face haunted the swell of St. Jim's the rest of the evening.

Christmas Day dawned upon the party at Eastwood House, the day of peace and good will and happy faces. Tom Merry and Cardew met at the breakfast table, and Tom carefully avoided looking at his enemy; but Cardew's glance rested on Tom with a look that was calm, smiling, and implacable. But that day, at least, there was no hostility between the rivals of St. Jim's, and it was, after all, a merry Christmas.

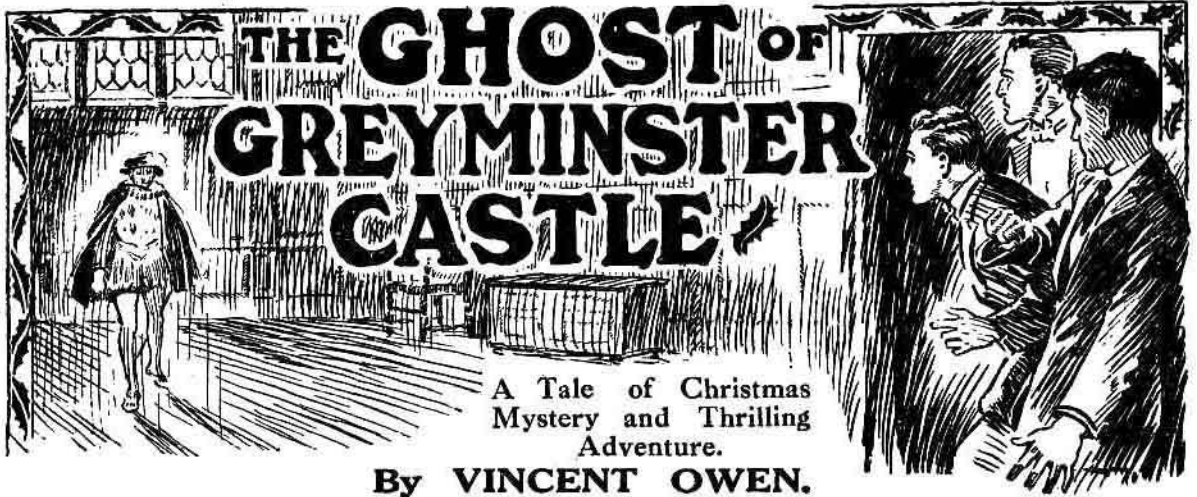
THE END.

(Look out for "THE VENGEANCE OF CARDEW!" in our great Christmas-Week issue of the GEM.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 323.

Little did Dick Baker, of nowhere, realise the fortune—

—which awaited him until he impersonated Guy Derrington!



A Tale of Christmas
Mystery and Thrilling
Adventure.
By VINCENT OWEN.

CHAPTER 1.
A Strange Request!

DICK BAKER stood on the corner of Berners Street, in Oxford Street, wistfully watching the bustling throng of Christmas shoppers. It was Christmas Eve, and all the great shops in London's busy thoroughfares were radiant with light, and noisy with the chatter and laughter and shuffling of feet of countless people.

"Christmas to-morrow!" muttered Dick, digging his hands deeper into the rather thin pockets of his overcoat. "Wonder where I shall be spending it, anyway?"

This thought fetched a frown to his young, handsome face.

Dick was "roughing it," like many thousands of others in the empire's great capital. He had no friends, no relations whom he could visit for the Christmas. Yesterday he had been "sacked" from his job as mechanic and motor-driver to a small firm at King's Cross. He had done nothing wrong, but the manager of the firm had said that there was not enough work for him to do, and it would not pay the firm to keep him on. So he had had to go. It was one of those cruel strokes of misfortune to which he had by now become accustomed. Still, it seemed very hard to be turned away on the eve of Christmas.

Dick could have made a living—and a good living—had he chosen to follow his father's profession. But Dick's father was a thief and head of a desperate East End gang of criminals, and Dick preferred to "rough it" honestly, rather than become a crook.

Two years ago he had run away from the Limehouse eating-house that served as the headquarters of his father's circle of accomplices. Life there had become intolerable to a lad with scruples. Dick had read well, and was as plucky and able a youngster as one could wish to find; but, with friends and relations he was ashamed to own, he had found life a hard struggle.

He was standing there in the glare of the shop lights, musing on things in general, when he felt a tap on his arm. Turning round, he gave a start, for he found himself staring at a young fellow who, despite his immaculate dress, bore a remarkable likeness to himself.

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"I say, old chap, I'd like a few words with you!" said the stranger, with a pleasant smile. "It isn't often one meets one's double, anyway, is it? Are you in a hurry?"

"No," replied Dick.
"Then come into the Cosy Cafe here; we can get a corner to ourselves and have a jaw."

Seated at a small table in a corner of the cafe, the two regarded each other curiously.

"Well, we are alike, aren't we?" said Dick, with a laugh.

"Yes, rather! That's just why I asked you to come in here and talk with me," came the quick, eager reply. "I'll introduce myself first. My name is Guy Derrington. I'm just up on the Christmas vac, from Telby College. Who are you?"

"Dick Baker, of nowhere; and I'm just roaming the streets and watching the people do their Christmas shopping, and wondering what on earth is to become of me," replied Dick. "I've just lost my job, you see."

"Hard lines!" said Derrington. "Through no fault of your own, I'll bet my boots! You look a jolly decent sort, and I'll confide in you. First of all, though, are you willing to impersonate me during the Christmas holidays? I'll pay you a hundred quid if the thing works, and I can assure you that you'll have plenty of everything where you go."

Dick gave a look of surprise.
"Impersonate you!" he exclaimed. "Where? What for?"

"I'll tell you the whole tale from beginning to end," said the other. "The Derringtons, I must explain, are related to the ancient family of De Coverley. The home of the De Coverleys is at Greyminster Castle, in Kent, a fine old Norman building that has been held by the family since Richard I. There are no De Coverleys now. The last of the line was Sir John de Coverley, who died some sixteen years ago without leaving an heir to assume the title. Sir John made a will before he died, leaving the castle to his old friend and physician, Jasper Oldacre, and his money to the Derringtons, who were his only near relations. But he made a special and, to my mind, a foolish stipulation in his will.

"He demanded that all members of the Derrington family benefiting under the will should meet at the castle every

Christmas, and spend Christmas there together in the old home of the De Coverleys, and that the villagers of Coverdale should be invited to the festivities. Any member of the family failing to turn up for the Christmas reunion forfeits the remainder of his heirloom, which then is divided among the others. Funny sort of stipulation to make in a will, wasn't it?"

"Well, it shows that Sir John was proud of his family; and the Christmas reunion at Greyminster Castle is quite a good idea, I think," said Dick Baker, with a smile.

"Yes, the spirit of the thing is all right; but—well, Christmas at Greyminster Castle isn't exactly a pleasant affair!" said Derrington, with a grimace. "The old place gives me the creeps, and so does Jasper Oldacre, who lives there. There are only three of the family left to turn up at Greyminster Castle this year—myself, my brother Lionel, and Ralph Tredegar. Lionel is rather an invalid, and he lives at Greyminster Castle with Oldacre. Jasper is a clever physician, and he is looking after my brother, you see. Lionel will be there this year, and so will cousin Ralph—trust Ralph for that! I ought to be there, but—well, to tell you the truth, old man, I'd rather be anywhere this Christmas than at Greyminster Castle.

"Some college chums of mine have asked me to spend Christmas with them, and I very badly want to. But I don't come into my own money until next year, so that I cannot afford not to turn up at the family reunion, such as it is. Now, perhaps, you can see what I am driving at? I was in the dickens of a quandary until I spotted you in Oxford Street just now!"

"You want me to attend the Christmas reunion at Greyminster Castle, posing as yourself, and thus save you from being cut off without a shilling?" said Dick Baker, with a whimsical smile.

"That's it!" said Guy Derrington eagerly. "Now, the question is—will you? I'll tell you everything about the castle and the people and myself. You can take my bags and luggage. I'll give you more than enough money for what you'll need. You speak well, although you're down and out. You'll do it, Baker? It's a chance you can't afford to miss."

"No, I can't afford to miss it," replied Dick. "I'll do it, Derrington."

CHAPTER 2. A Miraculous Escape!

SEATED alone in a corner of the first-class compartment of the 8.15 p.m. train from Charing Cross, Dick Baker had ample time to muse on the unexpected stroke of Fate that had given him a destination for Christmas.

Dressed in Derrington's clothes, he looked more remarkably like the other. He had spent a long time in conversation with Derrington, and felt confident of being able to carry out the masquerade successfully.

"So long as I don't forget that my name is Guy Derrington, everything should be fine!" He laughed to himself as he turned over the pages of his favourite motoring journal. "This is rather an adventure, besides being a jolly good stroke of luck for me. Here's wishing a Happy Christmas to both Guy Derringtons!"

The train roared on through the darkness. Snow was falling out in the open country, and, peering into the semi-darkness through the train window, Dick could see that the countryside was laden with a white mantle of snow.

He had to change at Ledbury Junction, and catch a slow local train for Coverdale. Ledbury was bustling with happy crowds and the noise of Christmas holiday traffic. The Coverdale train left at last, and Dick could not repress a certain amount of thrilled excitement on contemplating his journey's end.

Snow everywhere as he looked from the train window. The train churned up the stiff gradients of the Kentish hills, stopping at each small station. Looking at the map, Dick saw that Coverdale was now only two stations ahead. He was about to sit down again, when the train stopped with a jerk. He opened the window and looked out, and saw the guard walking in the snow along the line. When the guard came back Dick asked him what was wrong.

"Snowbound!" grunted the guard. "Big fall of snow on the line ahead. We shall probably be stuck here for a few hours yet."

"B-r-r-r-r!" said Dick, shivering at the prospect. "Then I'm not staying!"

He gathered up his two suitcases and jumped down from the train. Crossing the other line, he slid down the railway embankment, and struck out across some fields towards a farmhouse, the lights of which he had seen twinkling in the darkness.

There was no telephone at the farmhouse, but the farmer directed him to an inn low down the country road. Dick found the inn, and used the telephone there to ring up Greymminster Castle. He informed them that it was Guy speaking, and told them what had happened, requesting that a car be sent along to pick him up. He was told to wait at the inn, and that his cousin Ralph would be along as soon as possible in his car.

Dick sat in front of the fire in the parlour of the inn until, after nearly an hour's wait, he heard a car draw up outside, and heard his name—or, rather, the name he had assumed—being called.

He turned, to see a tall, dark, small-featured man of thirty years of age or thereabouts enter the parlour. He immediately recognised Ralph Tredegar from Derrington's description of him.

"Hallo, Ralph!" he exclaimed, rising and taking the proffered hand. "I'm glad you came! How's everything?"

Tredegar looked at him rather curiously, Dick thought, but it was

apparent that his identity was not suspected. Dick carried on the conversation in a free and easy manner, but found Tredegar somewhat reserved and taciturn.

They entered the rather old four-seater car that was waiting outside, and Ralph Tredegar drove it away.

No conversation passed between the two until, having left a small village behind, Tredegar turned to Dick.

"You can drive, can't you?" he asked. "Rather!" said Dick promptly. "Would you like me to take the wheel for a bit?"

"I want you to drive on alone to the castle," said Tredegar. "I'm stopping here to make a call, and sha'n't be back till late. You go on in the car—you can't miss the way. Keep straight ahead on this road and turn to the left after you pass the railway-crossing. That brings you to the castle."

Dick assented, noticing a strange uneasiness in Tredegar's manner. Tredegar put the gear-lever into the neutral position, and allowed the car to draw slowly to a standstill. Then he jumped out of the car, and Dick took the wheel.

He changed up the gears quickly, and soon had the car humming along the road at a good pace. He came at length to where the road ran steeply downhill to the railway level-crossing at the bottom. As the car gained speed down the hill, Dick, in attempting to ease her pace, suddenly made a dramatic discovery.

The brakes would not act!
"Oh, good heavens!" he gasped, wrenching vainly at the hand-brake lever. "I can't stop, and—"

He broke off with a thrill of horror, for he saw the light on the crossing-gate at the bottom turn from green to red. The gates had closed, indicating that a train was coming! He realised that this was the main line to the coast over which the fast expresses travelled.

The car was hurtling down the hill at unchecked speed now. Dick closed the throttle and thrust home the low gear—that was all he could do. But the car did not stop. It dashed downward to the level-crossing.

Dick's grip on the steering-wheel tightened; his teeth came tight together. As the crossing-gates loomed up, he decided on a daring plan of action—his only alternative to crashing into the wall at the other side of the line. Not far away came the sound of an approaching train.

Crash! The flimsy wooden gate buckled like matchwood under the impact of the runaway car. In the same instant Dick wrenched round the steering-wheel. The car lurched drunkenly round, and then took a course along the railway-line, its pace easing as it bumped over the sleepers.

Dick flung a look behind him, and saw the headlights and the glare of the approaching express. The train would not be able to slow up in time, and unless he acted quickly the car would be run down.

Dick put the car into top gear, and drove his foot down hard on the accelerator. The car bounded forward along the permanent-way. The train behind roared closer and closer!

Dick timed himself to a nicety. Just when it seemed inevitable that the train would crash into the car, he jerked at the steering-wheel, and turned the car on to the opposite line. Next minute the express thundered by and disappeared, glaring, into the darkness.

"Whew! A close shave that!" muttered Dick, as the car stopped of its own accord on the level railway-line. "I wonder whether Tredegar knew that the

brakes wouldn't act when he sent me on alone? He knew about the hill, and the railway-crossing, and he seemed to be pretty nervous and restive. No wonder he never used the brakes to stop the car when he got out. He knew that they wouldn't work! The rascal meant me to be injured, or killed!"

His thrilling experience over, Dick got the car round and drove back to the level-crossing. He explained matters to the scared signalman, and, having left the car in a shed at a farmhouse, he set out on foot for the castle.

CHAPTER 3. The Truth Revealed!

GREYMINSTER CASTLE was a grand, greytoned pile, bearing with its four towers and the battlements on the walls, all the grandeur of the Middle Ages.

Dick was shown into the castle through the main door, and he found himself in the Knights' Hall. All around him in this lofty hall were links of the past glory of the castle. Large oil paintings hung from the oak-pannelled walls, the windows were of stained glass, many suits of armour stood about the hall, and on the walls, too, were spears, and daggers, and weapons of all kinds, while the tattered and stained banners of past De Coverleys hung from the wall over the large open fireplace.

"Master Guy!" A cracked, wheezing voice broke into the lad's meditations, and, looking round, he saw a short, wizened old man regarding him from a doorway on the left. It was Jasper Oldacre, the present occupant of the castle. Oldacre's looks were of incredulous amazement. His eyes, as he approached Dick, seemed to glint maliciously.

"Hallo, Jasper!" said Dick. "You seem surprised to see me!"

"No, Master Guy, not surprised, but glad!" croaked the old man. "A merry Christmas to ye! Ah, here is Lionel!"

A pale, delicate-looking young man walked in. On seeing Dick his listless eyes brightened, and he hurried over and grasped the lad's hand.

"So you have come, Guy!" he said fervently. "I was wondering whether you would come. I—I somehow had a feeling that you wouldn't."

Dick laughed as easily as he was able. Talking to Lionel, he kept his eyes on Jasper Oldacre, and saw that the old man was watching him furtively. He took an instant dislike to Oldacre.

Dick carried out his part well. There was something strange and repelling in the atmosphere of the castle, but Dick felt convinced that all believed him to be Guy Derrington.

Ralph Tredegar did not arrive until after supper. Dick saw him give a guilty start on seeing him.

"So you—you got here all right, Guy!" stammered Tredegar.

"Yes—after being nearly killed in that car of yours!" rapped Dick sharply. "Did you know that the brakes were useless, Ralph?"

The other licked his dry lips, and a hunted look came into his small, beady eyes.

"The brakes were useless?" he muttered. "I—I didn't know. Of course, the car is rather old, and all sorts of things are liable to go wrong—"

"Yes, of course!" said Dick, meaningly. "How fortunate for you, Ralph, that you had to make that call! You

missed a thrill that was worthy of a screen serial!"

The main hall of the castle had been gaily decorated for the Christmas festivities on the morrow, when prominent local residents and the villagers would gather at the ancestral home of the De Coverleys and join together in celebrating Yuletide, in accordance with the wishes of the late Sir John.

Dick wandered alone about the old corridors and the musty rooms of the castle before retiring to bed. The old-world place fascinated him and stirred his imagination, conjuring up visions of the romantic past.

Traditions and superstitions were associated with Greyminster Castle, as with every old building in the country. The most popular superstition was that the spirit of Sir Roger de Coverley, the first of the line, walked abroad in the picture gallery every Christmas at midnight. The villagers of Coverdale were convinced of the truth of this, and several of them who had been servants at the castle swore that they had actually seen the ghost with their own eyes.

Dick retired to bed at last. His was a large, old-fashioned bed-room, oak-pannelled, and containing antique furniture. Midnight had struck from a distant church before he blew out the light and settled down to go to sleep.

He was awakened from his sleep, however, by a mysterious tapping on the wall. It was pitch-black in the room, and not a sound disturbed the night silence until the tapping sounded again.

His nerves tensed, Dick found the matches and lit the candle. There was nobody else in the room. Yet again there came that strange tap, tap, tap! on the wall.

Dick sprang out of bed and put on his slippers. He was not a believer in

ghosts, being too matter-of-fact and clear-headed a lad for that. He was resolved to discover the origin of the mysterious tapping and what it meant. He examined the oak panels carefully where he judged the tapping to have come from. Several minutes passed, and then a loud shriek of terror rang out through the night stillness.

Dick ran from the room and entered the room next to his, where Lionel Derrington slept.

Huddled up on the floor in front of a large mirror was Lionel Derrington. He was writhing and moaning like one demented. With one spring Dick reached his side.

"What is the matter?" he demanded. "What has happened?"

The other was inarticulate with horror. His face was blanched, and he looked into the mirror with large, dilated eyes. Then, shuddering, he turned his face away and pointed into the mirror.

What had Lionel seen in the mirror that had sent him into such a helpless state of terror? Looking into the mirror, Dick saw that directly opposite it stood a large, carved oak chest. And as he looked his quick eyes detected a slight, almost imperceptible movement of the lid.

Waiting first to give Lionel a drink of water, he sprang over to the chest and grasped the lid. It would not come open.

Dick snapped his teeth down hard. "The lid moved two minutes ago, I could swear to that!" he muttered. "I mean to discover what this means!"

Finding it impossible to raise the lid, he grasped the chest and swung it over on its side. Then an exclamation of amazement broke from his lips. The bottom of the chest was false. The edges of a sliding panel could be seen. Dick swung the panel open and saw that the chest was empty.

Instinctively his eyes turned to the floor where the chest had stood. He went down on hands and knees and examined the oak boards. And, as he had expected, he discovered a sliding panel there immediately underneath the secret panel in the base of the oak chest. He found the spring, and pressed it. A square section of the floor swung inwards, revealing a black, open cavity beneath.

Dick flung a look at Lionel. "Go on, go on!" hoarsed the other. "Find out what it means! I shall be all right now. A form appeared out of the trunk; it was that that frightened me. Now I know that it was a trick, and not supernatural, I shall not be frightened. Go on down and see what it means."

Dick took a lighted candle and lowered himself through the hole in the floor. He found himself in a narrow tunnel, which led upwards, it seemed, between two walls. Dick traversed this, and guessed that he was walking behind the panelled wall of his own bed-room.

"The fellow who frightened Lionel must have been the one who tried to frighten me by tapping at the wall," he mused, as he passed. "I wonder if Ralph or Jasper are at the bottom of this?"

He passed on until he reached a flight of stone steps. Clambering up these, he came to another narrow, tunnel-like passage. This ended abruptly in a stone wall. But Dick soon discovered that, by shifting one of the stone slabs, he could get through. The keen night air swept in through the aperture.

Climbing through it, Dick found himself at the top of the west tower. Looking through the wide battlements, he saw the dark, snow-clad countryside for miles around.

Then a stealthy footstep behind caused him to turn. Hardly had he done so than he found himself assailed by a tall figure clad in a flowing white robe. Dick grappled with his assailant, and the pair rocked to and fro at the top of the tower, fighting desperately.

"I planned death for you, but you shall die now!" hissed the other, dragging him with demoniacal strength towards the low-built battlements. "You shall go over, to fall into the moat below; and people will think that you walked in your sleep—"

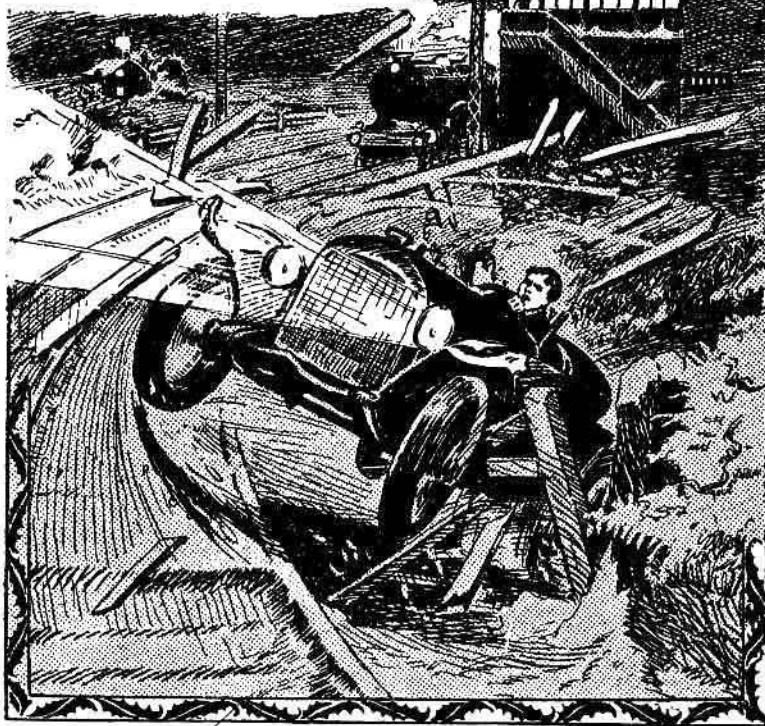
Dick gripped the man's throat and forced him back. They were rolling together between the battlements now at the top of the tower.

Looking down, Dick saw that to fall from there would mean certain death.

He smashed a terrific right-hander on his assailant's chest that sent him reeling back. Suddenly there was a shriek, and Dick saw the other topple off the stonework and disappear over the other side.

With blanched face and heart beating fast he looked over, and then drew a deep breath of relief. His assailant was clinging to the ivy that grew on the walls. He had saved himself in the nick of time.

"Save me!" panted the man below.



Crash! The flimsy wooden gate buckled like matchwood under the impact of the runaway car. Dick saw the approaching express!

"Do not leave me here! For mercy's sake, get me up!"

Dick gritted his teeth and swung himself over the battlements. He clambered down the ivy till he reached the other.

"Hang on to me with one hand, and on to the ivy with the other!" he cried. "When we reach the top I'll help you over."

It was a terribly difficult task for Dick, for the man was almost helpless with fear. But at last, by dint of great risk to himself, Dick managed to get him back to safety at the top of the tower.

"I thank you!" muttered the other. "You have saved me when I tried to murder you. Come with me. I will tell you all."

Dick followed the white-clad figure through the gap in the tower wall left by the removed stone. The stone was put back into place, and Dick was taken along the tunnel he had traversed until another tunnel was reached. This eventually gave access to a small, stone-walled room. It was furnished comfortably, and a large oak bedstead stood in one corner.

"This is where I live," said the old man, removing the white shroud. "Look at me. Whom do you think I am?"

Dick looked at the handsome, pallid face that was lined with the furrows of care. He gave a start. He had seen a portrait of this man in the castle picture-gallery.

"Sir John de Coverley!" he cried, reeling back.

"Yes, I am your uncle!" said the other. "Do not be afraid. You know that I am not a ghost, although I have been masquerading as one. That terrible experience I have just had at the top of the tower seems to have cleared my brain and brought a return of reason. For sixteen years I have been a madman, hiding here in secret, awaiting the culmination of my revenge."

"Then the report of your death was false!" ejaculated Dick.

"Yes. There was a mock burial in the grounds of this castle. I was not dead. I lived—in secret—to attain my revenge."

"On whom?" demanded Dick. "For what?"

"On your family—the Derringtons!" came the fierce reply. "I craved revenge on them for stealing my infant son—the son who was heir to my title. It was one of the Derringtons who took away my son. I received proof that the baby had died. And then I decided to die, too—and to get my revenge. My son stood between the Derringtons and my fortune, because he was my heir. With the heir to Greyminster out of the way, the Derringtons knew that they would inherit. I let them inherit, but made the stipulation in the will that they should meet at the castle here once a year—at Christmas time. Every Christmas for sixteen years the Derringtons have met here—and there have been deaths—numerous deaths. I and old Jasper between us achieved those deaths. We selected our victim, and on Christmas Eve Jasper had a draught put into his drink—a draught that weakened the heart. Then, at night, I would appear as a ghost, and the fright killed my victim—his heart was weak, and he died of shock. That was my revenge on the Derringtons. It was a Derrington who sent my family into oblivion by killing my son. And I swore to obliterate the Derrington family as the De Coverleys have been obliterated."

Dick Baker listened to this impassioned speech in amazement. He looked at the old man before him, and saw that he was in earnest. Tears glistened in the shrunken eyes.

"I realise my madness now!" said Sir John, quietly. "Jasper Oldacre kept



Dick Baker smashed a terrific right-hander on his ghostlike assailant's chest and sent him reeling backwards. Then followed a sudden shriek, and Dick saw the other topple off the stonework and disappear over the side of the tower.

alive the fires of my hatred and urged me on to get rid of all the Derringtons. I can see his motive now. With all the Derringtons gone, he would inherit everything, under the terms of my will."

Dick nodded.

"I see," he said. "You are sorry now, that you have kept on with this awful campaign against innocent members of the Derrington family?"

"Yes, I am sorry. It was madness. The whole business has been madness—the mock burial and my living in hiding here for sixteen years with only Jasper knowing my secret. But what had I to live for? My son was gone—stolen away and killed by an accused Derrington who—"

The old man broke off, and Dick saw that he was looking at him with dilated eyes. The other came towards him, slowly, and pulled aside the torn sleeve of Dick's pyjama jacket. The tear had been made during the fight on the tower, and Dick's bare arm was showing.

"That mark—that birthmark on your arm—do you know anything of it?" cried Sir John, hoarsely.

Dick looked down at the birthmark on his arm that was shaped somewhat like a heart.

"I've always known the mark was there, of course," he said. "But I know nothing special about it—"

"But it's the birthmark of my own son!" came the quick, eager response. "Every De Coverley had a mark like that on his arm at birth! Boy, you are not a Derrington at all!"

"I know that," said Dick, with a chuckle. "I'm an impostor. The real Guy Derrington met me and was struck by my likeness to him—"

"Of course there is a likeness! You two are cousins! You are my son! But—but I cannot realise it. Go on—tell me your story."

Dick told Sir Roger frankly all about himself, how he had never known his mother and how he had been brought up among thieves in Limehouse until his better self had asserted itself, and he ran away.

"I am convinced that you are my son!" cried the old man, when Dick had finished his story. "An amazing coincidence sent you here this Christmas! But if only I could get proof—"

Dick had been thinking hard, and he suddenly burst out with:

"I have an idea! To-morrow night the villagers will be here for the Christmas festivities. At midnight the ghost is supposed to walk. This Christmas the ghost will walk and—"

He talked earnestly with Sir John, who listened with hands clenched and eyes gleaming. Dick laughed softly as he left the secret room, having been told the way back to Lionel's room.

"Oldacre will have a surprise to-morrow," he muttered. "The old rogue was in the conspiracy with the Derringtons who made off with the infant heir to Greyminster—myself, if what Sir John says is true. Gee, but this seems all so unreal—more like a story than real actuality! There will be stirring happenings at midnight to-morrow, or I'm a Dutchman!"

CHAPTER 4.
A Rude Awakening!

NEITHER Jasper Oldacre nor Ralph Tredegar had heard the commotion during the night. Dick shrewdly suspected that they had put themselves well out of ear-shot. That Ralph was in league with old Jasper he felt convinced, for they both evinced disappointment in the morning on finding Lionel still alive.

"Oldacre has been doping Lionel—making his heart weak so that he wouldn't be able to stand a fright!" muttered Dick to himself. "The old villain! He and Ralph are as thick as thieves. I shouldn't be surprised if they weren't planning to get the three of us out of the way—Lionel, myself, and then Sir John. But I'll give 'em a surprise to-night."

Dick announced that, as a further attraction for the Christmas revellers that would be at the castle, he proposed "laying the ghost" in the picture gallery. Old Jasper did not dissuade him from the idea, but Ralph appeared nervous.

When the lad had gone out, the two met in the Knights' Hall.

"Supposing Sir John does venture out to play ghost to-night, Jasper?" said Ralph Tredegar. "That kid is cute, and he may discover the truth—and then our game will be up!"

"Listen!" chuckled Oldacre, his eyes glinting like a monster's. "To-night Sir John will play ghost. I will see him and persuade him to—he does all I tell him. As soon as he appears there will probably be a panic. You will sham fright, pull out your revolver and shoot the 'ghost'—shoot him dead. It will be believed that you did it in fright, not knowing that the 'ghost' was really a human being. That will put Sir John out of the way, and put you and I into the chance of getting the entire fortune for ourselves. We shall easily be able to dispose of Lionel and young Guy."

"But won't it come out that you—" faltered Ralph.

"Nothing will come out about me!" japped Jasper. "It will be thought that Sir John has been living here unbeknown to anybody. I will disclaim any knowledge of the affair. We shall be safe if you keep your nerve, Ralph—and shoot."

Ralph Tredegar nodded. "I'll do it, Jasper," he muttered. "But mind, if there's a hitch, you'll get into trouble with me!"

Dick did not put in an appearance until dinner-time. He did not satisfy Oldacre's demands to know where he had been. The Christmas dinner was a gloomy affair, but later on the villagers began to arrive, and the real spirit of Christmas pervaded the old castle.

The rafters rang with sounds of music and laughter. Christmas at Greymminster Castle was an event that was made the most of by the people of Coverdale. Feasting and merrymaking was the order of the day.

A dance was in progress in the ancient ball-room when Dick announced that at midnight the ghost was supposed to walk, and he invited all who were bold enough to turn up at the picture gallery in order to "lay" the ghost.

This announcement was greeted with cheers, and there was no lack of volunteers. The village doctor, and the grocer, and the constable, and a dozen others all announced their willingness to help in snaring the ghost.

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Night drew on; the castle was gaily lit, and the Christmas revelry reached concert pitch. Nobody thought of returning home until the small hours of the morning.

As midnight approached, Dick summoned all the volunteers to the picture gallery. Ralph and old Jasper accompanied them.

There was silence and darkness in the long, lofty picture gallery. On either side of the panelled walls hung large portraits of past De Coverleys. At one end was a handsome stained-glass window, and priceless tapestries adorned the walls on either side. A door that gave access to the main corridor was at the other end, screened with curtains.

All lay in hiding behind the massive curtains and waited breathlessly.

Midnight! Hearts beat fast as the last reverberating note of a distant clock died away. Then, out of the tense silence that followed came the sound of soft footsteps in the picture gallery.

Dick, Ralph, Oldacre, and the villagers looked from behind the curtain and saw a dim figure, dressed in the picturesque garb of a courtier of the Middle Ages, walking slowly along the picture gallery in the darkness.

Cries of amazement arose from the watching villagers, several of whom evinced fear.

Oldacre nudged Ralph. "Shoot!" he muttered.

Tredegar whipped out his revolver with a cry and took aim at the moving, ghost-like figure in the picture gallery. In the same instant as the spiteful crack of his revolver sounded there was a blinding flash of light that lit the gallery from end to end and then it plunged back again into darkness.

Dick's voice rang out above the cries of the frightened village people.

"You rascal, Tredegar! You knew it wasn't a ghost! You shot on purpose—you and Oldacre planned it between you!"

The lad flung himself on Tredegar and wrenched the revolver from his grasp as he swung, snarling, towards him.

Oldacre snapped on the light and ran to the figure that lay huddled on the gallery floor. He turned it over and the face was revealed.

Then Oldacre recoiled from the victim of his plot in horror, a shrill cry escaping his lips.

"Seth Baker!"

The man who had masqueraded as a ghost moved. His eyes opened and he groaned. Then, on seeing Oldacre, he gave a hoarse cry and started up.

"Seth Baker!" shrilled Jasper Oldacre, his shrivelled face going livid. "You—here!"

"Yes, Seth Baker is here, to confront you with your villainy!" cried Dick, stepping forward with Ralph's revolver in his hand. "This is a surprise I planned for you, Jasper. Look!"

One of the pictures in the gallery swung suddenly outwards, revealing a cavity through which stepped two figures.

One was Sir John de Coverley, and the other Guy Derrington.

Shouts of fear and amazement arose from the villagers, who believed the late owner of Greymminster Castle to be dead.

"Oldacre, you miscreant, Seth Baker has told me all!" exclaimed Sir John, in a ringing voice. "My son Richard planned this surprise on you. His idea was to have the people of the village here as witnesses."

"Your son!" almost screamed Jasper Oldacre. "What do you mean!"

"He means that I am really his son, stolen by you from this place when I was a kid and put into Seth Baker's hands to be brought up as his son!" cut in Dick laconically. "I met my father, you see, last night, and he recognised me by the birthmark on my arm as his son. But we wanted proof. So this morning I hired a car from Coverdale and drove to London, taking with me two friends. I visited Seth Baker, my supposed father, at Limehouse, and told him that unless he made a confession of the truth about my parentage I would give information to the police about himself and his gang. That frightened him, and he told me all. He returned here with me and I hid him where Sir John, my father, has been hiding for sixteen years, a victim of your malicious influence, Jasper. Then I rang up the real Guy Derrington and told him to come here—and this is the surprise we planned for you! So you intended that Ralph should kill my father. No wonder you came up to him this afternoon and threatened him with exposure if he did not play ghost to-night. You wanted to decoy him out here to be shot. But, you see, I got some magnesium flash-powder and made Seth Baker play ghost—just to give you a surprise!"

Oldacre and Ralph Tredegar recoiled in horror and fear.

Seth Baker, lying wounded on the floor of the picture gallery, then gasped out his confession. The villagers listened in amazement.

Dick turned to Oldacre again. "Now, you rascal, what have you to say?"

Oldacre collapsed at Sir John's feet, whining for mercy. The doctor attended to Baker's wound, and announced that it was not fatal. Baker was taken away to the village hospital, while Ralph Tredegar and old Jasper were made captives by the villagers and locked in a lower room.

Then all returned to the ball-room, where Sir John de Coverley amazed the revellers by revealing himself, and telling them the whole story. Tears streamed down his pallid face as he introduced Dick as his son, and heir to the title and estates.

Never before had there been such Christmas revels at the old castle as those which followed. Guy Derrington confessed to Dick that he was "knocked flat" by the revelations.

"It seems like a magazine yarn to me, Dick," he said. "What a stroke of fortune, though, that I spotted you in Oxford Street last night and sent you here to impersonate me!"

"It was!" said Dick fervently. "But I made you turn up for the family reunion after all, and my father is sticking to the terms of his will. You'll get your money for this year, and then—"

"And then I shall come into my own, so I don't care!" laughed Guy Derrington. "I'm jolly glad all this happened, Dick. As for that old rogue Jasper, and my precious cousin Ralph—"

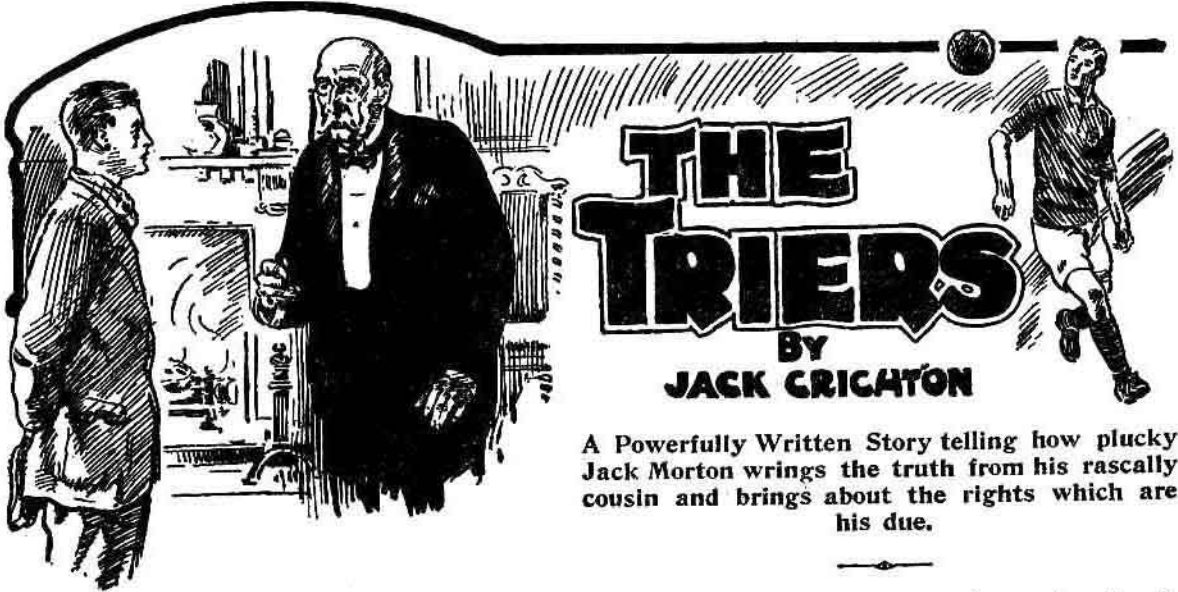
"My father will let them go, provided they leave the country," said Dick.

THE END.

(Be sure you read "The Stolen Pie!" a magnificent story, featuring old-time favourites, *Gan Waga, Ching Lung, Rupert Thurston & Co.* in next week's Special Bumper Number of the GEM Library.)

Faced without a friend
in the world—

—George Clifton deems
it wise to confess!



A Powerfully Written Story telling how plucky
Jack Morton wrings the truth from his rascally
cousin and brings about the rights which are
his due.

In the Court.

IN all the history of Boltwich it was by far the most amazing day.

Certainly, since Jack Morton had become so dear to the hearts of the Boltwich fans, he had been making history, and many strange things had happened; but there was no getting over the fact that the crowd which now stood outside the police-court was one of the greatest and worst-tempered that had ever collected in the town.

The police, however, on this occasion, had not been taken unawares, and they had drafted in great squads of police from other towns, so that there was little risk of real trouble, and getting into the court itself was a matter of no small skill.

George Clifton had fortified himself with some little refreshment before he had left home, and he had walked down towards the court feeling quite certain that everything was going to go all right.

And then, when he suddenly got close to the court itself and heard the crowd yelling and cheering, singing songs, and again and again demanding his blood, he realised that he could not possibly get to the court as he was.

What was he to do?

It was somewhat against his dignity, but he was passing by a barber's shop at the moment, in which reposed a false beard, and so he entered in and, much to the man's surprise, bought it. A moment later he bought a pair of spectacles, and then, with his coat-collar turned up about his neck, he approached the police-court.

But here again he was handicapped.

At last he found a policeman, and, slipping a pound into his hand, he whispered his name.

The policeman started, grinned, and gave him a quick glance of surprise.

"What's the game?" he asked.

"I could not get through otherwise," Clifton whispered, in reply. "The fools want me!"

Again the policeman grinned.

"Yes, they do," he said. "All right, sir; you come along with me. I'll get you in."

And so, pushing and shoving, during the process of which Clifton's false beard very nearly came to a sad and a bad end, he was pushed into the police-court, and it was only as he entered the court itself that he slipped the beard into his pocket and took off the glasses.

The inspector came up to him at once.

"Had rather a bad time getting here, didn't you, sir?"

Clifton nodded angrily.

"I did. It's a disgrace. When are you people going to get this mob into order?"

The inspector looked serious about it.

"Don't ask me, sir," he said. "The trouble is that they are so fond of him. Anyhow, it looks as though we have got him this time; but I don't know what is going to happen if he gets sent for trial. All the magistrates have had threatening letters, and it looks nasty. We've got a lot of police, but it is altogether a nasty show!"

George Clifton gave a grunt of disgust.

"A nasty show!" he ejaculated. "Do you know that I had a raging, tearing mob of them up at my place last night?"

"I heard something about it, sir. You'll have to look out!"

Clifton started angrily.

"Look out! Do you think I'm going to clear out of my own home for a whipper-snapper like that, and a lot of roughs? I tell you, inspector, it seems to me that you are the person who is to blame."

"I, sir?"

"Certainly! Respectable citizens should be looked after better than this, and I shall certainly go up to London to-morrow and have a word with the commissioner!"

The inspector said nothing aloud, but he said a good deal under his breath, and it seemed to be to the effect that he hoped that Mr. George Clifton would stay up in London when he got there.

Suddenly there was a silence in court and the magistrates entered.

There was an electric atmosphere about the place, and it was clear that it had

spread to the magistrates themselves, for they took their seats looking very serious.

There was silence for a moment, and then the chairman of the Bench began to speak.

"I—I want to say, before we take the first case, that the Bench is very much disturbed by the state of affairs which seems to exist in our town. It is not a credit to Boltwich, and we hope very sincerely that there will soon be an end to it. And I have one thing further to say. It would be idle for us not to confess that we know about the case which is causing so much excitement; but we have to put it on record at once that none of the letters of a threatening nature we have received, will stop us doing our duty, and, further, if we discover the writers of these letters, which are most improper, we shall not hesitate to take the gravest steps. Now, call the first case!"

"Jack Morton!"

There was a great silence, and then a buzzing as Jack entered the court.

He glanced quickly round, and in the front row of the court he saw the Triers. One and all they were there, and their cheery smiles did him good.

He was charged and, having pleaded not guilty, the first witness was called. It was the police-sergeant to whom he had given himself up.

He was soon done with, and then the name of George Clifton was called in court.

He had been sitting with the solicitors, talking hard to young Clifford, and he rose with a jerk and went to the witness-box very pale. Every eye was upon him as he moved, and as he passed Jack in the dock he raised his eyes, and for one moment the two looked at one another.

Clifton took the oath, and was about to speak when Jack suddenly leaned forward from the dock.

"One moment, Mr. Clifton," he said, pointing to that worthy. "Before you start, I just want to say that my defence is that you know all about that fifty pounds, and that, further, you know very well that you asked a certain person to destroy my grandfather's will."

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The Truth Comes Out!

HERE was indeed silence in court. Then the Chairman of the Bench turned quickly to Jack.

"Look here, young man," he said, "you can't behave like that in this court. You must wait; a proper time will come for you to have your say. Wait until that time comes!"

"I am sorry; but—"
All eyes, however, were upon George Clifton by this time.

An amazing change had come over him. As he had entered the box he had seemed confident and insolent almost in his bearing; but now as he stood there he was holding to the edge of the box as though in physical pain, and his face was a ghastly white.

"It's ridiculous—a fairy tale!" he stammered; but the voice was the voice of a man who knew he was doomed, and the effect upon everyone in that court was electric.

The Chairman of the Bench turned to him.

"You need take no notice of anything that the lad said, Mr. Clifton," he said; "it is quite irrelevant to this charge. Kindly proceed with your evidence."
"Yes."

George Clifton made an effort. He drew himself up in the box and squared his shoulders. He looked about the court, and then suddenly his jaw dropped again.

At that moment he had caught sight of old Graves, the butler, staring at him from across the court.

He started to speak.

"I—I—"
He got no further, but suddenly he raised his hand, which was shaking like a leaf in the wind, and, pointing at Graves, cried in a hysterical voice:

"What are you doing here? What are you doing here?"

And with those words he pitched forward to the ground in a dead faint.

It was an amazing moment. People rushed to his assistance, there was confusion in court, and for some minutes it was quite impossible for anyone to make themselves heard.

They carried him outside, and then silence was ordered once again.

The chairman looked curiously at the lad in the dock.

"The question now is what to do with you?" he said.

At that moment a wild cheering broke out in the square without, and for a minute or so it was impossible to transact any further business in the court. In fact, it was not until the chairman had threatened to have the court cleared that he could make himself heard again—though it was difficult to see how he could have it cleared at all, for at that moment there was a wild mob fighting round the door for admission, all yelling like mad for Jack Morton.

At that moment a police-sergeant came hurrying into court, and as he was one of the people who had taken Clifton out when he had fainted, there was immediate silence.

"Mr. Clifton wants to withdraw the charge, sir!" he said.

"What—"

That was as far as the magistrate got, for now there was no holding the crowd. Men jumped over seats, sweeping the police on one side as they struggled and fought to get to Jack and shake him by the hand.

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But the lad kept his head.

He was still a prisoner, and he wasn't so foolish as to try to leave the dock until he was told that he could go.

There was a consultation during the turmoil, and when something like order had been restored the chairman turned once again to the hero of Boltwich.

"Well, Morton," he said, "this has been a very strange morning, and not, I am afraid, a very creditable one for any of us. But as the charge has been withdrawn there is nothing for it but to discharge you!"

It was not very gracefully said. In fact, the chairman was not in a good temper at all. He was a friend of Clifton's; but, even more than that, he was a great believer in good order, and it made him furiously angry to see all this disorder in his native town, and, rightly or wrongly, he blamed Jack for it.

"Go on!" said the police-sergeant to Jack, as the lad still lingered in the dock; "you can go."

But Jack drew himself up proudly, and looked the chairman in the eye.

"I don't understand quite, sir," he said. "Do I leave here without a stain on my character?"

And while the chairman hesitated for one fraction of a moment, a mighty cheer went up in the court.

"Of course you do, boy! Good old Jack!"

That was answer enough for Jack. As a matter of fact, except for the chairman, he saw that he had the Bench with him; and so he turned, having bowed to the magistrates, and tried to get down into the court.

It was not too easily done. People were pressing about him, and for a few moments he felt himself absolutely lost in the midst of the press.

But suddenly a cheerful sound came to his ears.

"Come on, the Triers!"

Such a scene had never, of course, been seen in the court before, and probably will never be seen again. The Triers, arm-in-arm, soon cleared a path to him; and while the Chairman of the Bench shouted for order, and finally told his clerk that the sitting would be adjourned until the afternoon, they gathered round their pal and shook him heartily by the hand.

They were all there, and there were tears in Jack's eyes by the time he had shaken hands with them all.

Then they cleared a way again, and got him outside into the lobby of the Court House.

A pompous police-inspector came up to Ronnie, who was running the show.

"He'd better go out by the back entrance," he said.

"Why?"

The answer came in a moment.

"We want Jack Morton!"

It was shouted by thousands of voices, like the roll of thunder, and Ronnie smiled as he heard it.

"All right, old friend," he said to the inspector; "you go out by the back door yourself, if you like. We are going to take Jack out this way, and if you don't like it you can jump it. But you are rather foolish to stop us, if you can, because once we get him out into the square the crowd will soon clear off!"

The inspector evidently saw the sense of this, for he said no more, and did nothing to try and stop the Triers as they dragged their hero along towards the door of the Court House.

Suddenly in the square there was silence.

It was certainly one of the proudest moments in Jack's life, and although he felt that he had done little enough to call for all this, he would have been little short of human if he had not been intensely happy at the cheer that went up a few moments later, as the crowd saw who it was.

In a little while they were silent again, and Ronnie, waving his cap in the air, yelled:

"Acquitted, without a stain on his character!"

The air was rent with another terrific cheer, and then they started to call for a speech from Jack, and nothing would satisfy them until he had spoken.

He hated doing it.

In the first place, he felt that altogether too much of a fuss was being made of him, and in the second place he felt that it was scarcely his place—a youngster and a newcomer to the Boltwich team—to make public speeches.

But he had to do it, and so they lifted him on some stalwart shoulders, and he thanked them in a few simple words.

"It's very kind of you to take such an interest in me," he said. "Of course, I had nothing to do with the thing of which I was accused, and if I have deserved this kindness from you, I will try in the future to deserve it still more by scoring lots of goals in our games!"

How they cheered! It was not a long or a very brilliant speech, but it was what they wanted. And then came the question of getting Jack away.

Here the Triers came to his rescue again, and a few minutes later they had carried him down into the square, and, literally fighting a way through the mob, escorted him from the scene of his triumphs.

Another moment, and, by a clever ruse, Laurie Robson had managed to sneak him into his two-seater, and they were spinning away out of Boltwich for Robson's house.

They scarcely spoke until they reached the place and were safely inside Laurie's library.

Then Jack held out his hand.

"I've really got you to thank for this, Laurie," he said.

But young Robson shook his head.

"No, my lad. You have got yourself to thank, because you have always played the game. That is why you are out of the mess now. But did you ever see such a cur as that cousin of yours? He has not even the courage to carry out his own rascality to a successful conclusion!"

Laurie laughed as he spoke, but there was a serious light in his eyes.

"As a matter of fact," he continued, "it's rather a funny position. What about the will, Jack?"

Jack nodded.

"I meant to confront him with the whole thing in court!"

Laurie agreed.

"Yes, I know; and you told him about it; but I don't think that many people understood to what you were referring."

Jack shook his head.

"No. But he understood all right. That is why he fainted."

"And what now?"

Jack considered for a moment or two, puckering up his brow.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Laurie," he said, "I would rather go and see my old mother than anything else in the world; but I think I ought to finish this business first with Mr. George Clifton, for her sake as much as for anything else."

There is no telling what the fellow will get up to now that he is frightened!"

"You are right there," said Laurie. "He is frightened to death. We ought to get after him!"

As he spoke the telephone-bell rang, and he picked up the receiver.

"Yes?"

There was a pause, and as Jack watched he saw the look of surprise come to Laurie's face as he spoke through the transmitter.

"Yes, yes. All right. He's here with me now, inspector. All right. I'll see what he says. Hold on a minute!"

Laurie put down the receiver and turned to Jack.

"Jack, guess what has happened?"

"What?"

"Clifton went home, feeling pretty rotten. Some of the crowd saw him going, and now half Boltwich is outside the house, trying to break in, and declaring that they are going to have his blood. That's the inspector. He says that he has not got enough police to deal with the situation, and he thinks that you ought to go along and try to quieten them."

Jack jumped to his feet.

"It means saving the skin of George Clifton!" said Laurie.

Jack answered with a nod and smile.

"After all," he said, "we are not cannibals, Laurie. Say I will come straight along!"

Laurie went to the telephone and gave Jack's message, and then turned back to his pal.

"I must say, Jack," he exclaimed, "that I don't think that I, personally, would move a hand to save a hound like that!"

Jack shook his head.

"Yes; you would, Laurie," he said. "you know perfectly well that you would!"

"Well, do you want me to run you over there, young fellow m'lud?"

Jack blushed.

"You are being very good to me, Laurie!"

"Shut up! Come along!"

So once again the two lads bundled into Laurie's two-seater, and were soon hurrying towards the home which should have been Jack's.

As they neared the place they heard the shouts and roars of anger which were going up from all round it, and when the car swung through the lodge gates and they could see the house itself, they were met with a really remarkable sight.

A sort of pitched battle was going on there in front of the fine old house between the mob, police, and Clifton's servants, and it was clear that the mob would soon get the upper hand.

Laurie laughed as he stopped the car some way from the fray, and tried to hide it behind some trees, in case the mob turned their kindly attentions to it.

"I should think you'll owe me a new



George Clifton gave a hoarse cry as he found himself face to face with his cousin. "You!" he cried. "What are you doing here?" Like a flash Laurie sprang upon him.

car this time to-morrow, Jack," he smiled.

"All right," said Jack; "you shall have it!" They both ran forward.

The fight was getting along very nicely as they rushed upon the scene, but suddenly someone saw Jack Morton, and a shout went up, and it was really remarkable the effect that it had upon the townspeople.

Like magic the fight stopped. But the crowd was in a nasty mood, and Jack realised that it would take more than this to quieten them.

"Say, chaps," he cried, standing upon the steps which led up to the house, "this isn't the game! You are robbing me of a bit of sport!"

"What's up, Jack?" some of them cried. "We want to get at George Clifton!"

"I know you do. So do I!"

They roared at that.

"Look here, chaps! Give me a chance," he said. "I am going in now to have a few words with Clifton, and I am taking a few of these policemen along with me. You clear off, and leave him to me, and I promise you that you will all be satisfied at what I do with him!"

For a moment or two it did not look as though the crowd were going to listen to their young hero this time, but at last wiser counsels seemed to prevail, and perhaps the fact that a fresh lot of police were arriving, helped them to make up their minds.

"All right, Jack," one of their leaders said, "we will leave him to you. But give it to him good and strong!"

Jack laughed.

"You bet I will," he said. "You bet!"

They started to clear off, and a police inspector came hurrying up to thank Jack.

"Look here, inspector," the lad said, "I am going in to see Mr. Clifton—"

"But—"

"I am going in, and I want you to come with me and make a note of all that is said. If you don't let me get in, or don't make them let me in, then I shall be forced much against my peace-loving nature to get those chaps back to help me get in to him!"

The inspector grinned. He happened to be a great football fan himself, and he was all with Jack.

"All right," he said, "I haven't got any objection to you going in, Jack. I only want to see this town settle down again. We are going to hear too much about this as it is. Come along with me. We'll see Mr. Clifton together!"

The Confession.

OLD GRAVES greeted them as they knocked at the front door, and let them in at once.

Laurie went in with Jack and the inspector and also a sergeant of the police.

"Where is he?" asked Jack at once.

Graves grinned.

"He is in a terrible state. He has locked himself in the smoking-room. There used to be a story, sir, about a secret panel in one of the walls and he's been knocking round the walls for a long time. He's half mad with fear. Never knew such an exhibition in my life. You'd better be careful, sir, he's armed to the teeth!"

The inspector gave a grunt.

"Show me which room, Mr. Graves," he said.

"Yes."

They crossed the hall. Now that the shouting of the crowd had died away the hall was strangely quiet, and except for the whispering of excited and

frightened maid-servants who hung about and peered over the banisters, there was scarcely a sound as they reached the smoking-room.

Certainly the man within was being quiet for the time being. Perhaps it was that he, too, had heard the shouts of rage die down. At any rate, all was silent when the inspector of police knocked boldly on the thick door.

There was a moment's silence, and then there came a reply from within.

"Who's that?"

The inspector nodded to Graves.

"Tell him I am here!"

"Yes."

Graves went close to the door.

"It's the inspector, sir. He has cleared them off and now wants a word with you."

"Sure they have gone, Graves?"

"Yes, sir; sure."

Another moment passed, while George Morton was obviously making up his mind within. Then he said:

"All right, I'll see you, inspector, but I have had about enough of this disgraceful business. I—I—I—"

He started to unlock the door. It was clear that it took an effort on his part, and that his hand was trembling.

But at last he threw the door open and stepped out, and then a hoarse cry came to his lips as he found himself face to face with his cousin.

"You!" he cried. "What are you doing here?"

He carried a revolver in his hand, and as he spoke he started to raise it, but like a flash Laurie had jumped forward and had knocked the weapon out of his hand.

The inspector bent down and picked it up.

"I'll keep this, sir," he said. "We don't want any accidents. And now that the mob has cleared off I dare say we shall be able to settle up any little difference we have between us without recourse to this sort of thing, Mr. Clifton."

Clifton was deathly white again. Indeed, much as he hated him, Jack could not help at that moment feeling a little sorry for the fellow.

He looked an awful sight.

He was dishevelled, white, ill, and he was now trembling violently, but for all this he had resource in bombastic methods.

"I should like to know what this insult means?" he asked.

The inspector told him.

"Mr. Morton here has a charge to

make against you, Mr. Clifton, and he asked me to come in with him while he made it."

Clifton sneered.

"Am I bound to be insulted in my own house in this way?" he asked.

"No, sir," said the inspector. "You are not bound to listen to what Mr. Morton has to say. Personally, I think that you ought to be rather grateful to the young fellow, because if it had not been for his arrival five minutes ago, the crowd would certainly have got in, and I would not have answered for your life then, Mr. Clifton."

George Clifton bit his lip, but suddenly an idea came to him, and he gave a quick, inquiring glance at his cousin. There was just, perhaps, one flickering ray of hope for him. If he could get on the better side of young Morton he might still get away with it.

He looked long at Jack, as though trying to read what was in the youngster's mind, but Jack's face was like a mask. He had never looked half so calm, even when about to shoot one of his coolest goals.

"I'll speak to Morton alone," Clifton said in a moment, "if that is what he wants."

Jack laughed.

"It is not," he said.

"Eh?"

"I want all these gentlemen to hear everything that I have got to say to you, George Clifton," the youngster said, "especially Graves there. He has quite a lot to do with it."

Clifton grasped the situation in a flash. He realised that the business about the two wills had been given away, and he lost his head to the extent that, without in the least thinking what he was going to do if he got away, he suddenly dived through them, and tried to make a dash for his liberty.

Laurie Robson merely put out one foot, and the terrified fellow came hurtling to the ground.

Laurie stood over him, grinning, as he picked himself up.

"You know, Clifton," he said, "if you want to stand a dog's earthly, you had better hear what Morton has got to say. We are five to one, and we are not going to let you go. There has been too much dirty work going on, and I am going to see that you listen to Jack."

Jack went up to Clifton.

"Come on, my good cousin," he said, "let us get this over. I don't like it any more than you. We'll go in here. It will do as well as anywhere else."

He took Clifton by the arm, Laurie took him by the other, and so the strange group entered the smoking-room, from which Clifton had just emerged.

The door was then closed, and the police-sergeant stationed himself in front of it. Clifton was at bay.

And now he made a better showing than he had done before. He squared his shoulders, faced them all, and seemed to indicate that even if he knew he must sink, he was going down with a smile on his lips.

"What is it?" he said.

Jack turned to Graves.

"Graves, here, has a somewhat strange story to tell, Clifton, about a will."

"What?"

Graves came forward, but at the same moment the inspector held up his hand.

"This looks like developing into a pretty serious matter," he said. "I think that I had better take notes!"

He sat down at a desk and picked up a pen and paper, then he looked up at Graves seriously.

"Of course, Mr. Graves," he said, "I do not know what you are going to say. But you know, don't you, that you have no need to say anything which could possibly be used against you at any future time? This is in no way an official inquiry. We are merely here because we have been asked to stay by Mr. Morton."

Graves nodded.

"I understand all that, inspector," he said. "And I dare say that I shall get into serious trouble for what I am going to say; but it is gospel truth, and I am speaking out now because it is time that justice was done to this young man, Jack Morton—Jack Morton, who saved my daughter's life!"

"What?" cried Clifton.

Graves turned on the man.

"That is another story," he said; "and I will not waste time with it now. But it is more than you would ever have done for anyone, George Clifton!"

So the old fellow told his tale. He left nothing out; and as he came to an end—to the point where he had told George Clifton he had destroyed the second will—Clifton jumped forward and shook his fist in his face.

"It's a dirty lie!" he said. "And you shall go to prison for this, you dog! You cannot say this sort of thing with impunity, and I will teach you that you can't! My word is as good as yours; and you cannot prove a word that you have said!"

SPECIAL

NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE CONTAINS—

"THE VENGEANCE OF CARDEW!" Another Topping School Yarn.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"THE STOLEN PIE!" A Magnificent Story featuring those Old-time Favourites, Gan Waga, Ching Lung, and Rupert Thurston & Co.

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SPECIAL

"I can!"
 "How?"
 "There is the second will," said Graves, and he took something from an inner pocket and handed it to the inspector. "You had better keep it, inspector. And what I have said is the truth, and nothing but the truth!"

A deadly silence followed his words. Both Jack and Laurie were staring at Clifton, wondering what he was going to do, what he was going to say. And suddenly they had the surprise of their lives.

He did just what they had not expected him to do.

"All right," he said. "I give in!"

"What?"
 He turned to Jack.
 "Morton," he said, "I am beaten! How are you going to treat me?"

Jack felt his heart swell within him. For a moment or so he did not know what to say. He just stood staring at the other rather helplessly; and then, to their fresh amazement, Clifton confessed everything.

"I admit the truth of what has been said," he told them. "I lost my head that night. After all, you must surely

all agree that it was a terrible blow between the eyes, after I had been brought up all my life to consider that I was going to be my grandfather's sole heir, to be suddenly faced with the fact that I had been, as I considered it, rightly or wrongly, robbed of half my inheritance.

"The result of the matter was that I—I fell to the temptation of trying to do away with the second will. I imagined that Graves had done so, and—Well, Morton, I put it to you like this. You will have to contest the first will. The whole thing is going to take time and money. And even if you get me put in prison, is it worth it? Won't you let bygones be bygones, and be satisfied if I sign a document to the effect that I am content with the second will, and that I personally know that it is the right document?"

They all looked at Jack.
 It was a difficult moment, but the youngster dealt with it in his usually calm way.

"Sign such a document, and I will think matters over, Clifton."

"Right!"
 Clifton rushed to the desk, and a

moment later he had signed the document and had handed it to Jack.

The youngster took it and read it, and then he handed it to Laurie, whom he trusted more than he trusted himself in these matters.

"What about it, Laurie?" he asked.
 Laurie screwed his eyeglass into his eye.

"It seems all right," he said. "But it seems rather a shame not to see the handcuffs on a beast like this!"

Here the inspector broke in.
 "I'm not sure, sir," he said, "whether I could arrest this man at the moment. There would have to be a more formal charge made—"

Jack held up a hand.
 "I'll think it over," he said. "But all I want to do now is to get back to my mother and let her know that everything is all right."

He turned to Clifton.
 "You have done us all some pretty bad turns, George Clifton," he said. "If you want to have any mercy shown to you, you will keep very low and quiet during the next few days."

(To be concluded.)

A FEW SEASONABLE WORDS TO MY READERS!

My Dear Chums,—It is a tip-top issue of the good old GEM which is in your hands to-day. My heartiest Christmas greeting to you all go with it. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to everyone! May this jolly season bring along tons of happiness, with rare good luck to everybody in the coming year of 1924.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.
 You will be pleased with the grand yarn of St. Jim's this week. It carries on the superb traditions of the old school, and does Mr. Martin Clifford immense credit. The author has surpassed himself. The story carries on the famous ding-dong struggle between Tom Merry, the stalwart young skipper of St. Jim's, and Ralph Reckness Cardew, his sworn rival. This yarn will rank among the best ever printed.

"THE VENGEANCE OF CARDEW!"
 By Martin Clifford.

Now, what of next week's treat? The title tells a lot. Martin Clifford handles a big theme in masterly and trenchant style. Cardew has been swept along by a strong tide of personal ambition. He sees things at a wrong angle. It is often like that in the case of a fellow with a marked personality. Cardew has a tremendous belief in himself, and for some reason he has come to regard Tom Merry as an enemy. The two have often been pals. It is not so now. There is deadly rivalry, and you will be carried away by the grippiness of it all, and the thorough-going intensity with which Mr. Clifford has worked out his plot. Ernest Levison figures also very prominently in next week's story. You will come to like him better. What's more, your admiration for Tom Merry will be increased considerably. Feelings will be mixed as regards Cardew. Without a doubt, there will be plenty of argument amongst GEM

readers concerning next Wednesday's tale. It raises a whole heap of questions connected with St. Jim's, and the captaincy, likewise the strange contradictoriness of Cardew. I want you to make sure of your copy of the GEM next week. There is bound to be a rush. And just tell your chums about the wonderful yarn in store.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL!"
 No better treat for a winter evening can be found than a copy of the "Holiday Annual." Let the icy blast blow as it may, and whistle round the house; you can forget all the discomforts of winter when you sink into a cosy chair

by a jolly fire and open the "Annual." The budget of stories it contains meets all tastes. Do you like school yarns best? The "Holiday Annual" gives them in plenty. Or, maybe, you are keen on adventure in the trackless wilds, or on romance. You will find such fiction in the prize book which is the best of all.

"THE STOLEN PIE!"
 By Sidney Drew.

Our old favourite, Sidney Drew, will contribute a most seasonable story for next Wednesday's GEM. It introduces the amusing Eskimo, Gan Waga, and Rupert Thurston & Co. Sidney Drew is, so to speak, a Pasha of many tales, but in all his brilliant record I do not think he has ever turned out anything more humorous or out and out interesting than this splendid yarn of the pie which vanished.

"TOM OF THE AJAX!"
 By Roland Spencer.

Mr. Spencer, the author of our magnificent new sea serial, is the writer of the "River-wise Ned" stories, which everybody liked. I cannot say enough for the dash and excitement which characterises the great nautical romance just starting. It has the real atmosphere of the sea. The author knows the briny well, and he describes the life of a training-ship in first-class style. The story starts with a bang, but there is still better stuff to come. Mention the matter to non-readers. They will thank you. It is a tip worth having, for there is real life in this romance of the deep, and thousands of my friends are casting longing eyes to a career on the water. You are plunged right into the thick of things, and you meet sundry characters who will be remembered for long. Look out for a certain adventurer of a novel type, a man who fears nothing in the world, and is always ready to face the worst danger.

ONE MORE WISH.
 In bidding you farewell till next week, just let me repeat my wish that this season may be the jolliest ever. May Christmas be full of good cheer, and may there be lots of sunshine in the New Year, whose footstep we can hear at the door!

YOUR EDITOR.

Boys and Girls!

HERE ARE THE BEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY.

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THE POSTMAN'S PONDERINGS!

Old lady (to postman): "Do you know, my good man, that during all the years you have been coming to this house I have wondered, as I have watched you making your daily rounds in the heat of summer and the rigours of winter, just what you are thinking about? You always seem to be philosophizing as you plod along in silence, apparently buried in sober reflection and at peace with the world. Do you ever let your thoughts roam at will through that bag and play among its contents—missives wet with tears, messages of joy, tender words of love, shattered hopes, and high ambitions realised? Tell me, upon what do you ponder? What do you think of day after day, hour after hour, step after step?" Postman: "My poor feet."—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to Michael Adams, Reama, Climsland Road, Paignton, South Devon.

A QUAINTE SENSE OF HUMOUR!

A costermonger met his friend the other day. The friend was convulsed with laughter, and it was some time before anything could be drawn from him. At last he explained the cause of merriment. "You would have laughed! I've just been round to see old Bill 'Iggins. When I got there 'is 'ouse was all alight. 'E lives in one of them there tenement 'ouses—six floors. 'E's on the third fload. There 'e was dancin' about on the window-sill in his nightshirt. We 'ollers up to him: 'Jump, Bill! We've got a tarpaulin to catch ye!' But 'e 'adn't the pluck to jump. Instead, he runs up to the next floor, and there 'e dances about again. We shouts up to him to jump again. But, no, up 'e goes as the flames mount higher, until he gets to the roof. There 'e

is dancin' about as we 'ollers up again: 'Jump, Bill! We've got a tarpaulin to catch yer! And he ~~laughs~~." Here the story-teller was overcome with laughter, but at last managed to gurgle: "And the funny part about it was we 'adn't no tarpaulin!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Roy Hudson, 123, Fitzgerald Street, Bradford, Yorks.

LOCAL COLOUR!

"I want my photograph taken," said the man as he came into the studio. "Certainly, sir," said the knight of the camera, as he sat the victor down in a chair. "Would you like a carte or a cabinet?" The prospective customer glanced at a full-length picture of Wilson, the Wednesday International, and wriggled uneasily. "It doesn't matter much whether there's a cart or a cab in it," he said; "but if you can put a railway touch in it it'll be all right, 'cause I'm a guard."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Yelland, 69, Broadfield Road, Sheffield.

A "TACKLESS" REPLY!

The old Scottish butcher noticed that one of his customers had not been visiting his shop lately, so he made up his mind to ask her the reason for her falling off when he next saw her. "Why do ye no' buy your meat off me noo?" he asked when he met her a few days later. "Weel," replied the old woman, "the last I got frae ye I could hae soled my buits wi' it." "And why did ye no, then?" asked the other sarcastically. "So I wud if I could hae got the tacks to go through it!" was the sharp reply.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to I. Macdougall, 21, Crawford Road, Edinburgh.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Entries in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House Gough Square, London, E.C.4

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