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"A DISGRACE TO THE SHELL!" A Powerful and Dramatic School Story By Martin Clifford.

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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LIBRARY OF

SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



A CADDISH TRICK!

"Look at that!" cried [Racke's cousin, his eyes blazing. "That's my pater's photo—look what that cad's done to it!" Aubrey Racke held his aching jaw whilst Tom Merry glanced at the disfigured photograph! (A dramatic incident from the grand school yarn inside.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

MY DEAR CHUMS,—Every week our great story paper for everybody, young or old, has another success to its credit. A letter has just reached me from a chum who had the bad luck to meet with an accident which laid him by in a hospital for a week. He sends me word that those seven days streaked by like one o'clock, thanks to a few copies of the trusty old GEM. So that's that, and nothing better.

"CARDEW TAKES A HAND!"

By Martin Clifford.

You are left wondering this week about the fate of the hapless Clegg. Aubrey Racke's poor relation has had the sorriest of times at St. Jim's, as this week's grand yarn shows. Next Wednesday we get a tale of the further doings of that insufferable snob, Racke, who is a type of the superfine person with no ideas about anything bar cash and clothes. Racke carries on with his shabby plot to get the unfortunate Clegg turned out of St. Jim's.

TIMELY INTERVENTION!

Next week's extra-long, and certainly specially fine, yarn reveals an amazing state of affairs at the school. Things look jolly black against Clegg, for Racke has laid his plans with plenty of low cunning. It all makes you think of the time-honoured comment about it being a pity a fellow could not put his abilities to better advantage. Racke has talent of a sort. He has shown himself a cool hand many times over. He is smart enough to see to it that No. 1 always has the best of what's going. That's Racke—a mean, shifty, unscrupulous fellow, as hypocritical as the highly emotional croc which wept on a certain well-remembered occasion. In the new tale the fat gets into the fire with a vengeance. Cardew scents a rat, and feels that injustice is being done. From that point onward the chase is hot. Cardew never lets go of a problem until it is solved. He is as persistent as a terrier with a favourite hammy bone. The yarn resolves itself into a duel between Ralph Reckness Cardew and the too-clever-by-half Racke. The latter is no match for Cardew at any time. In this struggle for the mastery we get a glimpse of the real Cardew, who has been so much of a mystery to some readers. Cardew will be better liked than ever, and as I get letters every week asking for more about him, that is saying a lot.

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

A week or two since, I threw out a hint about the next issue of the "St. Jim's News." This is a Parliamentary Number, and the scene of the august deliberations is Pepper's Barn. I have no hesitation in asserting that this new number, which will be an ornament to next week's GEM, will be the finest yet, for many hands have gone to the compilation of the Supplement, and the brain power is immense. There have been heaps of merry doings in Pepper's Barn, but nothing to equal next week's show. There is nearly always something hot and peppery about a parliament, and the St. Jim's variety offers no exception.

"DAVE, THE PIT BOY!"

By Max Hamilton.

Dave has a terrible ordeal in the mine, as the next gripping instalment shows. He is a fast prisoner, immured in a living tomb. Nothing so thrilling has been written as this account of the frightful peril of the brave lad who has stood so gallantly by the mine proprietor. I know you will be carried away by the coming chapters of our enthralling serial. A shocking fate overtakes the wily Markham, and, apart from all that, we get a most vivid and striking impression of the deep, dark mystery of the underworld, the tap-tap-tapping in distant galleries, and the gaunt horror of captivity shut away from the sunshine and life. You should tell your pals of this wonderful mine serial.

A SPECIAL MEM.

There are notable things coming in the GEM this season, and these attractions include a new and superb St. Jim's series, full of excitement and laughter.

Your Editor.

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GET BUSY NOW!

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER!

THAT TICKLING FEELING!

Tramp: "I'm starving, mum. Tee-hee! Ha, ha! I haven't had a bite to eat for two days. Ha, ha, ha!"
Housewife: "I can't see anything to laugh at in that." Tramp: "I can't help it, mum. Ha, ha, ha!"
Your doormat keeps tickling my feet. Hee, hee, hee!" A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to W. A. Clark, 84, Blissett Street, Greenwich, S.E. 10.

TOO TRUE!

First man: "What kind of leather makes the best shoes?"
Second man: "I don't know, but banana-skins make the best slippers!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Dorothy Smith, 84, Old Church Street, Aylestone, Leicester.

OVERDOING IT!

A Yorkshireman and a Scotsman chanced to be in Hull. Both were thirsty and stony. They were studying what to do, when the Englishman turned to the Scotty and said: "I know the barmaid in there"—pointing to an inn across the road. "She is so absent-minded, that when you've been talking to her for a while she forgets to ask for your money. What about risking it?" "Ay, away wid ye first," said the cautious Scotty. The man from Yorkshire went in, and after a period of ten minutes had elapsed, he came out drying his lips. "Go on in," he said. "It worked a treat!" Not to be daunted, the Scotty went in, ordered his drink, and after having engaged the maid in a lengthy conversation, he turned away and quite unconcernedly said: "I think I'll be ganging na'. Wha' about ma change?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Gippert, 32, Alfred Street, Seaham Harbour, County Durham.

AN APT PUPIL!

Tomkins placed his parcel on the table with a casual air. "What have you got there, James?" asked his better-half sternly. "Just a set of boxing-gloves for Johnny, my dear. Every British boy should learn the noble art of self-defence." He turned to his son. "Don't be afraid, Johnny; come into the garden." Mrs. Tomkins smiled icily as she continued her knitting. Five minutes later Tomkins staggered into the room and sank into a chair. "Some raw beef or something, Maria!" he ordered. "I have—er—sustained a slight injury to my eye!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Elias Kroll, 53, Upper Mill Street, Cape Town, South Africa.

ANNOYING!

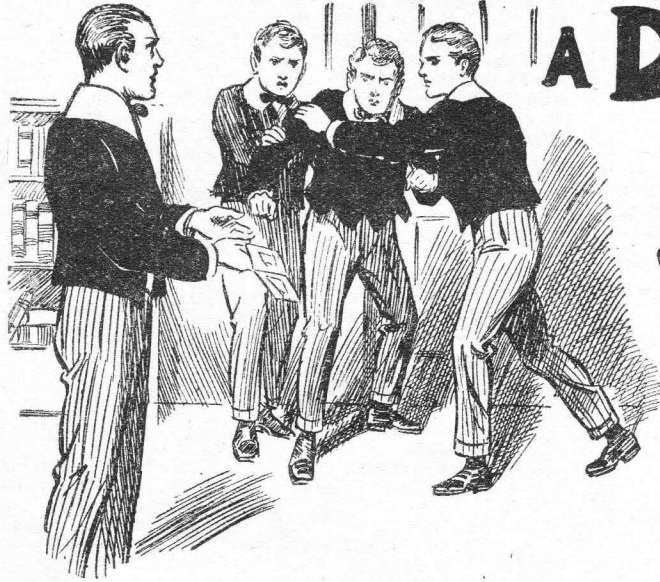
Angry Lieutenant (down the engine-room tube): "Is there an idiot at the end of this tube?" Voice from the engine-room: "Not at this end, sir!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. H. Long, 7, Portlands Avenue, Ryde, Isle of Wight.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

Aubrey Racke, the snob and sneak of the Shell, goes all out to strike a deadly blow at his cousin's honour!



A DISGRACE TO THE SHELL!

•••••
• A Powerful School Story of Aubrey
• Racke, the black sheep of the
• Shell, and Tom Merry & Co., at
• St. Jim's. By Famous
• Martin Clifford.
•••••

CHAPTER I.

Gussy is Indignant!

TOM MERRY came into Study No. 10, his usually bright and cheery features clouded. He found his study-mates busy—Monty Lowther oiling a cricket-bat, and Manners looking over a camera.

Lowther looked up at Tom's entrance, and chuckled.

"What's been biting Tommy?" he queried. "Why the careworn look, the sullen brow?"

Tom Merry gave a grunt.

"Nothing much!" he growled in disgust. "It's that chap, Racke. He makes me feel ill, the ill-favoured cad!"

"What's he been up to now—smoking in Hall?"

"Or playing nap in the Head's study?" asked Manners, with a grin. "Must be something unusual to bring the frown to your baby brow, Tom."

"Rats! It's about this blessed relation of Racke's," said Tom. "You fellows have heard about him—cousin or something of Racke's. He's coming into the Shell—"

"Who hasn't heard about it?" sniffed Manners. "That fat newsmonger, Trimble, overhead Racke and Crooke gassing about it, I believe. The chap's a poor relation, or something; coming straight here from a Council School."

"None the worse for that."

"I know; to a decent chap he wouldn't be. But Racke isn't a decent chap, remember. He's furious, I hear, at the idea of his giddy poor relation coming to St. Jim's."

"That's just it," said Tom Merry, nodding. "That's the yarn Trimble's spreading about, and I'm afraid there's some truth in Racke being furious about it. Railton told me just now to tell him to meet his cousin at Rylcombe Station this afternoon; he's coming by the two forty-five. But—"

"Racke fairly jumped for joy, I suppose?" grinned Lowther.

"He scowled like a demon," said Tom. "And what's more, he said he'd be hanged if he went to meet his low-down cad of a cousin! Those were his words."

"Nice boy!" commented Lowther.

"Mean-spirited rotter!" grunted Tom. "It's a poor look-out for the new chap to come here and find his own cousin up against him to start with. It's rotten!"

"I don't know," said Manners. "Better to have Racke for an enemy than a friend any day."

"Well, I suppose that's so," said Tom, grinning a little. "All the same, I feel like making Racke play the game by yanking him along to the station by the ears."

"Good wheeze!" said Lowther promptly. "Let's do it. We'll teach the cad to do the decent thing for once."

"Ass!"

"Why not?" said Lowther warmly. "We're going to the village, so why not combine a little pleasure with business?"

"It isn't our business to make Racke do what he doesn't want to do," said Tom Merry doubtfully. "And yet—"

"As skipper of the Lower School it's your business and duty to see Railton's orders are carried out, though," spoke up Monty Lowther.

"Well, that's so, I suppose," said Tom. He rubbed his nose thoughtfully for a moment or so, and then his eyes gleamed. "Jove! You're right, though, Monty!" he went on grimly. "Railton told me to tell him to do it, and it's

up to me to see he does it. In any case, it's time Racke was taught to do the decent thing. I don't like the idea of that poor kid coming and finding nobody to meet him. Yes, we'll do it, chaps!"

"Good egg!"

"We'll yank him along to the station by the ears, if necessary," said Tom Merry. "And if he doesn't welcome his cousin decently, we'll scrag the cad!"

"That's the spirit, Tommy!"

"Come on! We'll rout out Blake and his lot, and make a start. Racke ought to be jolly grateful to us, I think, taking his character in hand like this."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Shove that camera away, Manners, old chap—"

"Wait a bit. I just want to adjust this view-finder. It won't take me more than—"

"Blow your thumping camera!" said Tom cheerfully.

"Duty before pleasure, you know. Give me a hand to shove his camera away, Monty—"

"Here, you silly asses— All right, I'm coming!"

As his chums advanced towards him, Manners, terrified of harm coming to his precious camera, hurriedly placed it in the cupboard out of harm's way. Lowther had already put his cricket-bat and oil away, and a moment later the Terrible Three had left the study.

They walked along to the Fourth Form passage, and as they reached the door of Study No. 6, they heard the dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice from within, raised in wrathful indignation.

"Gussy again!" grinned Tom Merry.

He kicked the door open, and the Shell juniors entered. They found Blake, Digby, and Herries standing round D'Arcy, who appeared to be in a state of great wrath and indignation.

"Trouble in the giddy family—what?" grinned Tom.

"What's Gussy been up to now?"

Jack Blake, the leader of the chums of the Fourth, grunted.

"It isn't what he's been up to this time, but what he wants to get up to," he grumbled. "The silly dummy wants to poke his nose into another chap's business, and we're trying to stop him."

Arthur Augustus fairly swelled with indignation. He rammed his glimmering monocle deeper in his eye, and gave his study-mate a withering look.

"You wottah, Blake!" he said indignantly. "I twust I am the last fellow in St. Jim's to poke his nose into another fellow's business, bai Jove! I wepudiate the wotten suggestion with scorn, deah boys. You know perfectly well, Jack Blake, that I meahly desiazed to wemonstwate with that wottah, Wacke—to point out to him the wpopah thing to do, bai Jove!"

"Oh, it's about Racke, is it?" laughed Tom Merry. "That's the chap we've come to see you about, Blake."

"Oh, is it?" grunted Blake. "Well, I hope you're not on the same lay as Gussy, anyway. He wants to—"

"Pway allow me to explain the posish, Jack Blake!" said Arthur Augustus coldly. "I pwesume you have heard that Wacke is expectin' a wrelative this aftahnoun, Tom Mewwy?"

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"Who hasn't?"

"You've heard he is actin' like a wotten cad, wefusin' to own him because the fellow happens to be a poor membah of the family?"

"I've heard that—yes!" grinned Tom.

"Vewy well. Blake is actin' like a wude wuffian meahly because I desiah to wemonstwate with that wottah, Wacke."

"You said you were going to meet this new chap," snorted Blake.

"If Wacke wefuses to do the decent thing I shall certainly do so, Jack Blake. I feel it is up to us in those circs to show this wrelative of his that there are fellows at St. Jim's weady and willin' to welcome a stwanger, bai Jove!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Them's my sentiments, Gussy."

"Same here, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Matter of fact, we've come along to ask you fellows to go to the station for that purpose with us."

Blake blinked at the Terrible Three.

"Well, you burbling chumps!" he said. "Going to meet a relation of that cad, Racke's? Well, my hat! He's bound to be an outsider like his blessed cousin."

"Not necessarily. In fact, I'm inclined to think he's a fellow of a different kidney, simply because Racke's up against him," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "As it happens, though, we don't actually intend to meet the chap; we're only going to see that Racke meets him."

"Bai Jove!"

"We're going to take Racke along by the ears," said Tom Merry grimly, "and if he doesn't do the right thing we propose to give him a sharp lesson in common decency. See?"

"Oh!" said Blake, his face breaking into a grin. "That's a different matter altogether. Well, we'll come along, if that's it."

"That is it, old scout. Railton told me to ask Racke to meet his cousin at the station, and I'm jolly well going to see he does it!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, his noble face clearing. "That is a vewy good ideah, deah boy. It will scarcely be necessawy, howevah. And I wathah think it will be much bettah not to let this new fellow see that his cousin does not desiah to be fwriends. It would hurt the deah boy's feelin's howbibly, bai Jove!"

"Yes, you ass! But—"

"I pwopose that we only adopt dwastic measures as a last wresource," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I weally think that if I wemonstwate with Wacke—point out what a mean-spiwited wottah and a howlin' cad he is, and tell him what is the pwopah thing to do, he will see weason, and play the game. Don't you fellows think so?"

"Certainly!" agreed Lowther solemnly. "Run along and tell him now, Gussy. Don't forget to explain clearly what a mean-spirited rotter and a howling cad he is, though."

"Wathah not!" said Gussy innocently. "I think I will wun along now, Lowthah. I fancy that as a fellow of tact and judgment, I shall soon bwing him to see weason and decency. That will save any wisk of twouble, you know."

And, with that, Arthur Augustus marched out on his self-imposed task. A chorus of chuckles followed him.

"Well, the burbling ass!" grinned Manners. "I'm afraid it'll take more than Gussy's tact and judgment to bring Racke to see decently or act decently."

"Racke will cut up rusty," said Lowther, grinning. "He's not in the mood for Gussy's sermons, I bet. He'll dot old Gussy on the boko for his pains."

"What rot!" said Herries stoutly. "Old Gussy could mop up a dozen funks like Racke."

"That's right enough, Herries!" grunted Blake. "But Racke's in a savage mood now, and if Crooke's there, old Gussy may get it hot, the ass! I think we'd better slip along now. We'll just be in time to pick up the pieces, I expect."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

And the rest of the juniors followed Blake out as he led the way leisurely along to Racke's study in the Shell passage—to "pick up the pieces"—as Blake expressed it.

CHAPTER 2.

Escorting Racke!

"MAY I come in, Wacke, deah boy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped firmly on the door of Study No. 7 in the Shell passage, and the next moment he was looking into the study with that question on his aristocratic lips.

Arthur Augustus' tone was firm, but polite—very polite. Despite the fact that Racke's conduct had filled him with scorn and indignation, he saw no reason why he should be ill-mannered, or lose the calm repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. Arthur Augustus was an exceedingly kind-hearted youth with a thoughtful consideration for the

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feelings of others that was truly admirable. He felt he could realise the feelings of the new boy. He would be coming to St. Jim's happy in the thought that his cousin Aubrey would be his guide and protector there—would be the one friend among a host of strangers, to show him the ropes until he was able to feel his feet, as it were. And it quite upset Arthur Augustus to think of the shock Racke's cousin would get on learning that Aubrey had no intention of being a friend—far from it.

So now here was Arthur Augustus, calm and polite as ever, but firmly determined to prevent such a regrettable state of affairs, if at all possible—to point out to Racke the fit and proper thing to do. Racke would then abandon his projected campaign of caddishness, and all would be calm and bright.

So thought Arthur Augustus; he was doomed to discover his error, however, very quickly.

Both Racke and Crooke were in the room—Crooke lounging in the armchair, and Racke moodily pacing the expensive carpet. Crooke's face wore a half-smile, but Racke's face was black and scowling.

He gave the swell of the Fourth a far from welcome greeting.

"Well, what do you want, D'Arcy?" he snapped.

Arthur Augustus gracefully entered the room.

"I shall not keep you a moment, Wacke," began Arthur Augustus, with calm dignity. "I twust I shall not be intwudin' at a—"

"You are!" sneered Racke. "I don't know that I asked you to come in, D'Arcy. Clear out!"

Arthur Augustus held his eyeglass into place and regarded Racke in surprise.

"Bai Jove! But why should I clear out before I have explained my ewwand, Wacke?"

"Get out!"

"I shall certainly not wotire until I have said what I have come to say, Wacke," said D'Arcy, with some asperity. "It is in wegard to your cousin, Wacke."

"Oh! Is it, D'Arcy?" Racke's eyes glittered, and he fairly hissed out the words. "And what the deuce has my dashed cousin got to do with you?"

"Nothing at all, deah boy," said Gussy calmly. "I feel it my duty, howevah, to speak a word in season to you, Wacke, in wegard to him. Accordin' to Twimble—"

"Trimble!" interrupted Racke, with sudden rage. "Have you been listening to that fat rotter—"

"Oh, yaas! I undahstand—"

"The—the fat, sneaking toad!" hissed Racke, gritting his teeth. "He overheard Crooke and I talking, and because I licked him for prying, he's spreading it all over the school. I'll—I'll smash the fat beast."

"Bai Jove! Then it is quite twue, Wacke? I had hoped that Twimble was tellin' fibs—"

"What's he been telling you?"

"He claims," said Arthur Augustus calmly, "that you are wagin' because your cousin is comin' heah, and that you are goin' to make this study too hot to hold him; also, that you wefuse to meet the fellow at the station this aftahnoon, Wacke. If that is twue—"

"Mind your own dashed business, D'Arcy!" snarled Racke. "And get out—clear out before Crooke and I pitch you out!"

"I should nevah allow Cwooke and you to pitch me out!" retorted D'Arcy disdainfully. "Howevah, I have come to make a stwong appeal to you, Wacke—an appeal for faih play for your cousin. Because he's a Council schoolboy—"

"You—you've heard that, have you?"

"Oh, yaas! Because he is not so fortunately circumstanced as you, Wacke, is no weason why you should wreat him wjth caddish and wotten—"

"Will you get out?" snarled Racke, taking a step towards the serene Arthur Augustus. "You—you—"

"I will wotire when I have appealed to your bettah nature, Wacke. I am well aware that both you and Cwooke heah are w'etched snobs and cads of the first watah, and I am well aware that you yourself are wotten through and through, and uttably without a spark of decency and— Yawwooop!"

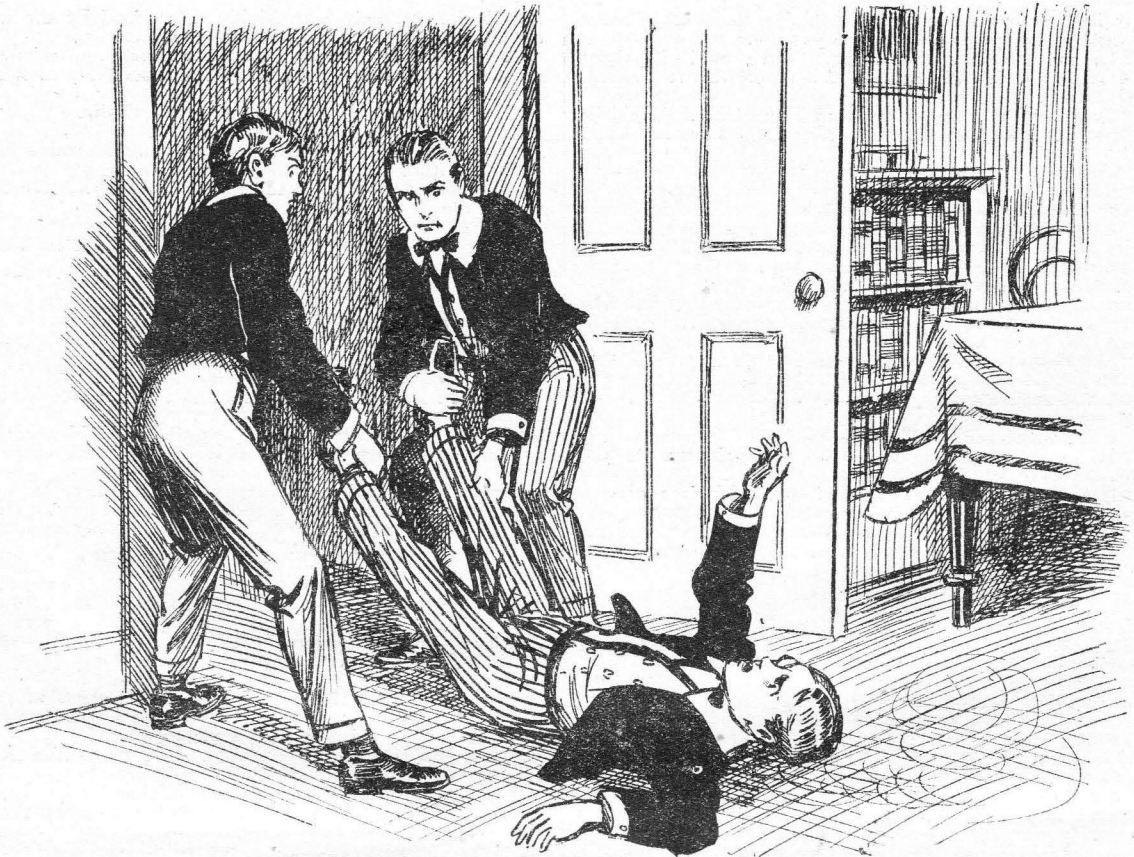
Crash!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's flow of eloquence came to an abrupt termination as Racke's knuckles clumped on his noble nose, and he sat down on the carpet.

In an ordinary mood, Racke would never have dared to tackle the redoubtable Arthur Augustus; but Aubrey Racke was not in an ordinary mood now. Moreover he was relying upon Gerald Crooke to back him up.

He glared down at the astonished and injured D'Arcy with savage eyes.

"That'll perhaps teach you not to come here with your dashed cheek, you stuck-up fool!" he hissed. "Help me chuck the rotter out, Crooke."



"Out with him!" snarled Racke. "Yes, rather!" grunted Crooke. "Snobs and cads are we!" "Bai Jove! Welease me—ow—wow!" Crooke kicked the door open and D'Arcy's head went back on the carpet with a fearful crack as the two angry Shell juniors started to drag him out of the study by the legs. (See this page.)

"Ow!" groaned Arthur Augustus, caressing his nose. "Ow! Bai Jove! You fwightful wottah, Wacke! Bai Jove, I will administah a feahful thwashin' to you for that, Wacke!"

He started to clamber madly to his feet, but at that moment Racke grabbed one leg and Crooke the other, and Arthur Augustus sat down violently again with a howl.

"Out with him!" snarled Racke.

"Yes, rather!" grunted Crooke. "Snobs and cads, are we?"

"Bai Jove! Welease me— Ow-wow!"

Crack, crack, crack!

"Yawwooop!"

Crooke kicked the door wide open and D'Arcy's head went back on the carpet with a fearful crack as the two angry Shell juniors started to drag him out by the legs. Twice more Arthur Augustus howled fiendishly as his head struck the floor, and then he went through the doorway with a rush, landing in the passage in a sprawling heap.

At that moment six juniors came along. They were the Terrible Three, and D'Arcy's own chums, and they chuckled as they saw the plight of the quixotic Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo, Gussy," said Lowther, staring down at the dishevelled and gasping form of the swell of the Fourth. "Have you finished remonstrating with Racke, old top?"

"And did he see reason, old man?" asked Blake.

"Groooh! Ow-wow! The feahful wuffians!" gasped D'Arcy, scrambling wrathfully to his feet. "Why, I'll—I'll—"

He made a rush after Racke, who was just hurriedly entering his study again and was just in time to prevent the door closing.

"Here, hold on, Gussy, you ass!" snapped Tom Merry, grasping the irate swell of the Fourth. "No scrapping here, you know."

"Wats! Welease me, Tom Merwy. I have been grossly assaulted, and tweated with wuffianly violence. I insist upon—"

"We'll deal with friend Racke, old chap," said Tom Merry soothingly. "See to Gussy, Blake—"

"Bai Jove, weally—"

Blake grasped his chum, and with Digby's aid, held him

back. Racke was trying his utmost to slam the door, but Tom Merry had his foot inside, and putting his shoulder to the door he charged, sending it crashing inwards.

The juniors surged in, Blake and Digby holding the warlike Arthur Augustus back.

"Now Racke, my lad!" said Tom Merry coolly. "We want a word with you!"

"Get out of here, hang you! D'Arcy only got what he asked for."

"I'm quite aware of that," grinned Tom Merry cheerfully. "Gussy usually does get what he asks for—especially when it's trouble. But never mind Gussy. Isn't it about time you were starting out for the station, Racke—to meet your cousin, I mean?"

Racke bit his thin lips hard.

"Look here, Merry," he said, in a low voice. "It's no dashed business of yours, is it? I've told you once—I'm not meeting the cad! I—I've got my reasons."

"And we've got our reasons why you should meet him, old bean," said Tom Merry calmly. "In the first place you've got to obey Railton's orders, and in the second place we're going to see you play the game, Racke."

"You—you interfering cads!"

"Thanks, old chap. We like hard names better than compliments—from you! And now, what about it? Will you be a good boy and meet that two-forty-five train?"

"Will I thump! I tell you I won't meet the cad! What dashed business is it of yours, hang you?"

"We're making it our business. Is that final—you won't go of your own free will?"

"No; I'll be hanged if I will!"

"Then we'll have to take you along," said Tom Merry. "Now, you fellows! Crooke had better come along, too. Collar them!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Here, what's this game?" yelled Racke furiously. "You cads! Here, leggo! Yooop!"

Racke yelled furiously, as several hands gripped him and his legs were swept from under him. Crooke also yelled, as he was treated likewise. Blake kicked the door wide open,

and the little procession, with the fuming Racke and Crooke in their midst, swept out into the passage.

"Let me down!" hissed Racke. "I'll shout! I'll shout and bring Kildare or someone. I'll report this to Railton, you rotters!"

"Yes, do by all means!" grinned Tom Merry. "He'll be pleased to hear you refuse to carry out his orders, won't he?"

"You cads!"

"Kim on!"

The procession went on, and Racke gritted his teeth and made no further outcry. Mr. Railton had requested him to meet his cousin, and a request from a Housemaster was a command to be obeyed. He knew better than to report himself—for that would be what it would amount to.

Luckily at that time of day very few were about, and the party reached the quad at last without incident. But there Jack Blake struck.

"I'm blessed if I'm going to help to carry these lazy slackers all that way!" he grunted. "Look here! Drop the cads, and boot 'em along instead!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good wheeze, Blake!"

The juniors willingly lowered their prisoners to the ground.

"I tell you I won't go!" snarled Racke, his face crimson with fury. "You—you bullying cads! I won't go!"

"He won't go, he says," said Blake calmly. "We shall have to help him, then. Now, Racke, my lad, march!"

"I tell you I won't—"

Thump!

"Now, march!" ordered Blake.

And Aubrey Racke marched. He did not want another help from Blake's hefty boot. He marched, and Crooke marched also. Crooke had already realised that Tom Merry & Co. were in deadly earnest, and he marched without a murmur, though his face was black with rage.

Across the quad and through the gates the little party marched, Tom Merry & Co. grinning cheerfully, and Racke and Crooke with glinting eyes and savage faces. Several times during that walk to Rylcombe Station Racke made as if to stop, but Blake's boot or Tom Merry's boot was always brought into play instantly, and Aubrey Racke went on again.

They reached the station at last, and after a few minutes waiting the London train steamed in.

"You've seen your cousin, I suppose?" asked Tom Merry, turning to Racke. "You'll know him, I mean?"

"No, I haven't seen him!" snarled Racke. "He's only a dashed distant relation—a half-cousin! And I don't dashed well want to see him, hang you!"

"Never mind," said Tom genially. "We'll soon pick him out, I suppose."

But Tom Merry was wrong there, as it happened. The train disgorged its passengers very quickly. There were only three—a farmer, the local curate, and an elderly lady.

"Well, I'm blowed!" grunted Blake in disgust. "The merchant hasn't come, after all! What a blessed sell!"

"All our thumping trouble for nothing!"

"Wathah annoyin', bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Pway what are you laughing at, Wacke?"

But Racke was not laughing—merely grinning. It was an unpleasant grin, and it irritated Tom Merry & Co. more than a little.

"He thinks we've been done! Done brown!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Well, in a way, I suppose we have. The chap must be coming by a later train, blow him!"

"Looks like it! We're not jolly well waiting for the next, though, Tom Merry!" said Blake warmly.

"Rather not!" said Tom Merry, nodding. "We've done our duty, anyway, and it can't be helped. Anyway, we can give ourselves one consolation and satisfaction—we can give Racke a sound bumping for grinning."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Collar the cad!"

"Here, you cads, leggo! I say, you rotters— Yoop!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

Four times the elegant form of Aubrey Racke descended to the concrete platform, and four times agonised yelps came from Aubrey Racke's open mouth as he descended. And then, leaving the cad of the Shell sprawling on the platform gasping and groaning, Tom Merry & Co. streamed out through the exit, feeling they had done their duty thoroughly and exceedingly well.

CHAPTER 3.

Grimes Chips in!

AUBREY RACKE staggered to his feet on the little village station of Rylcombe and glared about him with a face like a Hun's. Quite a number of grinning faces met his glare—the stationmaster, a porter, and several idlers had witnessed the bumping, and

they had apparently been highly entertained by the incident. Their grins served to add fuel to his fury.

Gerald Crooke, having escaped a bumping, was also grinning, but he changed his expression suddenly as Racke looked at him.

"Hurt, old chap?" he asked sympathetically. "It's all serene—the bullying cads have gone now."

"Hang them!" hissed Racke. "Oh, hang the cads! Let's get away from these grinning fools, Crooke. By gad, I'll make someone sit up for this! I'll make it hot for that dashed cousin of mine!"

Crooke chuckled inwardly. It seemed to him rather amusing that Racke should blame the absent new fellow for his misfortunes.

"You ought to be jolly glad, Racke!" he grinned. "The kid hasn't turned up, and Merry and those other rotters have been done brown. It's just as well they made you come along, though. If you hadn't, and Railton had got to know, it would have meant a licking for you."

"Don't talk rot, you fool!" snarled Racke. "I should have sworn I got to the station too late and missed him, of course."

"Blessed if I can understand you, Racke. This morning you seemed keen enough to meet him—thundering keen!"

"Can't you see why?" was the savage retort. "I was keen to meet him then, and Nobody but the beaks knew he was a relative of mine then. Railton wasn't likely to make a dashed song about it, was he? Well, nobody need ever have known but the beaks."

"Yes, but—"

"Don't you see what my game was? I meant to meet the confounded little worm and make him swear to keep it mum that he was related to me. He's bound to be a snivelling little toad—and I could easily have shut his mouth, either by means of threats or money. And now—"

"Now Trimble's let it out, and everybody knows," grinned Crooke. "He's knocked the bottom out of your game."

Racke clenched his fists and his eyes glittered.

"Hang the fat beast!" he hissed. "I'll make him smart for it, though. And as for Walter—"

"So Walter's the kid's name, eh? Walter Racke?"

"No, thank goodness! Walter Clegg's his dashed name! He's bound to be a scrubby little beast, and nobody would have dreamed he was related to me if that fat beast Trimble hadn't tumbled. Oh, hang the luck!"

"Rotten!" agreed Crooke—though from his covert grins he seemed far from being as sympathetic as he sounded. "Never mind! He's coming into our study, but we'll make things warm for him, old chap!"

Racke did not answer; but if his looks went for anything the unfortunate and unwanted Walter Clegg was booked for anything but a pleasant welcome in Study No. 7 at St. Jim's when he did arrive.

The two Shell juniors left the station and hurried down the village street.

"Home now, I suppose?" said Crooke.

"Of course! We'll have a game or two, and we'll talk over what we're going to do about my confounded cousin!" said Racke thickly. "He won't be coming until the three-forty-five now, so we've lots of time. Come on!"

But Racke and Crooke were not fated to return to St. Jim's yet awhile. The juniors turned off at the village green, meaning to take the footpath across one corner of it which was a short cut leading into Rylcombe Lane. On the well-worn green a cricket-match was in progress, and Crooke stopped with a chuckle.

"It's the giddy village shop-assistants," he grinned. "Let's see the louts play for a bit."

Racke sneered.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" he growled. "Hang cricket! Who wants to see those beastly yokels play, anyway? Let's get back for a smoke."

Crooke went on again; but he kept his eyes on the field for all that. Though by no means a lover of games—of decent games, at all events—he was a trifle interested in cricket, and suddenly he gave a yell.

"Look out! Heads!"

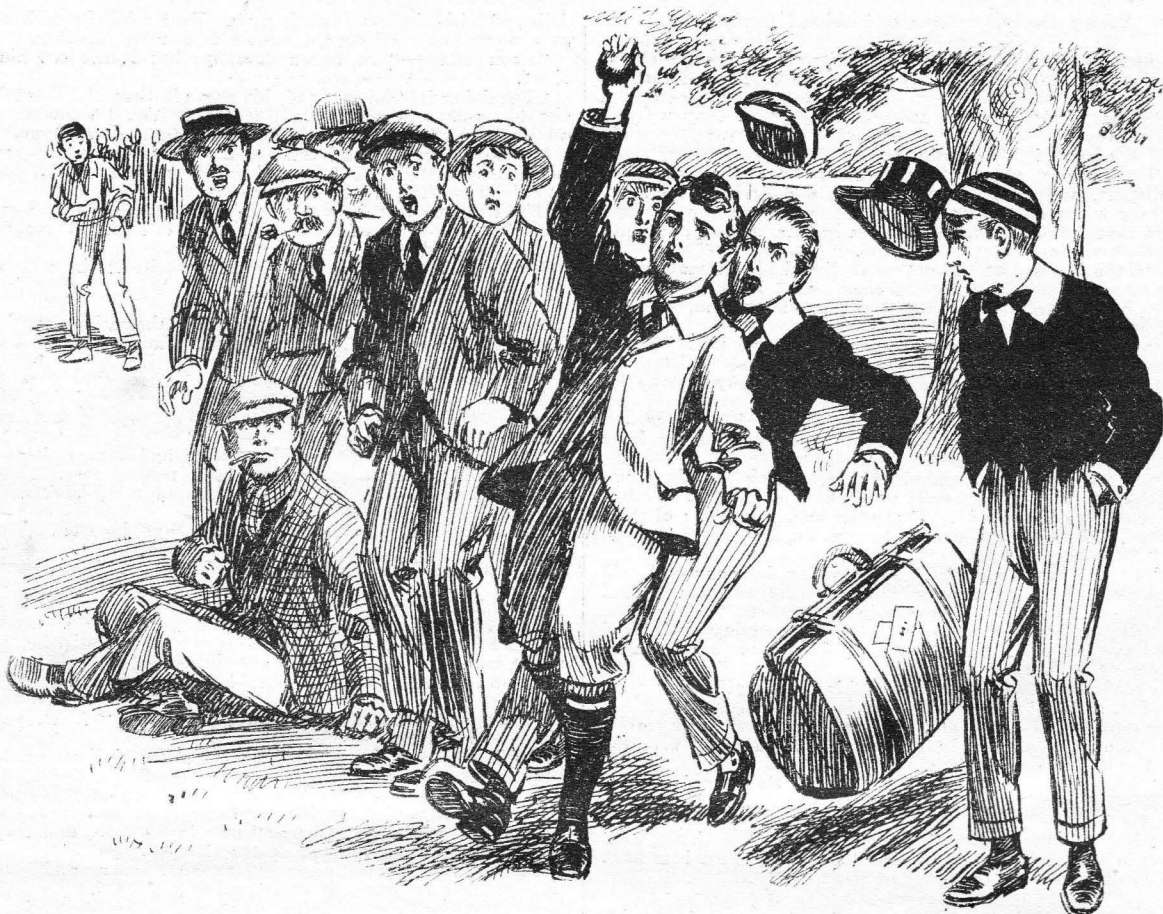
Racke had already caught the sharp click of willow against bat, and he half turned and stopped. Then his eyes caught a glimpse of the spinning sphere of leather dropping straight for him, and he gave a gasp.

In that instant of time several things happened.

Even as Racke stared fascinated at the cricket ball whizzing towards him, a boy who had been standing by the white rail watching the game, jumped in front of him.

He was a cheery-faced youth of fifteen or thereabouts, and he wore knickerbockers, and carried a rather shabby port-manteau. But he dropped the bag like lightning, and, judging the dropping ball to a nicety, sprang back with up-flung arm.

Unfortunately, Aubrey Racke was standing, dazed and helpless, in the way, and a collision was unavoidable.



Walter Clegg dropped his bag like lightning and, judging the dropping ball to a nicely, sprang back with up-flung arm. Unfortunately Aubrey Racke was standing, dazed and helpless in the way, and a collision was unavoidable. The boy's right heel clumped home on Racke's shin, and the back of his curly head thumped home into Racke's face. (See page 6.)

The boy's right heel clumped home on Racke's shin, and the back of his curly head thumped home into Racke's face.

Crash!

"Yaroooh!"

Aubrey Racke howled with pain, and went crashing down in the dust, and the boy in knickerbockers sprawled backwards over him.

But the ball was in his right hand, safe and sure, and he still held it up. As he did so, there arose a yell from the field.

"Oh, well caught, kid!"

"Good man!"

But Aubrey Racke did not join in the roar of praise. He was hurt—hurt in more places than one. He scrambled to his feet, his face scarlet, and congested with rage. His elegant clothing was rumpled and covered with dust—a very serious matter to the dandy of the Shell.

At the same moment the stranger scrambled to his feet also, and after throwing the ball back on to the field, he turned on Racke with a cheery laugh.

"Sorry!" he said, grinning. "It was an accident, of course. I did not know you were just behind me—at least, I was too excited to notice. Sorry!"

Racke did not answer for a moment. He held his nose, which was running red a little, and then he lifted his leg and hugged his shin. His eyes were glittering with rage.

"You—you careless, blundering idiot!" he choked. "I'll—I'll—"

Without stopping to finish his words, Racke hit the grinning face of the stranger with his fist. It was a hasty blow, but there was all Racke's rage and malice behind it. Racke was never a sweet-tempered youth at the best of times, and that afternoon he had had plenty of things to upset his serenity. It was upset now with a vengeance. Racke rarely attacked anyone without making absolutely sure first that his opponent was unable—or unwilling—to hit back.

He suffered for his omission to do so now. The stranger proved neither unable nor unwilling to hit back. Racke had not been satisfied with that one blow. In his blind fury he followed it up with another and another.

In a flash they were at it hammer and tongs.

"A fight! By crumps! 'Ere, you fellers, a bloomin' fight!"

The yell went up at once, and a group of village youths rushed up to see the fun. Croke recognised Grimes, the grocer's boy, and Pilcher, his chum, and he was not surprised when Grimes gave a gasp of amazement.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he exclaimed. "If it ain't Master Racke! Crumps! Fancy 'im scrappin'!"

"Wonders will never cease," observed Pilcher, with a chuckle. "Go it, Master Racke!"

But Aubrey Racke did not want to "go it" any longer; he already regretted with all his heart having "gone it" at all. It had taken him just ten seconds to discover he had awakened the wrong passenger, as it were. The first neat smack from the strange boy's fist had rattled every tooth in his head, and had taken all the fight out of him. He would have given every Treasury note in his well-lined, expensive wallet to be well out of the nasty position his rage had landed him in.

Even as Grimes' somewhat contemptuous remark was made, a left hook sent him sprawling on his back. Croke stooped to help him up.

"You—you fool!" panted Racke, in a low voice. "Why don't you chip in, you rotter? I—I'm not going on!"

"Look here, hang it all—" Croke was beginning uneasily, when a roar went up as the crowd saw Racke hanging back.

"Yah! Funk! 'E's smaller than you!"

"Yah! 'E funks it! What price St. Jim's, hey? Yah!"

"Look here, Racke," whispered Croke, as the howls of scorn went up, "you'll have to go on—you'll never hear the last of it from these chaps if you back out now."

"Shut up, confound you!" fumed Racke. He looked around him desperately. A few yards away the stranger was waiting, a slight grin on his rather good-looking features. He looked as fit as a fiddle, and supremely self-confident, and the sight of him ready waiting to go on was quite enough

for Aubrey Racke. "Come on!" hissed Racke. "Run for it!"

And as much to Crooke's astonishment as anyone else's, Aubrey Racke ducked through the little crowd and ran for his life.

"Great pip!"

"My eye!"

"E's bolted! By crumbs!"

There were gasps of amazement from the crowd of villagers, and then a howl of scorn and derision went up. Racke heard it, but he ran on, his face crimson with rage and humiliated shame. Shamed as he was, he had had quite enough of the stranger's hard fists.

At the far end of the green, in the shade of some giant oaks, he stopped, panting and breathless. He saw, on looking back, that Crooke was hurrying after him, and he waited, his face dark and trembling.

"Well, you ass!" began Crooke, as he ran up. "You'll never hear the last of this. Those village cads will tell the yarn to our chaps. You know how pally Merry and his lot are with Grimes' crowd."

"Shut up!" snarled Racke, his handkerchief to his swollen nose. "You—you rotter, Crooke! You could easily have chipped in and helped me!"

"How could I?" granted Crooke, eyeing his chum uneasily. "Those village louts would have chipped in if I had—you know they would. That chap looked like one of their breed. You—you ought to have gone on, Racke."

"You—you—"

"It was your own fault for starting it, anyway," said Crooke. "You know jolly well I'd have chipped in if I could—if Grimes and his lot hadn't been there."

"Oh, would you!" sneered Racke, still hugging his bruised and swollen nose. "Well, here's your chance to do it now, hang you! Look!"

Crooke followed the glance of his chum's glittering eyes, and saw that the strange youth in knickerbockers had left the crowd of villagers, and was hurrying fast on their tracks. It almost looked as if he was anxious to catch up with the fellow he had had the brief fight with.

"What—what do you mean, Racke?" stammered Crooke. "He—he's coming after us, then. If you think I'm going to tackle him—"

"I don't mean alone," sneered Racke. "If that's what you're thinking of? But Grimes' lot aren't with him now. We can smash him to a jelly between us."

"Oh!" said Crooke. "You mean both of us go for him?"

"Of course!" snarled Racke, gritting his teeth as he felt his damaged features. "We'll make the low cad sit up for this, by gad! We'll get him behind this hedge, and pound him to a jelly. Come on, he hasn't spotted us yet."

As he spoke, Racke slipped from behind the shelter of the oak-tree, and sprang into the hedge behind. Crooke

followed with obvious unwillingness. Even with the odds at two to one in their favour, Crooke did not relish the task.

"Look here——" he began uneasily; but Racke cut him short.

"I'm doing it!" he snapped, his eyes glinting. "I'll teach the low rotter to punch me like that! You'll thundering well help me, Crooke. If you don't, I'm finished with you."

Crooke nodded at that. He did not want the wealthy son of Sir Jonas Racke to "finish" with him. Racke was too useful—or, rather, his money was—for that.

The stranger was close now: his hurrying footsteps were audible, and they could see his face clearly. It looked rather agitated.

Racke waited until he was almost opposite to the anbuscade, and then he gave the word.

"Now! Go for the cad!"

As one man, Racke and Crooke flung themselves on the boy in knickerbockers. He went hurtling to the ground, and his shabby bag flew from his hand.

"On him—quick!" hissed Racke.

He jumped on the prostrate, startled youth, and dug his knees in his back, at the same moment attempting to grind the boy's face in the dust.

But the boy had swiftly realised what had happened, and with a swift, agile twist, he sent Racke rolling over. Then he leaped to his feet, sending Crooke staggering back with a quick lunge in the chest as he did so.

But instead of following up his advantage, he stood quite still then.

"Look here," he began eagerly. "Stop! I didn't know

He raised an arm to guard himself, as Crooke made a rush at him, and at the same moment Racke sprang viciously on his back. He swayed backwards, without attempting to strike out—much to his assailants' surprise.

"Down him!" hissed Racke, his eyes gleaming with triumph.

"Hold on!" shouted the youth, in alarm. "I tell you I'm— Look here——"

But Racke and Crooke had no intention of listening to protests, or anything else. They were surprised and relieved that the stranger did not hit out right and left; indeed, they were astounded at his apparent helplessness. They naturally supposed he "funked" now in his turn, and they became astonishingly brave at the thought.

Their sheer weight pulled the stranger down, and then they started to work, punching and pummeling for all they were worth.

But it did not last long. So engrossed were the two cads in their work, that they quite failed to hear the thud of running feet on the turf. It was Grimes, Pilcher, and Cragg, who came dashing up. They had seen from afar what had taken place, and they had cut across the green in a flash. Racke and Crooke had forgotten that they would be in full view out on the path.

They suffered for their forgetfulness now. Grimes & Co. were sportsmen through and through, and their eyes gleamed with anger as they saw what was afoot.

"Well, I'm hanged!" yelled Sidney Pilcher. "The funks couldn't face 'im alone, so they're goin' it two to one. 'Ere, fair play! None of that!"

"Go for the sweeps!" yelled Grimes.

The village youths obeyed their leader instantly—there was no love lost between them and Racke & Co. They piled in, and dragged Racke and Crooke from their victim, nor were they gentle about it, either. Racke went spinning into the ditch, with a singing head, and Crooke rolled over and over, locked in a close embrace with Sidney Pilcher.

It was just at that moment that seven newcomers arrived on the scene. They were Tom Merry & Co., and Blake & Co., of St. Jim's.

They stared in amazement at the scene.

"Here!" exclaimed Tom Merry, stepping up to the village lad. "What's this game, Grimes? Leave our chaps alone!"

Grimes gave a grin as he turned and recognised the St. Jim's juniors.

"It's all right, Master Merry," he said cheerfully. "I reckon you won't want to interfere when you hears what it's about."

"What's it about, then?" demanded Tom Merry grimly.

Though Tom Merry & Co. were on the best of terms with the cheery village youths, they had no intention of seeing St. Jim's fellows attacked without good reason, for all that.

"I'll soon tell you that," grinned Grimes.

And he did, while Racke stood by, whitefaced and shivering. Tom Merry & Co. listened in amazement and disgust.

"You—you mean to say Racke ran away—bolted from the scrap?" ejaculated Blake, when he had finished.

"That he did, Master Blake. He ran away like a scared rabbit. Then this chap, after we'd told him who Master

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Racke was and where he come from, hurried after him—goodness knows why."

"Well, my hat!"

"Well, the beastly funks!"

"Bai Jove! Wacke is weally the limit, you fellows!"

And that was the opinion of all the St. Jim's chums.

"And now he's got Crooke to help him—eh?" snapped Tom Merry, in sheer disgust. "I don't blame you for chipping in, Grimes! You village chaps are sports, anyway. You—you rotten worm, Racke!"

"It—it's not true, Merry!" hissed Racke, his face scarlet with shame. "You can't believe these beastly village louts! I—"

"We can, and do," said Tom Merry frankly. "Well, you are a worm, Racke! Fancy letting St. Jim's down—disgracing the school—"

"I tell you I didn't run away," breathed Racke. "I—"

"Very well, Racke," said Tom Merry. "If that's the case, you won't mind finishing the fight, of course."

And Tom looked curiously at the strange boy in knickerbockers.

"That's the wheeze," chuckled Lowther. "Let Racke show what a really brave chap he is. Look at him, he's fairly thirsting for gore—simply itching to be into the arena again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The expression on Racke's features made the juniors roar. Racke was obviously not thirsting for gore—his own or anyone else's. He gave a startled gasp.

"Look—look here, Merry," he snarled, his face black with rage. "I'm not fighting that low cad."

"Oh, yes, you are," said Tom Merry.

"I'm not, I tell you. I won't fight here before this crowd!" hissed Racke.

"You'll fight him," said Tom Merry steadily. "You've disgraced St. Jim's, and you've got to make up for it before these village chaps, you rotten funk! If you don't—"

Tom paused, as the strange boy stepped forward, his face the picture of mingled disgust and dismay.

"Half a minute," he said quietly. "You've no need to bother, thanks. I don't intend to fight him."

"You—you don't?" ejaculated Tom, staring. "But—"

"No, I don't. I—I see you are St. Jim's chaps?"

"Yes."

"I'm just on my way there now," said the stranger, looking at Racke curiously. "I would never have struck him back if I'd known who he was."

He hesitated a moment, and then he addressed Racke directly.

"These fellows," he said, indicating Grimes & Co., "told me just now, when you'd gone, that your name is Racke—Aubrey Racke. If that's so, I wish—"

"It is so—very much so!" grinned Lowther.

"Then you'll understand why I won't fight," said the stranger, looking eagerly at Racke. "My name's Clegg—Walter Clegg. I'm your cousin, and I'm just on my way to St. Jim's."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Great pip!"

"Racke's cousin! Oh, my hat!"

The St. Jim's juniors fairly blinked at the boy in knickerbockers. Racke's face was a study. If it had been black before, it was a sight for men and little fishes now.

"You—you're Walter Clegg—my cousin?" he breathed, almost in a whisper.

"Yes," said the stranger, stepping frankly forward and holding out his hand. "I'm thundering sorry this has happened. It couldn't be helped, though. If you're ready to shake and forget, I am."

Racke stared at his cousin's face, and then he stared at his outstretched hand. But he did not take it. His thin lips curled into a vicious sneer.

"Shake—shake with you?" he muttered huskily. "I'll be hanged if I will. You can go to blazes, you low cad! I don't own you as a cousin, and I'll dashed well make you sit up for this, you see if I don't. My dashed pater was a fool to bring you out of the gutter and send you here—a dashed fool!"

And with that final shaft of bitter malice and hate, Aubrey Racke turned and strode away. Crooke grinned a trifle, and followed. Nobody attempted to stop them, they were too astonished.

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Blake.

"My eye!" grunted Grimes. "E's a nice lad, and no error."

Walter Clegg stared after his cousin, dismay and disappointment in his frank and open face.

"So—so that's my cousin?" he muttered, as if to himself.

"My hat! What a go!"

"Nice boy, isn't he?" said Lowther.

Walter Clegg seemed to gulp, and then he grinned faintly.

"It—it's rather a staggerer," he said slowly. "I—I expected my cousin would meet me, and be glad to see me.

I—I was hoping we'd be friends, and all that. But—well, if that's my cousin, I think I'd rather he did disown me."

"Much better, for you," said Blake bluntly.

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove! Pway do not wowwy about him, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, in some distress.

"You weally have no need to wowwy—"

"I'm not worrying!" grinned Walter Clegg, his clear face suddenly brightening up. "I've always fought my own battles, and I can do so again at St. Jim's, I suppose. Only I'd thought—"

He broke off, his eyes gleaming, and, stepping to his bag, he picked it up.

"If you'll be kind enough to direct me to St. Jim's—" he began, eyeing the St. Jim's juniors a trifle hesitatingly.

"We're going there now," said Tom Merry cheerily.

"You can come along with us. I thought you were coming by the two-thirty-four in Rylcombe—"

"I caught an earlier train," explained Walter Clegg, nodding to the cricket-pitch. "But I've spent over an hour watching these chaps. I can't resist a game of cricket."

"Good man!" said Tom Merry approvingly. "Well, come along, and we'll see you all O.K."

"Thanks; I will!"

And, after stopping a moment to shake hands with Grimes & Co., and to thank them for coming to his rescue, Walter Clegg joined Tom Merry & Co., and they tramped to St. Jim's together.

And that was how Racke's "poor relation" came to St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 4.

Trouble in Study No. 7.

TOM MERRY & Co took an instant liking to Walter Clegg—a thing they certainly had not anticipated doing. His frank straightforwardness and absence of humbug—in striking contrast to his cousin's craftiness and swank, appealed to them at once.

During that walk back to St. Jim's they learned quite a lot about him. He was fond of games—especially cricket—and he was obviously no slacker like Aubrey Racke. And, as if he was determined there should be no misunderstanding on the subject, Walter made it quite clear to the juniors that he had just left a Council School, and was coming to St. Jim's entirely owing to the generosity of Sir Jonas Racke, Aubrey's father. He explained matters in a "take it or leave it" manner that made Tom Merry & Co. chuckle.

"The pater insisted that I should accept the offer," said Walter Clegg frankly, "and—well, here I am!"

"Never knew the old buffer was a generous chap!" grinned Lowther. "Always thought young Aubrey was a chip off the old block."

"I've heard he's a pompous old chap," said Walter, smiling grimly. "But I don't think he's like Aubrey—or what I've just seen of my cousin, at all events."

"Dear Aubrey is evidently a bit of rotten wood off the block, then."

"Looks like it!" grinned the new fellow. "I never expected this, I must say, though I'd heard he was no end of a swank. Will he keep this up, do you think?"

"I'm afraid so," said Tom Merry. "I don't like running your cousin down, Clegg. But you'd better keep your eyes on Aubrey. A snake in the grass isn't in it with him. That's a tip!"

"Yaas, wathah! It's only wight to let you know what to expect, deah boy!" agreed Arthur Augustus seriously.

Walter Clegg grinned; he did not seem much disturbed at the thought of trouble with his cousin.

Yet, for all that, his face was a trifle glum as he entered the gateway of St. Jim's with the juniors. He had obviously expected a different sort of welcome from his cousin, and he was obviously disappointed and hurt.

Tom Merry & Co. realised this, and they did what they could to make the stranger feel at home. After he had reported to Mr. Railton and the matron they took him a tour of the school. Then they escorted him to Study No. 10 for tea.

It was a merry meal, and Walter Clegg's face was bright as he left Study No. 10 at last to go to his own study. It was close on preptime by then, and the Terrible Three took him along to Study No. 7—partly to show him the room, and partly to see what a reception he would get from Racke and Crooke. They fancied the meeting would not be without incident.

They were quite right there!

Tom Merry tapped on the door and twisted the handle. The door was locked.

"That's a beginning, Clegg," said Tom. "Dear old Railton thought he was doing you a good turn by showing you in with your cousin, I suppose. But it's going to be unpleasant for you, old chap."

"I can stand it," said Walter Clegg calmly. "If the

Housemaster's put me in this study I've as much right in there as anyone else, I suppose?"

"Certainly!"

"Right!" said the new fellow, his eyes gleaming.

He tapped smartly on the door. Monty Lowther thumped hard on it. He was still thumping when there sounded a step in the passage, and Mr. Railton came along.

He stopped and stared at the group round the door.

"What is the matter, boys?" he asked. "Cannot you get into your study, Clegg?"

Clegg did not answer. Tom Merry hesitated. He knew Racke and Crooke were within, and he did not want to get them into trouble.

"The door seems to be locked, sir," he answered, after a pause, speaking loudly, so that Racke should hear and take warning. "Racke, open the door! Clegg wants to come in."

"Hang Clegg—and hang you!" came Racke's sneering voice. "We don't want any charity cads in here, and, what's more, we aren't going to have any. Clear out, and take the beastly cad with you, Merry!"

Mr. Railton was thunderstruck as he heard that little speech from Aubrey Racke. He looked closely at Walter Clegg, and then his lips set hard.

He rapped sharply on the door.

"Racke!" he called out, in a stern, angry tone. "Open this door at once! Do you hear me? It is I—Mr. Railton!" There was an alarmed exclamation in Crooke's voice, and then came Racke's answer, with a sneering laugh.

"You fool, Crooke! Can't you see it's a stunt? It was that cad Merry imitating old Railton's croak, to get-us to open the door?" He raised his voice. "Go and chop chips! Blow you, and blow Railton! Railton and his dashed orders can go to pot! He's shoved that cad in here, but we aren't having him! Got that?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

They had "got it"—including Mr. Railton. The face of the Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's was a picture. The juniors held their breath.

Mr. Railton raised his hand again and thundered on the door.

"Racke, you insolent boy!" he called out, his voice trembling with anger. "If you do not open this door instantly you shall suffer dearly. Open this door at once!"

"Oh, gad!"

From within came another alarmed exclamation—in Racke's voice this time. Even Aubrey Racke could not fail to recognise the master's voice as genuine this time. The next moment the key clicked in the lock, and the door swung open, revealing Racke's scared face.

"Oh!" gasped the cad of the Shell, as he saw it was indeed Mr. Railton. "I—I—"

Mr. Railton strode past him into the study, his face dark with anger.

"What does this mean, Racke?" he demanded.

Racke licked his dry lips.

"I—I—" he stammered. "I didn't know it was you, sir!"

"I am well aware of that!" snapped Mr. Railton. "Why did you refuse Clegg admittance to his study, Racke?"

"We—we don't want him in here, sir."

"What?"

"He's an outsider, sir," said Racke, setting his teeth doggedly. "We won't have him in this study!"

Mr. Railton's brow darkened. He gazed from Clegg's quietly composed features to Racke's pale face and glittering eyes.

"I do not understand you, Racke," said the master quietly. "I understand that Clegg is a relative of yours, and it was for that reason I placed him with you. I believed it would be pleasant and welcome to you both. Is it possible that, though cousins, you are not friends?"

"No, we're not, sir!" said Racke, with a glance of hatred at his cousin. "My father ought never to have sent him here. It was—"

"That is enough, Racke!" snapped the master, raising his hand. "It is not for you to criticise the actions of your parent. I am very sorry indeed to hear what you have told me. However, as I do not believe in placing boys together who are antagonistic to each other, I will place Clegg in another study when a vacancy occurs. For the present he will remain here, however. You understand, Racke?"

"Yes, sir," said Racke sullenly.

"Very well. If there is any further trouble of this nature I shall hold you responsible, Racke. And now I will deal with your insolence to me a few moments ago."

Racke paled. He had had a faint hope that Mr. Railton intended to allow that to pass. He was mistaken.

"When I was outside the door, Racke, you referred to me in insolent and disrespectful terms!" snapped the master grimly. "I am well aware that you did not intend me to hear them. That does not make them any the less insolent and ill-mannered, however. If you have no more respect for

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me than to refer to me in those terms, it is high time that you were taught to respect me more—also, to learn that my orders cannot 'go to pot,' as you term it. Merry, bring my cane from the table in my study."

"Oh, yes, sir."

Tom Merry hurried away, and returned a minute later with the cane. He handed it to Mr. Railton.

"Hold out your hand, Racke!"

Racke held out a trembling hand gingerly.

Swish, swish!

"Now the other!"

Swish, swish!

The master tucked the cane under his arm. He opened his lips as if to say something more, and then he closed them tightly, and turned abruptly to the door. He had intended to attempt to make the juniors friends again; but one glance at Racke's face showed him the hopelessness of that. He passed out, closing the door after him. Tom Merry & Co. had already backed out of the room, and they walked away towards their study.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "Old Racke fairly asked for it. But it will make him more vicious than ever against his cousin."

"Yes, rather! I don't fancy there'll be any more trouble to-night, though!" grinned Lowther.

"Rather not!"

And that was the opinion of the Terrible Three. They went back to do their prep, feeling that after what had happened, Aubrey Racke would try no further tricks that evening.

They were quite mistaken, however. Aubrey Racke was in a mood of black rage and recklessness that even Mr. Railton's cane and warning had not subdued.

As the door closed behind the Housemaster he stopped hugging his smarting hands, and fixed a look of burning malice and fury on his cousin.

"You—you cad!" he hissed. "You let me in for that! I—I'll not rest until I've made you pay for it, and for what happened this afternoon."

"It was entirely your own fault," said Walter Clegg grimly. "For this, and for what happened this afternoon, too!"

"It was all your fault!" said Racke savagely. "You rotten pauper! What the deuce did you want to come here at all for? Like your dashed cheek to come sponging on my pater!"

Clegg's features whitened a trifle, and he clenched his fists hard. But his tone was level and calm when he answered.

"Look here, Aubrey," he said quietly, "I don't know why you should treat me like this. I've never done you any harm that I know of. I suppose you don't like the idea of your pater paying my school fees here?"

"No, I dashed well don't!"

"It was none of my seeking," said Clegg. "I'm grateful for all that to your pater. But I owe you nothing. I'm sorry for what happened this afternoon. It was a sheer accident, and I should never have struck back if I'd known who you were."

He paused, and went on, a note of appeal in his voice.

"Look here, there's no reason why I should upset you, as far as I can see. If you're willing to be friends, I am, and—"

"Friends!" gritted Racke. "Friends with a dashed Council School cad who's here on my pater's charity. Go to blazes! I'll be dashed if I will. So put that in your confounded pipe and smoke it."

"Very well," said Clegg, his face setting hard. "Now we know exactly how we stand. Calling me Council School boy and charity cad doesn't upset me—coming from you, now I know what you are. In fact, it doesn't upset me coming from anyone. I've been sent here, and I'm going to stick it until I'm taken away. Got that?"

Racke said nothing.

"And now another thing," said Clegg, his eyes gleaming. "If you start any more tricks, Racke—cousin or no cousin—I sha'n't take it like I took it this afternoon. I warn you, Mr. Railton put me in this study, and I've as much right here as you. I'm stopping, and I'm going to stick up for my rights—see?"

As he spoke, the new fellow dropped a pile of books he was carrying on the table. To do so he had to move several exercise-books and papers a little further along the table.

"What's that for?" snarled Racke, giving Crooke a meaning look. "There's no room at this table for another, is there, Crooke?"

Crooke shook his head, but said nothing.

"I'm entitled to a share of this table, I suppose," said Clegg quietly. "Those are my books. I've just unpacked them. I know I'm not supposed to do prep on my first night, but I don't see the fun of sitting doing nothing. I might just as well tackle some prep."

"There's no room at this table, I tell you!" snapped Racke, his eyes gleaming.

Clegg's answer was to move the papers a trifle further



So engrossed was Clegg in his thoughts that he failed to hear the swift rustle amid the foliage. Before he could even look round a piece of rough sacking was thrust over his head and shoulders, and the next moment he went crashing down into the grass. It was an easier capture than Racke & Co. had even hoped for. (See page 17.)

along the table. Then he pulled a chair to the table and sat down. There was lots of room at the table, and he was resolutely determined to have his share. He opened a book and started to read.

Racke did not speak. He sat down again himself, and reached for the exercise-book he was working on. As he did so his elbow caught the inkpot, sending it rolling over.

The ink spurted all across the open pages of Clegg's "Virgil," and he jumped to his feet with an angry cry.

"Sorry!" murmured Racke, while Crooke chuckled. The thing was obviously done purposely, and Crooke saw humour in it.

But Clegg did not. His eyes glittered.

"You did that on purpose, you cad!" he snapped.

"Did I?" grinned Racke.

"Yes. You'll mop that ink up, my pippin—sharp! There's the blotting-paper!"

"I don't think I will," said Racke, though he went a shade paler as he saw the look on his cousin's face. "It was an accident, of course. I told you there wasn't room for another at this table."

"If you don't mop up that ink within two minutes I'll rub your nose in it, Racke."

"I dashed well won't! Who the thump are you to—"

"Won't you?" interrupted Clegg angrily.

He grabbed Racke by the back of the neck, and whirled him round like lightning. Then he twisted him over the table and rammed his nose in the ink on the open page of the "Virgil."

"Groooh!" gasped Racke. "Ow-wow! You—you—"

As Clegg released him, he withdrew his head, and snatching out his handkerchief, mopped frantically at his nose. Then, in an access of ungovernable rage, he flung himself at his cousin, hitting out right and left.

"Come on, Crooke!" he snarled savagely. "Help me—quick! Come on, you fool!"

The sheer fury of his attack sent Clegg staggering backwards; but he quickly recovered himself, and the next instant it was Racke who went staggering back, with a trickle of red mingling with the ink on his nose.

He realised then that he had let himself in once again for more trouble, and he gave a frantic yell.

"Crooke, you fool! Help me—help me throw the cad out of this! If you don't, I'll dashed well make you sorry for—Yarooop!"

Clegg's fist, connecting with his weak chin, stopped short

his gasping yell. For another instant Crooke hesitated, Mr. Railton's warning in his mind. Then he decided it best to help his chum. After all, Mr. Railton was not likely to be near the Shell passage at that time again, and he knew that Racke would never forgive if he failed him.

He leaped suddenly on to Clegg's back, bringing him sprawling down. The next moment all three were mixed up in a whirling, crashing struggle on the carpet. They crashed against the table, the bookcase, and the fender, and the sounds of strife floated out along the Shell passage.

There sounded the opening of doors, and then the door of Study No. 7 flew open, revealing half a dozen startled faces.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, staring in at the scene. "Trouble again! I thought as much!"

He started as if to interfere, and then he stopped, on seeing that the odds on Racke's side were availing him little.

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble, suddenly appearing in the doorway. "It's Racke chucking his blessed cousin out! He said he would! Look how he's doing it, you chaps!"

"Wrong way round, Baggy!" grinned Monty Lowther. "It's Racke's cousin who's chucking him out—and Crooke, too! Go it, Clegg, old chap! Put another colour or two on Racke's chivvy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors in the doorway laughed at the scene; they could not help it. Racke had already made known his intention to "chuck" his cousin out of his study. Instead of which there was every indication of the reverse coming about.

The new fellow was obviously quite at home in a scrap, and he was also very obviously one too many for Racke and Crooke.

He sent Crooke suddenly crashing among the fireirons, and then he grasped Racke and whirled him towards the doorway.

"Look out!" gasped Lowther. "Here's number one!"

Crash!

The juniors jumped out of the way, and as they did so Clegg sent Aubrey Racke spinning through the doorway. He fell in the passage and rolled over and over.

"Now, number two!" grinned Lowther.

Number two was not long in coming. Crooke had

scrambled to his feet, his face crimson with rage; but though he fought madly he was like a child in the new fellow's grasp.

Clegg dragged him to the door and planted a hearty kick behind him. Crooke spun through the doorway and collapsed on top of Racke on the passage linoleum.

Walter Clegg stood panting in the doorway and stared down at them.

"You asked for it!" he said, breathing hard. "If you want some more come back for it!"

But neither Racke nor Crooke wanted more, and they did not come back for it—greatly to the disappointment of the grinning crowd. They staggered up, and, with fiendish glares at the fellow who had evicted them, they tramped away towards the bath-rooms, both of them having repairs to attend to.

"What happened, Clegg?" asked Tom Merry, grinning. "I thought Racke had already had enough!"

"He evidently hadn't," said Clegg cheerfully, wiping a heated face with his handkerchief. "He tipped a bottle of ink over my 'Virgil'—the cad! I rubbed his nose in it, and that's why they went for me—see?"

"Good man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It wasn't my fault, was it?" asked Clegg coolly. "He got what he asked for—so did Crooke, if that's the chap's name. Anyway, I don't think they'll try to chuck me out of my study again—not to-night, at all events!"

"Rather not!" grinned Tom Merry. "I fancy they won't!"

And Tom Merry was right there. Racke and Crooke did return to the study fifteen minutes later, after attending to their damages. They found Walter Clegg seated at the table, quietly reading, but they did not speak to him. Neither did they question his right to the corner of the table this time. They resumed their prep in sullen silence, with black faces and smouldering eyes. But they did not attempt to "chuck" their unwanted study-mate out again that evening—or any other evening after that.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Merry's Find!

WALTER CLEGG took his place in the Shell Form the following day, and on the whole he acquitted himself quite well in his Form work. In the classics he was, perhaps, a trifle behind the rest of the Form, but in other subjects he showed up unusually well.

With the majority of his Form-fellows he met with the usual reception accorded to a new boy. They treated him with the careless offhandedness and lofty indifference that became "old hands"—that is, when they had got over the shock of discovering that Walter Clegg was quite a different sort of fellow to his cousin, Aubrey Racke.

Only fellows like Scrope and Mellish, and others of a like kidney—following the example of Racke and Crooke—did their little best to make things unpleasant for the new fellow, and had a great deal to say—with due caution when Clegg was present—regarding charity boys and Council School boys.

But Walter Clegg only laughed at them, and went on his way, regardless. He knew who was the evil genius behind the campaign of spite and hate, and he felt he could afford to ignore them when fellows like Tom Merry & Co. had accepted him as one of themselves.

In Study No. 7 there was no more open ragging on the part of Racke and Crooke. But, though not openly hostile, they did not allow the feud to rest—far from it. They subjected their unwanted study-mate to a continual series of mean and spiteful acts of persecution, which Walter Clegg found hard to bear patiently. Practically every time he entered the study he found his books scattered about, or torn, or damaged in some way or other, and the rest of his belongings were treated likewise.

Yet it was all done so slyly and craftily that he never could prove who had done the damage—though he was only too well aware who had. He took it all calmly, however, and all the sly tricks and guarded sneers of Racke and Crooke were like water on a duck's back to him. He laughed at their efforts to humiliate him.

After that first night Tom Merry & Co. had little to do with the new fellow. New boys were exceedingly "small beer" to such great men in the Shell and Fourth as Tom Merry & Co., and now they knew he could look after himself they troubled about him no longer.

On the following Tuesday, however, Tom Merry suddenly remembered that Clegg had mentioned his fondness for cricket, and that he had not yet given the new fellow a trial.

He was on his way for a spell at the nets at the time, and he looked in at Study No. 7. Only Racke and Crooke were in the study, however.

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"Clegg not here?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

"No!" snapped Racke rudely.

"Know where he is?"

"No—and I don't care!" grunted the dandy of the Shell.

Tom Merry was withdrawing, when Racke called him back. There was a nasty sneer on Racke's face.

"Well?" asked Tom Merry impatiently.

"I think I can tell you where to find Clegg," said Racke, his lips curling. "You'll find him on the village green with his pals."

"Eh? What d'you mean?"

"I mean what I say," sneered Racke, grinning at Crooke. "You'll find him on the village green, or on that dashed waste ground the village louts call a cricket field. Clegg's found his level. I knew he would!"

"What on earth are you gassing about? You mean—"

"I mean that Clegg's disgracing the school by palling on with Grimes' crowd from the village—shop-boys and counter-jumpers!" sneered Racke. "I suppose you didn't know that, Merry?"

"I certainly didn't! At least, I saw him with Grimes two nights ago, but I didn't know he was palling with those chaps. But—"

"Well, you know now! You're supposed to be skipper of the Junior School," said Racke. "You ought to put a stop to it. Fancy a St. Jim's chap chumming up with louts like them! What's St. Jim's coming to? I've seen him several times with Grimes and Pilcher lately. That's not all, either! He's even playing cricket with them—played in a match with them on Saturday. How's that?"

Racke finished with a triumphant grin at Crooke. He evidently imagined the news would fill Merry with indignation and disgust. He was right, in a way. But it was indignation and disgust with Racke's snobbery and spite, and not with Walter Clegg's alleged conduct.

"So that's where the chap's been putting himself lately," said Tom, with a whistle.

"Just that! It's a thundering scandal, Merry! You ought to kick up a fuss about it!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort, you silly snob!" was Tom's angry retort. "Grimes and Pilcher are jolly decent chaps, and Clegg might do worse than pal on with them—much worse!"

"Very much worse!" agreed Lowther, with a chuckle. "He might even pal on with you, Racke! That would be disgracing himself, and no error, old top!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

Racke bit his lip.

"So that's how you look at it, Merry!" he snarled. "I might have known you'd back the dashed little worm up! Well, other fellows won't look at it like that, if you do. We'll see what the fellows in general think!"

Tom Merry did not answer that. He closed the door hard and departed with his chums. He was looking a trifle remorseful. He did not doubt the truth of Racke's news—such as it was. He remembered seeing Walter Clegg mouching about alone—he knew the new boys usually were lonely during their first few days at school. And he remembered that it was Grimes & Co. who had gone to the rescue of Clegg on that first day.

Evidently, being lonely at St. Jim's, he had "chummed" up with Grimes & Co.—a quite natural thing for him to do under the exceptional circumstances. All the decent chaps at St. Jim's had their own pals, and he was not the sort to chum with rotters—had the rotters not been too snobbish to chum with him.

"Dear old Racke's fairly got his knife into Clegg," remarked Lowther.

"Hang Racke!" muttered Tom Merry. "I wish we'd taken a bit of interest in this new chap, you fellows. There's no harm in his palling with village chaps, of course—or playing cricket for them for that matter. But it's pretty clear he's feeling jolly lonely here. I thought I'd seen little of him out of classes lately."

"Rum for him to go and play for them, though," said Manners. "He might have asked if he wanted a trial."

"I suppose he didn't like pushing himself forward," said Tom. "Anyway, I intended to give him a trial, but forgot the chap completely. I'll look him up to-night and have a chat, and I'll give him a trial to-morrow."

And with that the subject dropped, and the Terrible Three went down to the nets.

But, as it happened, Tom Merry did not have to wait until the morrow to see how the new fellow shaped, for as they were coming in from the nets they overtook Clegg crossing the quad. He had evidently been out of gates, and he looked heated and cheery.

"You're just the chap I want to see," said Tom Merry. "I hear you're in the habit of playing cricket with Grimes and those village chaps, Clegg?"

"That's so!" admitted Clegg, colouring. "Nothing wrong in that, I suppose?"

"No," said Tom, smiling. "But why the thump didn't you come down to the nets here?"

"You never asked me, Merry," said Clegg a trifle bitterly. "And—and I didn't want to push myself at all. I happened to be watching the village chaps playing some days ago, and—well, I couldn't resist joining in. I—I'm mad on cricket! And those chaps are jolly decent."

"We know that," said Tom. "But—"
"It was just luck," said Clegg. "They happened to be short of a man, and I offered to play. Grimes and Pilcher did me a good turn, you know, that day I came; they chipped in when my cousin and Crooke downed me."

"And you've been playing for them since?"
Clegg nodded.
"I've just been there now," he said. "They—they want me to play in a match with a team from Wayland to-morrow afternoon."

"Then you must be pretty good," observed Tom, staring rather curiously at the new fellow. "Look here, what about a few minutes at the nets now, Clegg—just to see how you shape?"

"Yes, but—"
"Only for a few minutes," said Tom eagerly. "What's your strong point—bat or ball?"

"Ball," said Clegg, smiling, "if it can be called strong!"
"We'll soon see that," said Tom grimly. "Come on! Plenty of time before calling-over!"

And the enthusiastic skipper of the junior Forms started off without waiting for Clegg's approval. But Walter Clegg needed no urging where cricket was concerned. His eyes gleamed with pleasure, and he followed instantly as did Lowther and Manners.

In a few minutes the stumps were pitched again, and Tom Merry faced the bowling.

"Now let's have some," he called. "Hot and strong!"
Walter Clegg let him have some "hot and strong." The first ball went a little wide, and Tom blocked it. The second whipped his leg stump out.

"How's that?"
"Phew!"

There was a general gasp. Several fellows still lingered on the ground. Blake & Co. were there and they stopped and looked on with keen interest. Tom Merry was the best batsman in the Lower School, and it was no light task to shift him.

"Good man!" called Tom Merry excitedly. "Try again!"
Clegg tried again, and though Tom Merry was on his guard, the little red ball sent his bails spinning.

"Bai Jove!"
"Well bowled!"
Tom took his stand again, almost trembling with elation. That ball had beaten him to the wide, and he realised the new fellow was hot stuff indeed. He realised it more the next moment when Clegg's fourth ball took his middle stump out and deposited it a yard away.

CHAPTER 6. In the Act!

"GREAT pip!"
It was a yell. To see Tom Merry handled thus by a new fellow was astonishing. It was possible that, in his elation at such a find, Tom was not as calm and controlled as usual over the fourth ball. But the second and third were "eye-openers." Tom Merry handed the bat to Blake. He was quite satisfied. He had guessed the new fellow must be something unusual for a keen cricketer like Grimes to want to play him in a match. Yet he was amazed and delighted now his guess had been proved correct.

"That's good enough, Clegg," he called, his eyes dancing with elation. "Now have a smack at Blake."

Clegg had a smack at Blake—taking three of Blake's wickets with four balls. Arthur Augustus then took the bat, and after being clean bowled twice, decided not to tempt Providence a third time.

"Great Scott, man!" cried Tom Merry, as the stumps were drawn again. "You're a giddy marvel! You've been here days, and we never realised what we'd got. You—you blessed dark horse!"

Walter Clegg grinned.
"The light's going," he said. "That was in my favour, remember. I don't fancy I could do so well otherwise."

"You can bowl, all the same, my pippin!" said Tom. "Light or no light, you beat me all the way! You're going to be jolly useful!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
"You couldn't have come along at a better time," went on Tom delightedly. "Old Fatty Wynn's just crooked his wrist—won't be able to bowl again for a week or more. In any case, if you always shape like that I fancy you'll be a better man than Fatty—and he's our tip-top bowler!"

"Does that mean you'll give me a real trial?" said Clegg eagerly.

"Trial?" exclaimed Merry. "My dear man, what we've just seen's good enough. You'll play for us in the Grammar School match to-morrow if I'm not mistaken. I'll try you again when the light's better—before dinner to-morrow. I'll decide then. But I think you can take it you'll be down to play all serene."

Clegg's handsome face flushed with pleasure; and then quite suddenly it clouded again.

"I'm sorry, Merry," he said, in sudden dismay. "But—but I've as good as promised to play for Grimes to-morrow."

"Better cancel your promise, then," said Blake gruffly. "Hang it all, School comes first, Clegg."

Tom Merry bit his lip with vexation.

"You haven't actually promised?" he demanded.
"No; I wasn't sure if I was doing right. I was going to ask you about it. I told him I'd let him know definitely to-night by post. Grimes himself was doubtful if I was doing right or not. I—I'd like to play for St. Jim's, though."

"And you jolly well are going to!" snapped Tom warmly. "St. Jim's comes first, Clegg. And if you haven't actually promised, you'd better write to-night and call it off."

"Very well, I will," said Clegg slowly. "I'm sorry to disappoint those fellows, though. They've been jolly decent to me. But—but as you say, School comes first."

The juniors trooped schoolwards—Tom Merry excited and gleeful, as, indeed, was Walter Clegg himself. To play for St. Jim's was an honour he had scarcely dared to hope for so soon. He knew that, though Tom Merry was to give his final decision after the trial the next day, it was fairly certain the junior captain of St. Jim's had already made his mind up. And Walter Clegg's face was bright as he went up the steps of the School House that evening.

But it did not remain bright for long. At the doorway of Study No. 7 the new fellow stopped, while the rest went on towards their study. He turned the knob and threw open the door, and as he did so he gave an exclamation of anger—an exclamation that made Tom Merry and his chums turn back to see what was amiss.

They found Walter Clegg standing in the doorway, staring into the study. By the table was standing Aubrey Racke. In his left hand was a large photograph, while in his right he held a pen. On the table before him was a large, empty photograph frame, with the glass lying beside it. Close by stood a bottle of red ink. In the armchair Crooke was seated, leaning forward, sudden alarm in his eyes.

But the alarm in Crooke's eyes was as nothing to the startled fear in Aubrey Racke's eyes.

His eyes stared at Clegg in the doorway, guilt and utter dismay clearly showing in them.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the matter, Clegg?"

He did not see anything wrong.
But apparently Walter Clegg did. Without answering the junior captain, he took two strides into the study, and his grip fell like a vice on Racke's collar.

"What are you doing with that photo, Racke?" he asked, through his teeth. "Hand it over! I fancy you're up—"

He broke off, suddenly catching a sight of the photo. Then he gave a sudden exclamation, and snatched the photograph from Racke's hand.

For a moment he stared at it, and then he gave a low growl, and his face flushed suddenly red with passion. Without the slightest warning, his fist shot out, catching Racke full on the temple.

Crash!
The blow was savage, and came straight from the shoulder with all the junior's weight and fury behind it. Racke reeled across the room with a strangled yelp, and dropped amid the fireirons with a rattling crash.

"Great pip!"
Tom Merry ran into the room, astonishment and alarm on his face.

"Here, I say, Clegg—" he began, but Clegg stopped him by handing over the photograph for him to see.

"Look at that!" he said thickly, his eyes blazing. "That's my pater's photo. Look what that dad's done to it!"

Tom looked at the photo. It was a portrait of a rather handsome man, bearing a likeness to the new boy—though Tom could scarcely make the face and clothes out clearly, for Racke had evidently made a few alterations with red ink.

The nose had been tinted red, and deft touches of the pen had made the clothing torn and threadbare. That was not all, however. Sticking out of one pocket, Racke had drawn a bottle, out of another a red-ink tinted handkerchief, while under the right arm a long sweep's brush was shown protruding.

The alterations had been skilfully drawn, but they did not appeal to Tom Merry, or to his chums, when they, also,

saw them. And underneath was written the words: "The Sweep!"

"Well, if you've done this, Racke," snapped Tom Merry, staring down at Racke, who was still grovelling in the fender, gasping and groaning, "you deserve to be licked until you can't stand, you hound!"

"If!" echoed Walter Clegg, through his clenched teeth. "There's no 'if' about it, Merry. Can't you see the rotter's done it! I've caught him in the act this time. He's played these tricks before; he's damaged my books, and he's smashed my property. But he's denied doing it, and I've done nothing because I couldn't prove he'd done it. But I've got the proof this time."

He ended on a grim note of savage satisfaction, and Racke gave a gasp.

"You—you're mistaken, if you think I did it," he snarled, his voice almost trembling with rage and fear. "We've only just come in. We found it like that, and were just looking at it."

"That's—that's the truth," added Crooke feebly.

"Liars!"

The word came savagely from Clegg, and Tom Merry nodded.

"That's a bit thin, Racke," he said, in deep disgust. "You're bowled out this time, you howling cad! If I were in Clegg's place I'd give you the licking of your life. You've done nothing but persecute your cousin since he came here, and you've tried your utmost to poison the fellows' minds against him. If Clegg doesn't lick you, I'm blessed if I won't."

"Don't you interfere, Merry," said Clegg fiercely. "Leave him to me."

He picked up the cruelly despoiled photograph, and placed it carefully in his locker. Then he took his coat off. After that, he walked quickly to the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Racke watched him from the floor, his face going white.

"Look here!" he stammered. "Wha-what's the game? If you dare to lay a finger on me—"

"I'm going to give you both a hiding, if I can, and I'll start first with you, Racke. If you won't fight, or want to wriggle out before I've finished, I'll tan your dirty hide with a stump. Get up, and put your fists up."

"I won't, hang you!"

Clegg stepped to the corner of the room, where a couple of cricket-stumps leaned. As he did so, Racke leaped to his feet and made a blind rush for the door. But Lowther caught him before he could wrench the door open, and yanked him back.

"Nothing doing," he grinned. "You've got to go through with it, Aubrey."

"I won't!" hissed Racke. "It's rotten bullying; it isn't fair—he knows he's too good for either of us."

"Then let them come on both together!" snapped Clegg. "It will save time, anyway."

"Look here, though——" began Tom.

"Leave them to me," said Clegg, his eyes glinting.

Racke's lips set in a cruel line, and he gave Crooke a meaning look. Both knew they had to go through with it, and they jumped at the chance. It was certainly better than fighting the furious Clegg alone, and certainly better than a hiding with a stump.

They had scarcely time to make up their minds, however, for the next instant Clegg was at them, hitting out right and left.

"Back up!" gasped Aubrey Racke.

Crooke "backed up" as well as he could, though he clearly had less stomach for the queer scrap than Racke had, despite the great odds in their favour. Clegg came on like a mad tiger, and Racke yelped as a fist like iron took him on the chin.

Tom Merry and his chums did nothing but hop and dance out of the way for the next few brief, whirling minutes. Tom had intended to try to stop the fight, but he had no chance to do so. Clegg led the fighting—if it could be called that—and without troubling to defend himself, he attacked the two cads, who backed about the room, stumbling and reeling, and defending themselves desperately.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Lowther, with a chuckle. "Is this a blessed 'Here we go round the mulberry-bush' game? Fight, Crooke—you're not a blessed punching-ball, of a dancing doll! Hallo!"

Lowther's grinning words ended in a startled exclamation, as, without warning, Crooke suddenly ducked, and jumping to the door, which Racke had already succeeded in unlocking, he slipped through it like lightning.

"Oh, my hat!"

But Clegg scarcely seemed to have noticed that one of his opponents—or, rather, victims—had vanished. All his attention was given to Racke, and he gave him plenty! Round and round the room he drove the panting, gasping, and almost frantic junior, until at last Racke was yelling for mercy.

Without warning, he flung himself down on the carpet, and refused to get up again, stump or no stump.

"Leave him alone now, Clegg, for goodness' sake!" gasped Tom Merry. "He must be black and blue by this. Great Scott! It's a wonder the beaks haven't heard the din. He's had enough, this time."

There was no doubt about that. Aubrey Racke had had more than enough, though no more than he had deserved. He lay on the carpet, exhausted and panting, and glaring up with eyes filled with burning hate at his cousin, who stood above him.

"Let me alone!" he almost whimpered. "You—you brute!"

Clegg stood looking down at him, and breathing hard through his nose.

"There, you cad!" he panted. "I owe your pater something, and I've tried to keep my hands off you for that reason. But you've gone beyond the limit this time. I don't mind you insulting me—I can stand that. But I'm not having you insulting the pater."

"Let me alone!"

"I'm letting you alone now. But," snapped Clegg, stooping over his cousin with clenched fists, "now I've started, I'll go on. Play any more tricks with my property, and you'll get the same again."

Tom Merry caught his arm, afraid the angry junior would start on Racke again.

"Oh, come away from the cad, Clegg," he said quietly.

"Bring along your books, and you can do your prep in our study. You'll be able to breathe freely there."

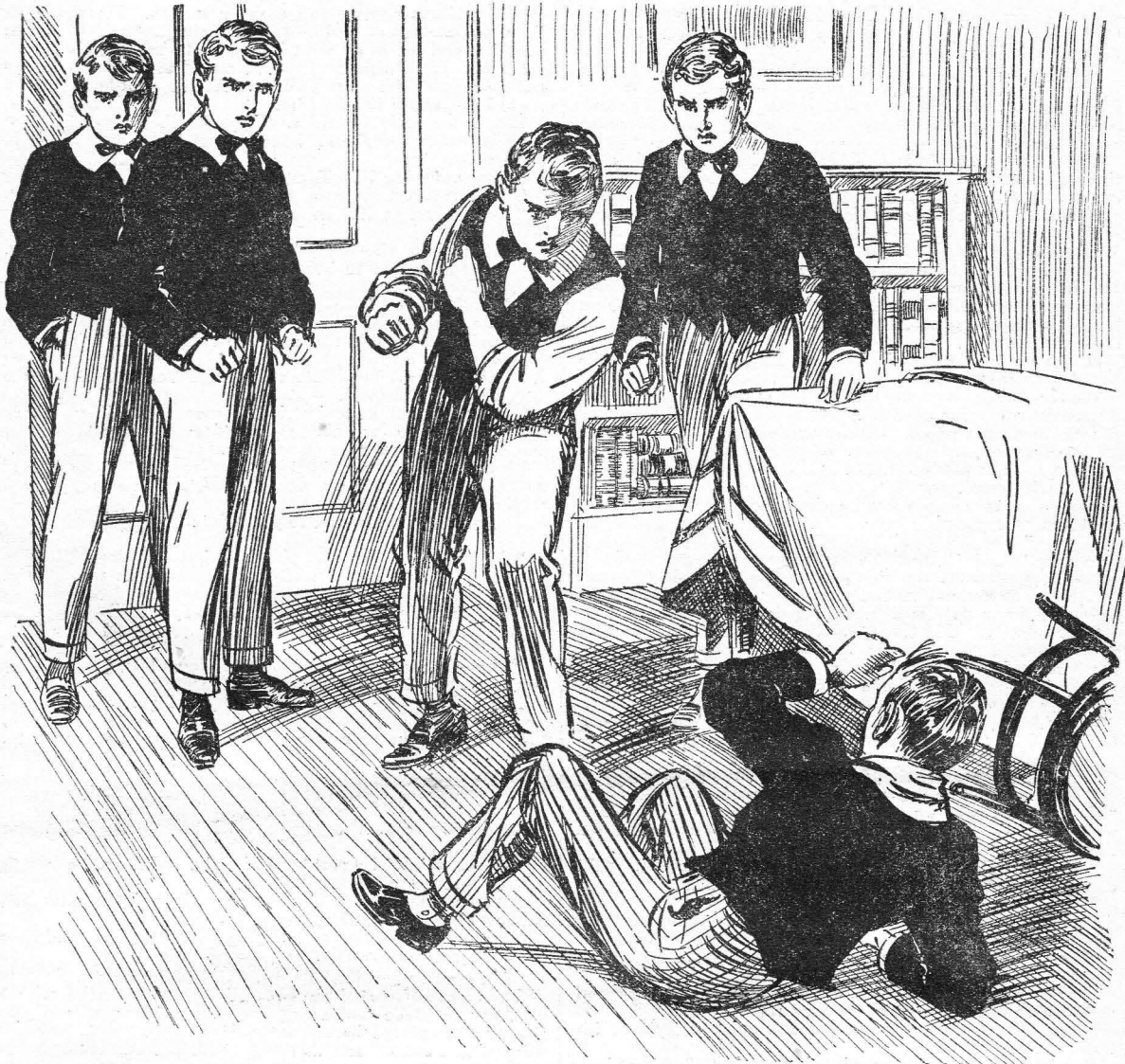
Clegg nodded. He felt he could not trust himself with his cousin a moment longer, and he was only too glad to get away from his company—even for an evening. He collected his books together, and followed the Terrible Three out without another glance at his fallen enemy.

The door closed behind them, and then Racke staggered to his feet. The look on his bruised face was not good to see. He dropped into the armchair, and over the handkerchief he pressed to his cut mouth his eyes glittered as he stared unseeingly into space.



"JOE" FRAYNE.

Commonly known by his merry young friends of the Third Form as "Young Joe." A staunch chum of D'Arcy minor, the acknowledged leader of the fag tribe. Like his "chief," he is not of the spick and span variety, and can usually be found wearing a grubby collar. Born within the sound of Bow Bells, Frayne is a true-bred Cockney, and like the majority of his species, is likely to be cheeky but cheerful. Ready to take part in all japes, and is always able to stick up for himself. A warm handful for his Form-master, Mr. Selby, who is everlastingly on the warpath amongst the unruly members of the Third.



Round and round the room Clegg drove the panting, gasping, and almost frantic junior, until at last Racke went crashing to the ground. "There, you cad!" panted Clegg. "I owe your pater something, and I've tried to keep my hands off you for that reason. But you've gone beyond the limit this time. I don't mind you insulting me—I can stand that. But I'm not having you insulting the pater!" (See page 14.)

He was still sitting thus when Crooke entered, glancing cautiously into the room before he did so. Racke looked up then, and gave his chum a bitter look.

"You—you sweep, Crooke!" he hissed. "You funky hound, to leave me to it like that!"

Crooke avoided his chum's eyes, and flushed uneasily.

"Look—look here, Racke," he stammered. "I only did what you'd have done jolly quickly if you'd had the chance. That awful brute was raving mad, I believe. And—and I wasn't going to get half-killed for nothing. It was your doing—I told you to leave the dashed photo alone, I told you you were going too far."

"You didn't care what happened to me!" gritted Racke. "You only thought of your own confounded skin. You—"

"You can't blame me, Racke. I say, you do look a sight, Racke! Hadn't you better go to the bath-room?"

Racke got up from his chair, scowling at his "pal." He saw Crooke was anxious to change the subject, but he was scarcely thinking of Crooke's conduct, despite his bitter outburst. All his thoughts were concentrated on bitter thoughts of hatred against the fellow who had thrashed him so soundly.

"Hang the brute!" he said thickly, fastening his collar, which was loose from its moorings. "I—I'll pay that cad out for this whatever it costs me! I'll make St. Jim's too hot to hold him! I'll never rest until he's kicked out in disgrace from the school!"

There was such deadly malice and hatred in Racke's voice

that Crooke gave him a startled look. But he was only too glad to get the subject off himself and his cowardice.

"I'm with you there, Racke!" he said eagerly. "We'll pay the howling cad out, old man! We've not done so badly already, you know. Those hints you dropped to that fat tattler Trimble are doing their work all serene. Most of the chaps give him a wide berth, and only Merry and Blake and that lot seem to be inclined to pal with him."

"And before I've finished they'll drop him, too!" snarled Racke. "You wait, Crooke!"

And with that Racke left the study en route for the bath-room and a much needed wash and change. He went with black thoughts in his heart, and the look on his face was that of a fellow who would stick at nothing to gain his ends.

CHAPTER 7.

Racke Writes a Note!

"READY, Clegg?"

Tom Merry asked the question cheerily as he looked into Study No. 7 the following day just after dinner. As he had expected, Walter Clegg had come through his "trial" down at the nets before dinner with flying colours. He had exceeded all Tom's hopes and expectations.

He had a sure eye and hand, and his deft and magical handling of the ball amazed the juniors. Delighted and enthusiastic, Tom had immediately decided to drop Clive and

substitute the new fellow. And, being a sportsman, Sidney Clive had willingly given way to make room for an undoubtedly better man.

There had been grumbles among the Shell and the Fourth—as might be expected, considering the fact that Walter Clegg was by no means popular. But the grumbles came from fellows who did not count, and nobody who did count at all minded them.

Up to now, Tom Merry had been worried not a little over the Grammar School match. Not only was Fatty Wynn crooked, but Noble was laid up in the sanny; while Levison was booked to meet an uncle in Wayland that afternoon. And the lazy Cardew—probably the best bowler next to Wynn—had politely but firmly declined to play.

With his best bowlers out of the team, Tom had seen a slashing defeat facing him. And now there was a better man even than Fatty Wynn, eager and willing to play. Tom looked upon Clegg as a veritable godsend, and he felt he could hug him.

It was no wonder Tom's face was bright as he asked the new fellow that question.

Walter Clegg was in the study, seated at the table, scribbling away for dear life. In the armchair Racke was lolling, reading a paper. Crooke was absent.

Clegg, whose face was rather worried, looked up glumly. "No; I'm not ready yet," he said quietly. "You're going down early, aren't you?"

"We want to get in a few knocks before the Grammarians turn up," explained Tom. "I was hoping you'd be ready—"

"Sorry!" said Clegg. "I can't come yet—got to finish this note and run to the village with it afterwards."

"My hat!" grunted Tom, frowning. "You'll be cutting it jolly fine if you do! Is it something desperate, then?"

"Not exactly," said Clegg slowly. "The fact is it's a note to Grimes. I told you I'd as good as promised I'd play for him to-day. Well, I meant to write and explain last night, but—well, you know what happened? And since then I've clean forgotten I hadn't written."

"You'd better send someone with it, then!" said Tom, a trifle gruffly. "Can't risk you being late, you know."

"I'd rather see him personally—if I could. I feel I've treated him rather shabbily, you know."

"What rot! You hadn't actually promised," said Tom. "He'll understand, won't he? In any case, you can easily send someone. Get hold of Trimble. He'll trot over for a bob, or a tanner, for that matter."

"Very well," said Clegg, though none too happily. "I'll do that, and come straight down to the nets, Merry."

"Good man!"

Tom nodded, and passed on down to the changing-room with his chums. He felt a little rattled at the thought that the new fellow was, as he supposed, treating the honour he had bestowed upon him too lightly.

Such was not the case, however. Clegg was elated beyond measure at the thought of getting into the team, but, at the same time, he was worried at having to disappoint his chums in the village.

But he had no intention of going against Tom's orders, and hurriedly finishing the note and sealing it, he left the room.



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He had scarcely done so when Aubrey Racke rose from his chair, a curious, excited gleam in his eyes. For a moment he stood motionless, and then he stepped swiftly to a drawer under the study cupboard and took out a large notebook. Next he took from the mantelshelf a slip of paper. It was a notice, in Tom Merry's handwriting, and it related to cricket subscriptions.

Placing the notice on the table before him, Racke seated himself and started to write, his ears keenly on the alert for approaching footsteps.

He wrote slowly and laboriously, referring continually

to the writing on the notice as he did so. He wrote on three or four sheets, and destroyed them; but at last he was satisfied, and put away the notice and the notebook.

He had just finished when the sound of footsteps in the passage made him start guiltily. As the door-knob turned he hid the paper behind him.

But it was only Gerald Crooke, and Racke greeted him with an evil grin, and handed him the paper he had written on.

"That anything like Tom Merry's fist?" he asked.

Crooke scanned the note, and eyed his chum wonderingly.

"Yes, jolly like it!" he breathed. "My hat! Have you written—"

"I'll explain afterwards," said Racke, his eyes glinting. "That cad's bound to be back soon for his cap. Let's get out quickly!"

"But, I say—"

Racke ignored his chum. He took out his pencil again and scribbled Clegg's name on the folded note, and placed the note in a conspicuous position on the bare table. Then he fairly rushed his chum out of the room, and led the way out into the quad.

They need not have hurried, however, for it was fully three minutes before Clegg came hurrying back to Study No. 7. He saw the note at once—he could not fail to see it.

Picking it up he opened it out, and read the contents, and as he did so he gave an exclamation, and his face flushed with angry disappointment.

The note was short, and to the point:

"Dear Clegg,—So sorry, old chap, but I've decided not to play you, after all, this afternoon, as it seems rather hard lines dropping Clive out at the last moment. So you can buzz off and play for Grimes right away. Will give you a chance later. Sorry!
TOM MERRY."

"The—the mean rotter!" muttered Clegg, biting his lip with vexation. "Why can't the chap make his mind up once and for all? Buzz off—eh? I'll be lucky if I get to the village in time now. Oh, blow!"

He crushed the note into his pocket almost unconsciously, and snatched up his cap. Then he rushed out, and made his way out into the quad, his face dark with angry disappointment. Not for one moment did he dream that the note was a forgery. Why should he? He had seen Tom Merry's handwriting several times, and he had recognised it—or thought he had.

"Never mind!" he muttered bitterly. "I'll not be letting old Grimes down, after all."

And, breaking into a run, Clegg ran through the gates, and started off for the village ground at top speed.

Racke and Crooke were lounging near the gates, and they watched him go covertly.

"Oh, good!" breathed Racke. "It—it's come off, Crooke. What luck! If that doesn't cook his goose over the cricket and put the fellows dead against him nothing will! Tom Merry will rave. I happen to know Clive's gone off to Wayland with Levison, and this will about put our team in the soup."

Crooke grinned gleefully, and then a thought seemed to strike him.

"What about the note, though?" he demanded, in sudden alarm. "If there's trouble, he may be able to produce that."

"Oh gad!"

Racke hadn't thought of that, obviously.

"He's bound to have chucked it away," he muttered, frowning. "Oh, hang it! That will muck up the whole thing if he's kept it."

"You were a fool to take such a risk, Racke," muttered Crooke, looking scared. "Tom Merry will put it down to you, sure as fate. It's serious."

"Oh, don't croak!" snarled Racke. "Come on, you fool! Let's be going and see if it's anywhere in the study."

He started off at a run for the School House, and Crooke followed, looking anything but comfortable in mind. They reached Study No. 7 and started to search eagerly for the note. Racke himself was beginning to feel scared now. It was dawning upon him that he had done a very risky thing, and Tom Merry, once he saw the note, would never rest until he had discovered the author of it.

The note must be found at all costs.

Racke looked eagerly through the wastepaper-basket, and the fireless grate, to no purpose, and after searching drawers and all other possible places, they had to give it up.

"We've got to get it back somehow, Crooke!" groaned Racke. "And—there's only one way."

"Thumped if I can see any way," said Crooke glumly.

"There is a way, though!" snapped Racke, his pasty features set hard. "We've got to get it back from him by force, Crooke."

"By force!" ejaculated Crooke. "You ass—"

"Easily enough. He's bound to come back by the footpath

through the woods—he came back that way yesterday. I know. We can wait for him, and we can take it from him by—”

“Can we?” jeered Crooke. “Not so much we, Racke. I’m having none. The brute’s too good for us, you fool!”

“Not for three or four of us,” said Racke. “What about getting Clampe and Scrope on the job?”

“They wouldn’t risk—”

“They would for a quid. It will be worth more than that to me to get this thing through. Besides, we’ve simply got to get that note back, Crooke. We’ll hunt them up now.”

Crooke made no further demur, and followed Racke as that plotting junior started for Study No. 5. He knew that if trouble came over the affair, Racke would not hesitate to drag him into it.

Racke chuckled as he found the door of Study No. 5 locked. It told him that Gibbons, Scrope’s stable companion, was not at home, but that Scrope himself was. On making their identity known, Scrope quickly opened the door.

There was a haze of cigarette smoke in the room, and through it Racke saw that Leslie Clampe was also in the room. Though a New House fellow, Clampe was Scrope’s closest pal.

“Oh, good!” grinned Racke. “I thought I’d find you here, too, Clampe. Shut that door, Crooke.”

Crooke shut the door, and Racke wasted no time in getting down to business. Clampe and Scrope listened to his proposal in amazement.

“You want us to help you down that sweep?” ejaculated Clampe. “What on earth for—to give him a pounding?”

“Never mind what for. There’s ten bob each for you if you help,” said Racke coolly. “He’s got something in his pocket that I want, and mean to get. Are you on?”

“There’ll be a row—”

“No there won’t—if we do the thing properly. We’ll take a sack or something, and he’ll not get the chance to spot who we are. It’ll be as easy as falling off a form.”

Clampe and Scrope looked at each other, and then they nodded. Racke grinned. He had little fear that they would refuse. The wealthy Aubrey—Young Moneybags as he was known at St. Jim’s—never had much trouble in getting such help from his toadies.

“You’ll do it?” he asked eagerly.

“Yes, like a shot!” said Clampe.

“What-ho!” grinned Scrope.

“Right!” said Racke, his eyes gleaming. “There’s plenty of time yet; but we may as well get everything cut and dried.”

And Aubrey Racke seated himself, and the four black sheep settled down to get everything cut and dried.

CHAPTER 8. The Ambush!

IT was more than two hours later when Racke left Study No. 5, and when he left, Crooke, Scrope, and Clampe left with him. Racke had a rolled-up parcel in his hands, and the three strolled carelessly down to the gates. The Grammar School match was not yet over, and scarcely a soul was about.

But once outside the gates the four black sheep put on speed. Despite his anxiety to get the risky task over, Racke had left it rather late, and he was blaming himself savagely as they hurried along Rylcombe Lane.

It was not a far cry to the footpath through the woods, and as they came suddenly into sight of the stile leading on to it, Racke pulled up suddenly with a muttered exclamation.

The stile lay back from the lane, and was invisible to anyone coming along the lane until they were almost upon it, and now Racke saw that a junior was seated upon it, idly swinging a gold-mounted cane in his hand.

It was Cardew of the Fourth, and at sight of him Racke bit his lip with vexation.

But they had already stepped on the grassy patch leading up to the stile, and it was too late to draw back without arousing suspicion in Cardew’s mind that they were up to something.

So Racke muttered below his breath, and went on with his chums. As they came up to the stile, Cardew gave Racke one of his usual cynical smiles.

“Dear old Racke,” he remarked playfully. “It does me

good to see you taking a bit of exercise, old top. Why, man, you’re quite breathless, y’know! And carrying a parcel, too! Fancy the elegant Aubrey carryin’ a parcel! Wonders will never cease! What a come-down, Aubrey!”

Racke did not answer. He started to climb over the stile, and Cardew dug him in the ribs with his cane.

“And hurryin’, too, begad!” went on the whimsical Fourth-Former, shaking his head. “Remember that smoker’s heart, Aubrey. Ah! I have it now! You’re hurryin’ to get to the village—to learn how your dear cousin has distinguished himself—what?”

“Mind your own dashed business!” snarled Racke.

He went on with his chums, leaving the languid Cardew staring after him, smilingly, and just a trifle curiously.

“Hang him!” muttered Racke, when they had plunged into the leafy woods. “Oh, hang the luck! Fancy meeting that cad just now!”

“Rotten luck!” agreed Crooke, looking uneasy. “I say, Racke, hadn’t we better chuck up the idea? You know what a sharp brute Cardew is!”

“I tell you we daren’t!” breathed Racke. “We’ve got to get hold of that dashed paper if we can. Cardew will guess nothing—why should he? In any case, he can’t prove anything.”

“He’s off now,” put in Scrope, looking back.

Racke looked back, and his dark brow cleared as he saw through the shadowy aisle of greenery that Cardew had dropped from the stile, and was languidly strolling on to the lane, swinging his cane carelessly.

He vanished from sight, and Racke drew a deep breath of relief.

“All serene,” he said. “The beggar can’t have spotted we’d something on. Let’s get on.”

The four plotters hurried on, and after some minutes had passed, Racke gave the word to halt. It was an ideal place for an ambush—where the path narrowed considerably, and was completely closed in overhead with leaves and creepers.

“Here’s the place,” said Racke, peering ahead along the woodland pathway. “Now get your hankies on. I’ve got the cap.”

“Good egg!”

Racke pulled from his trousers-pocket a cap—a school cap bearing the green and black colours of Rylcombe Grammar School. He dropped it carelessly among the moss and ferns bordering the path.

“That will clear us if anything does go wrong,” he grinned. “Clegg will just think it’s a Grammarian rag. Buck up!”

The other juniors bucked up, taking their handkerchiefs out and tying them round their faces as masks. They were soon ready, but not too soon, for hardly had the last of the four taken up his position amid the thickets, when a figure came into sight along the path.

It was a junior wearing a blazer over his cricketing flannels, and Racke gave a low warning hiss as he recognised Walter Clegg.

“Here he comes. Ready?”

“Looks jolly pipped!” whispered Scrope, peering out.

“Expect the louts have been licked!” sneered Racke, in a whisper.

And certainly Clegg did look “pipped.” He came slowly along the woodland path, his face glum, and his hands dug deep in the pockets of his red and white blazer. But Racke was wrong—it was not because the villagers had been licked. On the contrary, the Rylcombe team had trounced their Wayland rivals by a hundred runs and more—a victory for which Walter Clegg was responsible more than any other player.

But Walter Clegg was not thinking of the match at all just then. He had soon got over the excitement and elation of the victory, and now his thoughts were of the note he believed Tom Merry had sent him. And his thoughts were bitter—not because of the disappointment he had felt, but because he imagined Tom Merry had slighted him, had played him a nasty trick.

Though the new fellow cared nothing for most of the fellows at St. Jim’s, he did care a great deal what Tom Merry & Co. thought of him, and he valued their friendship. And now even they had treated him shabbily—as if his hopes and feelings were of no account.

It was of this Clegg was thinking as he came along the path, and so engrossed was he in his thoughts that he failed to hear the swift rustle amid the foliage, and so the attack took him completely by surprise when it came.

Before he could even look round a piece of rough sacking was whirled round his head and face, and the next moment he went crashing down into the ferns and grass.

It was easier than Racke had even hoped for. The sudden swift assault and the fall had scattered Clegg’s wits for the moment, and before he even thought of struggling he was pinned down and rendered practically helpless.

In a flash the rascally junior was running through the

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captive's pockets with desperate haste, but he was doomed to disappointment.

Save for a handkerchief, a pocket-knife, and a purse, Clegg's pockets held nothing, and Racke gritted his teeth with chagrin and dismay.

By this time Clegg had recovered himself, and was struggling and fighting furiously to break free.

"Buck up, you fool!" hissed Crooke, hanging on desperately to one of Clegg's flaying arms. "Any luck?"

"No go!" muttered Racke savagely. "Run for it!"

It was wise advice under the circumstances, for Clegg was proving more than a handful for the four slackers. And with one accord they sprang up and dashed after Racke at top speed.

As they did so Walter Clegg jumped dazedly up, tearing at the sacking round his head. But a cord had been twisted round it, and by the time he had extricated himself the crashing noise of his assailants' retreat had died away, and silence reigned in the woods.

Gasping and panting—for the sacking had almost suffocated him—the junior gazed about him, bewildered and dazed.

What the attack meant he hadn't the faintest idea. It could scarcely have been an attack by footpads. At the thought his hands flew to his pockets, for he remembered having felt hands fumbling with his clothing.

But nothing had gone! What did it mean? He had seen nor heard nothing clearly, and he could not even guess. And then his eyes fell on the cap on the grass, and he grinned faintly as he understood—or imagined he did.

So it was a Grammarian rag—though it seemed a senseless sort of rag!

Clegg picked up the cap and looked at it. It was a very old cap, and bore no name. It had been captured during an affray with the Grammarians at some time or other, though Clegg was far from guessing that.

The cap was of no use to Clegg, so he dropped it where he had found it, and was about to walk on when he saw something else lying among the ferns.

It was a pocket wallet—an expensive thing that must have cost pounds to buy. Clegg recognised it in a flash. He picked it up and whistled below his breath.

"So—so it was Racke!" he breathed. "Racke and his pals! That's his wallet, anyway. What the thump does this mean?"

He was more bewildered than ever now. Racke had obviously dropped the wallet unknowingly during that brief struggle. Either one of his Grammarian pals had been with him, or else the cap was just a blind.

Clegg placed the wallet in his blazer pocket, and after he had brushed himself down he started for St. Jim's. And as he walked his brain was busy on the problem—a problem that mystified him completely. Why had Racke made that amazing attack upon him? He had not struck a blow, or taken anything from him that he was aware of. A vague feeling of uneasiness took possession of the new fellow.

CHAPTER 9.

A Staggering Elow!

"ROTTEN!"

"Beastly rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wotten, bai, Jove!"

And it was "rotten."

The Grammarian match was over and the Grammarian brake had driven away. Tom Merry and his fellow cricketers, surrounded by a crowd of Lower School fellows, were wending their way towards the school from Little Side, and their faces were glum.

And no wonder! As Racke had opined, the loss of Clegg and Clive from the team had put St. Jim's "in the soup." Not being wanted—or believing he was not wanted—Sidney Clive had gone over to Wayland with Levison. And as Clegg had not turned up Tom had been forced to play Herries.

Herries was a steady bat and a useful field, but he did not shine as a bowler—and it was a bowler Tom was short of. And through being short of bowlers St. Jim's had lost the match by 55 runs.

It was no wonder that the juniors were feeling glum.

But there was more than glumness in their faces; there was anger—fierce anger against the fellow whom they believed had let them down.

"We'd have just about scraped through if Clive had been playing. I fancy!" grunted Tom Merry, his eyes glinting. "Oh, that rotten outsider! Wait until I see the cad!"

"Wonder where on earth he's cleared off to?" said Blake. "He surely wouldn't have the nerve to play for the dashed village after letting us down!"

"If he has," said Tom through his teeth, "it's the last chance he ever gets of playing for St. Jim's—demon bowler or no demon bowler. We want fellows we can rely on—not cads who play dirty tricks and leave us in the lurch!"

"Yaas, wathah! I am vevy disappointed in that fellow, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It serves you jolly well right, Tom Merry!" growled Grundy. "If you'd taken my advice this wouldn't have happened!"

"I don't know you offered any advice, Grundy," said Torr, staring.

"I advised you to play me, didn't I?" snorted Grundy. "If you'd done that—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Tom crossly. "I'm not in the mood for your funny remarks."

"Look here—"

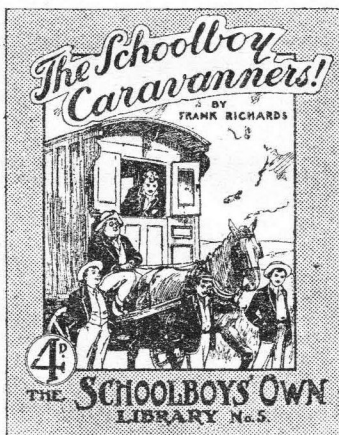
Grundy's wrathful remarks were interrupted by Manners.

"Here's Clegg now!" he said quickly.

All eyes turned towards the gates. It was Clegg right enough, and as he came across the quad Tom Merry went towards him, his face hard. The rest of the St. Jim's team followed him.

"Well, Clegg," began Tom, his lips setting as he noted the new fellow was still in flannels, "why didn't you turn up for the match?"

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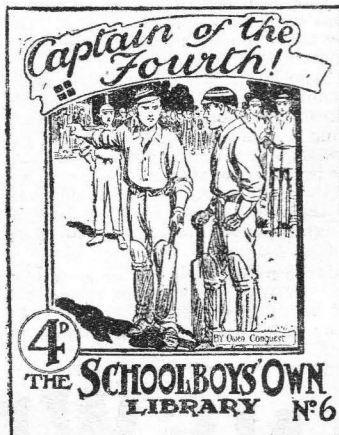
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Walter Clegg stared in some surprise at the circle of angry faces.

"I don't know what you mean, Merry," he said curtly. "Why should I have turned up at the match. You dropped me at the last moment, and so I've kept my word with Grimes."

It was Tom Merry's turn to stare. "I dropped you!" he repeated. "What on earth do you mean? I did nothing of the sort, Clegg. You were down to play, and you failed to turn up, you cad! You've lost St. Jim's the match!"

"Have you played for the village, then?" demanded Blake warmly.

"Yes, of course I have!"

"Then you're a rotten cad!" said Tom hotly. "You've put the village before your own school, and you've lost us the match!"

Clegg looked bewildered for a moment, and then his jaw set.

"Look here, Merry!" he snapped. "Not so much of the cad, please! You knew I was going to play for Grimes before you asked me. I was going to drop them and play for you—"

"Then why didn't you?"

"Because of your note, of course!" said Clegg, staring at Tom. "You know perfectly well why not. I suppose you changed your mind again, and—"

"Note!" interrupted Tom sharply. "Who sent you a note?"

"You did. I found it on my study table just after you had gone this afternoon. You said you'd changed your mind after all, and was playing Clive. You also said I could buzz off and play for Grimes."

"I did?" ejaculated Tom.

"Of course you did!"

"And you expect me to believe that yarn?"

"Naturally, as you sent it."

Tom drew a deep breath.

"I neither wrote you a note, nor sent you one, Clegg," he said, his lip curling. "If that is the best excuse you can give you'd better dry up and leave it at that."

Clegg flushed to the roots of his hair. He was bewildered, but the looks of utter disbelief and scorn on the faces round him made him tremble with anger.

"You don't believe me, Merry?" he said thickly.

"Not likely! I wonder you have the cheek to hand me such an excuse," said Tom scornfully. "You wanted to play for the village, and rather than let Grimes down you've let the school down!"

"I tell you—"

"I want to hear no more," said Tom. "It's done with now, Clegg. But it's the last chance you'll get of playing for the school while I'm skipper! You can go and play for the village as much as you like!"

"I mean to!" said Clegg, his eyes gleaming. "I'm playing for them next week, too! It was—"

"You—you'll play for them next week?" exclaimed Tom, with a start. "You know they're playing us?"

"Yes," said Clegg defiantly. "If I can't play for the school I shall play for the village, and be hanged to the lot of you!"

There was an angry murmur, but Tom held up his hand.

"You'll have a rough time, Clegg, if you do!" he snapped. "Some of the fellows won't like you playing against St. Jim's in the circumstances, I'll warn you!"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, Tom Mewwy!"

"Rotten traitor!" snorted Grundy.

He would have rushed at the new fellow, but several juniors held him back.

"Let him come on if he wants to," gritted Clegg, his face dogged and defiant. "I've told you the truth; I've told you I had a note telling me I wasn't wanted to play. I—"

"Then where is it?" snapped Tom, eyeing him steadily. "Show us the note."

Clegg gave a sudden start, and then he went through his pockets quickly, taking the things out of them as he did so. He took out Racke's pocket-wallet quite openly, and as he did so several fellows gave startled exclamations. But he slipped it instantly back again, realising the note was not there.

"I—I must have chucked it away," he muttered lamely. "I had it when I left St. Jim's this afternoon, though. I fancy I—"

He stopped abruptly, startled by the strange looks on the juniors' faces.

"I didn't expect you to find it," said Tom Merry quietly. "There never was a note, Clegg. But—but does Racke know you've got his wallet, Clegg?"

Clegg stared at him blankly, and then he flushed scarlet. He understood instantly why the fellows were looking at him in that way. Everyone in the Lower School knew Racke's wallet by sight. Racke always had plenty of money, and he

was proud of his money, and he was always letting other fellows see his money out of sheer swank. Every fellow present had recognised Racke's wallet, and every fellow present was wondering how it came to be in the possession of his cousin—of his bitter enemy.

But though he realised what the fellows must be thinking, and though the thought filled him with burning rage and indignation, he kept his anger under with a mighty effort.

"No," he said, a trifle shakily. "Racke doesn't know. But I can easily explain how I got it. I found it—"

"You found it?"

"Yes. When I was coming through the woods just now I was attacked by some fellows—goodness knows what for. They shoved a sack over my head, and I didn't see them. Then they left me, and"—said Clegg, taking the wallet from his pocket—"I found this on the path. Racke must have been one of the fellows who attacked me, and he dropped this."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, what a yarn!"

That last was the voice of Mellish of the Fourth; but for once there were plenty to echo Mellish's derisive remark. Even Clegg himself realised how feeble and tame his explanation sounded.

Tom Merry himself was dumbfounded. The story sounded so utterly weak and unconvincing that he could not possibly accept it. If it was untrue, then—

"My hat!" he gasped. "You—you expect us to believe that yarn also, Clegg?"

"Of course I do!" shouted Walter Clegg fiercely. "Why, you—you—"

He broke off, suddenly catching sight of Racke's white face on the fringe of the crowd. Racke had only just come up, but he had come in time to hear Clegg's explanation, and he was stunned and terrified. At that instant Tom Merry also saw Racke, and he called to him.

Racke pushed his way through the crowd, his face white as chalk. He had already seen the wallet in his cousin's hand, and he realised what had happened. It was all up now. Clegg had proof—proof that he was one of the fellows who had attacked him. He thought that Clegg would succeed in producing the note, and that the fellows would guess all the rest. He determined to bluff the thing through.

"Look here, Racke," said Tom Merry quietly. "Were you aware that your cousin had your wallet in his possession?"

"Of—of course I wasn't!" he stammered. "Why, how—"

"I don't know why or how," snapped Tom, staring hard at the new fellow's pale face. "He's already spun a yarn over letting us down on the match, and now he's spun another yarn to account for that wallet being in his pocket. If he found it, then why can't he tell us something we can swallow?"

Racke drew a deep, deep breath. He understood now—understood that Clegg had not got the note. If he had why hadn't he produced it? They were safe, then!

And as the thought struck him it brought another thought—one that almost took his breath away. All at once he saw why the fellows were all staring so curiously at his cousin—may, suspiciously! They thought it curious and suspicious that Clegg should have his wallet in his possession.

What a chance! What a chance to strike a deadly blow at his cousin's honour! What a chance to make him an out-cast—a fellow scorned and shunned by all. It might even lead to his hated cousin being expelled—expelled in shameful disgrace.

The temptation came to Racke in a flash, and he decided in a flash. It was now or never—now when his cousin was already unpopular, in disgrace with his fellows. He would strike while the iron was hot.

He steeled himself for the game of bluff.

Stepping forward he took the wallet from his cousin's hand. "How did you come to have this in your possession, Clegg?" he said, speaking quietly. "I missed it this morning. I've been hunting everywhere for it. You must know it's mine!"

Clegg looked at him—a look that made the rascally junior shrink.

"You know where I found it better than I do," he said, through his teeth.

Tom Merry looked from one to the other, utter dismay and amazement in his eyes. The affair was beginning to take a grave turn now—he realised that only too well.

"Is that the truth, Racke?" he asked quietly. "Did you miss the wallet this morning?"

"Yes," said Racke, assuming a distressed tone. "I was afraid this sort of thing would happen, Merry. I knew the fellow I was dealing with better than you fellows. How did it come out?"

(Continued on page 28.)

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BIFF! BANG! THUD!

And that's how Big Ben Derby's fists thumped home upon the body of the man-killing negro!

The BLACK DIAMOND!

An Exciting Boxing Story.

BY
LOUIS ALFRISTON.



CHAPTER 1.

A Willing Lad!

EXCITEMENT ran high in the training quarters at the Happy Huntsman, near Dorking. Big Ben Derby, the willing lad from Yorkshire, had won his first fight—the one against the brutal but unscientific Butcher Black, and with a little to spare.

After his first success his patron, young Lord Keyingham, was anxious to give him a trial that would display exactly how good the lad really was. He had rather more than a shrewd idea that in the young Yorkshireman he had a heavy-weight who, with teaching, was going to make boxing history.

In this opinion he was backed by Pa Doble, the proprietor of Funland, the East End Home of Boxing. Pa, indeed, had been the first person to discover Ben, and, taking a fancy to his "willingness," and quiet and modest manners, had provided the purse for the contest with Butcher Black.

Little Cocky Withers, the perky little light-weight, who was Ben's tried friend and inseparable companion, held an opinion of the new heavy-weight equally high. The two shared the same training quarters at the Happy Huntsman, where boxing together daily as they did, Cocky was in a position to judge of Ben's exact merits.

"He's not a world-beater yet, by a long way," he remarked one morning to Lord Keyingham, when the latter had called for a chat. "He's a bit slow, and sometimes before he puts his right over he threatens with it so long that he might just as well send a postcard to say that it is shortly due to arrive."

Pa Doble, who also was present, nodded his wise old head.

"I noticed that when he fought the Butcher," he remarked. "He is slow, but"—here Pa sank his voice impressively—"just sometimes he flashes out a burst of speed that reminds me of Jem Mace at his best."

"How do you account for it?" asked Lord Keyingham.

"I'll tell you," said Pa slowly. "It's the guards and punches he's been taught that he's slow with. 'Ought I to use this now?' he asks himself, and first he

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answers 'Yes,' and then he answers 'No,' and then he says 'Yes' again. By that time the chap he's fighting has either danced away out of distance or let loose a punch."

"I shouldn't wonder but that you're right," broke in Cocky Withers at this. "I've noticed it in sparring practice."

Pa nodded again.

"Sure!" he agreed. "It's plain as suet pudding. It's the times when something happens where he hasn't been taught what to do; when he's forced to rely on himself, where he shows his speed. That tells me he's one of those natural fighters that only have to be taught how to hit straight, and then left to find out the rest for themselves as they go along."

Lord Keyingham turned to Cocky Withers.

"Try him out like that," he suggested, "and see how he goes on."

Cocky nodded; the plan struck him as a good one.

"Very good, my lord," he agreed.

"Let me know in, say, a week's time, how he's getting on," instructed Lord Keyingham. "I'm wondering," he added slowly, and it must be confessed somewhat hesitatingly, "what sort of a chance he'd stand against the Black Diamond." He hesitated for a moment. "The offer came from a 'Syndicate.'" He smiled. "And I've a pretty good notion as to who is behind that 'Syndicate,'" he added grimly.

It took a lot to startle Pa Doble. He had been connected with boxing and boxers all his life, and thus was accustomed to shocks. But if there was anything in reference to the noble art capable of causing him surprise, it was the suggestion of putting a man, who, however good and willing, was, after all, but little more than a novice, against a trained and experienced pugilist such as the negro who had just landed from America.

"That wouldn't be a fight at all," he said decidedly.

Lord Keyingham raised his eyebrows. "No?" he questioned. "What then?"

"Murder!" said Pa decidedly. "If he was lucky Ben would be knocked out in the first round. And if he lasted longer he'd get such a hammering he'd never be any more use. His heart would be

broken before he fairly got started in the game."

"That's all right, Pa," said Lord Keyingham quietly. "In the ordinary way I shouldn't dream of making the match. As you say, it would mean the finish of a promising career." A slow smile that was full of meaning gleamed for a moment across his face. "But in this case," he added slowly, "I'm not so sure. A piece of information has come to my knowledge that may put rather a different light on the subject."

"You'll have to know a lot before Ben's fit to fight the Black Diamond," remarked Pa emphatically.

"It depends on how he gets on, of course," said Lord Keyingham. He turned to Cocky. "I'll be here a week to-day," he said, "at eleven o'clock. Have Ben in the ring. In the meanwhile don't say anything to him about the possibility of a match."

In the interval before their patron's reappearance Cocky worked long and hard with Ben Derby. He attempted to teach him no new tricks or guards, allowing him to go his own way and develop his natural style. All Cocky did was to pull out every trick, dodge, and shift he knew, in the hope the other would be able to deal with them.

And after a time, and in his own fashion, deal with them Ben did. It was necessary, of course, for Cocky to go through the same movements time after time before the big Yorkshireman could discover how best to answer it, but once this was discovered, however unexpectedly the same attack might be launched again, he never forgot the reply. And what from the smaller man's point of view was still more to the point, the speed with which this was accomplished was remarkable. At the end of that week by fighting on his own lines Ben was better by half than he was before.

Lord Keyingham was delighted with the progress made. So, too, was Pa Doble.

"But he isn't in the same class as the Black Diamond by the length of a street," he observed, quite forgetful of Ben's presence. "Give him another three months and you might think of it. As he is now, as soon as he gets in the ring with the nigger it'll be Biff! Bang! Wallop! and Ben'd see more stars than

all the astronomers in the world put together. The next thing he'd know he'd be in the hospital."

Here Ben himself broke in: "Who is the Black Diamond?" he demanded.

Lord Keyingham turned quickly. "A man I may want you to box," he said. "That is, of course," he qualified hastily, "if you'd care for the job."

Ben grinned his usual amicable grin. "Anyone you want me to box, my lord," he said, "I'll be glad to accommodate. I'm a willing lad."

Lord Keyingham smiled in response. "You hear what Pa here says?" he replied. "And even with what I know, I'm not sure but what he's not right. Keep on working for a week or two, and we'll talk about it again. In the meanwhile, I'll send you down a sparring partner at your own weight."

A few days later the new addition arrived, a tall, hard-hitting heavy-weight, with a lightning delivery, who had forgotten more about the art of boxing than nine out of ten men of his weight had ever known. But for what is known as a "glass jaw," and a body that was unable to withstand even moderate punishment, Tommy Chambers would have been champion of the world. As it was, although his pluck was magnificent, his constitution was too fragile for the hard give-and-take of the ring. As matters stood he was the ideal sparring partner for Ben Derby.

A fortnight after Tommy Chambers' arrival Ben could hardly be recognised as the same man who had fought and defeated Butcher Black.

"Not much of the novice about him now," remarked Lord Keyingham, with a smile of satisfaction. "Anyway, I'm going to match him against the Black Diamond."

**CHAPTER 2.
A Queer Coon!**

PA, thoughtfully appreciating Ben's improvement, still looked dubious. "It depends upon what this thing is you say you know," he observed.

Lord Keyingham linked his arm through that of the old man, and drew him cautiously aside. For a full five minutes the two remained in conversation, Lord Keyingham speaking earnestly and emphatically.

"Very good, my lord," Pa Dobble said at last. "If what you say is right, we may be able to bring home the bacon. But, believe me, we're on no soft job. Ben'll have to be all out from the word 'Go' with his training. And the chief thing we've got to give him is bellows. We've got to get him so that if each round lasted three hours, instead of three minutes, he wouldn't turn a hair. Wind and footwork. Don't forget the footwork." He ceased speaking, as though in thought. "Another thing," he went on at last. "We've got to have another sparring partner."

Lord Keyingham wheeled sharply. Training for his last fight, Ben had been sent a sparring partner who was in the pay of Lord Barnston, Lord Keyingham's bitterest enemy, and but for the shrewdness of little Cocky Withers, that fight never would have taken place.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "What's wrong with Chambers?"

"Nothing he can help," replied Pa reassuringly. "He's a real useful lad is Tommy, and doing Ben all kinds of good. The only trouble is that, for fear of hurting him, Ben plays so light that if we're not careful he'll lose his punch. What we want as well as Tommy is a chap who can take anything Ben sends

over same as if it was a present from mother."

"Good!" said Lord Keyingham. "I'll send him Nutty Gould."

Pa nodded gleefully. "That's the chap," he agreed.

"Nutty'll let Ben hammer him for an hour by the clock, and the harder Ben hammers the more Nutty'll like it. I've heard it said that any scrapper who wants to put the Black Diamond down for the count's got to have a horseshoe in one glove and a ton of Portland cement in the other; and for training to beat an armour-plated coon like that Nutty'll fill the bill all the way."

Which, indeed, proved actually the case. About as broad as a pair of gates, as hard as a whippet tank, and as good-natured as a pet spaniel, for the first few days it seemed as though the greatest pleasure of Nutty's life was to be hit hard and often.

And, as always, anxious to oblige, Ben put all his strength and timing behind every punch. Nutty's ideas of boxing were not up to much; he was just a human punching-bag.

With every bout they had Ben's hitting powers increased, and, owing to constant practice with Tommy Chambers, his speed also, until the time came when even the ironclad Nutty began to wilt under the strain.

At last came the afternoon when, with a fair and square punch to the mark, Ben knocked him out. It was a full minute by Cocky Withers' watch before Nutty was able to sit up and take notice.

"Was I hit," he demanded, with a rueful grin on his flattened countenance, "or did a town-hall fall on me?"

Cocky helped the battered pugilist to his feet.

"Just a bit of Ben's Yorkshire pudding," he explained breezily.

"It sure wasn't Yorkshire relish," murmured Nutty. "That's the first time ever I was knocked out. That feller Ben isn't a human man at all; he's a kicking mule!"

Thus, then, was both speed and power developed in Lord Keyingham's rising young heavy-weight.

The day came when, after a trial trip before his patron, Ben was pronounced fit in every way to meet the Black Diamond, an opinion that was seconded even by the more cautious Pa Dobble.

After Ben's rub down, and when he had changed once more into his ordinary clothes, Lord Keyingham drew Ben and Cocky into the private parlour at the back of the bar, and, with Pa Dobble as equally interested auditor, laid his cards on the table. When both information and instructions were at an end, the latter brought his hand down to his thigh with a resounding slap that echoed through the little room like a falling roof, accompanying the action with a great shout of delight.

"If what you say is right, m'lord," he exclaimed, "we've got 'em stone cold!"

Lord Keyingham turned to Ben and Cocky.

"You understand?" he said warningly. "The negro's coming down to the Rising Falcon, which is only about a mile down the road from here, to train. Watch him, and let him know you're watching him. And"—even in the absolute privacy of the parlour he lowered his voice cautiously—"see that you play your parts well. Don't let him suspect that all is not as it seems."

Cocky Withers was guilty of an understanding wink. Ben, his straightforward soul a little puzzled, even now, at the need for deception, did his best to look as knowing as his friend.

"Can you trust Chambers and Gould?" demanded Lord Keyingham.

Both Ben and Cocky nodded emphatically, the latter, as usually was the case, speaking for the pair of them.

"Yes," he said. "They're both lads who won't open their mouths too wide."

"Good!" exclaimed the patron, as though satisfied with their judgment. "Tell them just as much as is necessary, without, of course, revealing the plan."

His expression grew momentarily grave, and there was a light in his eyes that transformed his rather mild face into one of quiet resolution.

It may be remarked, incidentally; that in the sporting world of London there



"I don't think it is much of a good thing putting a novice like Ben Derby against a man-killer like the Black Diamond," said Cocky Withers dubiously. Barney Logan smiled. "Man-killer!" he said scornfully. "Why, the terrible Black Diamond is the biggest wash-out in the game!"

was more than one member of the happy band of brothers who are ever on the look-out for a "mug" who, trading on that same mild expression, had set out, with confident smiles, to separate Lord Keyingham from a little easy money. It may be remarked also, however, that there had never yet been one of these enterprising brotherhood who had been known to try it a second time.

"This will be the fourth round in the duel with my Lord Barnston," murmured Lord Keyingham, and there was that in his voice which spoke of a purpose as grim as it was resolute. "The first time the honours, if such they may be called, went to him; the second and third time he was beaten pretty badly." He broke into a smile that was grimmer, even, than his voice. "This time he's going to get it good and hard," he concluded.

"Just where the chicken got the chopper!" exclaimed the irrepressible Cocky. "In the neck!"

A week later the negro, accompanied by his sparring partners, arrived at the Rising Falcon; though it was not until two or three days later that Ben or Cocky actually caught sight of him.

They were legging it at their usual five and a half miles an hour training-walk, when they happened to pass the rival training quarters.

The negro, who was wielding the skipping-rope rather ponderously on the lawn in front of the inn shouted a greeting.

"Say!" he called. He was a huge six-footer who looked as though a course of training was about the best thing that could happen to him, and he was twirling his skipping-rope in leisurely fashion as he spoke. "Dis sure is a real hot day for trainin'!"

Cocky nudged Ben, and the latter, taking his cue, called back feelingly: "It is that!"

The negro edged nearer. "Couldn't you two fellers give a drink a good home on a hot day like dis?" he asked insinuatingly. "You've only to say the word an' I'll get the boss to bring it along."

Cocky, while thanking him effusively for the offer, declined, though with apparent reluctance.

"We have ours a bit later," he explained regretfully, omitting to say how much later.

The big negro's hands strayed absently to his pocket, from which he produced a black, juicy-looking cigar, which, after sticking into a corner of his enormous mouth, he duly lighted. Then with a grin that seemed to open his face as if it was on hinges, turned on his heel and went back into the house.

"And that's that!" remarked Cocky Withers, after the door had slammed. "Come on, Ben!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Funny Business!

THE following day Lord Keyingham arrived at the Happy Huntsman with a piece of news that was the cause of intense satisfaction to the "stable."

"Who do you think our coloured friend has got down as sparring-partner?" he demanded.

Cocky Withers pricked up his ears. "I don't know, my lord," he said interestedly.

"My old friend Barney Logan," said their patron. "The man with the worst reputation of any middleweight in the game."

Cocky nodded understandingly. He had heard stories of the redoubtable Barney he was not likely to forget.

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"I know about him," he said. "He's so crooked that if he was to suck a ten-inch nail he'd spit out a corkscrew."

"That's the chap!" said Lord Keyingham. "No one will give him a job, because he always makes a point of selling his man to the other side. Unless, of course, his own side pays him best," he added, after a pause. He looked intently and with meaning into Cocky's face. "Do you get the idea?" he asked at last.

"You mean," said Cocky slowly, "that it won't be long before he pays a visit to the Happy Huntsman?"

"That," confirmed Lord Keyingham, "is exactly what I do mean."

And to the surprise of Ben Derby, to whose simple brain the conversation might just as well have been carried on in Greek, the prophecy was justified within three days, for sure enough Barney Logan made his appearance.

He was a tall, slight lad, who at first sight, and to those who did not trouble to look beneath the surface, seemed a pleasant-looking chap enough. But to Cocky, who in his way was a pretty good judge of men, there was something in Barney's smile that was a little too good to be true, and a reluctance to meet his glance in the rather shallow eyes that created a by no means favourable impression.

"Just called to pass the time of day, neighbourly like," announced Barney, with his wide smile. "No use in being bitter enemies just because we're standing in opposite corners of the ring. Let the best man win, an' no ill-feelin'. That's my motto!"

Now it is a thing almost unheard of for those engaged in rival boxing-camps to exchange visits, and none knew this better than Cocky. That Barney had not called just out of good fellowship he was perfectly aware; and as to what the actual motive was could give a pretty accurate guess.

However he concealed his knowledge in a more or less welcome grin, as he returned the other's greeting.

"Besides," said Barney, with his eyes darting restlessly here and there about the gymnasium, "you've no need to be stand-offish."

It struck Cocky that what he had been waiting for was on the point of arriving. So, to be sure of not putting Barney off, he affected innocence.

"Oh?" he said. "Why?"

Barney smiled in more friendly fashion, even, than before.

"You're on a good thing!" he announced.

It had come!

By that one speech Cocky knew that the enemy was delivered into his hands—or, rather into the hands of Lord Keyingham, his friend and patron.

"I don't see that it's much of a good thing putting a novice like Ben Derby against a man-killer like the Black Diamond," he returned, shaking his head dubiously.

Barney broke into a short, derisive laugh.

"Man-killer!" he repeated scornfully. "Black Diamond a man-killer!"

He turned suddenly to face Cocky. "Man-killer nothing," he went on. "Black Diamond may have been a number one mit-slinger some time 'way back before the Flood, but now—" He paused; and when he spoke again punctuated each syllable by tapping Cocky's shoulder with a not very recently washed fore-finger. "The—Terrible—Black—Diamond—is—the—biggest—wash-out—in—the game!" he said, slowly and deliberately. "A back-number, and a ham!"

"You can tell that to the marines!" remarked Cocky, with an incredulous laugh. "The Black Diamond's record of knock-outs wasn't won by a dud!"

He turned round and faced the other with well-simulated anger. "You're wasting your time here!" he exclaimed. "Go back to your own camp and say we're not such mugs as to slack off in our training on account of a trumped-up yarn like that!"

He turned away, shrugging his shoulders disgustedly.

"Honest!" Barney followed him up, arresting him. "If you don't believe me, send one of the lads over to have a look for yourselves."

Cocky turned slowly to face him.

"If what you say is true," he said slowly, "you're double-crossing your own side. In either case I don't see where the honesty comes in!"

Barney's face flushed, and his shifty eyes dropped.

"It's true enough, anyway," he muttered. "I wouldn't have told you if the Diamond had treated me right. He promised me ten pounds a week, and—well, I haven't got it! I've just got to look after myself now, and when you've proved what I've said I guess you won't see me a loser."

The little light-weight remained for a moment as though studying the matter from all its aspects.

"Could I come and have a look at the Diamond without him knowing anything?" he asked at length.

Barney's face lighted into eagerness.

"Sure!" he exclaimed. "Listen!

The Diamond does his training—what there is of it—between eleven and twelve in the shed that looks out on the yard in front, and on to the paddock at the back. Don't come by the yard way—come by the field. There's a big knot-hole in the wood. If you glue your eye to this you can see all that goes on inside."

Cocky turned away.

"Very good," he said quietly. "I'll come to-morrow. And if what you say's true, I'll see that Lord Keyingham doesn't forget you."

After the boxer from the rival camp had gone, Cocky hurried to Ben with the news.

"It all fits in with what his lordship said, like the paper on the wall," he said gleefully. And then, rather anxiously: "Do you think you can manage to play your part?" he inquired.

"I'd sooner everything was plain sailing and above board," Ben said moodily. "A straight fight and no favours asked or granted is my motto. On the other hand, if there's any funny work, I suppose I've got to do my best. I'm a willing lad."

Although Cocky liked the game they were forced into playing as little as did the honest Yorkshireman, he made no comment on the other's attitude.

"If you can win this fight," was what he said, "you'll be doing something to keep the game clean. Remember that. It's worth a little play-acting."

"I'll do my best," said Ben.

The following morning saw Cocky peering closely at the coloured man's training stunts through a knot-hole in the shed.

The first thing he noticed was that the negro went through what exercises he accomplished with a long black cigar in his mouth, and at the finish he was puffing like a grampus.

But it was in the three rounds of boxing he had with Barney Logan that he showed up the worst. Apart from his poor condition, whatever knowledge of boxing he had ever possessed he had forgotten. On the form the negro showed that day Ben Derby could have beaten him with one hand.

Cocky returned to the Happy Huntsman, with a feeling of intense satisfaction. Everything was working to plan.

And when the next day Barney Logan called, Cocky had no hesitation in saying so.

"If that's the Terrible Black Diamond," he wound up, "then Ben Derby is good enough to fight Jack Dempsey!"

"The Diamond's gone all to pieces," confirmed Barney. "He had an illness no one knew anything about. When he got better and came to put the gloves on, he'd forgotten all he'd ever known."

"Must have done!" assented Cocky. He glanced across at Ben who was slamming away at the punch-ball. "I shouldn't bother so much about that stuff if I were you, Ben," he called out.

Then he turned once more to the visitors.

"No good him sweating to a shadow to knock out a man he could whip in his sleep," he explained confidentially.

"It sure isn't!" agreed Barney, a gleam in his eyes that Cocky did not fail to note.

Hereafter, during the interval before the fight, there could be no doubt in Barney's mind but that the opposition camp was taking things easy. When Ben passed the Rising Falcon on his training walks it was no longer at five and a half miles an hour. More often than not it was just a quiet stroll, and always he had a cigarette in his mouth. When Barney called at the Happy Huntsman, too, only rarely was Ben attempting to do any work; usually he was not even changed for the gymnasium. Lying back in an easy-chair with a cigarette and a morning paper seemed more in his line than the strenuous routine of a training camp.

CHAPTER 4.

Double-Crossed!

THE big hall of Funland, the East End Home of Boxing, was packed to the doors when Ben and his three supporters presented themselves on the night of the contest. A fight between heavy-weights always attracted a bigger crowd than one contested by men of lighter weight, and in the present case there had been so many conflicting rumours as to the terms of the match and the conditions of the rival boxers that the fight was more than usually well patronised.

The Happy Huntsman contingent, however, made their way to the room reserved for them by a private entrance. As far as possible they were anxious to avoid observation. For that reason they gave instructions that, apart from Lord Keyingham and Pa Dobbie—who was the proprietor of the hall—no one was to be admitted under any pretext.

When at last a knock came to the door, and a loud summons told them that all was ready for the big event, Tommy Chambers and Nutty Gould went at once to the ring with the bucket, waterbottle, and towels.

Cocky and Ben, however, made no move. So long, in fact, did they wait, that at last the same voice, a little angry now, told them that the Black Diamond was becoming impatient.

Then, and only then, did the two pass out of their dressing-room, and, climbing the steps of the ring, ducked under the ropes.

Lord Keyingham hardly gave them a glance. It was upon Lord Barnston, who, accompanied by his paid tout, "Doc" Bludgeon, and occupying a seat near by, that his gaze was fixed.

And he saw what he had hoped to witness, that for which he had aimed. He saw the cold, aristocratic face of his

enemy, as his glance fell upon Ben, become suddenly strained and rigid, observed how the cold eyes flickered and fell away, and then, re-focussed on Ben, and then became fixed in a stare of mingled incredulity and rage he attempted, with only partial success, to mask.

For never had a boxer appeared in better condition than Ben Derby. On the whole of his lithe, compact frame there was not a single ounce of superfluous fat; his skin, under which the mobile muscles moved freely in smooth, undulating ripples of supreme and perfectly controlled power, gleamed white and smooth as satin; his eye was clear, his step as light and springy as that of a young girl. As Ben stepped into the ring that night he was fit to fight for a kingdom.

Removing his gaze from Ben, Lord Barnston turned to "Doc" Bludgeon, who, with goggling eyes, was staring open-mouthed at Ben, as though the latter was some strange, impossible creature who had strayed into the hall from some other world.

"I'll deal with him later for this!" Lord Barnston said to him; and, coming through teeth close-clenched, the

so bitter as that of the rogue unjustly accused.

For the first time in their association he turned on Lord Barnston savagely.

"You mean I've double-crossed you?" he demanded.

Lord Barnston nodded.

"Obviously," he said coolly. "I have only to look at Ben Derby to see that!" When he raised the match to light the cigar he had produced a moment previously Doc saw that the slim white hand was trembling. "Even if you have not 'double-crossed' me, as you call it, you have proved yourself incompetent. And as I do not permit inefficiency, I have no further use for your services," he concluded, with the same deadly intensity he had used throughout.

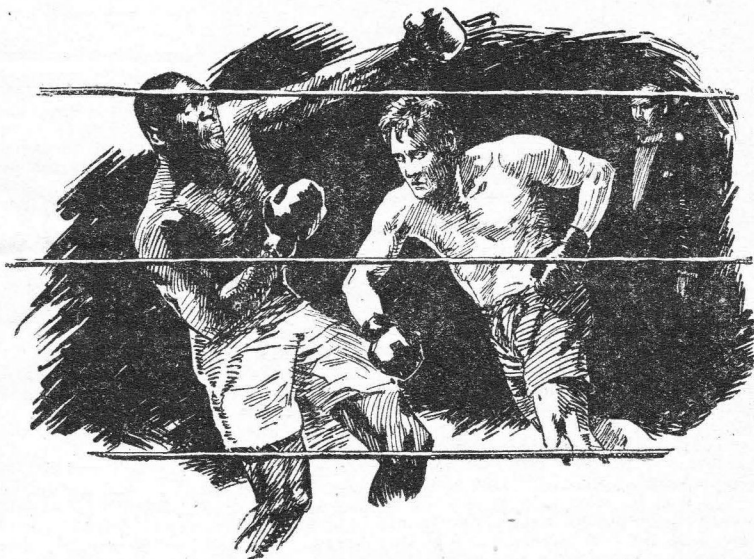
"You mean I'm sacked?" snarled Bludgeon.

"I mean precisely that," said Lord Barnston.

His evil face livid, his features working convulsively, Doc Bludgeon rose.

"Very good, my lord!" he snarled. He stared leeringly into the eyes that met his own with such cold contemptuous purpose. "But, believe me, I'll get even before we're through!"

Without deigning to reply, Lord



Amazingly alert and strong now that the looked-for opportunity had come, Ben Derby hooked his right well and truly to the mark. The negro gasped with pain, and his great knees, no longer able to support his weight, gave way from under him!

accents struck upon "Doc's" ears as knife-edged and implacable, so that when he turned to his employer, his face was grey and fearful.

"I swear I didn't know!" he stammered. "Barney told me he was smoking and drinking and as fat as a pig—assured me of it both in his written reports and by word of mouth."

"Did you make sure of it yourself?" demanded the other icily.

Bludgeon mournfully shook his head. "No, my lord," he admitted. "You kept me too busy—elsewhere. Someone has sold us."

"Evidently," said Lord Barnston, with a cold sneer. "But what you appear to forget is that I pay you to look after my interests. In this case, however," he added, with a meaning there was no mistaking, "it looks rather as though I have been outbidded."

Had it been profitable to do so, Doc Bludgeon would have betrayed his patron without hesitation.

Up to now it had paid him better to keep faith. There is, however, no rage

Barnston directed his glance to Ben, the man he had so heavily backed the Black Diamond to beat, and from Ben to the coloured pugilist himself.

And he was not the only one to centre his attention on the latter. An expression of amiable contempt on his good-humoured face, Ben, too, was staring at the negro.

But it was not at the same nigger who had idled his time away at the Rising Falcon!

This was the real Black Diamond, a personality far more formidable. This man was of huge frame and savage aspect; so fierce and menacing indeed that a heart less brave than Ben's would have shrunk instinctively from the task confronting it. There was something in the negro's manner, an aggressive knowledge of his own iron strength and endurance, and, more than all, the long record of victories that lay behind him, at which many a boxer of far more experience than the Yorkshireman had quailed. It was said that more than

half of the Black Diamond's opponents had been beaten before ever they had even entered the ring.

And yet, when his muddled eyes rested upon Ben, a close observer might have perceived that the black was not quite at his ease. He had been led to believe that his opponent would enter the ring hog-fat and unfit, because he had been bluffed into neglecting his training.

Examining Ben closely, and with the eyes of an expert, the Black Diamond could detect no trace of this neglect. There was something wrong somewhere.

And all the while Ben, in his turn, was just as closely examining the negro. The conclusion he came to was that the pretence of believing that the lounging nigger at the Rising Falcon was actually the Black Diamond, and that his own training had been neglected in the sense of security thus afforded, had done its work. The opposition had been caught in its own net. The one who, in the assurance of having an easy job on hand had not bothered to go into hard training, was not Ben, but the Black Diamond himself!

That Ben was not the only one to notice this was soon shown.

"Cast your eyes over the Diamond's waistline," said Cocky Withers. "He could lose a pound or two weight there without going into a decline, couldn't he? And look at his skin! No shine to it. And the dullness of his eyes. If you can make him dance round the ring for half a dozen rounds, you'll have him where you want him!"

It was on account of this sound advice that for the first two rounds the crowd gained the impression that Ben Derby didn't fancy his job—that he had a yellow streak!

With his opponent's splendid condition in mind, the negro made up his mind to get the job done quickly. It wouldn't take him long to clean up a guy who was just a raw novice. This, his first fight since landing in England, was going to be just a nice easy training stunt to get his hand and eye in before signing up for serious matches. He'd play with his man for three or four rounds, just to try-out his condition, and then, at the first hint of feeling tired, he'd bring the right over and put the big ham to sleep.

When he returned to his corner at the end of the first round, although he was blowing like a grampus, perspiring in streams, and in a towering rage, he had done little to put this plan into execution. Neither had he laid a glove on Ben Derby.

Acting on Cocky Withers' advice, Ben had "kept away." Never once, although the big black had chased him all round the ring, had Ben permitted him to come to really close quarters. The moment the latter came within striking distance Ben had danced merrily away, dodging, backing, or side-stepping.

That first round was more in the nature of a running match than a boxing contest.

So was the second round, when exactly the same happened as in the first. The Diamond went back to his corner more blown than ever.

In the third and fourth rounds Ben rather changed his tactics. During the first two minutes of each he still kept away. Then, when the negro began to hang out signals of distress, Ben allowed him to come close. By that time his previous exertions had had the effect of slowing him down, so that his punches, ponderous and man-killing as they were, came over so slowly that Ben had no trouble in getting out of their way. Meanwhile, he sent over one or two hefty

body punches that did the negro no good.

By the end of the sixth session the fight had become little better than a farce. By this time Ben had no hesitation at all in swapping punches with the negro. The Diamond's strength had fled with the exertions he had undergone. Those man-killing blows for which he was famous now lacked force. Ben, while careful to guard any that were directed at a vital spot, could take all the rest that came his way.

When the negro returned to his seconds at the end of the round, it was easy to see that, to all intents and purposes, the fight was finished.

Ben fought the Black Diamond all round the ring. There was no call from the crowd now concerning the Yorkshireman's yellow streak. On the contrary, they were on their hind legs, yelling their admiration. He was some lad, this new Yorkshireman!

In the last minute of the round the negro was too tired almost to lift his arms up to the fighting position.

But in the make-up of the born pugilist, and however badly things may be going, there is some latent reserve power upon which he can call. And just before the end the Black Diamond, in one desperate effort to stave off defeat, assembled every ounce of strength and energy he had left into one stupendous punch.

And because Ben, confident of victory, was for a moment off his guard, that punch got home just five seconds before the end of the round. Had it landed one solitary half-inch higher on the jaw the fight would have been over. Even the minute's rest would not have been sufficient to bring Ben to his senses. As it was it required all the combined skill of Cocky Withers, Tommy Chambers, and Nutty Gould to bring him up to the call of time.

Even then Ben had a bad time in that next round. Only the boxer's instinct enabled him to stave off disaster. The Diamond, as if refreshed by his success, came up surprisingly fresh, and, with the object of finishing matters before Ben could regain his strength, fought with the ferocity of a tiger.

The clamour in the hall was deafening. Nothing rouses a boxing audience so much as to see victory snatched from what looked like certain defeat. Shouts and cheers mingled in one overwhelming din of sound. And in the middle of it all, slowly but very surely, Ben's senses were returning. And here he displayed a cunning that, coming from one naturally so simple and straightforward, proved once and for all how splendidly he was adapted for the sport that gave him his livelihood.

It struck him suddenly to conceal his

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recovery. The more helpless he appeared, the more likely was the Diamond to become as careless as he himself had been. He kept an alert and wary eye for an opening to the body. The negro's jaw was of chilled steel. It was no use going for that.

At last his chance came. Ben was swaying, as though uncertain, in his own corner. The Diamond let loose a lightning left lead to the jaw, which, while avoiding by turning his head, as though to save himself Ben fell into a clinch.

The black was confident now that he had his man at his mercy. To come within striking distance of the jaw he raised both hands to Ben's shoulders to push him away. In so doing he left his body open.

Amazingly alert and strong now that the looked-for opportunity had come, Ben hooked his left well and truly to the mark. The negro gasped with the sudden spasm of pain and weakness, and stepped back half a pace. Then, simultaneously with the action, Ben shot over the right to exactly the same spot as before.

The Black Diamond great turned, his eyes rolling. Then his great knees, no longer able to support his weight, gave way slowly from under him, and he reached the canvas half kneeling, half lying.

From that position he did not move until after the fatal "ten" was counted and he was carried to his corner.

Ten minutes later, while Ben and his seconds, with whom were Lord Keyingham and Pa Dobbie, were changing from their ring kit, there came a knocking at the door. The nearest to it—Lord Keyingham—answered the summons. Opening the door, he found that Doc Bludgeon was standing outside.

"What do you want?" demanded Lord Keyingham curtly.

"Just a word with you, my lord," answered Doc quietly. "About the match to-night. You know now, I suppose, how Lord Barnston tried to put one over you by kidding that the coon at the Rising Falcon was the Black Diamond? It was by his instructions, too, that Barney Logan got Cocky Withers to see for himself, not only that the nigger wasn't training, but that he couldn't box for toffee, either."

Lord Keyingham gave him a look of utter contempt.

"If you think you're going to get money by betraying your employer you've come to the wrong market," he said curtly. "Particularly as I knew it all beforehand."

Bludgeon scowled.

"I don't want money!" he said savagely. "What I want is to get my own back. His lordship fired me because he said I'd double-crossed him over this here fight. And although I hadn't done anything of the kind then, so as not to disappoint him I'm double-crossing him now."

Lord Keyingham hesitated. Black-guard as the man was, in his present mood of resentment against his former employer he might well prove useful.

"What I can't get on to," Bludgeon continued, watching the other carefully, "is how you found out that the coon at the Rising Falcon wasn't the Black Diamond. At that time he'd only been in England a week, and no photograph had been published."

Lord Keyingham smiled grimly.

"Because," he said, "the day the plot was hatched Barney's brother Mike sold it to me for a five-pound note!"

(Look out for another of these splendid yarns, chums, entitled: "CHECKMATE!" By Louis Alfriston.)

Alone in the blackness of the mine, Dave makes an amazing discovery!



DAVE, THE PIT BOY!

By MAX HAMILTON.

A Thrilling Story of the Coal-Mines, dealing with the Exciting Adventures of the Young Hero of Wrexborough Pit—
DAVID STEELE.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

LEAVING the little North-country village of Thorpe Western, DAVID STEELE, an ambitious young lad of fifteen, decided to try his fortune in Wrexborough.

With a few shillings in his pocket, and with a tramp of thirty to forty miles to his destination, the sturdy country lad sets off.

Utterly tired out at night, the lad sought a sheltered place, into which he crept. But hardly had he dropped off to slumber when he was aroused by hurried movements near at hand. He was alert almost on the instant, and, on making investigations, found, to his horror, the bound figure of a man lying on the permanent-way at the mercy of an express train which was at that moment due. With great presence of mind, the lad dragged the inert form to safety just a fraction of a second before the great train rushed by.

But the perpetrators of the crime were returning; so, carrying the unconscious form, Dave took refuge beneath the arched stone bridge which carried the railway over a canal.

His presence was detected, however, and in an effort to escape the clutches of the unconscious man's assailants, Dave and his burden found themselves in the canal, sweeping helplessly through the arch and out into the open waters beyond.

Fortune was at hand, however, for the two were just able to scramble on board a barge which lay right across the canal. David then learned that he had rescued Mr. Scott, the owner of the Wrexborough coal-mines. David was offered a job in the mine, and gratefully accepted.

Mr. Scott's manner was very strange after that; for not only did he ask Steele to keep the whole affair a secret, but he also found the lad accommodation with a man named Markham, his own assailant!

Markham had recognised Steele, too, and had made many unsuccessful attempts to get the lad out of the way.

Later, by a strange coincidence, Steele gets wise to another plot to capture Scott. But he is unable to warn the mine-owner, for he is caught spying and made prisoner.

Scott, however, walks into the trap, and after a fierce struggle is made a prisoner also. A moment later a match is struck, and in the flutter of light Scott recognises his assailant to be none other than his brother George. But the rascally George's threats prove unavailing, and the mine-owner is shut up in a disused pit hundreds of feet beneath the earth.

Steele, however, is instrumental in erasing his captors, and gets on the track of Markham. He is following him along one of the galleries when, to his surprise and horror, he suddenly loses sight of his quarry and finds himself lost in the darkness of the mine.

(Now read on.)

A Strange Discovery!

DAVID STEELE'S heart stood still.

For an instant a horrible foreboding almost paralysed him, then, forgetting even his fear of Markham in his overwhelming sense of loneliness and darkness, he staggered forward as fast as the uneven nature of the ground would allow him.

"There must be another turning a little farther on. I shall see the light in a minute. I shall—I shall!" he muttered with dry lips.

But would that turning never come? The gallery seemed endless.

He felt it at last, an opening on his left—but felt it only. No sign of a light! Which way, then, had Markham gone?

His brain was reeling as he dashed across the tunnel. Yes, there was another opening on the right. There were three ways, then, either of which the miner might have taken.

To find his way back without a light through all the turnings and twistings of the disused mine was a sheer impossibility. His safety depended on discovering the man who was at once his enemy and his guide, and every moment's delay lessened his chance of overtaking him. In blind desperation he stumbled forward.

On and on he went. He thought no more of caution. Better that Markham should discover—ay, kill him—than that he should be left to wander through that blind and pitchy darkness, through endless turnings, until exhaustion overcame him, and he lay down to leave his bones where no man would ever discover them. The perspiration dripped from his forehead as he ran, falling now and again, and picking himself up, heedless of his bruises, to recommence his frantic chase.

"Markham!" he called at last, feeling as though it would be better to throw himself upon his enemy's mercy than to wait for death in a living tomb. "Markham!"

But no answer came to his despairing cry. It echoed along the gallery and died away slowly, as if in mockery of the boy's agony.

Again he began his hopeless journey—this time to find his way blocked by the fallen roof. Back he turned. But he was almost exhausted now—his limbs were trembling, and his breath came in long-drawn sobs. For some ten minutes or so he staggered onwards through the darkness, then he felt that his strength was failing him utterly. He had lost all hope that Markham was within hearing, but a last despairing cry for aid rose involuntarily to his lips.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Help! For mercy's sake, help!"

As the echo of his own accents died away he stood motionless, his heart thumping against his ribs, his every sense on the alert.

Had he or had he not been answered? Was he dreaming? Had his ears deceived him, or had he in truth heard a human voice give back an answering shout?

For a moment he stood thus, scarcely daring to hope or breathe. And then a cry, a cry of hope and relief, sprang to his lips.

There was no mistake. He had heard aright. A voice had answered him. He hurried forward in the direction from whence it seemed to come.

"Where are you?" he shouted. "Call again!"

Again the cry was repeated, sounding louder and louder as he went on, and, as it grew clearer, David felt a thrill of hope, as it was borne in upon him that the voice he heard was certainly not Markham's.

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Whose was it, then? Who else but Markham could be wandering about these gloomy, disused tunnels?

As the question flashed through his brain he reached an intersecting passage, and, to his unutterable joy, a streak of light met his eyes. Never was light more welcome to a human being than it was to David at that moment.

And, as he neared it, he saw that it was, in fact, a streak of light—such a streak as comes through the hinges of a door. More, it was a wooden door against which his fingers at length brushed, a door that yielded to his touch—the door, as he afterwards discovered, of what had formerly been one of the stables of the old mine.

Comparatively dim as was the light in this shed, it dazzled his eyes, so long accustomed to utter darkness. For the first moment he could not make out anything of his surroundings, and he stood blinking in the doorway until a cry of amazement fell upon his ears.

"Good heavens! David Steele!"

There was no mistaking that voice. And, as the mist cleared away from the boy's sight, he stared in utter astonishment at the figure before him.

On a rough bed, which was nothing more than a heap of straw, lay William Scott, his cheeks sunken, his eyes unnaturally large, his whole appearance telling of suffering and confinement. A jar of water and a hunk of bread were placed upon the floor beside him. The bare shed was lit by a lamp hanging from the roof, and by its light David perceived, as Scott started into a sitting posture, that a slight but strong-looking chain ran from his right wrist to a staple firmly secured into the wall.

"Mr. Scott!" he stammered, unable to believe his eyes.

"David, my dear lad! It does me good to see your face again. Thank Heaven, you have come! But how did you find out where I was? How did you manage to get here?" And the mine-owner stretched out a thin, wasted hand.

"I have been in a torment about you," Scott went on, "ever since that night—how long ago was it? I have lost all count of time. Whenever Markham has visited me I have implored him to tell me what they had done with you—whether you were still alive. But, I suppose by my brother's orders, he refused to give me an answer."

"Your brother!" cried David, a light breaking in upon him. "Then it is your brother that is living at Wrexborough, while he keeps you here—here!"

A New Danger!

"I SUPPOSE you are kept prisoner by your brother?" questioned David.

Scott nodded sadly.

"Yes," he said. "My enemy is my own brother George. It was he who tried to kill me on the railway-line; and he who, by a forged letter, purporting to come from a friend of mine, lured me to the old shaft!"

David stood thunderstruck. All that had appeared to him so incomprehensible in his employer's conduct was clear to him now.

"Do you wonder now," Scott went on bitterly, "that I wished to keep secret the horrible story of his attempt upon my life? But tell me, how did you find me out, David?"

In a few words as he could, David related his adventures—his tracking of Markham, and his horrible experiences in the darkness of the mine. When he had finished, Scott grasped his hand warmly.

"You are a plucky fellow, Dave," was all he said; but there was a heartfelt ring in his tone.

"It's lucky you did not come across Markham," he continued, after a moment's pause. "He had only left me about ten minutes before I heard your cry. He came to replenish my scanty stock of provisions"—and he pointed to the bread. "They keep me on pretty short commons, Dave. I suppose my brother thinks that by starving me he will get me down to his terms and wring the money he wants out of me. Whatever happens I cannot have a public scandal—I cannot denounce my brother."

"My father is dead, but my mother is still alive; and, David, she still hopes that George will one day reform. And I will not bring this fresh misery upon her if I can prevent it. I shall want you to help me to get out of this, my boy; but my escape and return to Wrexborough must be managed without compromising my brother. You understand?"

He broke off suddenly, and sat listening with a raised forefinger.

"Hush!" he whispered. "I hear footsteps! Markham is coming back!"

David sprang to the door with the intention of slipping away into the darkness.

"Too late!" whispered Scott, checking him with an anxious gesture.

He was right. The opening of the door would have revealed the boy's figure against the light in the shed for the whole length of the gallery.

The footsteps were growing nearer. There was not a moment to be lost.

David looked round the bare little shed. Its four walls—three of them of planking, the fourth formed by the rock face—offered not the faintest shadow of a hiding-place. Quickly his mind revolved the possibility of taking Markham by surprise and dashing past him as the door opened; but Scott cut his plans short.

"The straw, Dave," he whispered excitedly—"the straw! Quick—quick!"

David understood.

The prisoner's bed was nothing more nor less than a heap of straw. It was just possible that a boy of David's size might effectually conceal himself beneath it.

The idea had only occurred to Scott just in time. However, when the door was opened, nothing was visible of the boy, and the prisoner was lying quietly on his primitive bed.

As Scott had surmised, his visitor was Markham.

"Hallo!" he said coolly. "I didn't expect to see you back so soon."

"An' you wouldn't ha' done," returned the miner, "if I hadn't ha' left my knife. I was cutting your bread with it, and I suppose I may ha' dropped it somewhere about. I'm not going to leave it handy for you, you bet."

"It's not here," replied Scott quickly.

Perhaps his eagerness to prevent Markham making a search for his lost property was too obvious, for the miner replied roughly:

"I didn't expect you to tell me if it was. Not such a fool, I'll see for myself, thank 'ee. I may ha' dropped it as I went along. On t'other hand, you may ha' got it shoved away in your straw, ready to use on me when you get the chance. So up with you, and let's have a look!"

Scott as he lay across David's prostrate body felt the boy stir in readiness to spring up, and pressed his elbow against him as a sign to lie quiet for the present. Then:

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he said quietly.

"You won't, won't you?" returned the miner grimly.

"We'll see about that!"

He placed his lamp upon the floor and leaned over Scott, intending to raise him by main force, an easy task, he imagined, with one not only shackled but weakened by short rations and confinement. As he did so, however, Scott, raising his right arm, struck the miner with all his strength upon the forehead. The padlock by which the chain was secured about his wrist added to the force of the blow, and Markham sank down in a heap, the blood pouring from a deep cut above the eye.

"Now, Dave," he cried, "up with you and run! Stop! Wait a minute! I've knocked him senseless."

It was true. Scott had only hoped to make a momentary diversion in David's favour, but with the aid of the padlock he had done better than he had intended.

"Good luck!" exclaimed David gleefully, as he bent over his unconscious enemy.

"It is good luck," Scott replied, "for now he will never guess that you have been here at all. But you must take advantage of it, and be off at once. Listen! Turn to your left outside this door, and about twenty yards straight on you will find yourself at the foot of the old shaft. As I told you, there is a rope ladder which reaches to within twenty feet of the surface. After that there are iron stanchions driven into the rock right up to the top. The way is simple enough, though no one would ever guess at it. Now, up you go. Come down when you think it's safe—when you are sure you are not watched; and until you see me again do not breathe a word of what you know to a living soul."

With a last grip of the hand David slipped through the door, and, following Scott's directions, found himself at the foot of the shaft. Mounting a rope ladder is not so easy as it sounds, and before he had gone halfway the boy's legs were aching and his knuckles grazed by contact with the surface of the rock.

"Thank goodness!" he muttered, as he reached the end of the ladder, and put out his hand to feel for the stanchions of which Scott had spoken. As he gripped the first two or three, little stones which he had dislodged went rattling down into the depths, and following on the sound came another, at which the boy started.

"That you, Markham? What a time you have been?"

David looked up. Over the edge of the pit a head protruded, distinctly visible against the sky.

Between Two Fires!

DAVID stopped short. He knew instinctively whose was the voice he had heard and whose was the head that protruded over the pit's mouth. George Scott—and he alone—knew of Markham's visit to his brother's prison.

"That you, Markham?" was repeated in a louder tone.

Needless to say, the question received no answer. In fact, it was hardly out of the speaker's mouth before David had begun to climb down the toilsome way by which he had lately ascended. He thanked his lucky stars that George Scott had spoken before he had betrayed his presence by walking straight into the enemy's arms. As it was, it would be easy enough to remain concealed in the darkness at the bottom of the shaft until Markham had made the ascent, and, with his fellow-conspirator, cleared off from the neighbourhood.

But in laying his plans he had reckoned without his host. Scarcely was he half-way down the ladder than a sudden tightening of the ropes warned him that a fresh strain had been placed upon them. He looked down; and, far below him, a spark of light shone like a tiny moving star—the light from the lantern carried by Markham. He was between two fires—one enemy on the watch at the top of the shaft; the other, with every second, advancing on him from below.

For a moment he remained nearly paralysed with terror, and then, for the second time, he began to climb upwards. His only chance, he felt, was, on reaching the pit-brow, to scramble to his feet and take to flight as quickly as might be; but he knew that that chance was a very faint one. His legs were aching horribly from the tedious climb, and he could hardly doubt that, even if he succeeded in getting past his enemy in the first instance, the latter would easily be able to overtake him. Yet to stay where he was and fall into Markham's clutches was simply madness.

He had almost reached the top of the shaft, and was nerv- ing himself for the necessary dash, when his upturned eyes fell upon a thick bush that overhung the edge of the pit's mouth a short distance to the right of the spot where he must gain the surface. He remembered noticing that very bush when he had stood at the top, and remarking inwardly that its roots were fixed on the very edge of the gulf.

If he could get a firm hold of these roots, and if they were strong enough to sustain his weight, it would be quite possible for him to hang from them unseen, leaving the way clear for Markham, who, unless he by chance turned his lantern on the boy as he passed, would be unaware that his young adversary was close to him in the darkness.

Gripping one of the big iron nails tightly with one hand, he stretched out the other and took a firm hold of the bush just above the earth; then, with his heart in his mouth, swung off his foothold and hung dangling by the arms.

The strain on his arms was tremendous; only the desperate knowledge that his life was at stake enabled him to support it. Quietly as he had moved, he had not been able to transfer his weight to the bush without a perceptible crackling and rustling sound—a sound that brought George Scott once again to the edge of the shaft.

"Markham, are you there?" he called once more. And this time the expected answer came out of the black depths.

"Ay, I'm coming!" returned the miner, whose light was nearing the surface moment by moment.

David held his breath as Markham mounted. His enemy must pass within a few feet of him. Should he turn his lantern in his direction, discovery was inevitable.

But once again fortune favoured him. Markham's eyes were too much occupied with the trickiness of the ascent to look about him; he passed actually within touch of the lad, but went straight on, and clambered to the surface with a groan of relief.

As soon as he had disappeared, David reached out, and, gripping the iron stanchion again, once more swung himself back into comparative safety.

"Why, Markham, what's the matter?" the boy heard George Scott say. "What have you been doing to yourself?"



David Steele perceived, as Scott gained a sitting posture, that a strong-looking chain ran from his right wrist to a staple firmly secured to the wall.

"Doing to myself!" returned the miner gruffly. "It's what your madman of a brother has been doing to me! You're drivin' him mad now, I tell you, with keepin' him shut up there. He went for me and nigh killed me just now—knocked me fair silly for a time! It ain't safe to go near him, and I'd be obliged if you'd take over that part of the job yourself."

"But what did he say? Is he as obstinate as ever?" broke in Scott, who seemed to have very little sympathy to spare for the miner's injured head.

"Obstinate!" growled Markham. "I told you all along that this plan o' yours was nothin' more nor less than a fool's idea. Have you known your brother all these years and not found out that he's a pig to drive? He'll stay in that mine till he's a hundred, rather than give you what you want—he's as stubborn as they make 'em. You'll get no money out o' him!"

"By heaven, I will, though!" his companion interrupted him fiercely, "or—"

He paused, as if strangled by rage. "Or," sneered Markham. "Yes, I fancy it will be a case of 'or.' 'Or' means, I suppose, that we shall finish by having to make a bolt for it, with the coppers at our heels!"

"No, it doesn't," returned Scott more calmly. "It means that if I don't get my money I will have my revenge—and not on my brother alone! I haven't played my trump card yet, Markham; but I will play it, and play it now. As for yourself, don't be afraid; you shall have the five hundred pounds I promised you. I can lay hands on that easily enough!"

"What is your trump card?" asked Markham curiously.

His companion laughed—a low, jarring laugh. "I'm going," he said deliberately, "to make the name of William Scott cursed throughout the length and breadth of Wrexborough. I'm going to leave my mark on Wrexborough Town and Wrexborough Pit; and if I can't put the thousands I want into my own pocket, I'm going to take them out of my brother's!"

"What do you mean?" "Wait, and you'll see," was the answer given, with the same unpleasant laugh. "Wait, and you'll see!"

These were the last words that David caught distinctly. Apparently the two men started off towards the tunnel, for their voices sank and died into silence. Not until that silence had lasted some minutes did David Steele venture to creep cautiously over the edge of the old shaft. No one was in sight, and he set off as fast as he could for Wrexborough, making, however, a considerable detour, so as to avoid meeting Markham and Scott.

(By hook or by crook David Steele was determined to learn the meaning of George Scott's phrase—"the trump card." Be sure you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)



A DISGRACE TO THE SHELL!

(Continued from page 19.)

"Your cousin just pulled it out of his pocket, Racke," he answered, giving the cad of the Shell a sharp look. "He was looking for a note he says I sent him. I suppose he forgot the wallet for the moment and pulled it out without thinking. But—but, hang it all—"

"It's rotten for me," said Racke. "Look—look here, Merry! Keep this from the beaks, won't you? After all, though he's only a distant relation, he is a relation, and it's rotten for me. If you fellows—"

Racke broke off abruptly, and yelled with alarm as his cousin suddenly leaped at him, and gripped him, shaking him like a rat.

"You cad—you rascally cad!" shouted Clegg furiously and almost hysterically. "This is a plant—a thundering trick to—"

"None of that, Clogg!" snapped Tom Merry.

With the help of several other fellows, Tom tore the raging new fellow off his cousin.

"That sort of thing won't do any good, Clegg," said Tom quietly. "You'll have the beaks on the spot if you start that."

Clegg ceased to struggle, and the juniors released him. He was about to speak, and then he turned abruptly and walked away, his shoulders hunched. At that moment Mr. Railton appeared on the School House steps, and Tom Merry

gave a muttered warning, and the crowd dispersed, fairly buzzing with the startling affair. Tom Merry walked indoors with his astounded and dismayed chums. Like them, he simply did not know what to think about it.

Aubrey Racke was one of the last left standing in the quad. Crooke nudged him. Crooke's eyes were gleaming.

"By gad!" he whispered. "You did that dashed well, Racke. That's dished him—dished him for good and all. The game's yours, Racke!"

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Racke.

But inwardly Racke was gloating—though he strove hard to keep his features grave and concerned. As Crooke had said, he had done it well—he saw that few, if any, had not put the worst possible construction on the affair of the wallet. Walter Clegg was dished—dished for good and all. The game was his.

He turned to go indoors, and as he did so, he caught Cardew's eyes fixed on him, and he gave a violent start. There was a curiously mocking expression on Cardew's smiling face.

"Dear old Racke," smiled Cardew blandly. "Always finding himself mixed up in these tiresome little bothers. Hard lines, Racke! It must be rotten to have a cousin like Clegg—especially at St. Jim's. By the way, old top, how did you enjoy your little walk this afternoon?"

Racke did not reply. He walked away slowly, but there was a look of fear in his eyes now.

Was the game his, after all? Did Cardew guess—did he know anything? Only a moment ago, Racke had felt quite safe—the game was his! But was it? If there was one fellow in all St. Jim's Racke feared it was the cynical and keen-witted Ralph Reckness Cardew. And Aubrey Racke wondered, with fear in his heart.

THE END.

(Did this mean that the false charges being made against Clegg were likely to be dropped? Be sure you read next week's exciting yarn of Tom Merry & Co. entitled, "CARDEW TAKES A HAND!" by Martin Clifford. You are bound to enjoy it.)

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