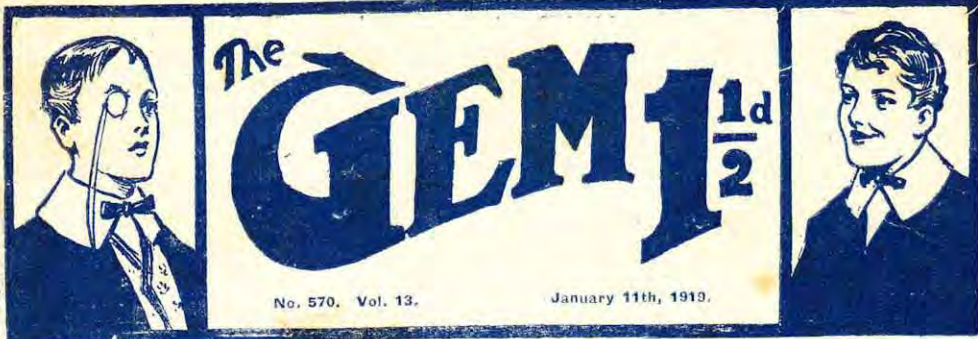




RIVAL DETECTIVES!



FEEDING THE INVALID!

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



Rival Detectives

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

Gussy on the Job.

"HEWVIES, deah boy!" It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who spoke these words.

He and George Herries were together in Study No. 6. Jack Blake and Robert Arthur Digby, who shared with them that celebrated apartment, were at footer. Gussy and Herries were not playing footer that afternoon. Gussy had a slight cold, which he feared might develop into influenza, and Herries already had an invalid on his hands—which may have accounted for the very small amount of sympathy he could find for Arthur Augustus.

Herries was kneeling on the floor before the armchair. In the armchair lay Towser, the most cherished of all his possessions.

It was hardly as a possession, indeed, that Herries regarded Towser. To judge by the care he lavished upon that very plain—not to say ugly—specimen of the canine race, he considered Towser of greater importance than any of his chums.

He would not, for instance, have taken one-tenth part of the trouble he was now taking had the appetite of Blake or Gussy or Dig been temporarily off.

But it was a serious thing when Towser showed signs of loss of appetite, and Herries was trying to tempt him with a nice mess of bread and beef-tea.

Towser had eaten a mouthful or two; but he appeared to have done so merely out of politeness, for he showed no disposition to clear up the plate. In an ordinary way, Towser's capable swallow would have accounted for the mess in less time than it took Arthur Augustus to say, for the third time:

"Hewvies, deah boy!"

For the third time Herries refrained from answering, unless an impatient shrug of the shoulders could be accepted as an answer.

"Weally, Hewvies—"

Arthur Augustus was getting slightly impatient.

"Oh, bother!" snapped Herries. "Go away and play!"

"Weally, Hewvies. I must say—"

"If there's anything that you must say trot off and say it to Grundy or Skinny or some other silly ass who's got time and patience to listen to you!"

"I weally do not see, Hewvies, why I should twouble myself to look for nothah silly ass while you are heah weady to my hand!"

Gussy thought that rather a smart thing in the way of repartees—as perhaps it was, for Gussy.

But he was hardly prepared to find it appreciated by Herries.

It seemed that Herries did appreciate it, however.

A slow but beaming smile lighted up the face of Herries. He did not speak for a moment, but he continued to smile almost seraphically.

"So, as you seem weady to listen—" "Brrr! Who said I was ready to listen to your rot, chump?" growled Herries.

"You did not say so in so many words, certainly, deah boy; but the fwiendly smile on your expressive countenance, Hewvies—"

"Ass! Don't you see?"

"See what? No, I weally do not see anythin' in particulah, deah boy!"

"He's eaten another bit!" said Herries, almost with bated breath.

"Oh, good! I am vewy glad!" said Gussy.

Towser licked his chops, stretched himself, sat up, and set to work with deliberation upon the rest of his invalid ration.

Deliberation was not Towser's usual line in matters of this kind. But Herries was too pleased to see him eating at all to be critical.

"I didn't think you cared a scrap about old Towsey, Gussy!" growled Herries.

But his growl was softer now. It sounded much like Towser's when Towser growled at him. There was always a different tone in that from the bulldog's standard growl.

"My fwiends' fwiends are my fwiends, natchuwallly, Hewvies!" replied Arthur Augustus.

"I don't call that really caring about him!"

"But I do caah about him, weally, Hewvies! I have the highest respect for Towser as a man—I mean, a bulldog, of course—an' a bwothah, so to speak!"

"Don't talk rot like that, when the old chap's been jolly near to croaking, and we don't know even now whether he'll ever be quite his old self again!" said Herries reproachfully.

"Oh, bai dove, don't you wowwy, Hewvies! Old Towseh will be as wight as wain in a day or two. He's polished off that whack now!"

Hewvies looked down at the empty plate. Towser had not only eaten his mess, but he had also dealt with the plate in a manner which might have suggested to anyone not too particular that washing it was quite unnecessary.

"I dunno!" said Herries doubtfully. "I'm afraid he only did that to please me."

"I dare say that he was anxious to please you, deah boy!" Arthur Augustus answered, with some of the diplomacy for which he ought to have been famous, though fame, somehow, lagged behind desert. "But I do weally think that he welished it a little bit on his own account, y'know."

"Do you? Well, p'raps he did! I

must say you aren't always such an unfeeling ass as you look, Gustavus!"

"Weally, Hewvies, I twust I am nevah unfeelin', an' I wefuse most emphatically to be called an ass!"

"He really is a bit better," said Herries.

"He is vewy neahly well. In a day or two, I have no doubt whatevah, he will be behavin' in his usual wuff an' weekless mannah in the mattah of a fellow's twonsahs!"

"Well, s'pose he does?" said Herries warmly. "You ought to be jolly glad! It will show that the old chap is pulling round a bit."

"Yaas; but I do not want him pullin' me wound, an' he has done that in the past when—"

"I thought I knew just about how much—"

"You are quite w'ong, Hewvies, I assuah you! It is twue that I have not always pwecisely cottoned to Towseh. But when the pooah old wascal lay on his death-bed—"

"You silly chump! He didn't! Why, you say yourself that he's going to be all right in a day or two!" hooted Herries, standing up now, and gazing down at Towser with real alarm in his rugged face.

"I spoke in the language of metaphor, Hewvies—"

"Rot, I call it! Bunk, if you are going to talk like that!"

Towser had curled himself up very comfortably, and was now snoring hard. He really did not look as though the armchair were his death-bed.

"But I have a suggestion to make, Hewvies!"

"More rot!" growled Herries.

"You will not say that when you have heard it, I am suah!"

"I'm not. But I'll listen if you like. I can't leave Towser, and you won't go, so I suppose I may as well hear your rot!"

Arthur Augustus looked severely at Herries through his monocle. But as Herries had eyes for nothing but Towser, that severe look was totally wasted.

"The miscewaut who twied to poison Towseh ought to be punished!" said Gussy weightily.

"Any ass knows that!"

"But before he can be punished it is necesawry to discovah him."

"Rot! We know who it was!"

"But we do not know who it was, Hewvies!"

"If it wasn't that cad Racke, who was it?"

"That is a question I cannot ansuah. Not at pwesent, anyway. My own suspicious point to Wacko as the cwiminal. But—"

"But he hauged! It was Racke!"

"Can you pwove it, Hewvies?"

"I don't see what more proof we want. We know all Towsy did in a pair of bags for him—and serve the rotter jolly well right! Isn't that enough proof?"

"I weally feah not, Hewwies! That is onlay what Towsah did to Wacke, wheehas what we desiah to pwove is what Wacke did to Towsah—or, wathah, that he did do it to Towsah—if he did, that is, of course!"

"If he didn't, who did?" persisted Herries, who was nothing if not obstinate.

"That is what I pwopose to find out, deah boy!"

"Well, you needn't come to me and say anyone else did it, for I shan't believe you!"

"I must say, Hewwies, that you are weally extwemely obstinate—not to say pig-headed!"

"You're not, are you?" snorted Herries.

"I trust not, Hewwies."

"Do you? Oh, my hat! Look here, Gussy, how do you think you're going to prove anything anything about this bizney?"

"In the same way that other detectives—"

"Call yourself a detective?"

"Not a pwofessional detective, of course, deah boy. But I flattah myself—"

"You're always doing that! It stands to reason that Racke did it, and if no one's found out anything yet—"

"Has anyone twied, Hewwies?"

"Well, no, if you come to that. We're all sure, but—"

"Well, then?"

"I did think of asking Kerr. He is some use."

"Meanin' to imply that I am not, Hewwies?" demanded Arthur Augustus warily.

"Imply be hanged! You're not, and that's all about it!"

"That is only your opinion, deah boy, an' I must say that I do not gweatly value your opinion!"

"And I don't jolly well value yours at all!"

"Vewy well, deah boy! We shall see what we shall see!"

Gussy caressed the big, clumsy head of Towser; and the dog, in a sleepy, lazy manner, licked his hand.

Then Gussy went.

Herries stood looking down at Towser.

"He isn't a scrap of good as a 'tec," he said to himself. "I think I shall have to get Kerr on the job. But Gustavus isn't a bad old sort. Never knew Towser to take so much notice of him—not in a friendly way—before!"

CHAPTER 2.

Grundy on the Job.

"WILKY!"

"Oh, dry up, old top!"

"Gunny!"

"Oh, can't you leave a chap alone for five minutes when he's reading 'Ivanhoe,' Grundy?"

George Alfred Grundy surveyed his two study-mates with profound contempt.

"I never did see such chaps as you two!" he snorted.

"And we never saw such a chap as you, so that's all right, and we can let it go at that," replied Wilkins, without looking up from the work he was engaged upon.

Wilkins was mending a rent in his footer shorts. There were things Wilkins could do better than sewing. He was well aware of that fact, and he wanted to give undivided attention to the repair business.

Some people find threading a needle as easy as falling off a form. George Wil-

kins was not one of these lucky individuals. Twice he had just managed to insert the well-moistened end of his thread—cotton would not do for Wilkins—through the eye of the needle, thinking all the time about camels, only to have it slip back again through his attention being suddenly demanded by Grundy. Now that he had got it through the third time, and had tied a big knot at the end of his double thread, he wanted to make sure that his stitches were fairly even, and every interruption meant a stitch that puckered up the serge in a way that struck even Wilkins as not quite right.

Gunny was no more inclined to listen to Grundy than was Wilkins.

"You've read that rotten book five times at least!" growled Grundy.

"What rotten book?" snapped Gunny.

"That 'Ivanhoe' thing."

"It's not a thing, and it's not rotten!"

But Gunny closed his book as he spoke, leaving the siege of Torquilstone Castle to be finished for the fifth—or the seventh—time later on. And Grundy had thus gained the undivided attention of both his chums.

They knew they would have to listen to him sooner or later. There was no choking off the great George Alfred.

"'Ivanhoe'—I've-a-nection!" said Wilkins, very plainly and loudly. "See?"

"Oh, I see!" answered Grundy impatiently. "But where's the joke?"

"Better give it up, Wilky!" grinned Gunny. "It's a long way off being new, anyway!"

"I've never seen it anywhere, you chump!"

"You couldn't—you never read anything."

"Oh, dry up!" hooted Grundy.

"What's it matter about piffing jokes and things? Or reading, either. If you ask me, Gunny—"



Mutual Accusations.

(See Chapter 5.)

William Cuthbert Gunny was, on the whole, a very quiet and peaceable fellow, but his ire could always be raised by any slighting remark concerning the works of his adored Scott.

"I've a notion he's read it at least seven," said Wilkins.

He could look up to say that. It seemed to Wilkins no end bright—far in advance of anything of Monty Lowther's.

"That's rank!" said Gunny.

Grundy looked puzzled.

"What's rank?" he asked.

"Wilky's joke, duffer!"

"Did Wilkins make a joke?"

Grundy looked at Wilkins as if that youth had been guilty of most astonishing impudence.

"Jolly good one, too, old top!" replied Wilkins, tying a knot in the thread at the end of his repairs, and then biting off the thread.

"I didn't hear it."

"Well, you needn't ask me to repeat it," said Gunny. "It's too cheap."

"But I don't old bean. I shouldn't think of it, knowing you as I do."

"If you ask me, you read a heap too much. It can't addle your brains, because you haven't any. But if you didn't read so much—well, look at me, frinstance. It's very seldom I read anything, and yet—"

"And yet there isn't a single chap at St. Jim's with brains so completely addled as yours," put in Gunny.

"Or a married one, either," said Wilkins. "Not that I quite agree with you, Gunny. Partly, but not quite. I don't believe old Grundy's brains are addled."

"I should think not!" snapped Grundy.

"Really, William Gunny—"

"In fact, I know they're not. They can't be. He hasn't any!" yelled Wilkins.

He dodged in anticipation of a book hurled at his head. Grundy's chief use for books was as missiles.

But the great George Alfred did not

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even stretch out his hand for a book to throw.

He looked at Wilkins with a pitying smile.

"Brains!" he murmured. "Brains! My word! I'll show—"

"No good, Grundy! Not a bit of good, old son! It would hurt no end to have the top of your head taken off, and even then—"

"You talk like a fool—a perfect fool, George Wilkins!"

"Well, we were always in danger of catching something, living with you!" retorted Wilkins.

He glanced at Gunn, expecting to see upon his face an approving grin. Wilkins felt that he was in great form to-night; his repartees were quite brilliant.

But Gunn was looking intently at Grundy. Now he held up a warning hand.

"Shush, Wilky!" he said, in a tone as of awe. "He's been thinking! And when—"

"What with?" asked Wilkins, with another bright flash of wit.

"Don't be so childish! Grundy's been thinking—"

"I'm glad to see one of you has a little sense!" said Grundy. "If you want to talk rot, George Wilkins, I suppose there are other places you can talk it in—eh, what? You leave me and Gunn to discuss serious matters. Buzz off!"

"I think I'll stay," said Wilkins. "I don't know that I want to talk rot. I'd just as soon hear it. Fire away, Grundy!"

Wilkins winked at Gunn. But Gunn only looked sad. Perhaps he felt that with Grundy what he was it would be rather too much if Wilkins were to set up as a humorist.

"I've been thinking about that bizney of Herries' dog," said Grundy solemnly.

"Oh! Has Herries got a dog?" inquired Wilkins.

"You idiot! What about Towser?"

"Oh, Towser! Yes, I suppose you'd call Towser a dog. He isn't an elephant, and he isn't—"

"You're an ass!" rapped out Grundy.

"Well, Towser's not that—at least, he is, in a way, but—"

"Will you shut up, and let a chap talk sense?" howled Grundy.

"I should be glad to," replied Wilkins, with a pained look. "But who's the chap?"

"Me, of course, idiot!"

"You ought to say 'I,' because that would be better grammar. But you oughtn't to say 'I,' because it would be untrue," murmured Wilkins. "You can't talk sense! Never mind. I give it up. Talk something—any rot! But don't glare at me in that murderous fashion. I shall go to bed and dream I've met the Kaiser!"

"It wouldn't be half a bad idea if you went to bed, now, Wilky!" said Gunn.

"Whaffor, ass?"

"Well, you'd stop talking rot then, I suppose, and give Grundy a chance."

Grundy did not perceive the hidden barb in this speech. His glare at Wilkins changed into a benevolent smile as he turned the light of his countenance upon Gunn.

"We won't take any notice of the chap, Gunn," he said. "I must say he isn't always like this—"

"No. He has his lucid intervals," admitted Gunn.

"And I don't want to be too rough on him. After all, if he hasn't brains, he hasn't brains, and he can't help it, poor boulder! And it really doesn't matter much, because, as everyone knows, I've brains enough for this study. I often wonder how you and that ass Wilkins got on before I came!"

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"It was a bit hard, wasn't it, Wilky?" said Gunn, with a wink.

"Rotten!" replied Wilkins emphatically. "Why, we often had to have tea in Hall!"

Perhaps the thought of the changed conditions in the study which had been the result of Grundy's advent softened the stony heart of George Wilkins, for he turned to Grundy now, and said, quite civilly:

"What had you been thinking about, old scout?"

"I told you, chump! Herries' dog."

"Well, Towser's pulling round all serene now, I fancy."

"That's not the thing. The thing is to find out who tried to do him in. The vet was certain he'd been poisoned."

"We know who it was," said Wilkins.

"Who?"

"Racke, of course!"

"Can you prove it?"

"No. I never said I could, did I?"

"Can anybody prove it?"

"Well, no. Crooke might, I dare say."

"But he wouldn't. So nobody can."

"I suppose that's so."

"Well, then, nobody can know!"

George Alfred Grundy was not famous for his powers as a logician. But he was not far astray this time. Until the blackguardly deed could be proved against Racke all the certainty of his guilt only amounted to opinion, and opinion proves nothing.

"Don't you think it was Racke?" asked Gunn.

"Yes," admitted Grundy. "But that's no more proof than anyone else's thinking so."

"You surprise me!" said Wilkins.

And it really was surprising, for Grundy was very much in the way of considering his opinion on any question as amounting to a settlement thereof.

"I think it was Racke. But I don't know that it was Racke," Grundy said.

"So I shall leave Racke alone at the start. The best thing is to go for the unlikely solution, you know."

"But there might be two or three unlikely solutions," objected Gunn.

"Twenty or thirty—two or three hundred, come to that," said Wilkins.

"Sounds like trying to work out a maths problem by what you know jolly well is a wrong rule."

"It's the way the very best detectives go to work," said Grundy doggedly.

"What's that to do with you?" asked Wilkins.

"Because, having equal brains to theirs, I mean to go to work in the same way."

"Well, start in on Tom Merry," grinned Gunn. "He's about as absolutely unlikely to do such a thing as any chap at St. Jim's. Or there's Talbot. He'd as soon poison himself as old Towser."

"Or D'Arcy," suggested Wilkins, as one who japes.

"I've thought of D'Arcy," said Grundy, quite seriously.

"Oh, you soft-roed blitherer!" groaned Wilkins.

"Gussy; why, he's the very last—"

"Shut up, William Gunn! I'm not saying I think D'Arcy did it—matter of fact, I'm pretty sure he didn't. But all this gas about couldn't doesn't affect me. Look at the time when Cardew wangled that five on me! Is there anything more certain than that I wouldn't steal? But everybody believed it; even you two be—"

"We didn't!" put in Wilkins earnestly.

"If we did, it was only for a minute," mumbled Gunn, flushing.

"Anyway, you can't want to get home on Gussy for that," Wilkins said. "If you wanted to get at Cardew now—I don't say it would be quite the cheese to—"

"But I don't, you hopeless maniac! I've thought of Cardew, and that's dead off. There was no motive."

"Here, hold on!" said Gunn. "According to your theory he ought to be a better mark than Gussy, then, because a chap might make out a motive in Gussy's case."

"Yes; Towser eats his 'tousals!' grinned Wilkins.

"That's why!" said Grundy.

The two stared at him. It seemed impossible to follow the workings of Grundy's massive brain.

"And you've pitched on Gussy because he might have a motive?"

"That's it."

"But, you silly cuckoo, if he might have a motive you can't call him one of the most unlikely!"

"That's rot, William Gunn! Nothing could be more unlikely than that a fellow of D'Arcy's type could do such a thing. Why, even you and Wilky can see that!"

"It's a corker!" said Wilkins perplexedly. "He's going for Gussy because he knows Gussy couldn't have done it, being Gussy; and also because Gussy might have done it, having a motive!"

"You've got it," said Grundy, with a satisfied nod.

"It cancels out," Gunn remarked.

"Oh, that's maths—this is something much higher and more intricate!"

"It does seem a bit intricate," said Gunn.

"Mind, I don't say I'm going to confine my attention to D'Arcy. There are others, you know. I might watch Cardew a bit. Then there's Manners. And I'm not quite satisfied yet about Kerruish."

"Must have been a syndicate of 'em!" grinned Grundy.

"Look here, old top, are the fellows you've mentioned likely ones or unlikely ones?" asked Gunn shrewdly.

The query made Grundy rub his head and look solemn for a moment.

Then he said:

"Both! Nobody's to be reckoned likely or unlikely—that's the way to look at it."

"But that doesn't fit in with what you said before," objected Gunn.

"Yes, it does, only you haven't the sense to see it! It's brains you need, William Gunn—brains!"

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy Investigates.

"THAT'S rather good, I consider," chuckled Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three were at work in Study No. 10 on the forthcoming issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly," which they intended to make an extra-special number, hoping that its appearance might be coincident with the formal declaration of peace.

"Do you?" said Manners indifferently.

"Don't you, ass?" returned Lowther warmly.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to state that what Lowther considered rather good had come from the pen of Montague Lowther. Monty might at times see merit in what others had written; but he did not get heated when others refused to see it.

"I thought it piffle!" replied Manners, with comradely frankness.

"You! You can't think!"

"Peace, children—peace!" said Tom Merry.

"But this silly ass—"

"This howling lunatic—"

"Oh, read it to me, Monty, and I'll laugh if it kills me," said Tom desperately.

"Does the fact that Prussia is a Hun-entailed estate justify the Kaiser in cutting Little Willie out of the succession?"

"Eh? Has he?" asked Tom.

"What does that matter, chump? I suppose the joke's the same?"

"Yes; but what is the joke?" demanded Manners.

"Hun-entailed and unentailed—see? When there isn't any entail on an estate a father can cut his eldest son off with a shilling."

"If he has one," said Manners.

"Well, is Prussia like that?" asked Tom, with a perfectly serious face.

"It doesn't matter a scrap whether it is or not!" snapped Lowther. "There's the joke—take it or leave it!"

"Thanks, I'll leave it," said Manners. "Don't give us any more, Monty. We haven't long had tea, you know."

"You see, don't you, Tommy? Hun-entailed—twig?"

"Oh, I see! The joke is sticking in the 'h' when it oughtn't to be there. Pretty poor joke, I think."

"Oh, you're hopeless!"

"Why don't you say 'hopeless, and make another joke of it? They're dead easy, if you ask me, Monty. Why, young Hammond makes hundreds of them without knowing it!"

Lowther's face was almost tragic. Lowther thought a lot of that joke, though why, it is difficult to say. He had made many better ones, although there is reasonable doubt whether he was quite the great original humorist he believed himself.

But it was no use saying more to such willfully stupid people as Tom Merry and Harry Manners, and Lowther turned again to his comic column. For some minutes the only sound besides the scratching of pens which was heard in Study No. 10 was an occasional chuckle from Lowther.

He did not volunteer to read out any of the jokes which made him chuckle, however. Perhaps he was waiting to be asked, out of mistaken modesty; perhaps he was revenging himself upon Tom and Manners. But if he was waiting to be asked, he waited in vain.

Tap, tap!

They were loud taps—decisive taps—taps which said in advance that no notice would be taken of what Tom howled:

"Keep out!"

The door opened, and the grave face of George Alfred Grundy appeared.

"Oh, I thought it was Railton, or Linton, or Kildare," said Tom. "We roar at them to keep out. Other people we put out!"

"I must say, Merry—"

"But you mustn't say it here, Grundy! Can't you see we are busy?"

"Oh, that 'Weekly' thing!" snorted Grundy. "I should chuck that, if I were you. Directly paper gets more plentiful I'm going to bring out a journal that will lick that into a cocked hat!"

"You needn't wait for that," said Lowther.

"Eh? But I must. The paper's wanted in quantities, because I'm going to bring out a journal more the size of the 'Times'—something like the 'Times,' in fact—only, of course, a heap better."

"Still, you won't want much paper."

"Oh, don't be a sillier ass than you can help! I shall want a lot. Look at the difference between the 'Times' and your little rag!"

"Well, there is a bit of a difference, even in one or two little things apart from the size," admitted Tom.

Manners did not even look up.

"All the same, Grundy will be able to get along with very little paper," persisted Lowther.

"Rats!"

"You don't see why, Grundy?"

"I know jolly well you're wrong!"

"Not at all. You will only need to

print one copy of each issue, old top, because nobody in the wide, wide world but you will want one!"

Grundy snorted his contempt. Manners also gave an emphatic snort, though whether at Grundy or at Lowther was not clear.

"It was you I wanted to see, Manners," said the burly Shellite.

"Well, you've seen me!" growled Manners. "There's no charge, but you aren't allowed to go on feasting your eyes as long as you like. Having looked once, you bunk—see?"

"Lest his fatal beauty destroy your sight," said Tom, grinning.

"Rot about his beauty!" growled Grundy. "I don't think much of his looks myself. Why, you're a better-looking chap than Manners, you know, and you're no beauty-show prize-winner!"

"Think not, dear boy?"

"Sure of it!"

"You are, of course?"

"On the whole, no. My features are rather above the average; but I consider I look intellectual rather than handsome. What in thunder are you cackling at, Lowther?"

"He's taken like that sometimes," explained Tom. "Lowther hasn't your strong, balanced intellect, Grundy. He's a bit—"

Tom tapped his forehead significantly.

"I've always known that," said Grundy. "I'm glad you fellows are coming round to my point of view. I say, Manners!"

"Well?" snapped Manners.

"Manners, Manners!" said Lowther reprovingly. "Speak to the intellectual giant of the Shell with proper respect—in fact, manners, Manners!"

"Dry up, ass! What is it, Grundy? I've no time to waste on your rot, you know."

"You're a bit of a photographer, aren't you?"

"Just a bit!" replied Manners sarcastically.

Manners was really first-class, for an amateur; but he did not propose to argue with Grundy the question of his ability.

"Yes, I thought so. I've seen some little things of yours that weren't half bad—not half bad," replied Grundy, with a fatuous belief that he was conciliating Manners, whose temper everyone knew to be a trifle short at times.

"Thanks!" said Manners drily.

"Grundy wants you to take a portrait of his intellectual face, for fear posterity shouldn't know what he looked like if he happened to pop off suddenly," said Lowther.

"Are you going to pop off, Grundy?" asked Tom. "Hurry up, if you want your obituary notice to go in this number!"

"If there's to be a portrait with it, someone else will have to take it," said Manners. "I've got further use for my camera."

"I wouldn't have you take my portrait if I were dead!" howled Grundy.

"You wouldn't have me take it, anyway, because I wouldn't do it!" snapped Manners.

"I don't believe that's what he really wants, old man," said Tom.

"What does the fatheaded chump want, then?"

"I fancy he wants to borrow your camera."

"Brrrrrr!"

"I don't want the camera. That isn't it at all," said Grundy. "You don't use your brains much, Merry. But perhaps that's a good thing, for there ain't a lot of them to be used. I say, Manners!"

"Don't!" snapped Manners.

"Don't what, you crass idiot!"

"Say Manners! I've heard enough of that bull-bellow of yours!"

"Look here—"

"And seen too much of the object you call a face!"

"Can't you be civil, you bounder?"

"Manners, Manners!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"I've been as civil as I know how."

"Well, I must say it doesn't amount to much," said Grundy.

Possibly it struck Manners that Grundy was right. Anyway, his next speech was more pacific.

"What is it you really want?"

"You use poison of one kind and another in your photographic gadgets, don't you?" asked Grundy.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" yelled Lowther.

"Cheer, Thomas, you dummy!"

"What is there to cheer about, fat-head?" asked Tom.

"Well, of course, it hasn't been done yet. But I'm sure Manners won't say 'No.'"

"Of course, I sha'n't say 'No,'" said Manners, looking at his chum in puzzlement. "Some of the chemicals are poisonous. Any duffer knows that. Why, even Grundy seems to have a notion of it!"

"Oh, you thick-headed gorilla! Give him some at once—some of the deadliest you have!"

"Rats! Grundy doesn't want any poison, you chump!"

"Not for Grundy's sake, but for ours, Manners!" pleaded Lowther, with clasped hands and shining eyes. "Don't thwart the dear old thing's altruistic resolve!"

"Why, you silly lunatic!" roared Grundy. "Do you—"

"He will toss off the bumper of deadly stuff, saying, 'It is a far, far better thing I do than I have ever done.' And Wilky and Gunn will find him lying on the study floor, horribly contorted, but with the smile of an angel on his rugged countenance, and—"

"Dry up, you mad bounder!" snapped Manners. "What about the stuff, Grundy? I'll give you credit for not coming here just to ask me a potty question like that, though I am not so dashed sure you're entitled to it."

"Where do you keep the stuff?" Grundy asked.

"What's that to do with you?"

"I have a reason for asking, Manners."

"And I may have a reason for not answering, Grundy."

"So you may—so you may. You're not the sort of fellow I should have suspected; but, of course, it may not have been you—most likely it wasn't. Lowther would know where you kept it, I dare say."

And Grundy looked at Lowther as though he were by no means so ready to acquit him in advance as he was to acquit Manners, and, by implication, Tom Merry.

"Suspected of what?" inquired Tom. "What are you drivelling about, Grundy?"

"I am not drivelling at all. Any question I may ask has a bearing on an important investigation I am making!"

"And what's that?"

"I intend to find out who poisoned Herries' dog."

"Oh! Has Herries asked you to?" returned Tom.

"Not exactly. In fact, I haven't mentioned the matter to him yet. But what Herries thinks is really of no consequence."

Lowther sprang to his feet. For a moment the inference to be gathered from Grundy's words had failed to reach

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his brain. But now that he saw he was wildly indignant.

"Why, you swab-faced imbecile, you wooden-headed image, you depraved orang-outang, you mean to make out that you think I tried to kill Towser?" he howled.

"I don't go so far as that, Lowther. All I say is that you may have done—that circumstance's make you liable to the suspicion. And I must say that your manner is against any theory that you are innocent. In fact, it looks to me very much like guilt!"

"Grundy, you old fool—" began Tom warmly.

"You be quiet, Merry! I shouldn't like to think that you could possibly be guilty. You're a chap I have always had some respect for. But I can't disguise the fact that all three of you here are open to—"

Manners flung the door open. His chums said no word, but they seized Grundy, and Manners hastened to their aid.

"Yaroooooh! Wharrer doing? Stop-pit!" howled Grundy.

But in a grim, determined silence the Terrible Three lifted George Alfred from his feet, and deposited him, with a mighty bump, on the linoleum outside.

"Yooooop!" roared Grundy.

Again they lifted him. Again they dropped him.

Then Tom spoke.

"Finished your criminal investigations in this quarter, you maniac?" he asked grimly.

"No. Yooooop! Not jolly well—yaroooooh!—likely! I believe—ow!—you were all three—yow!—in it!"

"We can't let him go away believing that," said Lowther. "It would be anguish to his kind and generous heart, and 'twere better to inflict a little more pain upon his body than—"

"Don't gas! Bump him!" hooted Manners.

"Yooooop!" howled Grundy again.

"Do you still believe that we were all three—"

"Yes, I do! Yaroooooh! Stop-pit, you silly idiots! I— Well, then, I don't believe any of you did it. But I do think Manners ought to keep his poisons locked up."

"That is merely an expression of opinion about a matter which does not concern him, and if he were to be bumped whenever he was guilty of that sort of thing there would soon be no Grundy left to bump," said Lowther. Thomas, dear boy—Manners, my bonnie youth, shall we let him go?"

Grundy was suffered to go. He said very impolite things to Wilkins and Gunn when they asked him how he had got on.

But he did not chuck it. Grundy was not built that way.

CHAPTER 4.

An Appeal to Racke's Better Nature.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY tapped at the door of the study on the Shell passage which Aubrey Racke shared with George Gerald Crooke.

No one answered, and he turned the knob. But the door did not open.

"Who's there?" called the voice of Racke.

"It is I—D'Arcy," answered Gussy.

"Quite a good notion, 'tting 'is eye—what?" giggled Mellish.

A little game was going on in the apartment of Racke and Crooke, and the atmosphere was charged with tobacco-smoke. Mellish, for once in funds, it seemed, was there, with Scrope and

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Clampe, and the five sweet youths were busy at banker.

Racke had been losing, and Racke hated losing. He had had enough of the game.

"Might open the door, Crooke, old bean," he said.

Scrope and Clampé and Mellish stared. Crooke, who had also been suffering from a run of bad luck, hastened to comply.

"Oh, by gad!" said Scrope, throwing his scarcely-started cigarette into the fire.

Mellish, more provident, thrust his into his trousers-pocket, holding it there. Clampé scowled, and drew his hand back from the box.

But Racke went on puffing, and Crooke's cigarette hung from his lips as he opened the door just sufficiently to admit Gussy without showing himself.

Gussy came in with his noble nose high in the air, and sniffed in very marked fashion.

The cards had been swept together and tumbled into a drawer. The party appeared nothing more dreadful than a smoking-party, though that was bad enough in the eyes of Arthur Augustus.

"Weally," he said, "I considah that for your own sakes you fellows would do bettah to be more careful. The smell of smoke is quite stwong in the passage outside."

"Oh, never mind, old top; there's no one about," replied Racke affably.

"Have one, D'Arcy?" asked Crooke, with a leering grin.

"No, thank you, Cwooke!" replied the swell of the Fourth, with immense dignity.

Then he looked round in rather a marked way at the three visitors.

"They're just goin'," said Racke. "Ta-ta, you bounders!"

Scrope and Clampé and Mellish departed, not altogether unwillingly. Each had won something, and was glad to get off with his winnings.

Crooke was evidently puzzled. When Aubrey Racke had first come to St. Jim's he had taken no end of trouble to ingratiate himself with Gussy, simply because Gussy was the son of Lord Eastwood, and therefore a swell beyond all dispute.

But any success he had had was of the most fleeting kind, and he and Gussy had hardly been on speaking terms of late.

Crooke thought that the genial Aubrey might be planning another attack upon the soft-hearted swell of the Fourth. But even that would hardly account for Gussy's coming to Racke.

It was evident that Gussy would have preferred to see Crooke follow the other three. But Crooke was in his own study, and the Chesterfieldian manners of Arthur Augustus hardly allowed him to give a hint to Crooke that he was not wanted.

"I have looked in to intahview you on wathah a gwave mattah, Wacke," said the Fourth-Former, without taking a seat.

"Well, sit down, anyway," said Racke. "No harm in sittin' down. Of course, if any of your chums came along, they might rag you for bein' so friendly with us two forsaken reprobates. But they aren't very likely to come."

Gussy sat down, carefully pulling up his trousers, so that they might not bag at the knees. Then he put his monocle in his right eye, and gazed into the glowing fire.

He was somewhat at a loss how to begin.

"Pile in!" said Crooke encouragingly. "But if it's a dashed sermon, cut it short! Ten secs is our limit for that kind of thing."

"It is not exactly a sermon, Cwooke;

but it is weally sewious. Pewwaps Wacke won't mind my speakin' before you?"

"Not a scrap, by gad!" yawned Racke.

"An' it would be no odds if he did," said Crooke. "I'm stayin'."

"Vewy well, Cwooke. Pewwaps you will beah in mind throughout the fact that I am not speakin' to you."

"That's all right," said Crooke condescendingly. "I'm dashed sure I don't want you to. I'll have a snooze if what you have to say to dear old Aubrey starts borin' me quite stiff."

Arthur Augustus, disregarding that taunt, turned to Racke.

There was a change in his face that Racke noticed without understanding.

Gussy was an incorrigible optimist. No one was more down than he on anything shady. But he always hated the sin more than the sinner—for which, after all, he is hardly to be reckoned a fool, if what we are taught has any meaning.

Others might consider a fellow quite hopelessly outside the pale. Gussy might share their views—for a time. When it came to the pinch, however, he always had a feeling that there must be enough good even in the most utter rotter to give one something to appeal to.

"Wacke," he said, "I wish to ask you a question or two, an' in doin' so I desiah to appeal to your bettah natchah!"

"To what?" asked Racke, very considerably surprised.

"Your bettah natchah," repeated Gussy.

"Oh!"

Racke hardly seemed able to understand even yet.

"I am awagh, Wacke, that my ewwand would be considahed futile by most fellows*at St. Jim's. The genevahl belief, Wacke, is that you have no bettah natchah wathevah!"

"Oh!" said Racke.

It was all he could say for the moment. Wrath rose in him slowly.

As for Crooke, he was grinning. He had given up all notion of a snooze.

Arthur Augustus was appealing to the better nature of Aubrey Racke, and to Racke's dear pal Crooke it seemed quite the joke of the term.

"But I am suah that ewveryone, how-evah depwaved, has somewheah deep in his bewest—"

"Oh, go easy, by gad!" growled Racke.

"Have I hurt your feelings, Wacke?"

inquired the swell of the Fourth, in real anxiety.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Crooke.

Racke's face was very red. But he choked down his wrath. He would still have given a good deal to make friends with Arthur Augustus.

"Well, you know, D'Arcy," he said, "a chap doesn't exactly cotton to bein' talked to like that. There's nothin' of the plaster saint about us in this study."

"Speak for yourself, Aubrey!" chuckled Crooke. "Gussy must know I'm all serene, or he'd have included me in his chinwag."

"I am vewy fah indeed fwom wegardin' you as all sewene, Cwooke," said Arthur Augustus candidly. "In fact, I am by no means suah that you are not a biggah wottah than Wacke, though that is sayin'—"

"There you are again!" snapped Racke. "I don't want to quarrel with you, D'Arcy, but, dash it all, there's a limit!"

"I am sowwy, Wacke, if my plain speakin' hurts your feelin's, but—"

"You say I'm depraved an' a rotter an'—"

"Well, deah boy, twuth is twuth, how-evah unpleasent it may be. You are

wathah depwaved, you know, an' it is genewally agweed that you are the biggest wotah at St. Jim's—with the possible exception of Cwooke, that is."

"Dash it all!" roared Croke, jumping to his feet. "Are we goin' to put up with this from a dashed tailor's dummy, Racke?"

"If you do not welish my obsahvations I can only wegwet any pain you may suffah fwom them, Cwooke. But I must remind you—"

"Pain! It's you who are goin' to suffer pain, you cantin', over-dressed nunny!" howled Croke.

"Not fwom you, I fancay, Cwooke!" replied Gussy calmly.

"Oh, pile in on him, Racke!"

"I don't know that I'm inclined to do that at present," said Racke coolly. "He rather amuses me, y'know; an', accordin' to his exalted standard, you an' I, Gerry, aren't precisely the clean potatoes—are we, D'Arcy?"

"Vewy fah from it, Wacke," answered Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head.

"You wanted to appeal to my—er—better nature, I gather?" sneered Racke. "Yaas, deah boy."

"You're quite sure I've got one, by gad?"

"Yaas—at least, vewy neahly. I believe that eweryone has a bettah natchah, y'know."

"Even Croke?" inquired Racke sardonically.

"Well, yaas, even Cwooke."

But Gussy rather baulked at that jump. He had even a lower opinion of Croke than of Racke. Arthur Augustus thought no end of Reginald Talbot, and some of Croke's plots against Talbot had really been too thick for anything. The generous Gussy could forgive injuries to himself more easily than he could injuries to his friends.

"Look here, I'm fed up with this!" howled Croke.

"You needn't stay," said Racke. "But it doesn't matter as far as I'm concerned. I can't very well confess to Father Augustus here anythin' black that you don't know."

"I'm not so dashed sure of that!" snarled Croke.

"An' I shan't go confessin' on your behalf!" sneered his dear pal.

"Not so sure of that either!"

"Well, dry up, anyway! What is it you want, D'Arcy?"

"I came to talk to you about Hewwies' dog, Wacke."

Gussy was almost sure that Racke's face changed colour at those words.

But Racke's answer was quite cool.

"Has Herries sent you to ask how much he has to pay for the bags that dashed savage brute tore?" he said.

"Nothin' of the sort! Hewwies would decline, in any case—"

"Oh, of course! He's rather a poverty-stricken boulder, I know. But perhaps you feel that you would like to shell out yourself, old nut? Well, I'm not proud. I'll accept it. One pound fifteen clears it. I couldn't think of wearin' the things again, of course. You an' I have too much respect for ourselves for that sort of thing, though Cardew's about the only other chap of whom one could say the same thing."

Gussy gasped. He resented hotly being classed with Racke in any way, and he knew that Cardew would resent it, too—not that he minded so much about Cardew.

"I have no idea whatevah of payin' for the trousahs," he said. "It nevah entahed my head that you would expect such a thing fwom any of us."

"Oh, come off it! That's all rot! A chap generally does have to pay for any damage his dashed dog does."

"That depends on the cires, Wacke. In this case—"

"Nothin' at all in this case to make it out of the common. Towser went for me in the passage, where he'd no right to be, an'—"

"I wegwet to heah you speakin' falsely, Wacke!" said Gussy sternly. "It was not in the passage that Towser attacked—"

"I say it was. But we won't argue about that. It really doesn't matter. What in the world do you want with me, D'Arcy?"

"Towser was poisoned—at least, someone tried to poison him, an' vewy neahly succeeded," said Arthur Augustus slowly.

"Dashed sorry it was only very neahly, aren't you, Croke?" gibed Racke.

"Rather, old gun!"

"The misewant who used that poison will have to be found, Wacke! I have undahtaken to find him!"

"I wish you luck, by gad, D'Arcy!" said Racke.

"But you won't find him here," added Croke.

"In the course of my investigations I—"

"Your—er—oh, yaas, you would call them that!"

"I may come to suspect innocent persons."

"I should think it's dashed likely!" said Racke, with an ugly grin.

"That is why I have appealed to your bettah natchah, Wacke. The genewal opinion is that you did the foul deed. If you confess—"

"Wha-a-a-at?" hooted Racke.

"Own up, old top!" sneered Croke.

"Just to save this dummy trouble, y'know!"

"It may save quite a lot of bothah. On the othah hand, if you will give me your word of honah that you had nothin' to do with the affaiah—"

"That would save a lot of bother, wouldn't it, by gad?"

"The word of honah of any fellow who is a decent fellow an'—"

"But you don't consider me decent on your own showin', confound you!" howled Racke.

"That is true, Wacke. I wegwet vewwy—"

"So how far would my word of honour go? Why, you wouldn't even take it yourself, you self-righteous, peacockin' Pharisee!"

"I would endeavour—"

"An' I'll endeavour to give you the bumpin' you came here askin' for!" hooted Racke.

"That's the style, Aubrey!" roared Croke.

And the two of them charged upon Gussy.

It was not exactly pleasant to a sensitive mind to find oneself obliged to plant one's fist in the face of a fellow to whose better nature one wants to appeal; and, on the whole, as a means of so appealing the fistic method certainly does leave something to be desired.

Arthur Augustus did not like doing it. But he did it.

He got home quite a useful one on Racke's nose with his left, and then his right smote Croke on the left ear with some force.

But he had not the weight to stand up against the two; and he went down. "Yawwooh!" he shouted. "Stoppit, you wottahs!"

He was not bumped. So much at least he could claim. But what he got was much worse than a bumping. When Racke and Croke got a fellow on his back they were inclined to be Hunnish.

Gussy retreated at last, dusty, dishevelled, bruised, smarting, panting, hurt alike in mind and body, but undaunted.

"Hallo!" said Blake, when he made

his appearance in No. 6. "Been having an argument with a steam-roller?"

"No, Blake. I have been appealin' to Wacke's bettah natchah," replied Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Well, did you find it?" asked Digby, contemplating the sad result of that well-meant appeal.

"I cannot say that I did," answered Gussy sadly.

"He hasn't got any!" growled Herries.

"I am vewy much inclined to think that you are wight, Hewwies!"

CHAPTER 5.

Not Cardew's Business.

"TOO bad, old gun!" said Cardew sympathetically.

He spoke to Arthur Augustus.

Cardew stood with his back to the fire in the junior Common-room, with Clive and Levison close by. Not many others were present; but Gussy and Digby had just come in together.

"Did you address me, Cardew?" asked Gussy stiffly.

"Yaas, my noble kinsman! It really is too bad—altogether too bad! Dash it all, there's a limit somewhere! A fellow hasn't any right to start raggin' another fellow when his better nature is bein' appealed to, by gad!"

Gussy darted a reproachful glance at Dig.

Arthur Augustus himself had told no one but his three dearest chums what had happened to him. No one had seen, and it was scarcely likely that Racke or Croke had made the business public property.

Yet Cardew knew! And Cardew was almost the last fellow in the two Forms whom Gussy would have had know.

It was not Blake who had told. It was not Herries. Gussy was sure of that. But Dig, who had a keen sense of the ridiculous, often did let out things that might better have been kept dark, perhaps.

"No harm in telling, old chump, was there?" said Dig now, with his cheery grin. "It was a joke, you know! Ha, ha! Racke's better nature!"

"I didn't think it of you, Dig," said Gussy sadly.

"My dear good man, it's nothin'—nothin' at all!" said Cardew. "Don't get your noble rag out with Dig. He knew that in telling me it was bein' kept in the merry family. Of course, Clive and Levison heard, too; but then, I always tell them everythin'—they take such a severe line with me if I try keepin' the dashed littlest thing back."

Clive grinned, and Levison smiled his rather sardonic smile. Both were well aware that Cardew did not tell them everything, and that there were a good many things he did tell, only when it was too late for them to do anything to check him.

As to the matter of Gussy's appeal, the three chums of Study No. 9 took widely different views—views which reflected their widely different natures.

Cardew saw little but the humorous side. To him it was a joke.

Clive vaguely glimpsed pathos in it. Clive would not himself have gone to appeal to Racke's better nature; but he did not half understand the immense and indomitable optimism that had spurred D'Arcy on to do that.

Levison thought Gussy a fool. He liked him none the less. But who but a fool would have dreamed of so bootless an errand?

Perhaps Levison ought to have understood as well as anyone. It had been a good thing in the past for him that there was someone capable of seeing the better

nature under all his cunning plots and dingy blackguardism. He had not forgotten that, either. But it did not occur to him to compare himself with Aubrey Racke.

Gussy looked severely through his monocle at Cardew.

"May I ventchah to wemark, Cardew," he said icily, "that the connection to which you wefer is, aftah all, a vewy distant one, an' most assuahedly does not—"

"Don't be proud, cousin!" pleaded Cardew. "If you disown me utterly I shall never recover from the shock! Wally did it once, an' the effect was crushin'. But you—I could not bear it from you, cousin Augustus! Blood is thicker than water, y'know—lots!"

"Silly fathead!" growled Clive. "Just let Gussy alone! I suppose he has a right to go looking for trouble if he chooses, hasn't he?"

"Well, that's a thing we haven't made up our minds about in No. 6," said Dig. "You might say he has, as a human being—more or less—with a mind—more or less—of his own."

"More or less," put in Levison. "Seems to me you chaps think you're part owners of Gussy's mind."

"If any," put in Kerruish, looking up from the game of chess in which he and Julian were engaged.

"I decline uttably to permit any further discussion of the subject," said Arthur Augustus. "I am surprised that Dig should chattah about so essentially pwivate a mattah, an' I would ask him in futchah, when he feels that he must make such uncalled-for revelations, to make them to anyone wathah than Cardew, who is weally—"

"Your cousin, dear boy, and therefore—"

"Wats! I was not goin' to say anything of the kind!"

"But it's true, old gun; an' blood's no end thicker than water, an' next time I come across Racke and Crooke I'm goin' to pull their ugly noses for them!"

"Not on my account, I beg, Cardew!" said Arthur Augustus, in his very loftiest manner.

"Who's goin' to do what on our Gustavus' account?" inquired Jack Blake, coming in with Herries at this moment.

"Cardew talks about pulling the noses of Racke and Crooke," said Levison.

"Well, I thought about that myself," Blake said.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dry up, chump! If you can't take care of yourself, I suppose it's up to your friends to look after you, isn't it?"

"But there isn't the vewy slightest necessity—"

"That's where Blake an' I differ from you, old top," said Cardew.

"No need for you to butt in, Cardew!" growled Herries.

"Are you takin' in hand the matter?" asked Cardew.

"I'm waiting till I've found out for certain that those two cads—or either of them—tried to poison Towser. When I've found out that the Head himself won't keep me from giving them the licking of their lives," replied Herries deliberately.

"Old Herries wouldn't take Racke's word of honour that he didn't if it was offered," said Dig.

"Not likely!" snorted Herries.

"Who would?" asked Levison.

"Gussy!" said Dig, grinning.

"Weally, Dig—"

"You asked him to give it, fathead!"

"Yaas, but—"

"What was the good of that if you weren't going to take it?" said Julian.

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"You do not undahstand, Julian, dear boy. A chap's word of honour—"

"Is worth just as much as the chap. And Racke's worth nothing at all—less rather than more!"

"There can't be any doubt that it was Racke who tried to do old Towser in," said Kerruish.

He could talk on that subject with Herries now without either feeling any constraint.

They were, in fact, better friends than they had ever been before. But this did not mean that No. 5 had relinquished their ambition to be reckoned cock study in the Fourth Form.

"Are you looking for proof, Herries?" inquired Clive.

"What's the use? I'm not a detect—"

Cadet Notes.

We wonder how many boys can claim that they have nothing to do in the evenings. That is often the trouble in the winter. In summer, when the days are light, there is heaps to be done out of doors, but in the winter a number of lads have no place to go to for amusement. The cinematograph shows are very interesting, but they cost money. So do most amusements. We know of one, however, which costs very little indeed. This is the Cadet Corps. When a boy joins up with his Corps he gives it one or two evenings in the week and most Saturday afternoons, and an occasional Sunday. He meets a lot of new friends, learns a little infantry drill, and is able to take part in organised physical exercises.

This is a great chance for boys in large towns especially. We know of one Corps which has recently taken part in a cinematograph film, and Cadets have proved themselves useful in many other ways. The advantages to the members are obvious. Physical training is good for everybody, but it is not everybody who is able to get it. Working with others boys and taking command as a N.C.O. gives a boy confidence which is an asset in any business. Which do you think an employer prefers—a Cadet or a loafer? You may not be either, but you cannot be both. The bigger the Corps is the better it is to belong to, and the smaller the subscription, as a rule. Every boy should join a Corps, and try to get his friends to join also. There are Corps in most of the big towns, and some of the smaller ones. Where there is no Corps, steps are being taken to have one formed if a sufficient number of boys show themselves interested. Any boy who wishes to know the name of his nearest Corps should write, stating his age, etc., to the C.A.V.R., Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C. 2.

ive, and I'm not crafty; those slimy cads are too much for me," replied Herries, with a touch of bitterness. "It will all come out some day, though. I feel that, though I can't explain why."

"I should do something to help it come out!" Julian said quietly.

"What's the use?" repeated Herries.

"I am doing that, Julian!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Brrrr!" was all Herries said to that.

"Well, you've something to help you to fasten it on Racke now!" remarked Levison.

"But, my dear man, I weally should not dream of conductin' a detective investigation in such a vewy impwopah spiwit!"

"That is to say, because Racke wouldn't give you his word of honour—though Racke's word of honour would be dear at twopence—that he didn't, and

because he and Crooke piled in on you, two to one, you feel that it's up to you to find another criminal, in spite of the fact that we all know jolly well it was Racke!" said Blake. "Can't make out your methods of reasoning, Gustavus."

"Tain't reasoning at all—it's rot!" growled Herries.

"You do not undahstand, dear boys! We must not take it for granted that any particulah person was the culpwt unless—"

"Just what I've been trying to drive into these silly asses!" said a voice behind him. "I must say you are talking sense for once, D'Arcy, though I can't remember that you ever did it before!"

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"Don't bother, Gussy!" said Wilkins.

"It isn't really sense, or it wouldn't be the same as Grundy thinks, so there's nothing to worry about!"

"It was not the bein' told that I was talkin' sense that caused my pwotest, Wilkins—"

"Oh, beg pardon! I thought it must have been! Such a shock to you, you know!"

"Shut up, Wilkins! It's like this, you fellows— Here, where are you going, Cardew?"

"Out!" was Cardew's brief reply.

"Why?" snapped Grundy.

It was rather a scanty audience, anyway, and Grundy did not want to waste his words of wisdom.

"You're talkin'!" replied Cardew.

"What's that to do with it? You don't object to my opening my mouth, do you?"

"Yaas!" said Cardew simply.

And he went.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't think what you silly asses are cackling about!" howled Grundy.

"Shall I tell you?" asked Gunn.

"No, you idiot! It's like this, D'Arcy. Anybody might have done it—you, frinstance—"

"Weally, Gwunday, you ought to be uttably ashamed of yourself!"

"What on earth are you getting your rag out about? I was only saying— Where are you going, Kerruish?"

"Out!" answered the Manx junior. And he went.

"I wepudiate the aspersion with uttah despisewy!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Nothin' else would have made me imagine that you were the culpwt, Gwunday; but I must say that I have gwave doubts now!"

"It!" howled the great George Alfred, fairly shaking with rage. "I? You dare to—"

"Somehow, Grundy doesn't quite like the goose sauce when it's applied to the gander!" murmured Dig.

"I have always regarded you as a weally kind-hearted, though ewassly stupid an' blundewin' individual, Gwunday!" went on the swell of the Fourth.

"I would nevah have imagined that you would perpetwate such a ewuel twick upon pooah old Towshah! I—"

"You silly ass! You utter lunatic! What have I got against Towser? I never was afraid of Towser or of any dog!" roared Grundy.

This was true; but he went on to say things that were not strictly so.

"While you—everybody jolly well knows that you shivered with fright whenever the poor old fellow got within a yard of those swell trousers of yours! You— Where are you going, Julian?"

"Out!" answered Dick Julian. And he went.

Blake mizzled. Dig and Herries followed him. Clive and Levison left just before Wilkins and Gunn. When Grundy and D'Arcy looked around them again they found that they had the Common-room to themselves.

None of those who had gone thought for a moment that there was anything but foolish anger behind the mutual accusations of the two.

And perhaps there was little more than that.

But both George Alfred Grundy and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had rather more than a fair share of pig-headedness; and they parted on bad terms, each feeling that it was up to him to prove the other a villain—though neither had ever even dimly suspected the other of being a villain until that evening.

CHAPTER 6.

But Cardew Makes It So.

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW lounged along the passages in a mood that made him ripe for any folly.

He should have been sobered by the narrow squeak he had had only a few days before, when absence without leave had come near to bringing upon him the gravest trouble. But, somehow, he was not.

His threat to pull the noses of Racke and Crooke had been made on the spur of the moment, with little more behind it than the desire to tease Gussy.

But Cardew often talked of doing things on the spur of the moment, and then found his idle notions crystallising into firm resolves before he quite realised it.

And it was so in this case.

"After all," he said to himself, "Gussy's a dear, good little ass, an' I have some regard for our kinship if he hasn't! Besides which, it's quite a long time since Racke an' Crooke had their noses pulled, an' another pullin' is about due!"

And at that moment, as he was turning into No. 9, he sighted Racke and Crooke.

"Ah! Just the fellows I wanted to see!" he said in quite amicable tones. "Come in, will you?"

Arthur Augustus would have thought it rather off to entice the two black sheep thus. But had Cardew been remonstrated with he would have said that he saw no use in flying a flag of battle till the enemy were within distance of his broadside.

The two walked into No. 9 without any great suspicion. Not wholly without suspicion, it may be, for they knew Cardew. But there were times when he condescended to be on terms with them which offered them a chance of winning some of his plentiful cash; and Racke and Crooke were prepared to risk something for the sake of such a chance.

They were hardly inside the study before the hands of Cardew shot out.

His right hand gripped the nose of Racke, his left that of Crooke.

"Ow-yow!" roared Racke.

"Led do, you cad!" snuffled Crooke.

Cardew did not let go at once.

He brought Racke's head sharply over to the left and Crooke's to the right, and then they came together with a considerable thump.

"Yooooop!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"That," said Cardew blandly, "is for maltreatin' my noble kinsman! Please understand that in future you can't knock the dear Gussy about without my permission! An', on the whole, I don't think I shall give it, by gad! But you can—Ah! Would you?"

He had released the noses of his two victims. He had not counted on their changing in a second from helpless victims to avenging furies.

In a fair hand-to-hand fight Cardew might have had a chance against the two.

There was far more strength in the languid dandy than most people would have guessed. He was fitter than Racke and Crooke, and incomparably superior to either of them as a boxer.

But they were heavier than he, and they took him unawares.

Crooke had got a leg behind him, and pushed him back against the table till he felt as if his back were breaking. Racke threw his arms round his neck, and tagged.

Cardew's back did not break, though it might have done before those two would have forced from him a howl of agony. Racke averted any such catastrophe, though not out of kindness.

Racke's bearlike hug brought Cardew to the floor, and he lay there, with Racke's knee on his chest and Crooke sitting on his waistcoat.

"Got you!" hissed Racke triumphantly.

not in the lock, but a chair-back under the knob did nearly as well.

"Gerry," said Cardew, in low tones, "I'll give you a quid to turn your coat an' strike in on my side!"

"What? Do you hear what this rotter says, Aubrey? He's offered me a quid if I'll let him get up an' help him to mop you up!"

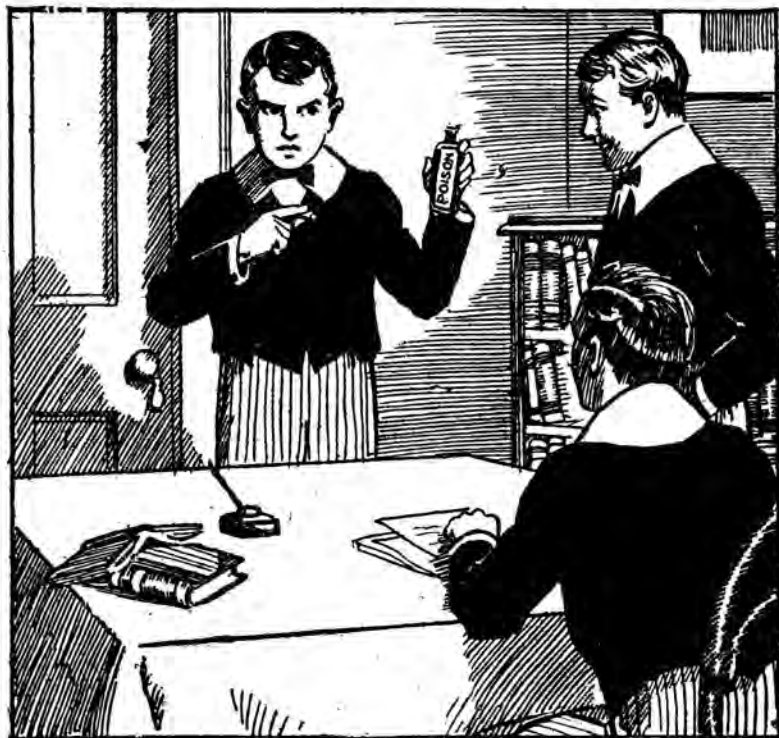
Racke and Crooke stared down at Cardew in absolute amazement.

Then the mocking smile on his face enlightened them, even before the mocking words came.

"By Jove, I'm surprised! I thought either of you would sell the other like a shot for half that!"

Crooke struck at the mocking face with his clenched hand, and it came away with blood upon it. There was blood on Cardew's lips, too. But the mocking smile stayed.

Racke thrust the toe of his elegant



Grundy's Great Discovery.
(See Chapter 7.)

"Looks a bit like it!" groaned Cardew.

He was feeling sick and strained, but he would not say so.

"By gad, you've some dashed nerve!" growled Crooke.

"Nerve, dear boy, is usually held one of my strong points—or little failin's, I'm not quite sure which," Cardew answered. "Depends upon the point of view, I suppose."

"You're dashed cool!" snarled Racke.

"On the contrary, I'm dashed hot."

"What do you imagine we're goin' to do?" young Moneybags said viciously.

"Haven't the faintest notion. But, if you have any decent regard for a fellow's feelin's, I would suggest your both gettin' off my waistcoat as a preliminary."

Racke's reply to that was a savage grinding movement of his knee. It hurt horribly; but the spasm of pain that momentarily contorted Cardew's face was all the sign Racke got of that.

"Sit on him hard, Gerry!" he said, rising to close the door. The key was

right boot into Cardew's ribs. It was not a kick; it did not really hurt. But Cardew took it as a kick, and felt about it exactly as he felt about that foul blow from Crooke.

"Get some soot, Aubrey!" said Crooke.

"Get it yourself!" snapped Racke. "Chimneys aren't in my line, by gad!"

"Well, ink, vinegar, sauce, pepper, anything that will make the beggar sit up!"

Racke moved over to the cupboard. He produced therefrom the cruet and a big bottle of ink.

"We'll have them mixed," he said, with a malevolent grin. "Plenty of pepper—eh, Gerry?"

Crooke's reply—if it can be considered a reply—was an unexpected one.

"Ow-yow!" he howled, as he plunged backwards.

Cardew had gathered all his strength for one effort, and at the critical second

had dug his fist hard into the region of Crooke's lowest waistcoat-button.

Taken utterly by surprise, the black sheep had been flung clean off his victim. Cardew was on his feet before Crooke could regain his.

He wasted no time. Two strides brought him up against Racke, who had in his hand the vinegar cruet.

It was snatched from him, and next moment its contents cascaded over his carefully-brushed hair. Crooke rushed in, and was met by a spouting stream of ink. Then Cardew grabbed the pepper-caster.

"I don't want to blind either of you!" he snapped. "But if you don't get out quick—"

The two black sheep retreated in real alarm.

"Look here, Cardew, you began it," mumbled Racke.

"An' by Jove, I'll finish it, if you don't clear!"

The pepper-caster came into play at that. Cardew, angry as he was, took care not to hurl the pungent stuff into the eyes of the enemy; but both Racke and Crooke got plenty of it a little lower.

"Atishoo! Oh, dear! A-tishoo!"

"Ow! Atishoo! Yow!"

"Try a little mustard, sweet creatures!" purred Cardew, and a great dab of mustard fell fairly into the open mouth of Crooke.

Racke fled, grabbing the chair from the door. Crooke followed him in frantic haste.

From the passage as they bolted came the sounds of sneezing and the pad of hurrying feet.

Cardew grinned. But the grin faded from his face, and a ghastly pallor came over it. He had to clutch at the table to keep himself from falling.

"By Jove, my back hurts!" he muttered.

"Hallo! Why, what— Atishoo!"

That was Clive.

"You silly, fatheaded chump—atishoo!—what—atishoo!"

That was Levison.

"I've had a visit from two gentlemen of the Shell, dear boys," said Cardew.

"My hat! You must have been treating them to pepper ad lib!"

"True, O Sidney! Also, my precious maid-of-all-work, the mustard-spoon will need a bath. It's been in Crooke's mouth. Better disinfect it while you're about it, old top!"

Sneezing, Clive took the spoon. He stared at Cardew, and sneezed again. Levison, also sneezing, likewise stared.

Somehow or other, rather more than his fair share of the domestic duties of No. 9 fell to Clive. He was wont to object to any chaff on the subject; but he did not refer to Cardew's gibe now.

His face and Levison's were alike serious. A thin trickle of blood had run down Cardew's chin, and the crimson showed up in startling contrast to the unusual pallor of his face.

"What have those brutes done to you, Ralph?" asked Levison, his voice hoarse with fury.

"Not more than I asked for, old gun—only rather in a different way, an' a beastly way even for their sort. But I'm all serene; don't you get worryin' your silly old napper about me."

"Sit down!" said Clive, pushing him into the armchair with rough tenderness. "To that I have no objec— Oh, by gad!"

From white Cardew's face had gone a dull leaden colour, and his head dropped back. He had fainted!

It was but a few seconds his insensibility lasted, and when his eyes opened there was the old, mocking, devil-may-care gleam in them.

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"I'm not peggin' out this journey, Clive, dear old soul!" he said.

"But what was it all? The rotters!" growled Levison.

"Nothin' much. Let me tell it briefly. I asked Racke an' Crooke in here to have their noses pulled—"

"You silly chump!" snapped Levison.

"And found that I had bitten off more than I could chew—"

"I should think so!" said Clive.

"I don't mean their noses, old top! I merely pulled them."

"Come along, Clive!"

"Right-ho, Levison!"

"Where are you two impulsive children goin'?"

"To interview Racke and Crooke!" replied Levison grimly.

"N.G., dear boy! Either they will be sleepin'—with the door locked—or on a journey, like merry old Baal when his prophets wanted him to get busy, y'know."

It is not likely that the two black sheep were sleeping; and the fact that their door was locked on the inside showed that they were not on a journey. But, like "merry old Baal," they gave no sign, and Clive and Levison had to wait.

CHAPTER 7.

Grundy's Great Discovery.

"I DON'T think—"

Grundy broke in upon Wilkins. "Of course you don't!" he said, with heavy sarcasm. "You can't! Thinking needs brains."

"Wilky's right," said Gunn gravely.

"How do you know that, you silly fathead, when you haven't heard what he was going to say?" snapped the great George Alfred.

"I know what he was going to say, and I quite agree with him," Gunn said doggedly.

Grundy looked from the bottle he held in his hand to the faces of his two faithful followers, and breathed hard through his nose.

That bottle had a big "POISON" label upon it, and Grundy had just displayed it to Wilkins and Gunn with immense pride.

He had also explained to them where he had got it.

Neither Wilkins nor Gunn was a youth of specially high-flown ideas. But they both had their notions as to what was and what was not the straight thing; and to them it seemed that George Alfred was right off the rails this time.

The great Grundy was often right off the rails as far as common-sense and cool judgment were concerned. But it was quite an unusual occurrence for him to be guilty of anything which conflicted with the standard of honour held by his chums.

He had done it this time, though. "What was Wilkins going to say?" hooted Grundy. "I know it was silly rot, so it doesn't matter which of you two lunatics I hear it from."

"He was going to say that it was dead off to go poking about among a chap's private things," Gunn replied resolutely.

"And especially when it's D'Arcy," added Wilkins. "There isn't a better or a straighter fellow at St. Jim's than Gussy. I suppose you've forgotten how he stood by me when I got myself into a rotten mess once, Grundy?"

Again Grundy looked at the bottle in his hand; but somehow this time he scarcely seemed quite so pleased with it.

But it was not the way of the magnificent George Alfred to take any very serious notice of the opinions of his henchmen.

"Now, listen to me!" he roared.

"Can't be off it while you bellow like

that," said Gunn. "The whole blessed passage can hear you, whether it wants to or not."

Grundy started in again on a slightly more subdued note.

"You chaps are jolly quick to jump on a fellow," he said, as if more in sorrow than in anger. "But have you considered what I am?"

"Rather!" replied Wilkins.

"Of course we have!" said Gunn.

"Well, what, then?"

"A blessed lunatic!" retorted Gunn.

"The silliest maniac at St. Jim's!" Wilkins said, with evident relish of the opening thus afforded him.

"You sheep-faced puppies!" hooted Grundy. "You—you—oh, I've no words for you! After all the time you've known me—after your chances of getting to understand what I really am—"

"That's why," put in Wilkins.

"Here, hold on!" said Gunn. More observant than Wilkins, he had noted that Grundy had gone purple in the face with wrath, and he dreaded lest something serious might happen.

"Hold on, do you say? I won't hold on! I give you up once for all, both of you! I renounce you utterly! Clear your sticks out, and don't let me see your silly, vulgar faces again!"

"Are you going to stop away from classes, or must we?" asked Wilkins. "Shut up, Wilky! Now, Grundy, old chap, you just explain what you mean! There's something in your mind that isn't in ours, I know."

"Maggots," grinned Wilkins. "Or sawdust, p'raps!"

"If you don't dry up, Wilky—"

"Let him alone, Gunny, old chap," said Grundy sadly. "I never saw much difference between you two before, except that you always had your beak in some mouldy book, and Wilky was mostly trying to be funny. But I see now! You aren't the silly, ungrateful rotter George Wilkins is, anyway!"

"Here, I say, Grundy, old man—"

"Don't dare to say anything more to me, George Wilkins!"

"Well, I'll listen, then," said the contrite Wilkins. "You won't mind that, I suppose?"

"That's your own look-out. I'm talking to Gunn. William Gunn has some sense, though I must say it isn't enough to brag about. It's like this, Gunny. I'm a detective!"

"I see," said Gunn gravely.

He frowned at Wilkins, who had put his hand up to his mouth.

"And detectives often have to do things that they aren't keen on—see?"

"We see," said Wilkins.

"I'm not talking to you, George Wilkins, so you can shut up! You don't suppose it was any blessed pleasure to me to go rooting about among D'Arcy's silly rattletaps, do you, either of you?"

"I thought you weren't talking to me," said Wilkins.

"Oh, do dry up, Wilky!" pleaded Gunn.

"I'm not!" snapped Grundy. "But I want you to understand that I acted from a sense of duty. I don't do dishonourable things!"

"Well, that's true enough," said Gunn.

"We know that, don't we, Wilky?"

"I'm not talking to Wilkins!" snapped Grundy.

"I suppose I may, though?"

"Not when I tell you you're not to!"

"You didn't tell me so, and I shouldn't have taken any giddy notice if you had."

"You're right, Grundy," said Wilkins.

"You're always doing silly-ass things, you—"

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Silly-ass things, I said—and I'm not deaf, if you are. But I must say you're straight enough as a rule."

"As a rule!" gasped Grundy.
 "Yes; but this is the exception. It
 *was dead off to go—"

"Don't I tell you, you blithering
 chump, that I was acting as a detective?"
 roared Grundy.

"But the point is," said Wilkins
 calmly, "that you aren't a detective.
 Nothing like it. You're only a common
 or garden member—"

"A—a whicher?"

"Not a witcher—is that the same as
 a wizard?—just an ordinary old ass. And
 if Gussy had raided your things I should
 say you had a right to object."

"You—oh, you potty idiot! I should
 think nobody could deny that?"

"Well, it's the same thing," said Wil-
 kins.

"The same thing? You must surely be
 potty!"

"I don't see a heap of difference in
 it," said Gunn.

"There isn't any," Wilkins said.

"Well, if you two chaps' don't fairly
 flabbergast me! Why, here I have been
 giving up my time and brains—"

"Er—time and—er—which?" put in
 Wilkins.

"Brains, Wilkins—things you naturally
 know nothing about, being what you are!
 Here I've been giving up my time and
 brains to solve a problem that really
 hasn't anything to do with me—"

"Well, I do agree with that," said Wil-
 kins heartily. "It's about the first word
 of sense you've spoken."

"Rot!"

"Nunno—the rest was rot, but not
 that."

"And I've discovered that the poisoner
 was D'Arcy—"

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"You silly cuckoo!"

To Gunn and Wilkins it really seemed
 for the moment that their chum had gone
 mad.

"What more proof do you want than
 this?" hooted Grundy, holding up the
 labelled bottle.

"But that isn't proof, at all," said
 Gunn, almost in despair. "By that way
 of arguing, any chap who has anything
 poisonous—Manners, for instance—oh,
 anybody—would be just as guilty!"

"I'm satisfied that it wasn't Manners,
 and I'm satisfied that it was D'Arcy,"
 said Grundy. "I'll admit that he's not
 the fellow I should have thought likely.
 But there's the motive. The thing's as
 clear as day to anyone with any intelli-
 gence."

"Glad I'm not that sort of person,"
 murmured Wilkins.

"Well, you're not, if that's anything to
 chortle about!" snapped Grundy.

"What motive?" asked Gunn.

"Mean to say you don't know?"

"I don't."

"Why, he hated Towser, of course."

"Oh, rats! I know he never did. You
 don't see things the right way, old top.
 Blake and Dig and Gussy all pretend they
 don't like Towser—think him a nuisance,
 and all that. 'Tisn't so really. They
 don't pretty nearly worship him, as
 Herries does, but they like the old beast
 all serene. Blake and Herries and Dig
 all pretend they don't think a heap of
 Gussy. But you just try this accusation
 on, and you'll see!"

It was quite a long speech for Gunn,
 and it revealed more discernment than
 most people credited that youth with.
 Wilkins was rather surprised with it; but
 Wilkins considered every word of it
 correct.

Not so Grundy. He laughed the laugh
 of scorn.

"Rot! Piffle! Bosh!" he said. "I'm
 going to tax D'Arcy with it before the
 whole crowd of them—you'll see! The
 more the merrier! And you'll see how
 he'll wilt before the proofs of his guilt!"

"It doesn't scan," said Wilkins, with
 most improper levity for such a time.

"What doesn't—"

"Your verses."

"My—Oh, you potty maniac! I
 never made any verses in my life!"

"Shut up, Wilky!" said Gunn.

"There's a time for everything, and the
 proper time for your funninesses is about
 two o'clock in the morning on the 29th
 of February. They wouldn't hurt any-
 one then. I wish you'd drop this silly
 rot, Grundy, old fellow!"

"Silly rot, do you call it, Gunn?"

"Yes; dashed silly rot! The silliest
 rot I ever heard!"

"Well, I'm blowed!"

"You'll be worse than blowed if you
 don't chuck it!" Wilkins said.

But nothing could move George Alfred
 from his stern, retributive purpose.

He had nothing against D'Arcy per-
 sonally, he admitted. That wasn't it.

Justice had to be done—that was the
 thing. And, asked whether he con-
 sidered that it was he upon whom the
 task of doing justice inevitably devolved,
 Grundy replied simply that he did so
 consider; in fact, he knew it.

After that, what more was there to be
 said?

CHAPTER 8.

An Accidental Vengeance.

"MY dear chaps, you can do
 exactly what you please.
 I'm not goin' to have your
 dashed help in any other
 way, that's flat an' final. If you care to
 give it me in this, well an' good. If not,
 still well an' good. We sha'n't quarrel
 about that. But we shall quarrel if I
 find either of you forcin' a row on either
 Racke or Crooke on my account."

It was, of course, Ralph Reckness
 Cardew who spoke, and his words were
 addressed to Ernest Levison and Sidney
 Clive.

"Well, we know you could mop either
 of them up easily enough," said Clive.

"So dashed easy that it's really not
 worth doin'. It would seem rather like
 bullyin'. Besides, it would be a bore,"
 yawned Cardew.

"But study-ragging is such a kid's
 game in the way of revenge," said Levi-
 son.

"When did you arrive at that sapient
 conclusion, dear boy?"

Levison shrugged his shoulders impa-
 tiently.

"Oh, I've done enough of that sort of
 thing, I know," he admitted. "Sinner
 rebuking sin, and all that. Nevertheless,
 it is rot, Ralph; and I can't quite
 understand how, with the way you feel
 about those cads, you should care for it."

"How do I feel about them?" de-
 manded Cardew, with a sardonic smile.

"Hanged if I really know!"

"An' isn't it just poss that that's why
 you don't understand, old gun?"

"You're not an easy chap to under-
 stand, Cardew," said Clive gravely.

"My dear, simple Sidney, I'm a quite
 impossible one. Why, I don't under-
 stand myself. There's too many of me
 for that. But the me that is in the
 ascendant just now insists upon a ragging
 chez Racke, whether the friends of the
 buzzom of that me an' all the other mes
 will help or not."

Clive stared at Cardew. Levison said
 slowly:

"I'll help, of course. I've done that
 sort of trick to gratify my own spite, and
 I needn't shy at doing it with another
 fellow who wants to get his own back
 that way. But I don't think much of it,
 and I'd advise Clive to keep out of it."

"Why?" asked Clive wonderingly.

Levison was growing nearly as puzzling
 to him as Cardew.

But Levison was not quite the puzzle
 to himself that Cardew was to Cardew.

His feeling about Clive was instinctive,
 but it had a very solid foundation.

Clive did represent in their comradeship
 something that neither he nor Car-
 dew ever could. Clive had always been
 straight. It was almost impossible to
 imagine his doing a dirty thing. There
 was no unnatural perfection about him,
 but he bore the stainless shield that
 neither of his chums could boast.

And study-ragging practised on
 enemies was not quite the thing accord-
 ing to St. Jim's notions.

It might be done in jest between fel-
 lows who were friends at heart, or half in
 jest between rivals, but not in enmity.

"I agree with Levison, after all.
 You're best out of it, dear man," said
 Cardew.

"Oh, rot!" said Clive. "I'm
 coming!"

"Come on, then!" said Cardew, rising
 from his seat. "No time like the pre-
 sent. Those two illustrious ornaments of
 the other Form are out. So are most of
 the fellows. Let us rag!"

And he led the way.

"Going all out?" asked Levison, when
 they stood in No. 7.

Cardew looked round him.

"Well, scarcely," he said. "We
 could do about a hundred quids' worth of
 damage here if we did, an' really I don't
 think I owe them quite that."

Racke had almost unlimited pocket-
 money, and Crooke was quite well off.
 No other study in the Shell or the
 Fourth—probably not one in the Forms
 above them—was half so luxurious as
 theirs. The carpet alone must have cost
 as much as would have sufficed to furnish
 some studies.

"Well, what shall we start on?" in-
 quired Clive, rather uneasily.

"Leave that to me!" said Cardew,
 opening the drawer in the table.

Now that they were there Cardew's
 keenness was on the wane. The opposi-
 tion of his chums had made him keen.
 He had begun to feel less so from the
 moment he found them ready to go with
 him.

And when Clive had expressed his
 resolution to go Cardew had realised at
 once that the wholesale smashing that he
 and Levison might have done in some of
 their moods was out of the question.
 They could not drag Clive into that.

But there were things in that study
 which Clive would willingly help to
 destroy. Cardew's eyes rested on several
 packs of cards, a considerable supply
 of cigarettes, and a couple of morocco-
 bound betting-books.

"Start on these, dear boys!" he said.

Levison sniffed. But Clive's face
 glowed. He was no smug; but he had a
 healthy contempt for gambling and
 smoking.

"Right-ho!" he answered; and as
 Cardew tossed him pack after pack of
 cards, he proceeded to slit them across
 and make of the pieces a neat little pile
 on the hearthrug.

The ornate betting-books were also
 slit up. The cigarettes Levison con-
 descended to deal with. He dealt with
 them by sticking them into pots of jam
 and marmalade taken from the cupboard.
 When he had thus rather complicated all
 the pots to be found he thrust the cigar-
 ettes left into the ashes under the grate,
 and stirred them up with a poker.

"Best Egyptian, too!" he said, with a
 note of regret in his voice.

"Sad, dear boy—sad!" giped Cardew.

"Have you saved a few for us to whiff
 when dear Sidney's not lookin'?"

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"Rats!" snapped Levison. "I haven't smoked one for whole terms!"

Cardew did not answer him. There had come into his face a curious look; his eyes gleamed, and his lips had drawn into one thin red line.

"What have you found?" asked Clive. "I don't know exactly. I may be dead off it, but—"

It was a small green bottle without any label that he took from the drawer.

He drew the stopper, and smelled at the bottle. Then he poured a few drops into the palm of his hand. He was about to put the tip of his tongue to those drops, when Levison sprang forward and gripped his wrist.

"Don't, you idiot! It's most likely poison!"

"Just what I think, old bean!" said Cardew coolly. "But I'm not goin' to take enough to be risky."

"You're jolly well not goin' to take any at all!" said Levison sharply.

"Why, if that's poison—I say, you know, we none of us felt much doubt about who it was that tried to do old Towser in," said Clive, "but—but this proves it!"

"Hardly, dear boy! Crooke might have been goin' to settle Racke's hash, or Racke Crooke's. If so—well, it would be rather a scandal for St. Jim's, otherwise I should say it was a pity—"

"Oh, don't talk out of your hat, Cardew! Isn't there any way we can prove it?" Levison said eagerly.

"H'm! This is only circumstantial evidence at the best, an' that never goes quite all the way," replied Cardew. Then he brightened up. "But, of course, that's law. What's the dashed law matter? It's justice we care about at St. Jim's!"

"And that's not at all the same thing!" said Levison.

"It ought to be, you know!" remarked Clive, rather puzzled.

"An' we ought to be as good little boys as you are, Sidney, dear old top! But we're not—by longish odds!"

"Speak for yourself, chump!" growled Levison.

"Can't we do anything?" asked Clive. Cardew sniffed again at the stuff in his palm. He was still tempted to taste it. But the keen eyes of Ernest Levison were upon him.

"It has quite a strong smell!" Levison said.

"Kind of characteristic niff!" agreed Cardew. "Now, I wonder whether the yet who handled Towser would recognise it?"

"My hat! That's an idea!" said Levison.

"Jolly good one!" assented Clive.

"Come on, children! We'll leave the rest of this! I'm rather tired of it, anyway!"

"It doesn't amount to much in the way of a study-ragging!" said Levison, half regretfully.

"That's the old Adam workin' in you!" Cardew reproved him.

"I think it's about enough!" Clive said. "We've meddled with nothing except what the sweeps ought not to have here!"

"Hear the virtuous Sidney!" giped Cardew.

Clive flushed, with a touch of resentment. But the flush faded when Cardew's hand rested for a moment on his shoulder. It was easy for Cardew to take the sting out of anything he said to Clive; not always so easy where Levison was concerned.

"It looks to me as if I had stumbled upon an accidental vengeance, dear boys!" remarked the dandy of the Fourth, as they sent out for Rylcombe.

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 570.

CHAPTER 9.

Neither of Them, After All!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY came into the junior Common-room after prep that night. He looked important—not that that was anything at all unusual—and very serious.

Wilkins and Gunn, who were with him, also looked serious—even more serious than Grundy.

They had done their level best to prevent their leader from making public the result of his detective activities. But all had been to no avail. They had half thought of refusing to come with him. But they were too curious as to what might happen to stay away.

There was a crowd in the Common-room. Figgins & Co. from the New House were there—unusual visitors at this hour. But Mr. Ratcliff was away for a day or two, and Mr. Lathom, taking charge of the House in his unregretted absence, was much easier about things. He had given permission to the three to run across and see Tom Merry.

They did not particularly want to see Tom Merry—not more than usual. But Kerr had heard that there was something in the wind—something out of the ordinary run. Gunn had given him a hint. Kerr had taken some interest in the attempt upon Towser; but Herries had never got farther than thinking of asking Kerr to take up the case as a case, and the Scots junior had waited to be asked.

"Is D'Arcy here?" asked Grundy in tones that were almost sepulchral.

"Ass! He's right before your silly nose!" snapped Blake.

"But Grundy doesn't see with his nose!" put in Lowther.

"What do you want with me, Gwunday?" asked Gussy icily.

He elevated his monocle, and looked at Grundy through it with a haughty glare.

And Grundy glared back at him—less haughtily, perhaps, but more ferociously.

"It's coming, Figg!" murmured Kerr.

"Well, I'm glad we haven't missed it!" replied Figgins.

"Get on with the washing, Grundy!" said Kangaroo.

"D'Arcy, I have to make against you a very serious accusation!" said Grundy portentously.

"Rats!"

That was Dig, not Gussy.

Gussy continued to regard the great Grundy with haughty scorn. But Blake and Herries and Dig were all in arms.

William Cuthbert Gunn nudged George Wilkins, and nodded at the three. Wilkins nodded back. He had to admit that William Cuthbert was in the right. It looked to Wilkins as if he and Gunn might find themselves up against Herries and Dig before this had finished. They did not want to support Grundy in his absurd charges; but if it came to a row they could hardly desert him.

"Out with it, Grundy!" said Tom Merry. "It's sure to be funny!"

"On the contrary, Merry, I am confident that when you hear it you will be disgusted with D'Arcy!" replied Grundy.

His tone and his choice of words were unusual. He seemed very much in earnest. But Tom grinned.

"Yes—I think not!" he said.

"Pwoceed, Gwunday!" said Arthur Augustus, with immense dignity.

"He'd better shut up!" growled Blake.

"It's sure to be some silly rot, and I'm hanged if I think it's funny!"

Grundy produced from his breast-pocket the bottle with the poison label.

"Do you recognise this?" he demanded.

"Not in the vewy least!" answered Gussy.

"What? You don't recognise it?"

"Not in the least, I assuah you!"

"That does it!" roared Grundy. "I never thought you'd tell a lie about it! But you're lying!"

"Lyn!—I? You soundwel! I will give you a feahful—"

"Easy does it, Gustavus!" said Blake.

Blake and Herries were holding their chum back. Grundy carried too many guns for the slim swell of the Fourth.

"Welease me!" howled Gussy.

"Wait a moment!" Tom Merry's face was very grave now, and his voice sounded grave, too. "Let's know exactly what you have against D'Arcy, Grundy! It's no good playing off this melodramatic stuff on us!"

"Get down to facts!" said Clifton Dane.

"And mind they are facts!" growled Gore.

Gussy evidently did not lack support. Julian & Co. had closed up behind the chums of No. 6. Manners was looking wrathful. Durrance and Lumley-Lumley moved over to Gussy's side. But Levison & Co. stood aloof as yet.

Then Figgins spoke.

"I don't care a scrap what Grundy's got to say!" he said. "Let's cut it all out, and bump Grundy! It's sure to be silly rot, anyway!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Thank you, Figgay!" Arthur Augustus said, unbending for the moment.

"But Gwunday had bettah make his charge, I considah!"

"Then I charge you with poisoning Herries' dog!" hooted the burly Shell fellow.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You're mad, Grundy!"

"Of all the potty asses!"

"Mad, am I?" roared Grundy. "Well, what do you say to this? D'Arcy denies knowing anything about this bottle—you all heard him deny it. Well, it's his; I got it from among the rotten things he has in the dorm—face-washes and scent and all such beastly stuff—faugh!"

"You got it! My hat, Grundy, you've cheek enough!" howled Blake.

"If I'd caught you in our dorm—"

began Herries.

"Wait one sec!" said Gussy, interrupting Herries. "I know what that is, now, though I had forgotten all about it when that sillay ass pwoduced it. My hair had begun to fall out, an' I got somethin' f'wom the hairdewessah fellow at Wayland for it. It was marked with a label that said it was not to be taken internally, which seemed to me pwetty considerable wot, because who would take stuff like that internally? But some of you fellows are weally dweadfully careahless, so when the label got wet an' slipped off I put that 'Poison' one on. That's all about it!"

"Likely story—I don't think!" sneered Racke.

Cardew looked at Racke in a very meaningful way.

So did Herries. But Herries did more than look. He put a big fist under Racke's nose.

"Gussy would just as soon think of doing old Towser any harm as I should!" said Herries emphatically.

"It hasn't occurred to Grundy's great detective mind that Gussy can prove an absolute alibi—if it was necessary—which no one is likely to think it," said Lowther, graver than his wont.

"That's all very well," persisted Grundy, shaken, but not beaten. "I don't say this wasn't hair-wash or some of that kind of muck. What I do say is that, on D'Arcy's own showing, it was poison!"

"Poison be jiggered!" said Blake contemptuously. "Here, give me the rotten

stuff! I don't mind sampling it! That will show everyone how much poison there is about it!"

"If anyone is to do that, Blake, deah boy, I will—an' I am quite willin' to do it!" Arthur Augustus said. "I do not suppose it is weally vewy deadly!"

"It didn't kill Towser!" sneered Racke.

Crooke slunk away from his place by Racke's side. Crooke had seen a danger-signal in the face of Cardew. He could not think how Cardew could possibly know anything; and yet, somehow, he was sure that Cardew did know something, and that before long Racke would find himself in a very tight corner.

"Grundy's found a mare's-nest," said Talbot quietly. "What do you think, Noble?"

"I think Grundy is the biggest ass I ever set eyes on!" said the Australian junior.

"Hear, hear!"

"Kerr, what do you think?"

"Not a scrap of evidence, Talbot. And east-iron evidence wouldn't make me believe our Gussy did a thing like that." Now Gussy stepped forward.

He pointed a finger dramatically at Grundy.

"There stands the culpwit!" he said.

"Wha-a-at?"

Nothing could have exceeded Grundy's utter astonishment.

"You'd better speak now, Cardew," whispered Clive.

"No, dear boy! I wouldn't miss this for anythin'!"

Levison left them, and planted his back against the door. He found himself barring the exit of Racke and Crooke. But as he had moved because he had seen them move, this did not surprise him much.

They slunk back. Levison's face was grim, and to attempt to force a way past him would have meant immediate trouble.

"I say, Gussy!" protested Glyn.

Everyone there knew that Grundy was just as unlikely as Arthur Augustus to have been the criminal.

Everyone except Gussy. He certainly seemed to believe in the charge he made.

"Draw it mild, old chap!" said Dig.

"I uttaly wefuse to dwaw it mild, Digbay! What else could possibly have

induced Gwunday to bwing this loathsome-charge against me but a desiah to sheltah himself?"

"But that's not good enough—not nearly good enough," said Tom Merry.

"Two blacks don't make a white, and you've no more right to accuse Grundy than he has to accuse you. You haven't a scrap of—"

"No furthah evidence is necessary! For what othah weason—"

"Let me get at him!" howled Grundy.

"I'll slay him! To accuse me—me!"

Gunn and Wilkins threw their arms around Grundy.

"Help, some of you!" gasped Gunn.

"We can't hold the beggar long!"

Kangaroo readily lent a hand.

Then Clive stepped forward, in spite of Cardew's attempt to hold him back.

"You're spoilin' sport!" hissed Cardew.

But to Clive, seeing the ferocity on Grundy's face, the real trouble and anger written on D'Arcy's, the sport seemed of rather a doubtful kind. And Levison thought Clive right, though he was never specially soft of heart.

"Cardew can prove that it's neither of them!" Clive shouted.

"Make way for Cardew!" yelled Digby.

Cardew lounged forward, hands in pockets. Ralph Reckness dearly loved the limelight.

"Sorry to be so dashed unoriginal," he drawled, "but mine's a poison-bottle, too. Show it, Levison!"

Levison obeyed.

"Anybody here recognise it?"

Nobody spoke, but Crooke's face went pea-green.

"The vet won't swear that the stuff Towser didn't die of came out of that bottle," went on Cardew, still languidly,

"but he's prepared to make oath that it was the same stuff!"

"Bai Jove! Cardew, deah boy, you didn't get that bottle—"

"Out of the excellent Grundy's study? Sorry to disappoint you, old bean, but it—"

"It came from Racke's study!"

"Dash it all, Clive—"

But Cardew's protest against the precipitancy of his chum was drowned in the hubbub that rose at that statement.

No one doubted. No one thought the evidence lacking in completeness. It

was justice they wanted at St. Jim's, not law.

"Fetch me a stick, Dig," said Herries grimly, "or a dog-whip—anything! I'm going to give those two rotters the hide of their lives!"

"Me? What have I got to do with it?" blustered Crooke.

"I shall fight!" said Racke hotly.

"You won't!" retorted Herries. "I know what that means—one round, and then chuck up the sponge. Not good enough."

"If Racke insists on—"

"Right-ho, Tommy! That won't prevent my thrashing him afterwards!"

"This is a bizney for the two Forms," said Talbot.

"It's my bizney!" snapped Herries.

Grundy and Arthur Augustus looked at one another strangely.

It was Gussy who spoke first. He had to swallow something in his throat before he did it. But it was a case of "noblesse oblige," and when it came to that Gussy was never wanting.

"I'm sowway, Gwunday," he said.

Grundy hesitated. Gunn was about to prompt him, but wisely refrained.

"I—well, I don't mind admitting that I'm sorry, too, D'Arcy," the burly Shell fellow mumbled.

Gussy held out a slim hand, and Grundy's bear-paw engulfed it.

Then Dig came back with a prefect's ashplant.

"You two can take it from Herries or from us," said Tom. "Is that right, you fellows?"

"Yes!" howled two-score voices.

"No!" howled Herries. "They will get it from me, anyway!"

And he collared Racke.

They took it from Herries—both of them. It was the quickest and perhaps the easiest way. But it could hardly have been the less painful, for George Herries showed no mercy.

"It isn't half enough!" he roared, when he was dragged off Racke.

"Crooke's got the other half 'to come!" said Levison grimly.

And Crooke had it!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—

"BILLY BUNTER AT ST. JIM'S!"—by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"BILLY BUNTER AT ST. JIM'S!"

By Martin Clifford.

Do you know Billy Bunter?

What! Not know Billy Bunter?

"Go on!" as Blake would say.

You will know him next week, anyway.

Nice chap?

Well, that's a matter of taste.

On the whole, no!

Where's the pull of knowing him, then?

You will see.

Chap may be no end interesting, you know, without being nice.

And Bunter's no end interesting.

What's he doing at St. Jim's?

To know all about that you should read this week's "Magnet" story—"Billy Bunter's Wheeze."

Beh, borrow, or—buy it!

Thought I was going to say "steal it," didn't you?

But Bunter has not corrupted me to that extent yet, though I have seen so much of him lately.

Never mind! Wait till next week—if you can wait—and you will have to wait, whether you can or not!

So everything's all right—or as near everything as makes no particular difference.

GREAT NEWS!

Every reader of the GEM should take a note of January 25th, for it is on this date that the "Penny Popular" will make its reappearance. As I told you last March, we always intended to bring the "Penny Popular" out again as soon as circumstances allowed. I have lost no time, and on January 24th every reader of the GEM will be able to go to his newsagent and ask for the good old "Penny Pop."

There will be three stories in the "Penny Popular." One will deal with the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., the other with Tom Merry & Co., and the third will introduce Jimmy Silver & Co.

There is one story I wish to mention in particular, and that is the one entitled "BILLY BUNTER'S POSTAL-ORDER." I have received hundreds of letters from readers asking me to republish this story: From this you will be able to gauge the popularity of this story, and will realise that there is a splendid treat in store for you.

The second story, which is entitled "D'ARCY'S DELUSION," deals with one of Gussy's many little love affairs. D'Arcy is always amusing when he falls in love. Therefore you are bound to enjoy this tale. You will also be delighted with "THE RIVALS OF ROOKWOOD," which deals with Jimmy Silver's arrival at the famous school.

With this issue I intend to present a

MAGNIFICENT FREE PLATE

of Billy Bunter—a plate that will excel anything on similar lines that has ever been given away in a boys' paper. For a reproduction of this plate see next Monday's "Magnet."

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted by—

J. Booth, 15, Ash Street, Middleton, near Manchester, wants members for lending library of old copies of Companion Papers. Also stamp and postcard exchange, and magazine.

S. Chadwick, 500, Leeds Road, N. Huddersfield, wants a good, cheap cinematograph.

C. M. Creight, 5, Lisbon Street, Belfast, Ireland, with readers, 16-18, in Australia or New Zealand, with wish to exchange views.

R. W. Sampson, 16, Hunt Street, Everton, Liverpool, wants members for World-Wide Correspondence Club. Meetings arranged for London members. Southern representative,

R. W. Bayly, Glenlyn, Villiers Road, Beckenham, Kent.

Mr. L. Bangs, 20, Chiswell Road, Oxford, wants members for the United Correspondence Federation; magazine published; stamped addressed envelope.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 570.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 31.—Reggie Manners.

THERE were quite a lot of things wrong with Manners minor when he came to St. Jim's.

Even his father, whose special pet he is, could see that. He warned Harry Manners in advance that Reggie had been getting into bad company, and had taken to such undesirable practices as playing cards and smoking cigarettes. But he seemed to think that but little blame could be attributed to Reggie; all the blame fell upon the bad company into which he had got. Well, some of it belonged there, no doubt; but certainly not all.

Mr. Manners also seemed to think that it would be an easy and pleasant task for Harry to wean his younger brother from his wrongful ways. But Harry, who saw that younger brother in a clearer light, knew from the first that it would be neither easy nor pleasant.

But he did his best. He has gone on doing his best. He has taken lots of trouble. He will probably have to take lots more.

Reggie Manners is not a "little beast"—though there are times when that epithet would describe him not unjustly. He is not a second Piggott. There is plenty of good stuff in him.

But he is a spoiled kid—sulky, rebellious, ungrateful, and with an unfortunate leaning towards things which are not good for him.

Harry Manners did not resent his brother's coming, but he did feel a bit nervous about it.

The Third were not likely precisely to cotton to Reggie. Arthur Augustus was certain that he had only to say the word to Wally, and Wally would be ready to adopt the new boy, so to speak. But Manners' other chums were reasonably doubtful about that. Wally never has distinguished himself by his extreme readiness to be ordered about by Gussy.

Tom Merry & Co. did their level best to pave the way for Reggie. They had some of the fags to tea. Wally was even invited to take some snapshots with Manners' beloved camera. The fags smelt a rat; they wanted to know what they were being buttered for. Wally was ready to promise that the Third would not eat Reggie, and also that if the kid needed licking he would attend to the job himself, and not allow anyone else to do it. But that really did not go very far.

On the whole, it was about as certain as anything well could be that Reggie was booked for trouble in the Third. But before his trouble there began he managed to land his brother into unpleasantness.

Manners met the youngster at the station, of course. Reggie grumbled because he had not been met at Wayland Junction. He had nearly missed the local train, it seemed—through stopping to get some cigarettes out of an automatic machine. He insisted on lighting a cigarette on the way to St. Jim's, and he was seen smoking it by the Vicar of Rylcombe, who was disgusted with Manners for allowing—the vicar said "encouraging"—it, and promised to report it to Dr. Holmes. Levison and Mellish also saw Reggie puffing away, and sneered. They wanted to know what Tom Merry would say; and when Manners minor gathered that Tom Merry was a fellow who did not approve of smoking, he sneered at Tom—which aroused the wrath of Manners major. Before they got to the school Harry had had to take the cigarettes away, and Reggie, full of anger and sulkiness, had vowed that he wanted to have nothing more to do with his brother.

Piggott gave Reggie a first taste of what he might expect from the Third—though, of course, the Third most emphatically do not take their tone from Piggott. But any of them might have played the trick which Piggott played—the locking-up of Reggie for a couple of hours or so in the box-room. Reggie threatened to complain to the Head;

he actually went to Mr. Raitton. The Housemaster advised him not to carry tales; and Tom Merry & Co. advised him to punch Piggott's head and have done with it. But the self-willed Reggie had no use for advice from anyone; he meant to go his own way.

It all led to a dormitory ragging, and to Reggie's appearance in a towering rage and his pyjamas in Mr. Selby's study. After that the Third sent him to Coventry—and small blame to them!

Joe Frayne tried to be decent to Reggie. Joe is a tender-hearted little chap. The attempt ended in a fight, and the fight was not Joe's fault. Even after it he promised Tom Merry & Co. that he would do his best

and owned up. Great-hearted Gussy went to the Head with him; he was afraid to go alone. But he went—and that was what really mattered.

A little later there was more trouble. Reggie really had a very considerable inclination to the ways of the gay dog, and it flattered his vanity when he was taken up by Cutts of the Fifth, who found him useful in many ways. Cutts and his pals took the lively Reggie up the river on a picnic with them, and the Terrible Three came upon them. They interfered, of course. They were not up to the weight of the three Fifth-Formers, though Tom Merry gave Cutts something to be going on with before St. Leger and Gilmore, having disposed of Manners and Lowther, came to Cutts' aid. Then the Terrible Three were bound, chucked into their boat, and sent adrift, Reggie looking on—not quite easy in his mind about it, but unprotesting.

Tom and Manners and Lowther came back with reinforcements. The four chums of Study No. 6 rescued them from their plight, and with the four were Noble and Julian and Kerruish. Ten of the Shell and Fourth had Cutts & Co. at their mercy, of course; and Cutts & Co. got it hot and strong.

Reggie was as sulky as a kid could be, and his major was so enraged by his attitude that he made up his mind to let him go his own silly way. But, of course, he could not keep that up. For Reggie's way led him to the Green Man—a plot of Cutts', that—and when he was in danger Harry could not longer hold aloof. He got him out of that, at heavy risk to himself; and for a time Reggie reformed.

He fell from grace again when Racke and Crooke took him up. It was only done in spite against Manners major; but Reggie did not see that. There was no end of trouble before the foolish fag was got out of the clutches of those two black sheep. In the event Manners did what even his own chums doubted to be the thing; he made Racke understand that if he did not leave Reggie alone his many delinquencies would be reported to Mr. Raitton. Sneaking! I am afraid that was what St. Jim's in general would have called it. But I think Manners was right. His young brother's character—his whole career—was at stake. Racke is the kind of fellow who could corrupt utterly a youngster of Reggie's type. It would have hurt Harry Manners no end to be thought a sneak. But he could have borne that better than to see Reggie go to the dogs.

There was the Roylance business. Roylance, coming along as a new fellow, was very rudely treated by Reggie, and quite properly gave him something for it. Reggie kicked his shins—it is a nasty trick of Reggie's, that, though luckily not a frequent one—and Roylance gave him a little more. Then Harry Manners came into the picture, and there followed a feud between him and Roylance—a feud which was not in the very vast fault of the New Zealand junior, but was due in part to the obstinacy of Manners major, but even more to the sulkiness and unsportsmanlike behaviour of Manners minor. Harry did not know what had really happened; he believed that Reggie had been bullied by Roylance. But he should not have believed it; no one else did. Most of you will remember how it ended—how Roylance, at the imminent risk of his life, saved the wilful Reggie from a danger that his own perverse folly had led him into, and how he kept it dark until it leaked out by accident. Since then Roylance and Harry Manners have been the best of friends. But I doubt whether Roylance thinks much of Reggie.

One might almost say that his own chums don't think much of Reggie. Perhaps that would be an exaggeration; they have seen something of his better side. But I fancy that he is the least popular among the rest of them with all the little band which owns Wally D'Arcy for leader. That is to



for Reggie, and he meant it. Sound little chap, Joe Frayne!

Then Arthur Augustus took a hand, brought all his well-known tact and judgment to bear on Reggie, and actually achieved something. He got Reggie to apologise for kicking Tom Merry's shins! It was not much; but the least sign of grace was welcome.

The Third began to like Reggie better when he "stood up to old Selby." That meant really flat rebellion; but one can understand the Third appreciating rebellion against their tyrant. He did more than stand up to Mr. Selby; he assaulted him in the dark quad. There was trouble about that—heaps of trouble. Sooner or later Reggie must have been found out. Manners told him that he would be found out, and urged him to go and confess and face the inevitable flogging. Reggie fumed that; but when his major had taken his crime upon his own shoulders Reggie played the man,

say that Wally probably prefers Frank Levison and Joe Frayne and Curly Gibson and Hobbs and Jameson to Reggie; and Frank prefers Wally and Frayne and Hobbs and Jameson and Gibson to Reggie; and Gibson— But that is enough! One cannot be quite sure about this; but one is quite sure that no one of the rest is so much surprised when Reggie kicks over the traces badly as he would be if it were one of the others. That sulky, jealous temper of his has more than once estranged him from his chums. It led to trouble between Wally and Frank once; and another time the Third found Frank and Reggie fighting—not Frank's fault, in any way. Frank puts up with a lot from Reggie—far more than Wally will. But Frank can talk very straight to his wayward chum at times. Reggie's usual attitude to Levison minor is not a nice one. He is inclined to sneer at Frank as goody-goody, which that sterling youngster certainly is not; and he rather likes to see Frank and Wally at odds.

The Third have taken Reggie in hand for his own good more than once; they have also, utterly disgusted with him, allowed him for a time to go his old wild way. When there was trouble between him and Frank Levison he deserted his chums and took up with that young scallawag Reuben Pigcott, and through Pigcott he got into danger of the most serious kind. He was rescued from that, but it was not Pigcott who rescued him. It was Wally and Frank. It must be said for Reggie that he is not incapable of being repentant and remorseful. But that mood never lasts long. It lasted longer after the sacrifice which his brother made for him than at any other time, perhaps; but he has got back to his old standpoint now—a totally wrong one. He persists in regarding Harry as a bore-some person with a mania for preaching sermons. Wally D'Arcy is not too polite to his major, but there is a great difference between his attitude and Reggie's. Wally is cheerily impudent to Gussy; Reggie is

sulkily impertinent to Harry. And Harry is worth a hundred of him!

But it was rather for their father's sake than for Reggie's that Harry Manners made his great sacrifice. At home Reggie is the white-headed boy; Harry is a bad second. When Reggie goes wrong at St. Jim's it is chiefly Harry's fault—or it used to be reckoned so. Perhaps Mr. Manners understands better now. He should do. He has learned what fine stuff there is in his elder son.

Gussy's friends are really fond of Wally. Ernest Levison's chums regard Frank as almost a younger brother of their own. But I doubt whether a single one among the chums of Manners has any real regard for Reggie, except for his major's sake.

And yet he is not at heart a bad youngster. In the long run, I think, he will make a man. The worst of it is that he more than half fancies himself one already. And that is not a help to a kid of thirteen in the process!

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

THE FRENCH PROFESSOR. By Herbert Skimpole.

INvariably experience a sensation of pain on hearing a gentleman of ninety years or so refer to one thing as being "a jolly sight better" than another. The expression is much too frivolous to be compatible with extreme old age. And I make a point of severely reproofing one who offends in that direction.

I was busily scrutinising the contents of a second-hand bookstall when this offence occurred. Looking up, I perceived two individuals engaged in discussion—I may say, violent discussion.

One old gentleman was tidily dressed, but he lacked that mildness which appeals to the philosophic mind. He seemed, indeed, extremely irascible, and he did not impress me at all favourably.

His companion, on the other hand, impressed me greatly. Although he was eccentrically dressed in garments patched with a vividly coloured material, there was a look of deep thought and meditation in his eyes—the latter being, perhaps, rather close-set.

His complexion was swarthy—inclined somewhat to the colour of dirt; a fact which at once brought me to the conclusion that he was a native of a hotter clime than ours.

The intercourse, though lately begun, showed signs of ending abruptly. A volley of words were interchanged, including "begging," "working," "grub," and "jolly sight better."

Then the first old gentleman stamped away.

"Sir," I said to the swarthy old gentleman remaining, "is not 'jolly sight better' an expression much too undignified to be employed by one of so great an age as yourself?"

The old gentleman turned his eyes—there was a look of deep enthusiasm in them, I now saw—upon me.

"Of all the impudent 'ounds—"

"Ah!" I interrupted quickly. "You are French, I presume?"

"Eh? Who says so?"

I smiled patiently.

"In France you do not sound your aitches; consequently, you have considerable difficulty in the pronunciation of our own," I explained.

"In addition, your complexion is not that of an Englishman."

At this point my venerable acquaintance grasped his stick more tightly. This was probably because it showed a tendency towards slipping to the ground, drawn thither by the mysterious force of gravitation, though I did not notice that tendency. However, that is neither here nor there.

"A man of science is a man of many powers," I smiled, observing a look in his enthusiastic eyes which I attributed to natural astonishment. "But you were calling your late acquaintance a hound? He has annoyed you. You were discussing some particular type of grub? I heard the word mentioned."

My French companion nodded vigorously.

"That's it! Grub!"

"My friend," I exclaimed, grasping his hand eagerly, "I am delighted to hear you are interested in entomology! You are, may I venture to hope, a professor of entomology?"

My esteemed friend seemed puzzled for a moment. His knowledge of our English tongue was evidently not so great as to enable him to divine my meaning immediately.

Eventually he nodded his head, in rather a vague way.

"If you could spare the time to come with me, sir," I said, "I should like to take you to my study at the school, and show how far I have advanced in entomology. It is exceedingly unfortunate that I am not sufficiently versed in your language to be able to speak it with any fluency. In that case, I would be in a position to receive valuable mental improvement. Will you accompany me to the school?"

"Lead on, young-feller-me-lad!"

I was delighted with the professor's condescension.

When we reached St. Jim's a number of fellows were in the quad, but they did not favour the professor with the respect due.

An unnecessary number of jeering remarks were uttered, and, it grieves me to state, the majority were levelled at the professor.

At the foot of the steps we met Tom Merry, but he surveyed the professor in a manner which was unworthy of the captain of the Shell.

"Who on earth's that?" he demanded, in a distinctly impolite tone.

"A friend of mine, Merry. A professor of entomology, from France."

"Is he?" Taking him to the bath-room, I suppose?

"My dear Merry!" I exclaimed, in a shocked voice. For Tom Merry's remark was quite audible to the professor—it was, I believe, intended to be audible.

I hastily left Tom Merry, for any more of such insults might have had the effect of disturbing the mild disposition of the professor.

But at the top of the steps we encountered Mr. Raiton. Mr. Raiton, I felt assured, would be pleased with my learned acquaintance. But his face betrayed no signs of pleasure.

"Skimpole, how dare you bring a tramp into the school?"

"Sir!" I stammered. "This is my friend—a French professor—a professor of entomology!"

"Oh!" Mr. Raiton looked at the professor in a fashion that bore a distinct resemblance to that of Tom Merry.

The professor extended a hand promptly, and Mr. Raiton took it less promptly.

The master then withdrew his hand, and looked at it hard, after which he looked at the professor's.

Here was a point for reflection. The professor's hands were of a much darker tinge

than his countenance. Did that mean that the hands are more susceptible to sunburn than the face? Or was it merely because the face was more shaded by the hat than the hands?

Mr. Raiton was probably immersed in these reflections when we left him, for he stood staring intently at his hand.

Gore was in the study when we arrived. Gore is the most impolite person I know. And this failing of Gore's was strongly noticeable in his reception of the professor.

However, Gore went on with an impot he was engaged upon, and the professor and I became engaged in animated conversation. The talking was largely upon my own side. I must admit, owing to the professor's difficulty with our language. But he listened interestedly to my views on entomology, and smiled encouragingly when I emphasised some of my strongest points.

The one drawback was Gore. This rude person persisted in punctuating the conversation with grunts and snorts, and I found these exceedingly irritating and unnerving. And the professor, I observed, looked uneasily at Gore several times.

At last Gore flung down his pen.

"I'm going down to foster!" he exclaimed, in quite a roaring voice. "And if that chap's here when I come back I'll—well, I'll kick him out!"

I was much dismayed at this outbreak of Gore's, but nevertheless I was exceedingly glad when his loud footsteps died away along the passage.

A queer expression suddenly overspread my friend's learned face.

"My dear professor—"

"Water!" he muttered. "Get me a glass of water, will you? I—I feel faint!"

"Certainly! I will not be a moment."

I hurried quickly away at my friend's request.

I was gone only a few minutes. To my surprise, when I returned the study was empty.

"Dear me! How very extraordinary!"

But on the table I perceived a slip of paper, bearing the following words in very large handwriting:

"Just gone to the little shop across the way to buy in provisions. Please to follow and help me to carry bag back."

Like most great men, the professor was obviously eccentric. He had recovered from his attack of faintness, and, suddenly remembering that he had some purchases to make, had gone to buy them at once.

I went without hurry to the tuckshop, calculating that by the time I arrived there the professor would have obtained his requirements, and be ready to return.

But I was exceedingly astonished to find the establishment empty, so far as customers were concerned, and Mrs. Taggles declared that she had served none but boys all day.

Slowly and thoughtfully I returned to the

study. I noticed that a large carpet bag, which Gore kept in the corner of the study, was missing. From this fact I came swiftly to the conclusion that the professor had assumed temporary proprietorship of the bag, that he might have something in which to carry the provisions.

Then for the first time, strangely enough, I noticed that several articles had been removed from the mantelpiece—the clock, a couple of vases, and a pair of silver ornaments.

"Now, why can Gore have removed those, I wonder?" I murmured. "Perhaps he flung them into the cupboard in a fit of temper. It is curious that I did not notice that they were missing when the professor was here."

Whereupon I opened the cupboard. It was completely bare!

"Extraordinary!" I exclaimed perplexedly. "Gore must have developed an exceedingly sharp appetite recently, for the cupboard was plentifully stocked this morning. Perhaps he has an attack of eating mania. I will question him later."

I seated myself beside the window, in order that I might catch sight of the professor should he journey to or from the tuckshop.

The professor did not appear.

Suddenly, from outside the study, there came the sound of staggering footsteps.

The door opened, and the professor entered, carrying the carpet bag, which bulged considerably.

"My dear professor, you should have taken me with you! That bag is much too heavy for you!"

"I know it well enough!" panted my friend. "Will you help me carry it down the lane?"

"But, my dear sir, what of our entomological discussion?"

"These provisions 'ere are for some sick relations."

"Indeed, you must have a number of sick relations to consume that vast amount of food!"

"They are dying!" said my friend in low tones of emotion. "Some may be already dead. Who knows?"

He wiped a tear from his eye.

"You should have informed me previously!" I cried.

"But your conversation, young sir, was so interesting! I was engrossed! That's it, as—as you English say, I was engrossed!"

"Then we must go at once!" I said quickly, though I was not a little pleased at such high praise from the professor, notwithstanding the sad state of his relatives. "I will accompany you all the way."

"Nunno!" interrupted the professor rather quickly. "Only to the bottom of the lane. I'll carry it the rest of the way, which isn't far. You see, these relations are peculiar—very peculiar relations. They allow nobody near them."

I hastily grasped a handle of the bag, and the professor and I moved slowly along the passage. The bag was even heavier than it appeared.

We had scarcely progressed ten yards along the passage when voices and footsteps sounded mounting the stairs, and Gore and the other fellows appeared.

"Hallo!" said Gore suspiciously. "Where are you taking my bag?"

"It is quite all right, Gore. The professor has been buying provisions, and has taken temporary use of the bag to carry them in."

Gore emitted an ungently grunt and stamped into the study.

A moment later a terrific roar emanated from the precincts of the study. I gave no heed, for Gore has an irritating predilection for expressing himself in that uncouth manner. But the professor showed an earnest though natural desire to vacate the vicinity.

Gore emerged from the study in a peculiarly precipitate manner. A certain gleam in his eye told me he was bent upon something decisive—perhaps desperate.

But what he did was most amazing. He grasped the professor by the scruff of the neck, and shook him!

"You old thief!" he roared.

"Gore!" I exclaimed, horrified.

"What's in that bag?"

"I—I—I—" The professor experienced considerable difficulty with the English language, for Gore's ruffianly behaviour flustered him.

Gore jammed the professor forcibly upon the linoleum.

Then he turned out the contents of the bag.

"My tommy!" he exclaimed, in a voice resembling the boom of a motor-horn.

"And mine!"

"And mine!"

"And mine!"

All the fellows seemed under the delusion that part of the food was theirs. I tried to expostulate, but my voice was drowned by their stubborn unreasonableness.

"And the study clock!" exclaimed Gore.

"And the ornaments!"

"My dear Gore, it was very absurd of you to hide away the ornaments in that bag!"

Gore answered me not in words. He probably realised that my stern remark was beyond the line of argument.

Instead, he seized me and served me with the same brutal treatment that he had forced upon the professor.

Then the fellows, reduced to the level of Germans by the ferocious example of Gore, bumped both the professor and myself hard, and many times, upon the cold linoleum.

And then—it grieves me to relate it—the professor was actually kicked out and dribbled down the lane!

(Editorial Note.—He was also rolled in the ditch, ducked in a trough, and rolled in the ditch again!—H. W.)

THE END.

THE MIDNIGHT MAN-HUNT.

By Robert Arthur Digby.

CRASH! The clock in the old tower had just struck one, and the Fourth-Formers at St. Jim's were asleep, as was fit and proper and in accordance to regulations.

But at that tremendous crash like one man they awoke.

Sleepy voices were heard on every side.

"Was that a gun, or a bomb?"

"That's the maroons!"

"Did you hear that?"

"Can't be a raid," grunted Jack Blake sleepily.

"The blessed war's over!"

"Pewwaps it's another Armistice day," suggested D'Arcy.

"Ass! How can there be another one?"

"Weally, Digby! I uttally refuse to be chawactewised as an ass! An' it might be another Armistice day. You wemembah that the mawoons went off—"

"How do you know these are maroons, chump?"

"Might be a burglar," said Clive.

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that!"

"Who's coming down to the burglar?" asked Blake, jumping out of bed.

Of course, we all decided to go.

Every fellow had a weapon of some sort, and Arthur Augustus, with many scornful sniffs, said he would come with us just to prove that it wasn't a burglar.

We let him come, of course. There were only a few fellows who didn't come.

Trimble and Mellish, of course, refused.

Trimble got under the bed. He said he wouldn't come down because he agreed with Gussy that it was another Armistice day. Apparently that's why he got under the bed.

We weren't keen on Trimble or Mellish, so it didn't matter.

The whole crowd of us crept out of the dormitory, Blake leading. Gussy, convinced at last that it was a burglar, came last. Of course, he wanted to come first, and lead, but we weren't having any.

"Shush!"

"What's up with you, Blake?"

"Shush!"

Blake held up his hand, and we all stopped. Apparently he had heard something.

Everyone took a tighter grip on their weapons. That burglar would have gone through it had he been at hand then.

Ahead we heard a sound of someone creeping.

"When I say 'now,'" whispered Blake, "all make a rush at him! Now!"

No sooner was the word out of his mouth than we all rushed forward. At the same moment, from the opposite direction, came another horde.

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Shell-fish!"

"Fourth kids!"

Our burglar—the chap we thought we had so nicely ambushed—was merely another party on the man-hunt. Tom Merry and

the rest of the Shell-fish must also have heard the burglar.

"You silly asses!" we hooted.

"You blithering chumps!" hooted the Shell-fish.

"Why did you rush at us like that?" hooted Tom Merry, rubbing his arm ruefully. He and Blake had cannoned in the corridor.

"Yow! You silly Shell-fish, why didn't you look where you were going?"

"Ass!"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Blake. "If we're going to nail that blessed burglar we'd better get on. Now, you fellows, come on!"

And the whole mob of us crept downstairs. We were over forty strong, and should have put up a fair fight with any burglar.

"What on earth are all you kids doing?" Kildare of the Sixth and half a dozen more prefects stared at us. Evidently they were after the burglar.

Jack Blake dramatically held up a forefinger.

"Shush!"

"Eh?"

Kildare stared.

"You silly chumps, go back to bed! There's a burglar in the place!"

"That's what we're after," growled Blake. "What on earth did you think we were doing?"

"I was just wondering," grunted Kildare. "Still, you kids might be useful. You can come on!"

And you can bet we came on! But as we stood there we heard a sound from inside the room on our right. That was the kitchen. Perhaps he was after grub.

"That's the burglar!" said Kildare. "Stand to, you kids!"

"Yass, wathah! Stand to, deah boys! I told you it was a burglar, if you wemembah."

Kildare strode to the door. At that moment Railton came along. In a second he was at Kildare's side.

We stood by ready to mob the burglar when he came out.

Somehow the door seemed to have got stuck. Neither Kildare nor Railton could open it, and it was not until we rushed it in a mob that it opened.

Inside all was dark. There was no sign of a burglar. From one corner glowed two small balls of fire.

Mr. Railton had a flash-light in his hand, and he switched it on.

Never had we seen such a sight. There was no burglar, but on the floor was a mass of crockery. Tea, jam, and other foodstuffs were mixed together in a mass of broken china.

An up-turned tray lay on the floor, and Tibbles, Mr. Mimbles' cat, was sitting in a corner scared out of his life.

It was easy to see what had happened. The Head had had something to eat late at night, and the parlourmaid had carried the tray down, taken it into the kitchen in the dark, and had, as she thought, put it on the kitchen table. But she had put it only half on. Tibbles, poor little beggar, had jumped on to the protruding half, with the result that we were contemplating.

We looked at the wreckage. Then, with hardly a word, we slunk off to bed.

Poor old Mary got into hot water over it, and so did Tibbles. He is still suffering from acute shell-shock, and now makes tracks at the sight of a laden tray.

"Bai Jove, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, when we returned. "What did I tell you? I knew it wasn't a burglar. You wemembah—Yow! Who thwew that pillow?"

But no one answered him, and he went to sleep vowing vengeance in the morning.

WEEK AFTER NEXT!

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