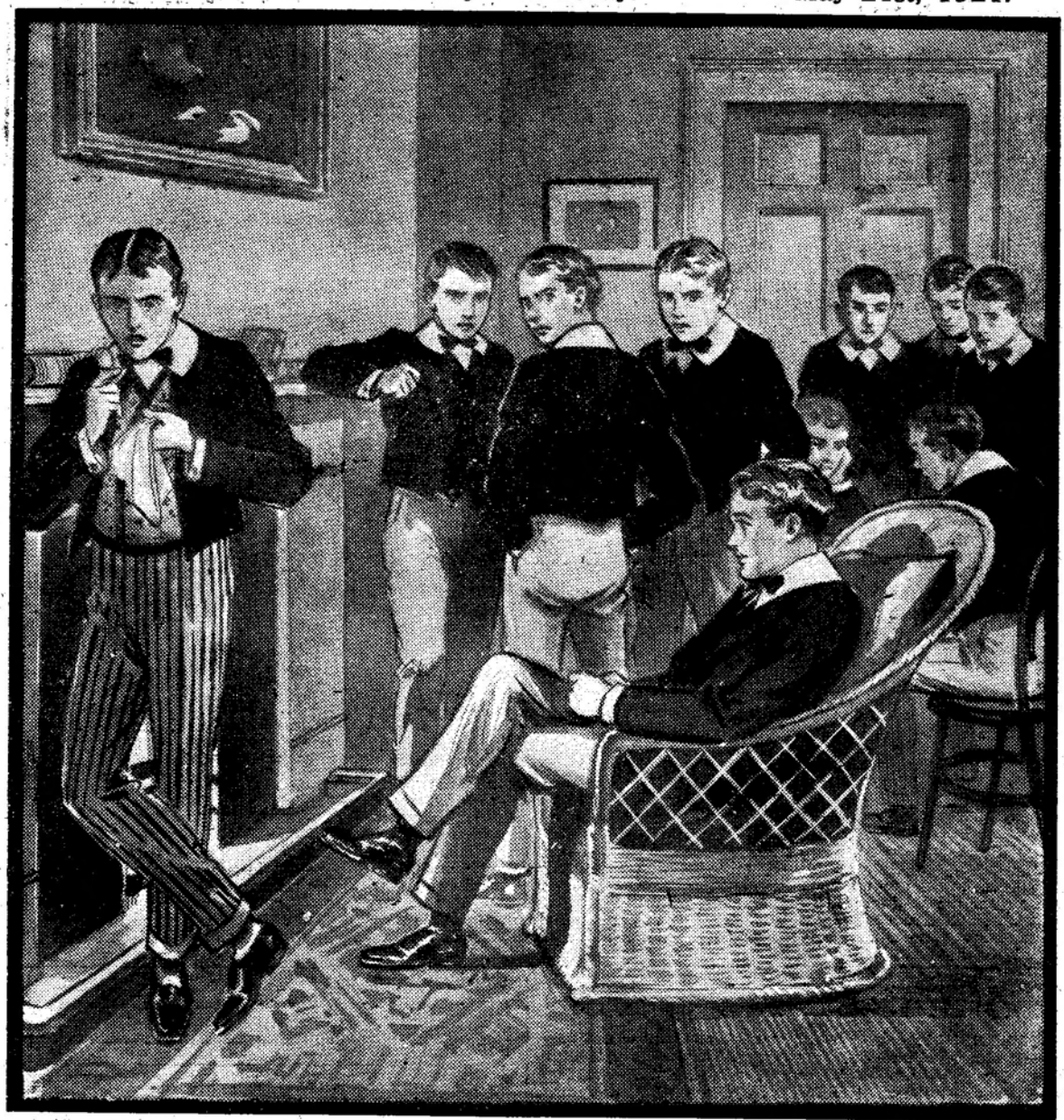
GRAND LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY!

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HIS CHUMS AGAINST HIM!

Don't Miss Our Splendid Long Complete Story of the Chums of St. Jim's Inside.

EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

The mystery surrounding the strange disappearance of Ernest Levison from St. Jim's deepens, and up to the moment of going to press, no news whatever has been received which would assist in clearing up the matter. All his friends are very gloomy about the whole affair, and many search-parties have been organised, but not the slightest clue can be discovered. The matter is now in the hands of a capable private detective, and everyone at St. Jim's sincerely hopes that his efforts will result in solving the mystery. All readers of the "Gem" are asked to keep a special look-out for Ernest Levison, and if any of you are fortunate enough to see anything of the missing boy, you are requested to communicate with the Editor of the "Gem" without delay. If this mystery is to be solved, the best thing is for every reader to keep continually on the alert for news; keep your eyes and ears open, and ask your chums to do the same. Poor Ernest must be found, and my loyal readers are asked to assist in the matter. Next week I sincerely hope I shall be able to announce some news or other concerning him. By the way, our long complete story next week will be entitled: "Baggy Trimble's Great Swindle!" and it is just the sort of yarn you have all been waiting for. Don't miss it; it is one long scream from beginning to end. Tell all your friends to look out for this extra special number. A great new "Railway Stations" Puzzle Competition appears in this week's "Boys' Herald," and many handsome prizes are being given away to competitors who succeed in solving the pictures. This competition is delightfully simple and entertaining, and all readers of the "Gem" should try for the prizes. The "Boys' Herald" is on sale everywhere. Price 1½d.

YOUR EDITOR.

ANSWERS TO READERS.

"TWINKLETOES" (Leeds).—No. 1. Jack Blake has an elder brother named Frank, and he is a professional footballer. I think Monty has a father and mother. No. 2. Have any of the St. Jim's fellows ever fallen in love? Rather! D'Arcy has lost his heart to quite seventeen young ladies. Grundy fell in love with a girl, and also with the sound of his own voice. Trimble tried to fall in love with Doris Levison. Fortunately, Ernest Levison took the necessary steps. Baggy also dearly loves his appetite. Herries loves his bulldog, and Gussy hates it. Cardew has often fallen in love with falling on to a comfortable sofa, and falling to sleep. I will give your kind regards to the St. Jim's historian, and mention your idea about Jack Blake to him.

"THE TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE THREE" (The Limes, Dulwich).—I had already made up my mind to publish a large plan of St. Jim's, giving all the interior passages and rooms. However, as most of you know, St. Jim's contains a number of secret passages, and in order to publish plans which will agree with every story of St. Jim's Mr. Martin Clifford has written, a lot of time will have to be taken in preparing them, and it will therefore be some time before they appear. Tom Merry lives at Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath. St. Jim's has a large shed in which pets are kept. You would most likely go into the Third Form if you went to St. Jim's. As you call yourself the Terrible Three, take care, mind, to keep up the traditions, and carry on as the original Co. would do.

CYRIL N. B. (Mount Park, Ham, Ont.)—There are quite a number of boys at St. Jim's who possess Meccano Outfits. Bernard Glyn has three No. 6 outfits, and quite £10 worth of spare parts. With it he has made an overhead railway suspension track, extending from a window in the top floor of the School House across to the New House. He has also made the big loom, and with it has woven Gussy an emotional tie. Moreover, Arthur Augustus was highly pleased with it. Then Skimpole has the inventor's outfit, and other odds and ends. The first and last thing Skimpole invented was a huge windmill. It had sails four feet long, and was driven by an electric motor. After a considerable time being expended, the sails commenced to revolve at a furious rate. Eventually it knocked a vase from the mantelpiece, landed the milk-jug and jampot in the fender, and then delivered George Gore a terrific upper-cut under the chin. About five minutes later it ceased to exist—chiefly due to the fact that it came into severe contact with Gore's boots. Many of the fags in the Third Form have smaller outfits. The chief articles created by the fags with this toy are permanent things, such as swords, catapults, and kipper-toasters.

A. P. writes from Portsmouth: "I have been a reader of the GEM for a number of years—since I was eight. I am immensely interested in three features at the back of the GEM. These are the serial, which seems to get more thrilling every week, 'Joy's Gossip,' and the portraits of the boys of St. Jim's. I think Joy's letters and the portraits are grand. I like all the decent fellows at St. Jim's. Sometimes I don't know whether to be amused or angry with some of the rotters' mean tricks."

I can promise this correspondent plenty of variety in the paper. New features and ideas will be introduced from time to time. So watch out!

"STARLIGHT" (Staines).—I can tell you the names of two yarns in which Sylvia Carr appeared. "Every Inch a Hero" and "Heroes of the Fourth." Football and cricket are compulsory at St. Jim's. Skimpole does not keep in trim as the result of Talbot's teaching. Skimmy prefers his wonderful volumes. There is no Spaniard at St. Jim's. No doubt it will surprise you to know that your friends' statement is quite correct. Clifton Dane's mother was a Red Indian. Her father was the leader of the tribe of Huron. Lumley-Lumley's father is called Lascellas. There are only two real millionaires' sons at St. Jim's—Lumley and Racke. Lumley's father made his millions out of canned meat. Racke's father made his from war-profits. Binks was the page-boy before Toby. St. Jim's is honeycombed with secret passages. One of the main passages leads into Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form. A special Levison number is in preparation. I think it will be better than the Cardew number.

JIMMY R. (Repton).—Quite a number of the boys at St. Jim's wear "white ducks" in the summer. The St. Jim's colours are red-and-white. Jack Blake's brother Frank once played for the junior eleven in a match against Rylcombe Grammar School. He is 6ft. 4ins. tall.

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His Chums Against Him!

A Grand Long Thrilling Story of the Chums of St. Jim's, introducing Kit Wildrake



KIT WILDRAKE.

By - - - MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
The Marble Eye!

KIT WILDRAKE stared.

He was astonished.

It was a bright morning, and there was sunshine in the old quadrangle at St. Jim's. Kit Wildrake, the new boy from Canada, had turned out of the School House in cheery spirits. He liked a trot round the quad before brekker; indeed, the Canadian junior was seldom found indoors when he had a chance to get out of doors.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form, was walking gracefully in the quadrangle, and Wildrake gave him a cheery word of greeting in passing.

To his surprise, Arthur Augustus did not reciprocate.

The swell of St. Jim's coloured slightly and swerved away, walking on as if in blissful ignorance of Wildrake's existence.

"D'Arcy!" ejaculated Wildrake.

D'Arcy did not turn his head.

He walked on, apparently deaf and blind.

The colour flushed hotly into Kit Wildrake's cheeks. There was no mistake about what had happened. He had been "cut." Cut in the quad by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had been kindness itself to the new fellow ever since he had arrived from the Boot Leg Ranch in British Columbia.

Arthur Augustus had even gone out of his way to be kind to the new fellow who had arrived at St. Jim's from the distant Dominion. And now he had cut him—dropped him like a hot potato.

It was inexplicable, and it was exasperating. Wildrake clenched his hands, more than half inclined to stride after Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and hurl that youth headlong with one of his hefty left-handers.

But he refrained.

He really liked Gussy, and he did not forget Gussy's many kindnesses in his first days at St. Jim's. And he felt that there must be some misunderstanding. He could not believe that Arthur Augustus was the kind of fellow to take a new friend up and drop him again without just cause. Such caddishness was likely enough in fellows like Racke and Crooke—perhaps Cardew of the Fourth might have been capable of it—but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy never!

Blake and Herries and Digby of the Fourth came strolling along towards the School House from the elms. They slackened speed as they saw Wildrake in their path. But Wildrake did not observe that they sought to avoid him. He wanted an explanation, and as Blake & Co. were Gussy's study-mates, he expected to get it from them.

"Hold on a minute, you chaps!" he said.

The three juniors paused unwillingly.

"Well?" said Jack Blake, with a total absence of his usual genial tone.

Herries and Digby did not speak, but they both looked uncomfortable.

"Is anything the matter with D'Arcy this morning?" asked Wildrake.

"Not that I know of."

"He's just turned his back on me."

"Really?"

"Yes, really!" said Wildrake sharply. "I want to know what it means. If D'Arcy has anything against me, I suppose he can say so?"

"I dare say he'll say so fast enough if you ask him," said Blake drily. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Look here——" began Wildrake.

Blake & Co. walked away without waiting for him to finish.

Wildrake clenched his hands hard.

He understood now that whatever it was that affected Arthur Augustus affected the whole of Study No. 6.

Up to that morning they had been as friendly as fellows could be, and now there was a sudden change. All four of them were giving him the "marble eye."

What did it mean?

Wildrake meant to know. He was a resolute fellow, and he wanted an explanation and meant to have one.

Blake & Co. had gone into the School House, and Wildrake followed them. In the doorway he came on the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell. The chums of the Shell were chatting as they looked out into the sunny quadrangle; but their cheery chat ceased as Wildrake came up the steps, and they looked away from him.

Wildrake's attention was on the alert now, and he noted the signs of avoidance at once. It was not only Study No. 6—the Terrible Three were "in it," too.

"Stop a minute, you fellows," said Wildrake very quietly, as the three Shell fellows turned away.

"Don't care to, thanks," said Manners drily.

"You'd better! I want an explanation."

"Rats!" was Monty Lowther's remark.

"You, Tom Merry——"

"If you don't mind, Wildrake, I'd rather you didn't speak to me," said the captain of the Shell.

"I guess I don't mind a Continental red cent!" answered Wildrake. "You can go and eat coke for all I care! But I want to know what this means. I guess I'm not used to being treated like this, and you can either explain or put your hands up on the spot!"

Kit Wildrake pushed back his cuffs.

There was no mistaking the fact that he meant business, and very serious business.

Tom Merry eyed him calmly.

"I think you ought to know what's up without any explanation," he said.

"I guess I don't, though!"

"I'll explain if you like."

"I'm waiting."

"Better not jaw here," muttered Manners, as Tom Merry was about to speak. "Too many ears. You don't want to get Wildrake sacked."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Right! Come out into the quad, Wildrake."

"I'll come."

The Canadian followed Tom Merry into the quadrangle, his eyes gleaming. He was not a quarrelsome youth, by any means—indeed, his unusual powers at fisticuffs made him careful to avoid quarrelling, if he could help it. There were few juniors at St. Jim's who were equal to him in that line. But if a satisfactory explanation was not forthcoming it was certain that there was going to be a fight in the St. Jim's quadrangle that sunny morning.

Tom Merry stopped, and looked Wildrake calmly in the face. He was quite prepared for fisticuffs if it came to that.

"Well?" snapped Wildrake. "I want to know what it means. What are fellows turning their backs on me for as if I were an unclean animal? I want to know!"

"And you don't know?" asked Tom.

"Nope!"

"You see, there are fellows and

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fellows," said Tom Merry quietly. "When you came here we all liked you. We thought you were straight."

Wildrake's eyes blazed.

"Don't you think I'm straight now?"

"No!"

The Canadian junior made a stride towards him.

"And why not?"

"You know best," said Tom, his lip curling. "We thought you were straight, and we've found you were not. Where were you on Monday night?"

CHAPTER 2.
Misjudged!

TOM MERRY asked the question quietly, his eyes looking steadily at Kit Wildrake.

Wildrake dropped his hands, and the angry flush faded out of his handsome, sunburnt face.

"Monday night?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"I—I was out of bounds."

"I think everybody in the Lower School knows that, now," said Tom Merry quietly. "You were out with Cardew of the Fourth."

"I guess that's no secret."

"Quite right; it isn't! Have you any objection to telling where you went with Cardew?" asked Tom.

"I—I——"

Wildrake paused.

"You needn't take the trouble," said Tom, his lip curling again. "Baggy Trimble knows all about it, and he's told every fellow in the two Houses. It came out yesterday, and was all over the school by last night. You'll be lucky if it doesn't get to the ears of the prefects. You cleared out of your dormitory at eleven o'clock——"

"Have you never broken bounds?" asked Wildrake sarcastically.

"Yes; but not for reasons like yours. You went with Cardew to a night club near Wayland, where a swindler named Lodgey runs a gambling game—not only against all decency, but against the law. Fellows who do stunts of that kind are not the kind of fellows I care to speak to. You'll find it's the same with most fellows here. If your tastes lie in that direction, you can pal with chaps like Racke and Crooke and Mellish, and Clampe and Chowle of the New House. Other fellows won't speak to you."

Wildrake stood silent.

It was on the tip of his tongue to state the exact facts—that Cardew of the Fourth had led him into that reckless escapade, without telling him his destination—that he had been savagely angry when he found that he was led, blindfold, as it were, into Lodgey's gambling-club.

But he did not utter the words.

The blame was all on Cardew, but it was not for him to say so. There was too much of a taint of self-righteousness, to his mind, in saying that it was "all the other fellow's fault."

So he was silent and dismayed.

"I'm sorry," said Tom quietly. "I never dreamed that you were that kind of chap. You don't look it. But you've asked for it, Wildrake. Any fellow would make allowances for a chap being reckless, and kicking over the traces. But sneaking blackguardism is past the limit. You ought to know that!"

"You—you think I'm that kind of chap?" exclaimed Wildrake, at last.

"What else do you expect anybody to think? Cardew's own study-mates—his best chums, Levison and Clive—have cut him for it. They told him they would, if he did it; and he did it, and they're keeping their word. Did you expect to get off any better than Cardew?"

Wildrake drew a deep breath.

"So I'm cut—what you'd call sent to Coventry, I suppose," he said.

"Nothing of the sort; there's no question of sending you to Coventry. But fellows don't want to associate with you, and they'd rather you kept your distance. That's all."

Wildrake raised his head proudly.

He was no longer angry; there was nothing to be angry about. He knew that in Tom Merry's place he would have acted exactly as Tom Merry was doing. He knew that he would never have deigned to speak a word to Ralph Reckness Cardew if he had known that youth earlier as he knew him now.

"I guess I could make you see things a bit differently, if I liked," he said.

"How?" asked Tom. "I'd be only too jolly glad to hear anything that would clear you at all. You went to Lodgey's den with Cardew?"

"Correct!"

"Of your own accord, I suppose?"

"Well, yes!"

"They were gambling there?"

"I guess so."

"Rowing, too, to judge by the marks Cardew brought home with him."

"There was a row," admitted Wildrake.

"A precious den for a St. Jim's chap to be seen in!" said Tom Merry. "You'd be sacked like a shot if it came out; you must know that!"

"I guess I do know it."

"And the disgrace!" exclaimed Tom hotly. "Suppose the police had got on to the place while you were there; you'd have been marched off to the station with the rest of the miserable blackguards. It would have been in the papers; the name of our school would have been dragged through a police-court and the newspapers. You can't expect a St. Jim's chap, who's proud of his school, to forget that in a hurry."

"I—I suppose not!" muttered Wildrake, with a look of discouragement.

"And I've heard, too, that you're going out again with Cardew this afternoon, a half-holiday," said Tom. "It's not my business; you're free to do as you choose, till you're found out and expelled. But it's a bit too dingy for a decent fellow to get mixed up in. You've chosen your own line, and you can follow it by yourself. Anything more you want explained?"

Wildrake shook his head.

"That's enough," he said, in a low voice.

"Very well!"

Tom Merry turned on his heel, and walked back to the School House.

Wildrake drove his hands deep into his pockets, and strode away across the quadrangle.

The sunshine of that bright morning was lost to him now.

It was a heavy blow that had fallen on him. And he was innocent, though he could not explain that. How could he explain that it was all Cardew's fault? It was impossible. Moreover, it was likely enough that he would not be believed; it would be looked upon, at best, as a "sneaking" explanation.

"He, he, he!"

Baggy Trimble's fat face grinned at him under the elms. Kit Wildrake gave the fat junior a black look.

Baggy retreated a few paces before he pointed a fat forefinger reprovingly and derisively at the Canadian junior.

"You're getting the marble eye, what?" he chuckled. "Serve you jolly well right! I'm shocked at you, Wildrake!"

Wildrake burst into a laugh, in spite of his trouble. He must have fallen low indeed if Baggy Trimble was shocked at him.

"You can cackle," said Baggy, with lofty scorn. "I sha'n't speak to you, for one. I'm disgusted! But I say"—Trimble approached a little nearer—"what's the exact address of that show you went to with Cardew, old chap?"

"What?"

"I'll tell you what," said Baggy, lowering his voice. "I sha'n't speak much to you in public; chap's got his reputation to consider. But I don't mind being friendly in private."

"I do!" said Wildrake grimly. "Public or private, Trimble, I guess I couldn't stand you!"

"Oh, don't be a cheeky ass, you know," said Trimble. "Look here, I'm a bit of a sport myself. Awfully goey, in fact. And I'll tell you what. I'll come with you to Lodgey's place next time."

"What!"

"We'll skin 'em!" said Trimble eagerly. "I'm no end of a gun at games, you know. You should see the huge sums I win at bridge, in the holidays, at Trimble Hall. Once, when I was playing with the Duke of York as my partner, I——"

"You silly ass!" hooted Wildrake.

"I've no doubt whatever that I can skin them at the game, whatever it is. You can lend me some money, and we'll go together—what? Is it a go?" asked Baggy Trimble eagerly.

"I guess not, you fat jay!" growled Wildrake.

"If you don't want my friendship, you rotter——"

"Thanks! I don't!"

"Yah!" said Trimble. "On second thoughts, I certainly shall not speak to you, Wildrake. In fact, my pal Gussy—I'm awfully thick with Gussy—would be offended if I did. I look on you with utter contempt, Wildrake. You're a disgrace to the school, in fact! Keep your distance from me!"

And Baggy Trimble turned up his fat little nose, and swung round on his heel, turning his back on Wildrake in the most crushing manner.

It was a crushing gesture; but it was unfortunate for Trimble. For Wildrake's boot shot out, and as Baggy had turned his back, he was admirably placed to catch it!

"Yaroooooh!"

Baggy Trimble lurched forward as the Canadian's boot smote him behind, and pitched on his hands and knees, with a terrific yell.

"Yow! Oh! Ooooooooop!"

Wildrake grinned, and strolled away towards the School House as the bell rang for brekker. And Baggy Trimble scrambled up, and shook a furious fat fist after him

"Yah! Rotter! Come back and I'll lick you!" he roared.

Wildrake turned.

But he did not take more than one step back. For Baggy Trimble was already speeding away from the spot as fast as his fat little legs could carry him, having apparently abandoned his intention of "licking" Wildrake, quite suddenly.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY.... PRICE 2:

CHAPTER 3.
Two in Trouble!

CARDEW of the Fourth smiled across the breakfast-table at Kit Wildrake, and nodded genially.

Cardew seemed in excellent spirits that morning.

His study-mates—Levison and Clive—who usually sat with him, had found places farther along the Fourth Form table. That circumstance, and their looks, showed that there was a rift in the lute in Study No. 9. In that study there often had been rifts in the lute. Ralph Reckness Cardew had his engaging qualities, sometimes, but he was rather an exasperating fellow to chum with in many ways. His latest escapade had "put the lid on," so to speak. Levison, who had some unpleasant recollections of his own earlier days at St. Jim's, was very tolerant. But he was "fed" now, and Sidney Clive, the South African junior, was more than fed. They had given Cardew the "marble eye" even more emphatically than the other fellows.

Doubtless it would all blow over in time. Cardew had a way of getting out of scrapes as easily as he fell into them, and schoolboys have short memories. But for the present, at least, Cardew was made to understand that he had offended, and offended seriously. What he had done was not even a shady adventure such as Racke and Crooke indulged in. It was beyond that. To "drop in" at the Green Man to play cards or billiards with the sharpers there was bad enough; but Cardew's escapade was more serious than that. He had run the greatest risk of disgracing his school as well as himself by visiting a gambling night-club, and Study No. 9 were fully "fed." Cardew was left completely to himself, but he seemed even more cool and cheery than usual. Never was he in such excellent spirits, as a matter of fact, as when he was "up against it." It seemed to give a zest to existence to the rather curiously-constituted dandy of the Fourth.

Wildrake did not heed either his nod or his smile. He was intensely angry with the fellow who, from sheer devilment and carelessness, had landed him in this wretched scrape.

After breakfast, the dandy of the Fourth joined Clive and Levison as they left the dining-room. He smiled sweetly in response to Clive's grim look and Levison's uneasy frown.

"Just a word, old beans!" said Cardew.

"Don't talk to me!" said Clive shortly.

"I was goin' to ask a small favour——"

"What do you want?" said Levison uneasily. Ernest Levison was attached to the reckless fellow, and his heart misgave him a little, angry as he was with Cardew.

"Dear men," said Cardew, with mock meekness, "I realise the full extent of my sins. At the present moment you behold me in the throes of repentance. I am experiencin', to the full, the day-afterish feelin'. I know you don't want my shady company. I contaminate you! Be it so, as they say in the six-shillin' novels. But one small favour——"

"Don't be an ass!" muttered Levison.

"What do you want?"

"Could you—could you lend me a tract?" asked Cardew, with a sob in his voice. "Just a little, little tract, to assist me on the upward path?"

Clive gave an angry grunt, and swung away indignantly. And Levison, with a look of reproach at Cardew, followed him. Cardew grinned serenely. At that time, with all the Lower School down on him, it amused him to pull the leg of his old chums, who needed only half an excuse to turn back to him and give him their support.

Wildrake had gone out into the quadrangle, with a frowning brow, and Cardew, after entertaining himself at the expense of Study No. 9, went after him. He came up to the Canadian junior with a smiling face. Kit Wildrake did not smile.

"Here we are, two naughty boys in disgrace!" said Cardew. "Shall we stand by one another, and help one another to bear it—what? It's a heavy blow. We're deprived of Gussy's charmin' conversation, Tom Merry will not talk cricket to us, Lowther won't spring on us any of his merry jokes. Do you think we can bear it and survive?"

"Oh, don't gas!" said Wildrake irritably. "You may like being cut for being a dashed blackguard, but I don't like it."

"Bless your little heart, they'll come round!" said Cardew, laughing. "I've been in disgrace before, more often than I can remember. Fellows always come round in the long run. Besides, you're not guilty. You've only got to tell them the facts."

Wildrake gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"You know I can't do that."

"Why not?" said Cardew mockingly. "You've only got to say that I asked you to come out for a motor run at night, and you thought no harm. That's the fact, isn't it? You need only mention that, in spite of appearances, you are really an upright and spotless youth, and that you did your best to lead your wicked companion back into the right path, by showin' him an example of shinin' virtue. I'm sure it ought to move the fellows to tears, as touchin' as anythin' on the most virtuous cinema film."

Wildrake flushed.

The way Cardew put it, in words, showed how impossible it was for him to exculpate himself, if he had thought of doing so.

"You don't care for it?" asked Cardew airily. "Well, then, we're both in the soup. All through that fat cad Trimble listenin' at a keyhole, and givin' us away. Shall we go an' kick Trimble?"

"I've kicked him once this morning," said Wildrake, with a faint smile.

"Good man! I'll kick him when I see him. Anythin' else we can find by way of solace?" asked Cardew. "Shall I punch Gussy's nose?"

"Oh, don't talk rot! Gussy is acting as I should act in his place," said Wildrake abruptly. "A fellow who goes of his own accord to Lodgey's night-club to gamble ought to be cut by any self-respecting chap!"

Cardew bowed.

"Thanks awfully, old top! Are they all as polite as that in British Saskatchewan? I think that's the name of your native heath."

"I mean it," said Wildrake. "I believe you go in for such things more from folly than vice; but while you do it you're not fit for a decent chap to speak to. You played a rotten, low-down trick on me in taking me to that den without my knowledge, and you know it. And I don't want to speak to you!"

"Am I goin' to be left on my lonely own?" asked Cardew. "My old chums won't speak to me, wouldn't even lend me a tract when I asked them, by gad! But have you forgotten that we've got an arrangement to go out together for this afternoon?"

Wildrake was silent.

"You remember our compact?" smiled Cardew. "You agreed to follow my lead on Monday night; I agreed to follow your lead on Wednesday afternoon. And we were to see which succeeded in diggin' up the most excitement. You can't deny that it was excitin' that night at Lodgey's club. You can't say it was slow. What's the stunt for this afternoon? Or have you decided that I'm too shady an individual to spend a half-holiday with?"

"No," said Wildrake. "I'm keeping



Baggy Trimble swung round on his heel, turning his back on Wildrake in the most crushing manner. It was a crushing gesture; but it was unfortunate for Trimble. For Wildrake's boot shot out, and as Baggy had turned his back, he was admirably placed to catch it. "Yaroooh!" he gasped. (See page 4).

to the compact, and I'm holding you to your word. You gave me a lesson the other night, a lesson not to trust a fellow who handed out smooth words. I guess I'm going to give you a lesson this afternoon, unless you back out of your word."

"I sha'n't do that!" said Cardew quietly. "Whatever I am, I'm a fellow of my word. You wouldn't care to come along to Lodgey's club this afternoon? They have afternoon sittings."

Wildrake's eyes gleamed.

Cardew stepped back, and made a soothing gesture.

"Don't let your angry passions rise, old bean. I'm at your orders; and until we're ready to start I'll withdraw my disgusting presence."

"Do!" said Wildrake grimly.

"With pleasure, old top. You see, you bore me!"

Cardew strolled away, his hands in his pockets, whistling a snatch from an operatic melody. He headed for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was strolling stately in the quad. Arthur Augustus gave him the marblest of eyes, but Cardew was not in the least affected by it. He nodded cheerily to the swell of St. Jim's.

"Dear old Gussy——" he began.

Arthur Augustus fixed his eyeglass upon him severely.

"Pway do not addwess me, Cardew!" he said. "I gweatly pwefer you to keep your distance."

"Have you forgotten that I am your relation, old bean?" asked Cardew sadly.

"I am vewy sowwy you are my welation, Cardew, and I am vewy glad that you are only a distant welation."

"Et tu, Brute!" sighed Cardew. "Even Gussy turns on me! It is said in the proverb that even the worm will turn!"

"Bai Jove! If you are alludin' to me as a worm, Cardew——" began Arthur Augustus warmly.

"You won't speak to me?" asked Cardew.

"Certainly not!"

"You won't drop into my study for a chat?"

"Nevah!"

"You'll never bestow upon me one of your long conversations?"

"Wathah not!"

Cardew grasped his hand before Arthur Augustus could elude him. He wrung Gussy's hand with a look of heartfelt gratitude.

"Thanks!" he said, in a broken voice. "Thanks! You don't know what a benefactor you are! Once again life is worth livin'!"

And Cardew walked away, leaving Arthur Augustus staring after him blankly.

CHAPTER 4.
Under Suspicion!

"MOTORIN'?"

"No."

"Cyclin'?"

"No."

"Walkin'?"

"Yes."

"Oh gad!"

That dialogue took place between Cardew and Kit Wildrake after dinner in the School House.

It was a fine afternoon—sunny and clear though a keen wind was blowing. Tom Merry & Co. were thinking of cricket; and, but for his engagement with Cardew for the afternoon, Wildrake would have turned up at cricket practice. The Canadian junior was very keen on cricket, and was making good progress at the game.

But his engagement with Cardew claimed him, and Wildrake—little as he cared for the company of the dandy of the Fourth—did not mean to miss that. As he had said, Cardew had taught him one lesson, and he was going to teach Cardew another. And Cardew had a good many misgivings with regard to that afternoon's outing.

But his word was his bond. He had made the compact, and he was sticking to it, whatever might betide.

"When are we startin'?" he asked.

"Two-thirty."

"Good! I'll smoke a cigarette in my study, an' nerve myself for the fearful ordeal."

Wildrake smiled grimly.

"Better not smoke," he said. "You'll need all your wind for the afternoon."

"Are we goin' to exert ourselves?"

"Yes—unless you back out."

"I'm not backin' out. But I'm goin' to have a smoke; I can see that I've got a virtuous afternoon before me, and a smoke will buck me to stand it."

"Just as you like, of course, if you're a silly ass."

"Thanks, old bean—I am, you know."

And Cardew loafed away to his study—Study No. 9 in the Fourth. There he lounged in the armchair and lighted a cigarette. He was thinking rather hard and rather uneasily. What was it Wildrake intended for that afternoon? Something of an unpleasant nature, Cardew had no doubt—that is, from Cardew's own point of view. Still, it could scarcely be more unpleasant than the visit to the night club had been to Wildrake.

Cardew sat thinking and blowing out little rings of smoke when Clive came into the study. The South African junior stared at Cardew.

"Smoking here!" he grunted.

"Dear man, I thought you were at the cricket," said Cardew. "Otherwise, of course, I should not have offended."

"I've come in for my cricket-bat. Why don't you come down to the cricket?"

"In the present circumstances, I fear that my beloved school-fellows would not take pleasure in my company," explained Cardew. "But for that, the thought of urgin' the flyin' ball would exhilarate me no end."

Clive grunted again, and left the study in a few minutes. Cardew shrugged his shoulders. As a matter of fact, he was feeling the estrangement from his chums, but nothing would have induced him to admit it. He was lighting a second cigarette when Levison came in.

Cardew smiled at him amiably.

"You also looking for your cricket-bat?" he yawned. "What a strenuous study this is—exceptin' little me!"

"I'm looking for you," answered Ernest Levison quietly. "You're going out with Wildrake?"

"Yes."

"Look here, Cardew, you're not playing the game with that chap," said Levison earnestly. "You've got all the fellows down on him; and I feel pretty certain that he was decent enough till you touched him. It's a rotten shame to lead him into your rotten ways—you know it is! And I've no doubt—or very little—that you've led him into that kind of game."

"What a character you're givin' me!" yawned Cardew. "A wicked corrupter of youth. Dear me, I blush for myself! Or I should blush if I wasn't past blushin'!"

"I don't understand your sudden friendship with him," said Levison. "You are the last fellow in the world I should have thought a chap like Wildrake would take to."

"You don't realise what a fascinatin' chap I am!" said Cardew. "No prophet is honoured in his own country, you know; and it's the same with a fellow in his own study."

Levison made an impatient movement. He had hoped, for once, to find Cardew in a serious mood; but he was disappointed.

"Before this week you never had much to say to him," he said.

Cardew nodded.

"You know my little ways," he answered. "I was bored, an' took him up for a change."

"Meaning to drop him again?"

"Exactly!"

"A rotten trick!" said Levison.

"Quite so!" assented Cardew, unmoved. "Only pretty Fanny's way, you know. Haven't I told you lots of times I'm a bad hat?"

"I wish you'd be serious," grunted Levison.

"Life is too serious to be taken seriously, old bean," said Cardew epigrammatically. "There, that's a 'bon mot' worthy of Bernard Shaw at his best! Why don't you grin?"

Levison did not grin.

"I wish you'd let the chap alone," he said. "You've done him harm enough. I feel sure he'd never dabbled in blackguardism before you began on him."

"Same here."

"Yet you're taking him out again to-day——"

"Not at all; he's takin' me."

"I don't catch on," said Levison, puzzled.

"Shall I explain? Explainin' anythin' is such a bore," said Cardew, with a portentous yawn. "Lend me your ears, dear boy. I made a compact the other night with Wildrake. I was to take him out, and then he was to take me out; and you know where I took him. Now he's goin' to fulfil his half of the merry bargain, and I only hope it will be entertainin'. If he proposes a drag to the races I shall fall on his manly chest an' weep with joy."

"You think he's likely to?" exclaimed Levison, aghast.

"I fear not—I fear not!" said Cardew, shaking his head. "But it's a faint, lingerin' hope."

"In that case, he's as bad as you are!"

"Not quite; but he'll improve in time, I've no doubt," said Cardew calmly. "But weren't you goin' to cut me, Levison? I understood that I was in disgrace in this study, an' barred, an' all that!"

"So you are so long as you go on blagging!" exclaimed Levison angrily. "I'm 'fed' with you, for one!"

And he quitted the study abruptly with a darkened brow. Cardew blew out smoke and smiled. He glanced at his watch when the cigarette was finished. There was time for another. So he lighted a third. He was doing so when a fresh, merry young face looked in at the doorway.

"Don't come in, Frankie!" rapped out Cardew.

Levison minor stared at him.

"Why not?" he asked, in surprise.

"Evil communications corrupt good manners!" said Cardew. "You can learn that in any copybook. In me you behold the wicked corrupter of youth—the leader of unsuspicious greenhorns from the straight and narrow path. Fly from me while there is yet time—I'm givin' you a disinterested warnin'."

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said Frank Levison cheerfully. "I'm looking for my major. He's going to give me some coaching at cricket this afternoon—and Wally and Reggie Manners. You coming down to the cricket?"

"That is a pleasure I am deprivin' myself of," answered Cardew gravely. "But for a prior engagement, I should be delighted to see our staid and sedate Ernest coachin' fags. But I'm goin' out blaggin' with another blackguard, so it's impossible."

"Fathead!" said Frank, and he scudded away in search of his major.

Cardew yawned, looked at his watch again, and finished his smoke. Then he left the study and loafed downstairs.

Kit Wildrake was waiting for him in the doorway.

"Ready?" yawned Cardew.

"Yep!"

"Let's move on, then, dear man."

The two Fourth-Formers left the School House together. Tom Merry & Co. were in the quad—Tom with a bat under his arm. The Co. glanced at Cardew and Wildrake as they passed, and Tom knitted his brows.

That unlucky expedition of Monday night to Lodgey's den was the talk of the Lower School, and the fellows who saw Cardew and Wildrake starting out together again had little doubt of their destination. Their careless air as they swung past seemed like impudence to Tom Merry & Co.

"Dear old blackguards!" said Monty Lowther. "What a pity Kildare or Darrel doesn't know what we know!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Pair of rotters!" growled Blake. "I had a sort of idea that Wildrake might have been led on by Cardew the other night; but there he is, marching out with him again!"

"Birds of a feather!" grunted Herries.

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry. "Well, we're not their keepers! Let's get down to the cricket."

"Bai Jove! I wathah think—"

"You do, Gussy?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Wats to you, Lowthah! I wathah think that I ought to speak to those youngstahs," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Do!" said Lowther. "They deserve it—they deserve anything, in fact."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Go and have one of your heart-to-heart talks with them," said Lowther. "Give it to them for half an hour! If that doesn't make 'em repent, nothing will!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah. I weally think it is up to me to speak a word in season to those misguided youngstahs," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard them with contempt; but I cannot see them followin' the woad to wuin without speakin' a word of warnin'. I will join you pwesently, deah boys. I wegard this as bein' up to me."

And Arthur Augustus started after Cardew and Wildrake towards the gates. Tom Merry & Co. grinned as they went towards the cricket-pitch. Arthur Augustus' intentions were good—of the very best, in fact—but Tom Merry & Co. did not think that the delinquents were likely to benefit much from his word in season.

CHAPTER 5.
A Word in Season!

"STOP!"

Cardew and Wildrake had turned out at the gates, and were proceeding along the lane towards Rylcombe, when a voice hailed them from behind.

They turned their heads.

D'Arcy of the Fourth was trotting in pursuit, and he waved his hand to the two juniors as a sign to stop. He came up breathlessly as they waited for him, wondering what he wanted.

"Dear man, are you comin' with us?" asked Cardew agreeably.

"Certainly not, Cardew!"

"You don't care to see the Abbotsford races to-day?"

"Weally, Cardew——"

"Can I put anything on for you?" asked Cardew. "They say that Pretty Polly is good for the three-thirty. Shall I put a quid on for you—both ways?"

"I wegard your suggestion with uttah contempt, Cardew! I am not likely to allow you to mix me up with such a blackguardly pwoceedin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I have a gweat mind to punch your nose for suggestin' such a thing!"

"You don't think Pretty Polly will win?" asked Cardew, in a thoughtful way.

"I am uttahly indiffewent to whethah Pwetty Polly wins or loses, Cardew, you wottah!"

"Oh, you fancy another horse?" asked Cardew, evidently determined to misunderstand the noble Gussy.

"I do not fancy anythin' at all for a wotten wace, Cardew!"

"It isn't a rotten race, old bean! I believe it's a fairly good one," said Cardew. "But what horse takes your fancy?"

"I believe you are delibewately misunderstandin' me, Cardew!"

"Not really?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And when did that dawn on you, old bean?" asked Cardew pleasantly.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard. He had followed these misguided youths to speak a word in season; but he felt much more inclined to "dot" Ralph Reckness Cardew upon his Greek nose. He restrained his indignant wrath with difficulty.

Wildrake was smiling. He seemed to find something entertaining in Arthur Augustus' bottled-up indignation and wrath.

"I have come heah to give you fellows some advice!" gasped Arthur Augustus at last.

"A tip for the races?" asked the incorrigible Cardew.

"No, you wottah! I am speakin' a word in season——"

"Oh, I see! This is firstly, isn't it?" asked Cardew. "Get on to secondly. We're in no hurry, and we'll wait for seventhly, and a word in conclusion."

"I beg of you to weflect on what you are goin' to do!" said Arthur Augustus, with as much calmness as he could muster. "You are wunnin' a gweat wisk in playin' the goat as you are doin'. If you get found out you will get sacked——"

"Ass!" said Wildrake.

"If you call me an ass, Wildwake——"

"Fathead, if you like that better!"

"Weally, Wildwake——".

"We're getting away from the sermon!" interjected Cardew. "Get on to thirdly, Gussy!"

Gussy breathed hard again.

"Apart fwom the wisk you are wunnin', think of the disgwaceful wottenness of what you are doin'!" he said. "Wemembah that evewy decent fellow looks on you with contempt."

Wildrake flushed angrily.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"No, it is not all——"

"I guess we won't wait for the rest," said Wildrake. "Good-bye, fathead!"

"Oh, let him run on!" urged Cardew. "You don't know how entertainin' Gussy can be when he mounts the high horse,. Let's hear fourthly, anyway."

"I'm going on!" said Wildrake abruptly.

And he strode up the lane.

"Cardew, will you heed what I say?" said Arthur Augustus impressively. "I feel it is my dutay to warn weckless youngstahs——"

"At your advanced age, I suppose it is," said Cardew gravely. "But I'm afraid I must be gettin' on. I renew my offer of puttin' on a quid for you."

"You wottah!"

"Or I'll take you myself," said Cardew. "Two to one against the field—there!"

"If you make such a wemark to me again, Cardew, I shall hit you!"

"Two to one against the field!" said Cardew calmly.

"Bai Jove!"

It was too much for Arthur Augustus. He made a jump at Cardew, his noble countenance aflame with wrath.

Cardew's hands came up like a flash, and Gussy's drive, at Cardew's nose, was knocked up. The next moment Cardew caught him round the waist, hooked his leg, and sat him down in the road. It was done so suddenly that Arthur Augustus, handy man as he was in a scrap, had no chance. He bumped on the road with a loud gasp.

"Gwooogh!"

"Ta-ta, old-bean!"

Cardew started after Wildrake at a run.

The swell of St. Jim's sat for a few moments, gasping, before he staggered to his feet.

"Cardew!" he shouted.

Cardew was already fifty yards away, and still sprinting to overtake his companion.

"You uttah wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Come back, and I will give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Cardew turned for a moment to kiss his hand to the enraged swell of the Fourth, and ran lightly on.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus breathlessly.

He made a step in pursuit of the fleeing Cardew, but paused, and turned back to the school. His noble face was very wrathy as he joined Tom Merry & Co. on Little Side.

Ralph Reckness Cardew was smiling cheerily as he joined Wildrake and dropped into a walk by his side.

"No end entertainin', old Gussy, isn't he?" he remarked.

Kit Wildrake frowned.

"I guess he thinks we're going out to play the fool, the same as the other night!" he said abruptly.

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"What did you think the fellows would think?" he inquired.

"I never thought about what they would think at all. I guess they can think what they like!" said Wildrake hotly. "If they choose to set me down as a bad egg, I sha'n't take the trouble to contradict them!"

"Hear, hear!" said Cardew. "'They say—what say they?—let them say.' Quite a good maxim."

The two juniors passed through the village, and turned into a white long road. Cardew glanced at his companion.

"This road goes to Abbotsford," he said.

"I guess so."

"You're going to Abbotsford?"

"Correct!"

"I believe it's about eight miles."

"Sure!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm game!" he said.

And they walked on.

CHAPTER 6.
Sticking it Out!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW was not smiling when the two Fourth-Formers walked into the High Street of Abbotsford.

In spite of his slacking manners and customs, Cardew was pretty fit, and he could walk. But the two juniors had covered nine miles from St. Jim's, and Cardew was feeling the effects of it.

But he would not even think of giving in.

Wildrake had followed his lead on the first excursion, and Cardew had played a trick on him. He had undertaken to follow Wildrake's lead on the second excursion, and it looked as if Wildrake, too, contemplated a trick, though of a different nature. Whatever was before him, Cardew grimly resolved to "stick it out."

The Canadian showed no sign whatever of fatigue. His constitution was an iron one, his muscles seemed to be of steel. He looked as fresh when he walked into Abbotsford as when he had turned out at the gates of St. Jim's.

"We get some tea here, I suppose," Cardew ventured.

"I guess it's not tea-time yet."

"No; but——"

"We don't stop in Abbotsford."

"We—we're goin' farther on?"

"Correct!"

Cardew compressed his lips, and walked on without another word. The town was left behind, and they followed a road through green, open country. Kit Wildrake went on with a light, springy stride, at a good pace, and Cardew found some difficulty in keeping up with him.

There was perspiration in clots on his forehead now, and he was beginning to ache.

The juniors had covered ten miles, and a ten-mile walk was not a slight performance.

But Wildrake showed no signs of stopping. He swung on cheerily, occasionally making a remark, to which Cardew hardly replied.

There was no banter or persiflage about Ralph Reckness Cardew now.

Fatigue was creeping heavily over him.

But though the flesh might be weak, the spirit would not surrender, and Cardew kept on with grim resolution.

Wildrake paused at last, looking at a milestone. Cardew dropped on the milestone to rest.

"Eight miles to Paddlewood!" remarked Wildrake.

"We—we're not goin' to Paddlewood?" faltered Cardew.

"Why not?"

"Oh, any old thing," said Cardew, with an assumption of his old manner.

Wildrake looked at him.

"You can back down, if you like, of course," he said.

"I'm not backin' down! Let's get on."

Wildrake swung on again, fresh as ever, seemingly, and Cardew, fighting against his weariness, kept at his side.

The miles seemed to lengthen into leagues under the feet of the hapless dandy of the Fourth.

He had wondered what Wildrake intended for that afternoon. Now he knew!

He deserved his punishment, and he knew it. But, like Cain of old, he found it very hard to bear.

He had led Wildrake, wilfully, unscrupulously, into his own shady pursuits. He had done it from sheer mocking cynicism. Now Wildrake was turning the tables—he was leading Cardew into his own pursuits—one of them being healthy, long rambles!

To the iron-limbed Canadian, used to great distances, almost impervious to fatigue, the afternoon's walk was a pleasure—as that visit to Lodgey's night-club had been to Cardew.

But the long walk was far from being a pleasure to Cardew; exactly as the night-club escapade had been exceedingly unpleasant to Wildrake.

It was tit for tat, a Roland for an Oliver; and Cardew could not deny the justice of it.

In his usual mood, he would have laughed with amusement at the idea of it. But he did not feel like laughing now, as the weary miles dragged under his feet.

Wildrake looked back for him several times, as he slowed down in spite of himself, and at last slackened his pace to accommodate Cardew.

But he did not stop. Cardew had to keep up, or else back out of his plighted word; exactly the position he had put Wildrake into on the previous occasion. Paddlewood was close on twenty miles from St. Jim's, and Cardew began to wonder whether he would reach it alive. He was determined, at least, to keep on till he dropped.

The sun was lower in the west now. In any case, the two juniors could not possibly be back at St. Jim's for lockingup. But that was a slight consideration in comparison with the fatigue that was turning Cardew's limbs to lead.

Motor-cars passed them on the road, and on every one that passed Cardew turned a longing eye. He would have given all he possessed for a lift back to St. Jim's in a car. Wildrake seemed unconscious of fatigue. There was a cheery, smiling expression on his face as he strode on.

Honk, honk!

A big car came swinging along the road, and, to the surprise of the juniors, it drew up, and a voice called:

"Ralph!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Cardew breathlessly. "Granddad and nunky!"

Tired as he was, he stepped quickly towards the halted car.

Wildrake's glance followed him curiously. A chauffeur in a quiet livery sat at the wheel. Inside the car were two gentlemen—one of advanced age, the other looking about forty or forty-five, a rather handsome man, with a clear-cut face and pale complexion, and very like Cardew in feature. Wildrake had never seen them before, but Cardew's ejaculation enlightened him, and he guessed that the old gentleman was Lord Reckness, and the other the old lord's eldest son, Lord Lilburn. Cardew's father, he knew, had been Lord Reckness' younger son.

Wildrake kept back at the roadside, having no desire whatever to "wedge" into Cardew's meeting with his relations. Neither did he care much for such acquaintances, in point of fact. It was only too easy to see the signs of dissipation in Lord Lilburn's face, handsome as it was; and even the old lord was lacking in the gravity that should have belonged to his years. Cardew leaned on the car as he spoke to his relations. He was intensely glad of the rest.

"Fancy meetin' you here," he said as lightly as he could. "How well you're lookin', grandfather. I didn't know you were in England, uncle."

"I left Monte a week ago," answered Lord Lilburn moodily. He leaned back on the cushions, and lighted a cigar, resigning himself to wait while the old lord talked to his favourite grandson.

Lord Reckness scanned the junior curiously.

"What are you doing here, Ralph, so far from your school?" he asked.

"Walkin'!"

"You've not walked here from your school?" exclaimed the old gentleman in astonishment.

"Yes, I have," said Cardew, with a faint smile.

"By gad!" remarked Lord Lilburn, with a curious glance at his nephew. "It must be ten or twelve miles."

"Over fifteen."

"What the deuce do you mean, then?" asked old Lord Reckness. "Is it some sort of a bet?"

"No. I'm out walkin' with a chap." Cardew gave a careless nod towards Wildrake, who was waiting for him out of earshot. The old lord put up his glasses and glanced at Wildrake.

"It would be only civil to your friend to introduce him, Ralph," said the old gentleman.

"He's not my friend. I hate him!" said Cardew cheerfully. "At the present moment I'd give ten pounds to anybody who would knock him on the head!"

"Ralph!"

"It's a sort of contest of endurance," explained Cardew. "I'm not goin' to give in till he does. And he's made of iron."

"Absurd!" said the old lord, who noted the signs of fatigue in his grandson. "Jump into the car, and I will give you a lift to your school. It will take us out of our way—but you do not mind, Lilburn?"

"Not at all," yawned Lord Lilburn. "Sensible thing for the kid to do, I think."

Cardew hesitated.

He would have given much to repose his aching legs in the luxurious softness of Lord Reckness' car, and the old earl was really concerned about him.

"I'll ask Wildrake, if you'll let me," he said.

"Of course; your companion is included. You could scarcely leave him here," said Lord Reckness, with a smile.

Cardew turned back to Wildrake.

"Like a lift home?" he asked.

"Thanks, no!"

"My grandfather's offered us a run back to St. Jim's."

"You're at liberty to accept it," answered Wildrake coldly.

Cardew's eyes glittered.

"You mean, by backin' out of our compact?"

"Sure!"

"I'm not doin' that."

"Please yourself," said Wildrake coolly.

Cardew turned his back on him savagely, and stepped back to the car.

"Sorry!" he said. "It can't be done. The fellow wants to keep on."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lord Reckness. "You shall do nothing of the sort, Ralph. I will not allow you to overfatigue yourself."

"It's a question of promise, sir," said Cardew. "If I chuck up, I'm breakin' my word."

"Oh!" The old lord appeared to reflect. "You shall not do that, Ralph. Keep on, then. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, grandfather! Good-bye, uncle!"

Lord Reckness shook hands warmly with his grandson, and the uncle nodded carelessly to the nephew. At a sign from the old lord the chauffeur set the car in motion again.

Cardew stood and watched it out of sight. Then he turned to Kit Wildrake, his eyes full of a sombre fire.

"Do you know," he said in a low voice, "that I hate you, Wildrake?"

"I know that I don't care a continental red cent whether you do or not," answered Wildrake. "Are you coming on?"

"Yes, hang you!"

Wildrake swung on easily, and Cardew limped by his side, his heart full of rage and bitterness, but of indomitable determination.

CHAPTER 7.
Bitter Blood!

THE dusk had deepened into night. Cardew, footsore and weary, still limped on, but at a pace that forced Wildrake to slow down very considerably, or to leave him. Only Cardew's savage resolution kept him going. Once or twice he glanced at the Canadian's handsome, sun-browned face, as if seeking some sign of relenting. But he found none there. That Wildrake was a kind-hearted fellow, always ready to lend a helping hand to anyone in trouble, all who knew him were aware. But he seemed merciless now. Cardew had wronged him too deeply to be let off lightly. There was no malice in the Canadian junior's nature, but he could not forget what he had felt like when he found himself in a gaming-room in Cardew's company; he could not forget the cold and averted looks of the fellows he liked at St. Jim's and who had turned from him for Cardew's fault. He felt that Ralph Reckness Cardew deserved a severe lesson, and making the slacking dandy of the Fourth exert himself was making the punishment fit the crime. The hapless Cardew was exerting himself now, with a vengeance.

All the light persiflage was gone—all the banter, all the mockery. He was conscious only of heavy fatigue, and of a dull hatred of his companion, as he trudged wearily on. In the back of his mind was the thought of the return journey. Did his taskmaster intend to walk back—was even the iron-limbed Canadian capable of that? As for himself, he knew that he would fall from sheer exhaustion by the wayside.

He stumbled suddenly, unconsciously, and fell forward on one knee. A glimmer of lights in the dusky distance showed the village of Paddlewood. Wildrake turned quickly towards his companion. Cardew made an effort to rise, but fell on his side in the road.

He waved Wildrake back savagely.

"Let me alone!" he muttered, in a thick voice.

A look of concern came over Wildrake's face now. He had meant to tire the dandy of the Fourth thoroughly out till he had an ache in every limb, but he had not meant to hurt him. He realised that perhaps he had not made enough allowance for a fellow brought up so much more softly than himself.

Cardew sat up unsteadily in the dust. For his life he could not have gained his feet at that moment.

His eyes glittered at Wildrake through the dusk.

"You've done me!" he muttered.

"You did me!" said Wildrake.

"I know I did. I'm glad of it! Let me alone! I'll be up in a minute or two, an' I'll keep on as long as you do, hang you!"

Wildrake shook his head.

"You can't!" he said.

"Mind your own business!" snarled Cardew. "I know what I can do. I'm not in specially good form to-day."

"I warned you not to smoke," said Wildrake, with a smile.

"Mind your own business, I tell you!"

Wildrake shrugged his shoulders. Cardew was in a mood for a quarrel and a fight, if his strength had allowed of it. But the dandy of the Fourth could not have fought a boy of ten just then. He could only slash his enemy with the bitterness of his tongue, and that had no effect whatever upon Wildrake.

"We're not going on," said the Canadian quietly. "You've had your lesson, Cardew, and you've paid for the blackguardly trick you played on me. As soon as you're rested, we'll get into Paddlewood to the station, and take the train home."

Cardew's lip curled bitterly.

"There's no station at Paddlewood," he said.

"Oh, I'm unacquainted with this quarter, of course. I suppose you know where is the nearest station."

"At Lipdale."

"Where is that?"

"Four miles from here," groaned Cardew.

"Phew!"

Wildrake looked very thoughtful. Four miles were little to him, even after the long tramp from St. Jim's. But it was pretty clear now that Cardew was no more capable of walking another four miles than of walking another four hundred. The dogged determination with which he had kept up had rather deceived Wildrake as to his condition. But now that he had collapsed he had collapsed utterly.

"No way of getting a conveyance here, I suppose?" said the Canadian junior, after a silence.

"I don't know this district much more than you do!" muttered Cardew. "We're in pasture country here. I suppose there are farmhouses somewhere. Leave me here to shift for myself, and clear off."

"I guess I sha'n't do that."

"I want you to."

"Whether you want me to or not, I sha'n't do it. I'm seeing you safe back to St. Jim's."

"You—you fool! Do you think I want you to look after me?" hissed Cardew, his eyes blazing. "I only want you to let me alone."

He staggered to his feet, and stood unsteadily, but he waved back the helping hand Wildrake would have given him. He leaned against a fence by the roadside, breathing in gasps. His knees had a tendency to double up beneath him.

"Which way to Lipdale from here?" asked Wildrake.

"Four miles back along the road we've come, and a turn," said Cardew. "Get off by yourself. I can manage."

Wildrake shook his head.

"I don't want your company," said Cardew shrilly.

"I guess you'll have to put up with it, all the same," said Wildrake good-humouredly. "Do you think I could leave you in that fagged-out state? Don't be an ass!"

"I'm not much more fagged than you are."

"A lot, I guess."

"You fool!"

"You're trying to make me hit you, I guess," said the Canadian. "But I wouldn't hit a fellow in your state if you punched my nose. Why didn't you let on before that you were broke?"

"I'm not broke, hang you, only a bit fagged."

"You're broke to the bones," said Wildrake coolly. "You couldn't run a dozen yards if a bull were after you. I'm going to wait till you're a bit rested, then I'm going to help you."

"I shall hit out if you touch me!"

"I guess I'm chancing that."

Wildrake leaned against the fence and waited. Cardew eyed him evilly. He had never imagined himself capable of the bitterness and hatred that surged up in him now.

He made an effort at last, and detached himself from the fence. Slowly, heavily, he limped away back along the way of that weary walk. But he had overtaxed his strength; he was undone by the dogged determination that had kept him going so far. He knew that he could never get a quarter of the distance to the railway-station without help.

But in the aching and failing body the



D'Arcy made a jump at Cardew, his noble countenance aflame with wrath. Cardew's hands came up like a flash, and Gussy's drive at Cardew's nose was knocked up. The next moment Cardew caught him round the waist, hooked his leg, to set him down heavily in the road. (*See page 7.*)

spirit was indomitable. Given the choice, he would rather have died by the roadside than have accepted help from the fellow he hated with a mortal hatred. As Wildrake stepped towards him he moved aside.

"Keep away!"

"Don't be a fool, Cardew," said the Canadian quietly. "You can't walk on your own. Take my arm."

"I won't!"

"You must, old chap."

Wildrake slid his arm under Cardew's. The dandy of the Fourth, with all his remaining strength, clenched his right hand and struck the Canadian full in the face, and Kit Wildrake reeled back from the blow.

CHAPTER 8.
Good for Evil!

CARDEW stood unsteadily, but with an evil glitter in his eyes. He fully expected the Canadian to spring at him, and in his present state he could hardly have raised his hand in defence. But he did not care; he rejoiced in the savage blow he had dealt.

Wildrake recovered himself, and panted a little. He raised his hand, but it was only to rub his cheek where the angry blow had fallen. He did not offer to touch Cardew.

"Now will you let me alone?" said Cardew, with a bitter sneer.

"I reckon so."

Cardew waited another moment or two, but it was evident that the Canadian did not mean to touch him. He turned away and limped along the road. Kit Wildrake did not move for some moments, but as Cardew's figure faded into the dark he followed.

Cardew staggered on unsteadily. He was so fatigued that his senses swam with the effort to keep on. More than once he stumbled, but he managed to keep his feet. He knew that if he fell he would not get up again, and he had struck aside the only helping hand on that lonely road. He lurched on blindly in the dark, hardly knowing whither he was going—till there came a stumble at last that brought him to his knees.

In a second Wildrake was at his side.

"Leave me alone!" muttered Cardew thickly.

A strong arm was thrown round his shoulders, saving him from lurching over at full length.

He resisted feebly.

But his senses were in a mist now. He was not fainting, but he was very near to it.

Like one in a dream he felt himself lifted in strong arms and resting upon a broad shoulder.

Wildrake had lifted him, and Wildrake was carrying him—carrying him, apparently, as easily as if he had been a child.

Cardew was past resistance now. He resigned himself into the sturdy Canadian's hands without a further struggle. He was too exhausted now even to feel bitterness or hatred. He was conscious only of grinding fatigue, and an intense passion for rest—rest and sleep. In spite of himself, his eyes closed as he was carried on.

During that strange tramp his mind was not clear. Once or twice he came to himself and felt the cold night air blowing on his face, and then he relapsed into dull drowsiness again. It was not till lights flashed in his eyes that he came fully to himself.

He stared round him.

Wildrake had set him down and had taken his arm. Before them the lights of a station on the edge of a village gleamed.

"Can you walk now?"

"I—I'll try."

With the help of the Canadian's strong arm Cardew walked into the station. He noted that Wildrake was breathing hard and heavily; the iron-limbed Canadian was exhausted now, or near it. Cardew was silent as they entered the station. Wildrake took two tickets, and inquired for a train to Rylcombe.

"Down platform. Change at Wayland. Train in three minutes."

"We're in luck, I guess," said Wildrake.

They passed on to the platform, and sat on one of the wooden benches to wait. Cardew almost dropped asleep again even in the brief interval. But the train came thundering in, and he roused himself.

"Here's a carriage."

Wildrake helped him in. There was a corner seat next the door, and Cardew dropped into it like a stone. Wildrake passed him and went to the other side of the carriage.

Cardew leaned back in his seat, and his eyes closed. It was heavenly bliss to him to sink back and sleep.

The next he knew Wildrake was shaking him by the shoulder. He started up.

"Wayland," said Wildrake. "We change here."

"Wayland already! Oh gad!"

Wildrake helped him from the train. Cardew was stumbling. They crossed the bridge to the local platform, where the local train was waiting for changing passengers. In the Rylcombe train Cardew slept again.

Again Wildrake shook him out of slumber when the train stopped in the little village station.

On the platform Cardew pulled himself together, and walked out without the Canadian's assistance.

Outside the station was the old hack, and Wildrake signed to the driver. Cardew stepped into the hack without a word. He was feeling better now, but he could not have walked a mile to St. Jim's.

The old hack rumbled away with the two juniors.

Wildrake sat silent in his corner, and Cardew glanced at him several times in the deep dusk of the interior of the hack. He was thinking of the blow he had struck, and of the patient help Wildrake had given him since. He opened his lips to speak more than once, but closed them again. And Wildrake did not break the silence.

They arrived at St. Jim's without a word spoken on either side.

The hack was dismissed at the gates, and Wildrake rang the bell. Old Taggles came grumbling down to the gates.

He glared at the two juniors as he let them in.

"Nice goings hon!" he remarked.

"Toppin'!" said Cardew. "What's the time, old bean?"

"Parst ten!" said Taggles. "And you two are to report yourselves to Mr. Railton! Nice goings hon!"

Cardew whistled softly.

"Ten o'clock!" he said. "I reckoned we'd be late for lock-up and call-over, but half an hour late for bed! My hat!"

The two juniors crossed the quadrangle to the School House.

The house had a deserted appearance as they came in. All Forms below the Sixth were in bed at that hour.

"We're in for it!" Cardew remarked.

"I guess so!"

"Well, let's go and face the giddy dragon in his den!"

Wildrake tapped at Mr. Railton's door, and the deep voice of the School House master bade them enter.

Mr. Railton fixed a frowning glance upon the two juniors as they came in.

"So you have returned?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"You will kindly explain your absence at once!"

"We walked to Paddlewood, sir——"

Mr. Railton started.

"Paddlewood is nearly twenty miles away!" he said.

"Yes, sir. We were done up, and had to take the train back," said Wildrake. "I guess I'm sorry we're late."

Mr. Railton looked at them very searchingly. The signs of fatigue about the two juniors were only too visible. The Housemaster was relieved. He did not wholly trust Cardew, and he was glad to learn that the juniors' absence had been of such an innocent nature.

"You must have known that you could not return from Paddlewood in time for locking up!" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Wildrake frankly. "I guess I didn't know how much we should be delayed, but I knew that. I—I'm sorry!"

"You had better go to bed at once," said Mr. Railton. "You will take five hundred lines each for remaining out to this hour, which you could have avoided if you had chosen."

"It was my doing, sir," said Wildrake. "I made Cardew come. But for me he would have turned back much earlier."

Cardew grinned faintly.

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"Cardew should have turned back, as you also should have done," he said. "You will take five hundred lines each, as I have said. Now go to bed!"

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night!" said Mr. Railton, kindly enough.

The two juniors made their way to the Fourth Form dormitory. Cardew stumbled a little on the stairs, his legs were aching. He switched on the light in the dormitory, and looked round with something of his old expression, as half a dozen juniors sat up in bed, and blinked at the late-comers.

"Bai Jove! The wottahs have come in!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sleepily.

"Where have you been?" inquired Baggy Trimble.

"Has Railton licked you?" asked Herries.

"Dear me, what a volley of questions!" smiled Cardew. "Can't you guess what we've been up to?"

"Easily enough!" growled Jack Blake. "But you needn't brag of it, you gambling rotter!"

"But what on earth did you tell Railton, for coming in at such an hour as this?" exclaimed Clive.

Cardew chuckled.

"What do you think?" he answered. "Ha, ha! We told him we'd been for a long country walk. Ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And he believed you?" exclaimed Dick Julian.

"Yes."

"He doesn't know you so well as we do, then!" said Herries grimly.

Wildrake did not say a word. Cardew was deliberately giving the Fourth Form a false impression, from what his chums in Study No. 9 would have termed "sheer cussedness." And the juniors were evidently only too willing to fall into the trap. Wildrake curled his lip and said nothing. He would not justify himself, and he went to bed in grim silence. In less than a minute after turning in he was sleeping as sound as a bell.

CHAPTER 9.
Under a Cloud!

CLANG, clang!

Kit Wildrake turned out cheerily enough at the ring of the rising-bell the following morning.

A sound night's sleep had restored him after the fatigue of that exhausting expedition, in which his exertions had been much greater than Cardew's. But the latter turned out very reluctantly and heavily. Cardew's movements were slow and languid, and his face was rather pale. He was still feeling the effects of his fatigue, and was likely to feel them for a day or two yet. A good many curious glances were turned upon the two juniors, but no one spoke to them. Cardew's pale and worn looks were put down to the unhealthy excitement of the gaming-room. The true story of the expedition would have astonished the Fourth-Formers very much if they had heard it.

They were not, it seemed, likely to hear it. Wildrake was too proud to explain, and Cardew seemed to take a gnomish delight in keeping up the mystification. He glanced at Wildrake several times with malicious amusement in his eyes. But the Canadian did not meet his eyes. He was "fed" with Cardew, and he wanted nothing more to do with him.

On his cheek, red in the morning sunlight, showed the mark where Cardew's fist had struck the previous evening. Wildrake had not returned that blow. He had helped the junior who had struck him. But he had not forgotten it. It was not a thing to be forgotten. If he did not think now of avenging it, it was probably only because he knew it was not worth while, for the dandy of the Fourth could not have stood up to him for two rounds.

Wildrake got out of the dormitory as soon as he could. Even Mellish and Trimble did not care to speak to him. They were not particular youths, by any means; but they felt that the fellow had gone too far. While his previous escapade was still the talk of the Lower School he had plunged again, to the extent of coming home after bed-time. And even if he had "stuffed up" the Housemaster, as they supposed, it was altogether "too thick." Such a career was only too likely to meet a sudden end in the sack. And even the black sheep of the Fourth felt inclined to give the reckless junior a wide berth.

That morning Kit Wildrake found himself in something very much resembling "Coventry."

Nothing had been said on that topic, but the juniors simply let him alone, and did not speak to him. And as he was too high-spirited to make any advances, he soon found himself in complete isolation.

Tom Merry & Co., in the Shell, knew that the two culprits had not returned at bed-time the previous night, and that was all they knew. But it was quite enough for them to know.

"They're asking for the sack!" Monty Lowther remarked. "They'll get it soon, that's a cert. And the sooner they get it the better for St. Jim's."

"My idea exactly!" said Manners.

And Tom Merry nodded assent.

There was one fellow in the Shell, however, who was inclined to smile upon Kit Wildrake in the hour of disgrace. That one was Aubrey Racke, the blackest sheep at St. Jim's. Racke had had his differences with the new junior, and serious differences, too. But Racke could have forgiven anybody who had turned out a thorough reckless blackguard, as he supposed was the case with the junior from the Boot Leg Ranch. And Racke bore down on him in the quadrangle after dinner with an engaging grin.

"Sort of merry outcast, it seems!" he said genially.

Wildrake gave him a contemptuous look, but did not otherwise reply. But his feelings were bitter. He knew what Racke's advances meant, and Racke's genial grin showed him how much he had fallen in the estimation of the decent crowd at St. Jim's.

Well, whether the other fellows ever did him justice or not, he did not want Racke's society, that was certain.

Racke seemed rather surprised by his cold reception. Doubtless, he had considered that the outcast of the Fourth would be glad of a word from anybody. And since he was in disgrace by his own fault, he need not have any repugnance to the society of another black sheep, Racke considered.

"I've been there!" continued Racke, still genial. "All the giddy saints are down on me for the same reason. I say, did you have a specially good time yesterday?"

"I'd rather you didn't speak to me, Racke!"

"My dear chap, we're in the same boat now," said Racke, laughing. "Your giddy reputation has gone the way of mine. Look here, I've been botherin' Cardew for the address of Lodgey's show, an' he won't give it to me. Will you come there along with me one night?"

Wildrake turned his back, and walked away.

Aubrey Racke stared after him.

His eyes glittered, and he clenched his hands. If physical courage had not been left out of Racke's composition he would have followed Wildrake, and called him to account there and then. But Racke did not think of doing that.

"Hoity-toity!" he murmured. "Still puttin' on airs, by gad! You cheeky rotter! You'll be glad enough for a fellow to speak to you after you've had a few more days at Coventry."

Wildrake's face was very calm, and a little set, when he took his place in the Fourth Form-room that afternoon. He did not look at any of his Form fellows, or speak a word. If they were going to avoid him, he seemed quite willing to meet them half-way.

But under his calm exterior his heart was heavy.

For the opinion of fellows like Racke or Trimble or Mellish he cared nothing. But he liked and respected Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three, and it was bitter enough to him to see himself set down as a rank outsider by fellows he liked and respected. His feelings towards Cardew were not pleasant.

For a malicious whim, the dandy of the Fourth had brought him to this pass, and he seemed to be enjoying the situation he had created.

Cardew was not, in fact, so isolated as Wildrake. For in Study No. 9 Clive and Levison were only half-hearted in turning from their chum. They were angry and exasperated with Cardew; but, after all, they were accustomed to making allowances for him, and habit, too, was strong. It was difficult to keep up a "down" on a fellow whose study they shared, who sat next to them in Form, and who was accustomed to working with them, borrowing their books, and lending them his books, and so forth. That evening, in fact, in Study No. 9, when the three juniors gathered at prep, anyone glancing in would hardly have noted that the three were not on their old friendly terms.

Cardew persisted in making smiling remarks to his comrades, and they found themselves answering, and smiling, too. After all, Cardew was not to be taken too seriously. His sins, after all, were not like Racke's. If he did the same things, he did them in a different way.



Like one in a dream, Cardew felt himself lifted in strong arms and resting upon a broad shoulder. Wildrake had lifted him, and was carrying him, apparently, as easily as if he had been a child. Cardew was past resistance now. (*See page* 10.)

His plunges were occasional, and caused by boredom or whimsicality, which was different from the dull, dingy blackguardism of a fellow like Aubrey Racke. And old friendship is strong. Both Clive and Levison hated the division that had arisen in the study, and wished it ended.

"Dear old men," said Cardew, after rattling on for some time, while his study-mates were trying to work, "you can't imagine how overjoyed I am to see you grinnin' again. The bulldog brow doesn't really suit your style of beauty, Clivey. A smile's ever so much better. It shows off your complexion to advantage, too. There, that's better!" added Cardew approvingly, as Clive, in spite of himself, laughed.

"Your turn now, Ernest, old bean!" continued Cardew. "Go easy with a repentant sinner, dear boy! In me you behold the returned prodigal—shakin' off the giddy wine husks and things, and comin' back for the sackcloth an' ashes! It's up to you fellows to kill the fatted calf, an' welcome the merry prodigal, if you only knew it."

"Ass!" said Levison.

"Think of what a touchin' scene it would be!" urged Cardew. "Dear old pals yearnin' for the naughty prodigal—naughty prodigal comin' home repentant, weepin' with remorse; dear old pals welcomin' him with open arms, an' killin' the fatted calf. There's only one drawback to the touchin' picture," went on Cardew thoughtfully. "I've often wondered what were the feelin's of the fatted calf when he saw the prodigal comin' along the road! Must have been rather mingled—what?"

"You ass!" said Levison, laughing. "For goodness' sake dry up, and let's get our prep done."

"Good! Get through it. I want you to come down to the Common-room with me."

"What's on, then?"

"I'm goin' to make a speech."

"A speech!" exclaimed Clive.

"Yes. I'm not wholly satisfied with the way some fellows in this House go on, you know, and I'm takin' a leaf out of Gussy's book—I'm going to speak a word in season."

"What do you mean? What fellows?"

"Well, there's Tom Merry——"

"Tom Merry!" ejaculated Levison.

"Yes; and Blake, and D'Arcy, and Talbot, and several more. I'm goin' to open their eyes to their iniquities, if I can. I believe I'm rather eloquent when I get goin'——"

"You utter ass!" said Clive. "If you're thinking of some silly jape, you'd better drop it. The fellows are not in a humour to stand any cheek from you just at present."

"But a word in season——" urged Cardew.

"Oh, don't rot!"

"I'm not rottin'. You'll see."

And Cardew, with a yawn, turned to his prep.

When work was over in Study No. 9, the three juniors left it together. They came on Wildrake, quitting No. 2, as they went towards the stairs. Cardew tapped him on the arm amiably.

"Come on, old bean!" he said.

Wildrake jerked his arm away, and gave the dandy of the Fourth a grim, steady look.

"Keep your distance," he said.

And he went downstairs with that.

"Floored again!" said Cardew, with undiminished good humour. "Dear man! But he's a good little man, and I'm goin' to do him justice. I owe him that, after punchin' his face yesterday."

Levison started.

"You quarrelled with Wildrake yesterday?" he exclaimed.

"Bad!"

"And—and hit him?" ejaculated Clive.

"He still carries the beauty-mark on his chivvy."

"What did Wildrake do?" asked Levison. "I don't quite catch on to this."

"What did he do?" said Cardew reflectively. "Ever heard of that ancient chap, the Good Samaritan?"

"Of course, ass! What——"

"Well, Wildrake understudied the Good Samaritan. He carried me some miles on his shoulder, because I was past walkin'."

"Are you pulling our leg?" exclaimed Clive.

"Honest Injun! I felt so wild with him I could have punched him again for carryin' me; but that's worn off. I've got a good heart," said Cardew mockingly, laying his hand on his waistcoat. "Sometimes it goes a bit astray, but it always rights again. My faults are superficial, dear men; at bottom, I'm a good boy—a model good boy, such as you read of in gilt-edged volumes for the young. At times I am awed by the contemplation of my own goodness. Now, come on, and I'll awe the other fellows!"

And, in blank astonishment, Clive and Levison followed their erratic chum to the junior Common-room.

CHAPTER 10.
Light at Last!

KIT WILDRAKE had dropped into a chair by the fire in the Common-room, with a book in his hand.

Most of the Shell and Fourth had gathered there after prep. The Terrible Three were standing in a group on the hearthrug, only a yard or two from Wildrake, chatting. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy leaned gracefully against the mantelpiece, polishing his celebrated eyeglass. Blake and Herries and Dig were gathered round a chessboard, at which Talbot and Kangaroo were playing. Dick, Julian, Reilly, and Hammond were engaged in an argument on a sofa near at hand. Wildrake was in the midst of the fellows he knew well and liked, but there was no welcoming glance for him when he came in. Tom Merry & Co. had no use for a rank outsider.

The Canadian junior's face was quite calm; he did not allow his looks to betray what he felt. But he felt keenly enough. If he had not liked these fellows it would not have been so painful. But he did like them and respect them, and he knew they had liked him. There was nothing between them but the barrier of misunderstanding, erected by Cardew's whimsical malice; but, so far as Wildrake was concerned, it might have been a barrier of adamant. He was helpless to remove it, even if his pride had allowed him to try. As to Cardew, he did not give that curious youth a thought.

Study No. 9 walked in abreast, and came towards the fire. Some glances of disapproval were cast at Levison and Clive. It was not fair play to let off one outsider when the other was not let off. Cardew's next action drew all eyes upon him.

He jerked a chair out into the middle of the floor, and mounted upon it. The juniors stared at him.

"Gentlemen——" began Cardew.

"Shut up!" grunted Grundy of the Shell.

"Gentlemen, I have a few words to say to the assembled company," continued Cardew calmly. "As Mark Antony remarked of old, lend me your ears!"

"Nobody wants to hear what you've got to say, Cardew," said Tom Merry, looking round. "You'd better shut up!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, with emphasis.

"My remarks, gentlemen, will be few but important. Certain fellows, now in this room, are not playing the game. I intend to name them, and call upon them to own up, and do better in the future. Followin' the glorious example of the one an' only Gustavus, I am goin' to speak a word in season."

"Weally, Cardew——"

"If this is one of your silly japes——" began Blake gruffly.

"Not in the least! Never was more serious in my life, not even when Lodgey turned up five, with my dibs on four."

"Shut up that, you utter ass!" muttered Levison.

"I stand corrected. Such things cannot be mentioned here," said Cardew. "I will run over my list of the fellows who are not playin' the game, and who shock me by the unsportsmanlike conduct they are pursuin'. Tom Merry——"

"What?"

"Lowther and Manners——"

"You cheeky ass!"

"Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy——"

"Bai Jove!"

"And others too numerous to mention," said Cardew.

Tom Merry gave him a grim look.

"You can go on," he said. "We'll give you a chance to back up your words before we give you a thundering good hiding!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I ask only a fair hearin'!" said Cardew gracefully. "You chaps I have named, and others, are down on Wildrake of the Fourth, the dear man who's sittin' yonder pretendin' to read——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For which reason," continued Cardew, heedless of the angry look turned on him by Wildrake, "I am goin' to enlighten you. You know where I went with Wildrake on Monday night, but possibly you don't know that I bamboozled Wildrake into goin', and that he hadn't the faintest idea of where he was goin' till he got landed."

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"Once arrived there," said Cardew, "the dear boy treated me to a lecture on the higher morality, which was greatly to his credit, but rather a bore. I couldn't give him the attention he really merited, because I was rather keen on the game; so the hapless youth stood first on one leg and then on the other, watchin' me with reproachful eyes—a paragon worthy of the admiration of any ordinary high-minded youth. He didn't wake up till we started scrappin', an' then he waded in like a good man an' true. And he rowed with me comin' home; and, in a word, his conduct was worthy of that of a high-souled youth brought up among the very best families."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that true?" growled Blake.

"After the speech is over, dear boy, I shall have exceedin' pleasure in punchin' your nose if you doubt my word! But to resume, gentlemen, chaps, fellows, and fatheads! Yesterday we went out on another expedish, and walked twenty miles——"

"Gammon!"

"We did, an' I live to tell the tale. Wildrake was leader, and he led my errin' footsteps in the way they should go. We walked to Paddlewood, and I fell down dead——"

"What?"

"Nearly dead, I mean—an' punched Wildrake for tryin' to help me. My temper had suffered—generally good, as you may have noticed, it fails at times, and it had failed then. Dear old Wildrake, rememberin' that it's the duty of a good and noble youth to return good for evil, picked me up and carried me about three miles to a railway-station."

In spite of Cardew's light manner, it was easy to see that he was telling the facts, and that it was due to a generous desire to set Wildrake right in the eyes of his schoolfellows.

"Wildrake walked me nearly into my grave to punish me for trickin' him into Lodgey's night club," said Cardew. "It was a Roland for an Oliver, an' I forgive him now I've recovered. Yesterday I wanted to lynch him, or boil him in oil. Now, feelin' better, I'm quite prepared to kiss him on his baby brow an' call him Christopher!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And why couldn't you tell us all this before, when you knew that we were treating Wildrake badly under a mistake?" demanded Tom Merry hotly.

"I could have if I'd liked," answered Cardew coolly. "But I didn't choose to. Pretty Fanny's way, you know!"

"Oh, dry up!" Tom Merry turned to Wildrake, whose face was flushed. "Wildrake, old chap, I'm sorry!"

"Same here!" said Blake.

"Apologies all round!" said Monty Lowther. "Wildrake, old top, unknit that frowning brow, and come to our arms—metaphorically, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wildrake smiled.

"I guess it's all right!" he said. "And it's rather decent of Cardew to have told you fellows the facts. I never expected it of him."

"Blessed are they that never expect!" remarked Cardew. "Gentlemen, Wildrake leaves the court without a stain on his merry character! And never, never more will I lead him from the merry, narrow path——"

"I guess I'll take jolly good care of that!" said Wildrake. "I know you now!"

"Neither shall I desire to do so," continued Cardew coolly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew stepped down from the chair.

"Gentlemen, the speech is over! I trust you giddy and thoughtless youths will benefit from a word spoken in season! Sorry to have poached on your preserves, Gussy! But I'm done—and you can bore the fellows for the rest of the evenin'!"

"Weally, Cardew——"

Ralph Reckness Cardew strolled out of the Common-room whistling. He left Kit Wildrake the centre of a crowd of fellows all anxious to show their regret for the misunderstanding, set right at last. And Wildrake's handsome face was very bright. The clouds had rolled by at last.

. . . . .

The next day Wildrake stopped to speak to Cardew as the Fourth came out after lessons.

"It was decent of you to speak up as you did," he said.

"Dear man, I'm no end decent, if you only knew!" smiled Cardew. "In my repentant moments—the present, for example—I can be justly regarded as a shinin' example to youth! And—and I'm sorry I played that rotten trick on you—about Lodgey's show."

"All sereno!" said Wildrake. "Coming, D'Arcy! Come along to the cricket, Cardew——"

"Cricket!" said Cardew. "So I will! I'll come an'—an' look on! I enjoy cricket no end when I'm lookin' on! Lead on, Macduff!"

"If you'd stick to cricket and give up playing the goat——" said Wildrake, as they left the School House.

"I'm goin' to!"

"Good!"

"Till next time!" yawned Cardew.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of the Chums of St. Jim's next week, entitled: "BAGGY TRIMBLE'S GREAT SWINDLE!" By Martin Clifford. Make sure of ordering next week's copy of the GEM Library early.)

THE NEW BOY.

Simon Lundy stared almost through the new boy, and Tom dropped his hand. He looked from one to the other of the aristocrats. Most of them were grinning, and Lionel Garnet sniggered, and pointed to a darned place in the sleeve of Tom's poor coat.

"Oh, my only aunt," gasped Lionel. "Look what's come to Millford—Oh, look at the darns!"

"I—I—I" stammered poor Tom.

He looked at Simon again. He could not believe that Simon had cut him. Perhaps the fellow did not remember him.

"I say," said Tom turning once more to the snob of the Fourth. "Don't you remember me. I used to bring the groceries——"

"What?" shrieked Bradshaw. And there was a perfect roar of mirth. Several fellows from other forms drifted up.

"He—he used to deliver the groceries——" yelled Garnet amidst a roar of laughter.

Tom Mace stared round him, scared at this reception.

"I—did," he repeated. "Mr. Lundy—I mean Simon Lundy——"

"Mr. Lundy! He—he calls Simon Mr." sobbed Bradshaw, convulsed with laughter. The crowd began to see the joke, and laughed with him.

(An extract from the appealing New Serial entitled: "WHAT HAVE YOU AGAINST ME?" which will appear in an early issue of the "GEM" Library. You should not miss this. Tell all your friends to look out for it.)



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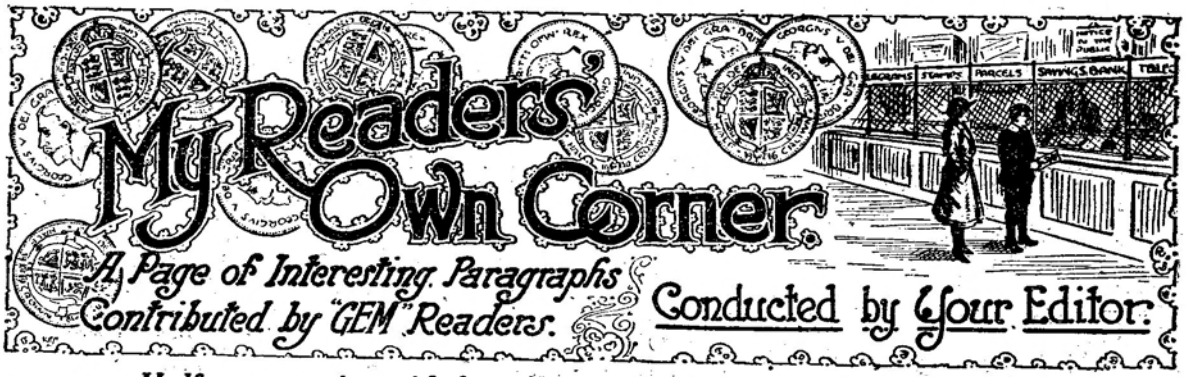
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TAKING NO RISKS.

Harry was enjoying himself tremendously, and now he wanted to go on the river. But on arriving at the landing-stage where boats were on hire, his mother was surprised to see him draw back.

"Don't you want to go on the river, Harry?" asked his mother.

"No, mother. Look at what the notice says."

There was a printed placard for all to see: "Come for a trip down the river. Ladies and gentlemen only 3d.; children thrown in."

T. Smith, 43, Sneinton Boulevard, Nottingham.

TESTING THE 'PHONE.

There is a private telephone in the office of Mr. Binks, and when that gentleman answered a call on a certain memorable date the following conversation took place:

"Are you Binks, No. 0001?"

"Yes," replied Binks.

"Well, I am the company's inspector. Your 'phone is not working properly, and I want to make some tests. Please stand to the right and shout 'Hallo!'"

Mr. Binks did as directed.

"Now stand about two yards to the left, and shout again."

Binks complied.

"Now stand right in front, and shout as loud as you can."

Binks raised a yell which might have been heard a mile away.

"Good! Now, you idiot, stand on your head and whistle!"

Then it dawned on Binks that it was the First of April.

G. Griffiths, 5, Jubilee Street, N. Ormesby, Middlesbrough.

THE EDUCATED YOUTH.

Sam went to the country to visit his aunt. Three weeks afterwards he wrote to his mother: "Dear Ma,—I got here. I rode on a meul from the stashun. It warn't a meul, sho nuff, but I don't know how to spell the thing it wuz. I ast Jim if hoss wuz rite. Jim is the colard boy who goze hunting with me, and rides behind me on the meul. He said he didden know, so I thort I'd better rite meul, as I cood spell meul. Jim ain't egercated, but he nocs all about dogs, and traps, and huntin'. I'm having a bully time. I killed 2 squirrels, and 5 duvs, and 3 potridges—I was very ill on the trane comin' here—and also 6 rabbits, and 1 snake. I like Jim bettern enny boy I know. Pleeze send me some pants like Jim's, those that won't wear out behind. Your feckshunate son, Sam Bates."—Jack Constantine, 1, Humphrey Lane, Urmston, Manchester.

HEARD AT OXFORD.

First Undergraduate: "What shall we do?"

Second Ditto: "I'll spin a coin. If it's heads we'll go to the cinema. If it's tails we'll go to the dance; and if it stands on its edge we'll study."—A. Parker, 59, Curzon Street, Derby.

FISHY.

Tommy to Fishmonger: "Have you any dried fish for sale?"

Fishmonger: "Yes, my boy, what would you like?"

Tommy (cheerfully): "Well, give 'em a drink then."—S. Hofmann, 6, Edith Terrace, Chelsea, S.W.10.

WHAT ARE THESE : : : : : : RAILWAY STATIONS?

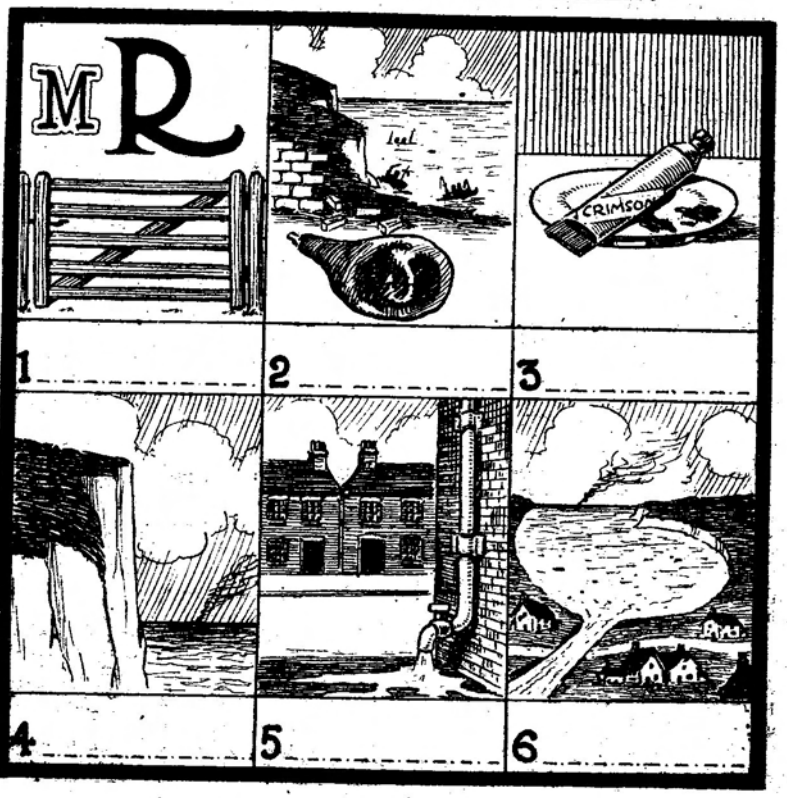
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The INVISIBLE HAND



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JOHN SHARPE.

IRON HAND.

New Readers Start Here.

John Sharpe, the great analytical detective, is engaged by Chief Burnett, of the Secret Service, to track down the band of organised and dangerous criminals operating under the guidance of Iron Hand, a fearless, clever man of dominating personality. Marna Black, one of the band of crooks, is captured, and Burnett induces Anne Crawford, a woman agent of the Secret Service, to assume Marna's identity and get into the confidences of Iron Hand.

She is instructed to keep her real identity a secret even to Sharpe; but she often assists him and sends him information concerning the movements of the gang, and he is puzzled to know just where it comes from.

Iron Hand has a number of hiding-places in different parts of the country, which are referred to as "Nests," the most important of which is Eagle's Nest, situated on a deserted cliff. The leader's chief assistants are Potsdam and Black Flag. John Sharpe has had many big tussles with the gang, and has foiled many of their deepest schemes. Iron Hand has robbed Colonel Bledson, the Cattle King, of a casket of valuable jewels, and he takes them to his assistant in Chinatown, Wong Li, to take care of.

After a great struggle Sharpe succeeds in getting them back, and he deposits them in a safe in Colonel Bledson's room. But Iron Hand determines to secure them again, and he sends some of his assistants to spy and pick up information concerning them. Sharpe, who is supposed to be asleep with the others in Bledson's office, surprises the members of the gang, and they hurry away.

(Now read on.)

A Clever Ruse.

Sharpe watched his friends for a moment, grinning broadly all the time at their agitated manners. Then he held up his hand for attention, and he quietly explained how he had seen Black Flag and another member of the gang at work in the office. He told them how he had fired up at the ceiling, and at the panic which had resulted.

The Cattle King looked fierce.

"Why the dickens didn't you stop them, then?" he roared. "It would have been easy for us to have captured them!"

Sharpe shook his head.

"No use," he said. "It would have spoiled everything. They are only Iron Hand's underlings. I'm after bigger game, and I only just did that to scare them a little!"

Honeydew and Cactus Bill grinned.

Colonel Bledson looked at his watch.

"It's near morning!" he grunted. "No more sleep now, I'm afraid!"

The detective agreed with him.

"All right!" he said. "We'll prepare the dummy box. Cactus Bill and I will get the car and leave. The place will be watched, and they'll follow us—not you!"

Bledson walked over towards the safe, which he opened, and presently produced the jewel-case. There were two boxes exactly similar in appearance standing on a cabinet in the room.

John Sharpe filled one of these with a number of paper-weights and other oddments, and into the other the jewel-case was placed. Both the boxes were then wrapped in paper.

The detective allowed the cowboys to attend to this, then he casually went over to the window, and peered out through the drawn blind. It was now early dawn, and he chuckled to himself as he saw two of the gangsters, half-concealed in doorways, and looking towards the office.

Sharpe returned to the cowboys as they finished wrapping up the boxes, then, selecting one of them, he and Cactus Bill made for the door.

Bledson was not yet fully acquainted with the detective's plans, and he inquired what he was about to do.

Sharpe explained that he intended to go over the roofs to the adjoining building, to evade the men who were in waiting below. But the colonel shook his head at this.

"There is no way of getting over the roofs," he explained. "You had better try the cellar."

"Very well!" replied Sharpe, and he and Cactus Bill bid the others good-bye, and made their way to the hall, the detective carrying the wrapped box. The pair made their way rapidly towards the cellar.

Soon they came to a heavy padlocked door, and, after opening it, Cactus Bill flashed a light around, and they inspected it, looking for a way to the adjoining building.

Sharpe soon discovered the door, but, after trying it, he found that it was locked, and, having no key, he picked up a heavy poker and used it to pry off the padlock. In the cellar of the adjoining building a watchman was sitting smoking, and, hearing the noise, he drew his revolver. At last Sharpe and Cactus Bill succeeded in removing the padlock, and they made their way through the doorway.

Suddenly they were confronted by the watchman, who very speedily covered them with his revolver. In obedience to his demands, the two men raised their hands, and then the detective told him who he was, at the same time showing him his badge. This made a great difference, and the watchman immediately became friendly disposed towards him.

The detective rapidly explained what he desired to do, and the watchman volunteered to aid him in everything possible. He led him to another cellar, roughly furnished, where there were several uniforms hanging on the wall. The man handed the clothes to Sharpe, and the detective and Cactus Bill immediately put on the uniforms of watchmen.

The party then moved over to a place where there were a number of sacks of paper. Sharpe half-emptied one of the sacks, and inserted the box he was carrying. He handed the watchman a handsome tip, and instructing Cactus Bill to follow him, the two picked up a sack each, threw them over their shoulders, and made their way to the street, leaving the watchman thoroughly pleased and amused over his experience.

As the two emerged from the cellar, carrying their sacks, their disguise was so complete that no one would have taken them for anything but ordinary employees.

The two gangsters, who had been observed by Sharpe from the window, looked at the two men curiously as they approached, but they were not able to recognise them.

A short distance away there was another gangster. He slunk back out of sight as Sharpe and Cactus Bill approached, but he was of a little more suspicious nature, and he shrugged his shoulders meaningly as they passed, and had half a mind to question them. The detective and his companion had now turned the corner, and before continuing on their way Sharpe peered back in order to satisfy himself that his movements were not being observed.

Then, when they got to a convenient spot, they shed their uniforms. Sharpe recovered his box from the bag he was carrying, and the two men hurried away, leaving the sacks and uniforms hidden as much as possible.

The old watchman was still chuckling over his experiences, and when he met, later on, the commissionaire of the next building, he could not restrain himself from imparting his experiences of the world-famous detective.

One of the gangsters managed to overhear the conversation, and his eyes lighted up with sudden interest.

"And so they succeeded in getting away in a couple of my old uniforms," said the watchman, concluding his narrative, "carrying their box of tricks in a waste-paper bag."

The commissionaire admitted that it was a very clever ruse on the part of John Sharpe, and both men laughed heartily.

The gangster realised how he had been fooled, and he immediately dashed away full of anger. He followed the direction taken by the two men, and soon came upon the sacks and the uniforms which

they had discarded, thus proving the truth of the old night-watchman's story. He muttered angrily to himself and rushed away to inform Iron Hand of the news.

Once again the detective had fooled them!

Iron Hand, Potsdam, and Black Flag were busily conversing in Wong Li's office, when their deliberations were suddenly interrupted by the entry of Anne Crawford, who was dressed in travelling-kit.

With her came another gangster, and Iron Hand was about to give them some instructions, when suddenly the telephone-bell rang.

Iron Hand was not expecting a call at the moment, and he was in a rather agitated mood. When he answered it, he heard the gangster tell of the ruse adopted by Sharpe and Cactus Bill, and how they had succeeded in getting away with the box which evidently contained the valuable jewels.

Iron Hand was fuming with rage, and when the man finished his story, he hung up the receiver and ordered everyone present to follow him.

Standing outside Wong Li's office were two powerful motor-cars at the kerb. The leader of the gang gave some parting instructions to Anne Crawford, the girl he still believed was Marna Black, and when he had finished she hurried away, while the others scrambled into the two cars which were in readiness for them.

Potsdam and a number of men entered the first car, which rapidly drove off, while Iron Hand and the remainder piled into the second vehicle, which moved off in a different direction.

Sharpe and Cactus Bill had now arrived outside Bledson's garage. The chauffeur drove the car out, and then he turned it over to the men. The detective deposited the box he was carrying in the tool-box under the front seat, and after tipping the chauffeur, the two entered the car. It was an ordinary touring-car, and Sharpe drove it quickly away.

A Desperate Situation.

At the railway-station at San Francisco, Colonel Bledson and Honeydew, also carefully carrying a wrapped box, boarded a train. On the platform were a number of people, and amongst them was Anne Crawford. In her hand she held a handkerchief close to her face, and it looked as though she was in some trouble, and was now wiping away her tears. Looking very sad and tearful, she also boarded the train.

Colonel Bledson and his cowboy, Honeydew, selected a seat in the train and settled themselves comfortably for the journey. Soon after Anne Crawford also entered. She glanced casually at them, and then took a seat in front. Her shoulders were drooping, and altogether she presented a most mournful appearance. As she collapsed in her seat, she pressed the handkerchief to her eyes.

Honeydew was the first to notice the unhappy girl sitting in front of them, and he nudged Colonel Bledson.

Both men looked at her for an instant, with sympathy for her sorrow expressed in their faces. And then they started reading the illustrated papers which they had brought with them.

By this time Potsdam's motor-car had arrived at a mountain-road on which there were rocks on one side and trees on the other side of the defile. Here Potsdam ordered his car to stop. Two of his men, armed with ropes, alighted from the motor-car in obedience to the second-in-command's directions.

"He's got to come this way to cross the trail through Avalanche Pass," said Potsdam. "Use your ropes and guns. We'll wait ahead by that clump of trees, where we can cut 'em off if they slip by you."

Heintz and Fritz, the two men detailed to do this work, nodded, and set about stringing one of the ropes across the road. At the same time, Potsdam drove the car out of view.

Some distance away Iron Hand's car also appeared upon a rise in the trail. The leader produced his glasses and searched the surrounding country. Presently his glasses rested upon a distant view of Sharpe and Cactus Bill driving along the road at a rapid pace.

Iron Hand watched them intently through his glasses, then he imparted the information to the others, and immediately the car started off in the direction taken by Sharpe's motor-car.

The detective was still driving, and something impelled him to glance round uneasily, and then he brought his vehicle to a stop. Sharpe took out his field-glasses, and the sight did not cheer him up very much. In the rear he could see another car speeding along towards him.

"It's Iron Hand for certain," he said to Cactus Bill. "He'll catch us, too! That car is far more speedy than ours."

The cowboy looked in the direction indicated by Sharpe.

"If we can get through the narrows a mile or two ahead, it'll only be a short distance to the Pass, where we can block the trail and get away easy."

Sharpe nodded slightly. Cactus Bill drew his pistol as the detective started the car and drove away at top speed.

Anne Crawford, sitting in front of Bledson and Honeydew, continued to sob, and the two men more than once expressed their sympathy to one another, for she seemed to be greatly troubled. At last Colonel Bledson, unable to stand it any longer, leaned over and touched the poor girl on the shoulder.

She looked around at him with her eyes full of tears. The Cattle King apologised to her, saying:

"I beg your pardon, lady, but you seem to be in trouble. Can we help you any?"

Through her tears Anne smiled gratefully. This was the opportunity she had been waiting for.

"You are very kind," she said. "I have been ill, and the doctors want me to leave the city and live on a ranch for a while, but I don't know where to go and what to do."

Again the girl buried her face in her hands, and sobbed more tears into her handkerchief. The two burly ranchers once more exchanged glances. This was really getting on their nerves.

Suddenly Bledson had an idea, which he whispered to Honeydew, and waited for his approval. Then the colonel leant over again and said:

"You'll be welcome on my ranch, miss, for a time. My wife and daughters will be glad of your company. There is plenty of room, lots of fresh air, and some good-looking cow-punchers. Eh, Honeydew?"

The cowboy showed encouragement, and on hearing this good news the girl brightened up, and she smiled into Bledson's face and thanked him heartily. Then the Cattle King rose and took his seat alongside Anne. But Honeydew was not going to be left out in the cold, and he endeavoured to push himself into the conversation from his seat behind.

On the narrow defile Heintz and Fritz were standing, one with his gun and the other with a coiled lariat. Another lariat was stretched across the road about four feet from the ground, and on it was fixed a placard which read "Danger! Stop!"

The two outlaws glanced down the road and noticed that their quarry was now fast approaching; so they climbed up the rocks at the side and disappeared. In their hiding-place they stood in readiness with their gun and lasso, which was coiled ready to throw.

"This will get him if the other don't," said Fritz, fondly stroking his revolver.

Sharpe's car had now arrived on the scene, and he pulled up suddenly when he saw something ahead but a short distance away from him. It was the rope which had been stretched across, and the placard with its warning of danger hanging to it.

Sharpe and Bill looked at the board with annoyance. Then they glanced back. There was no retreat; that was quite evident.

"We'd better look for another way round," said Cactus Bill presently.

Sharpe glanced at the board again, and then, grabbing the gear lever, he said in a determined manner:

"No. I believe it is some trick of the gang. We must take a chance."

Without waiting another moment, the man Heintz, with one end of the lariat tied to the rock, hurled the loop down towards the car. It settled on a part of the hood, and immediately tightened. The car sped on, but the top was torn right off.

The outlaws did not expect this, and they were filled with anger when they saw what had happened.

Heintz, from his position above, immediately fired down at the car, while the other man prepared another rope. But two could play at this game, and Sharpe, snatching out his revolver, immediately fired back at the gangsters.

His first shot found its billet, and with a terrible shriek Fritz, struck by Sharpe's shot, threw up his hands and fell headlong down the rocks.

Iron Hand's car was now crashing along at breakneck speed in pursuit of the detective, who still had Potsdam to deal with. When he saw that his other plan had failed, the second-in-command drove his car from behind the clump of trees, pulling it across the road, and thus completely blocking the way. Farther on there was a rough trail leading off the main road.

At this point Sharpe brought his car to a halt, and, pointing ahead and then behind, he said:

"We're trapped this time, Bill! One gang ahead, and one coming up behind!"

Cactus Bill had plenty of fight in him. Looking around he spotted the new trail, and, pointing in that direction, he said excitedly:

"That trail leads to Dead Bull Canyon. There's a swinging bridge there. Maybe we can cross."

Sharpe would never give up hope while there was the slightest chance left.

"We'll risk it," he said.

Once again he started the motor, and drove it up the rough trail.

Potsdam and his gang alighted from their car. Looking down the road, they saw what Cactus Bill and the detective were heading for, and they at once set forth in that direction, through the rough country alongside the trail.

Iron Hand's car, which had now arrived on the scene, made the turn at a rapid speed, and followed up the rough trail, in the same direction taken by the detective. Ahead of them lay a gorge with the swinging bridge, which was suspended by ropes, with planks for passengers to walk across.

On either side there were guide-ropes, about three feet above the bridge, and these were also attached to the planks by small guide-ropes every three or four feet. There are many similar bridges over gorges and ravines in the West, and the only difference between this and any other bridge of similar construction was that this was just wide enough to permit the passage of a car about five feet wide. From the side of the gorge appeared Potsdam and his crew, who rushed to the foreground of the bridge, which was a great height above the depths below.

Sharpe and Cactus Bill drove rapidly towards the bridge, with Iron Hand and his gang close behind. Suddenly Sharpe realised what he was heading for.

"Great heavens," he muttered hoarsely, "it's almost certain death! Shall I take it?"

He looked towards Cactus Bill for his reply. The cowboy prepared for the worst.

"Take the chance," he said courageously. "We're done for, anyway."

The detective was game, too. The thrill appealed to him.

Better to die this way than to fall into the hands of the gang who would most surely do for him this time.

Sharpe crouched low over the wheel, and he prepared to steer straight ahead. Potsdam and his gang could scarcely believe their eyes. What courage this man had! They stood appalled at his daring act.

Along the narrow trail appeared Sharpe and Cactus Bill in the motor-car, and they headed at top speed straight for the fragile bridge.

Potsdam and his gang watched, horrified, following with their eyes the progress of the motor-car towards the bridge and what they considered was most certain death.

Iron Hand and his motor-car came to an abrupt halt, and he and the gang also looked ahead at the amazing sight.

The detective's car was now dashing headlong on its awful journey. The bridge commenced to swing in an alarming manner. The motor-car shot out half-way across the bridge as far as the impetus took it. Then, with a resounding roar and a great smashing of splintering wood, the car crashed through the frail planking.

Iron Hand, in his motor-car, watched the scene with a tense expression on his face.

Although elated at the sight of the detective crashing to his doom, the scene was an awesome one which impressed even this cold-blooded and heartless creature. The motor-car dropped from the crumbling bridge and fell a great distance. As it hit the side of the gorge it rolled over and over, smashing itself to pieces on the rocks.

With great presence of mind John Sharpe and Cactus Bill leaped out of the motor-car before it started on its headlong flight into the depths below. Both men seized hold of the guide-rope on one side of the bridge.

Iron Hand and his party watched the disappearing car with fascination. The gang started to gloat over their triumph, but once again they were too early.

Glancing up suddenly, Potsdam caught sight of Sharpe and his friend making their way hand over hand along the rope towards the opposite brink.

"Look!" he shouted. "They have escaped!"

All eyes were turned towards the broken bridge again, and a look of hate passed over Iron Hand's countenance. He drew his revolver, and took aim.

John Sharpe happened to look round just then, and noticed his danger. He would have presented an easy target for the leader of the gang, and, without hesitation, he let go of the rope he was holding.

Iron Hand pulled the trigger, and the loud report of a shot rang out.

Cactus Bill continued to make his way towards the other side of the abyss in spite of his imminent peril. As soon as Sharpe loosed his hold, Iron Hand and Potsdam looked down the precipice, but they could not see him, and they came to the conclusion that Sharpe must have died from his fall.

Potsdam next drew his revolver and levelled it at Cactus Bill; but Iron Hand waved the weapon aside. A new idea had occurred to him. He took out his knife, and with one cut severed the guide-rope immediately.

Cactus Bill clung desperately to the severed rope. He swung down toward the opposite side of the canyon, crashed through some tree-branches, which he clutched hold of, and then climbed hurriedly down in order to get away from any further bullets.

"We've done for that pair," remarked Iron Hand gleefully. "Our next move will be to go over to the motor-car and seize the treasure."

So saying, the party moved away from the brink, and headed down a ravine that led to the bottom of the canyon.

But Sharpe was not dead yet. Fortunately, he had fallen into some water, and, feeble and dazed, he rose to the surface, and at once struck out for the shore. He was extremely weak from his great fall, and it seemed that, without assistance, he would have great difficulty in reaching safety.

Meanwhile, Cactus Bill, with his clothes torn and himself badly bruised, at once looked around in the direction in which Sharpe had fallen, and, seeing the detective, he rushed off at top speed. He arrived just in time to drag the almost exhausted man out of the water. They both realised how lucky they had been to escape from the clutches of the gang.

Iron Hand and his party scrambled down from the height, and noted where the motor-car had fallen. Black Flag, who was always anxious to keep in the leader's eye, volunteered to dive for the treasure, and he started to divest himself of his coat and boots.

Sharpe and Cactus Bill crouched down in concealment, and they watched what was going on with amused anticipation. Black Flag now dived into the water near where the car had fallen, and, groping around, he at length found the black box in the tool compartment under the front seat, where Sharpe had placed it.

He secured it, and struck out for the shore again. With a smile on his face, Sharpe told Cactus Bill to watch and see what happened when Iron Hand opened the lid and found what the box contained.

Black Flag waved his prize in triumph as he drew near to the bank.

Iron Hand greedily took it from him, and smashed the lid of the box in with the butt-end of his revolver. Everyone crowded eagerly around it, but their delight speedily turned to acute disappointment.

Iron Hand could scarce contain himself with rage when he discovered that the only contents of the box were a paper-weight and a few other oddments which the wily detective had put in. All the leader's efforts had been directed to this worthless object, and, in the meantime, the duplicate box containing the jewels was being speedily conveyed to its destination.

"Double crossed!" yelled out Iron Hand, in rage, as he dashed it to the rocks. "Sharpe has switched boxes on us!" he declared angrily. "The jewels may be at the ranch by now!"

Then his temper relaxed a little.

"We still have a chance!" he murmured. "Marna Black is clever, and I sent her there. Perhaps she will succeed in getting them."

The leader ordered his men back to the motor, and, with all speed, they scrambled up the wooded sides of the river.

John Sharpe and Cactus Bill found a great deal of enjoyment in Iron Hand's discomfiture, and the detective was firmly convinced that the leader believed they were both dead.

When he saw that the gang were retiring he decided to head for the ranch, and the pair hurried away, still laughing heartily over the success of their ruse.

The Ranch.

COLONEL BLEDSON'S ranch was a very prosperous one indeed. One part of it had a large modern dwelling-house built upon it, and in the near vicinity were numerous outhouses. Mrs. Bledson and her daughters were waiting about with a number of cowboys, in order to welcome Colonel Bledson home. She was a motherly type of woman, and her two daughters were aged about sixteen and twenty respectively. They were both very pretty and stylishly dressed.

A great roar of welcome rose up as the large motor-car containing the Cattle King, Honeydew, and Anne Crawford drove up. Mrs. Bledson and her daughters hugged and kissed the colonel, for he had been away from home for a considerable time. Then, when it was all over, the colonel introduced Anne to them, and explained how they had seen her in great trouble on the train.

The poor girl was still feeling very wan and tired, and Mrs. Bledson gave her a motherly welcome, while the two girls took an immediate liking to her. The family immediately went over towards the house, leaving Honeydew relating his experiences to his friends. Needless to say, his story greatly impressed them. They were vastly amused with the account of Iron Hand and his desperate gang, and how John Sharpe had, time and again, turned the tables on him. They were all very anxious to see this great detective.

Colonel Bledson at once produced the box of jewels, and he proudly held it up before the curious eyes of his family.

"Wait till you see what I've brought you," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes, as he prepared to cut the string. Then, when this was done, he unwrapped the precious parcel and opened it, taking out the jewellery by the handful.

Mrs. Bledson and the two girls stared with delighted amazement, and Anne also pretended to admire the beauty of the gems, although, of course, they were no novelty to her, for she had seen them so often, and, in fact, was growing not a little tired of the troublesome things.

The Cattle King took out a massive necklace from the box and clasped it around his wife's neck. Then he put a tiara, simply sparkling with jewels, upon her head. He next handed bracelets and rings to his daughters, and finally turned the box over and poured out other glorious articles of jewellery upon the table. He was indeed in such an excited mood that he even handed Anne a ring, but she refused it, protesting against such great generosity on his part.

When Mrs. Bledson had got over her astonishment her curiosity began to rise, and she inquired all about them.

"Are they real?" she asked.

"Real!" returned Colonel Bledson, "I guess they cost me a cool million. And,

my word, the trouble I've had to get them here."

The Cattle King wiped the perspiration from his brow as he reflected upon the attempts made by Iron Hand to secure them.

The trials and troubles increased, if anything, the amazement and delight of his wife and daughters. Then they chided him for spending so much money.

"There is nothing too good for you," he murmured in reply. "But I really had the devil's own time getting 'em here," he added, returning to the subject again. "If it had not been for Detective Sharpe, by gum, they wouldn't be here now! He's a corker!"

Colonel Bledson consulted his watch, and left them.

Outside the house the cowboys were still listening with increasing interest to the great adventures of Honeydew. He was making a regular yarn of it now. They seemed to like it, so he continued, adding little bits of his own imagination just to keep the thing going. How envious he made them all! He paused for a moment as Colonel Bledson walked over towards the group.

"A bunch of you ride over to Avalanche Pass," ordered the Cattle King, "and see what's delaying Sharpe and Cactus Bill. You may be able to render them some help."

The cowboys did not need telling twice, and they were all very anxious to take part in the great adventure. They dashed for their horses, mounted, and, taking two spare animals with them, rode off at a great pace. Colonel Bledson went back into the house.

"Woe betide any of Iron Hand's fellows if they meet with that lot!" he muttered as he went.

When he had entered the house they were still admiring and discussing the jewellery.

"You had better lock them up," the colonel told them. "It won't be safe to leave them about just yet. There's still a good bit of danger about."

Mrs. Bledson and the girls divested themselves of the gems, and Bledson replaced them in the box.

"I'm going to lock them up in the cabinet in the dressing-room," he remarked, as he made his way towards the stairs. The others followed him and proceeded towards the room.

In the room stood a somewhat old-fashioned cabinet, and Bledson placed the box inside this. Then he locked it, and gave the key to his wife. Colonel Bledson next called his wife's attention to Anne.

"We want to get the roses back in her cheeks," he said with fatherly affection, as he patted her on the shoulder.

Mrs. Bledson assured her that she was welcome to stay as long as she liked, and the girls were equally delighted.

Anne was given the room next to the one in which the jewels had been placed, and after she had looked round the apartment, arm-in-arm with the girls, they walked downstairs again, with Bledson and his wife following after.

Bledson had taken the precaution to lock the hall door leading to the rooms on this floor before leaving.

John Sharpe and Cactus Bill were plodding along very wearily, when suddenly the rancher shouted out with joy, and he pointed to something some distance away.

Sharpe looked ahead, and they saw Honeydew and a big party of cowboys riding fast towards them. They had already caught sight of Cactus Bill, and were now yelling and waving their hats excitedly as they recognised him.

A moment later and the party had reached them. Bill at once introduced the detective to the bunch, and the cowboys were very enthusiastic in their greeting. Sharpe and Cactus Bill mounted the spare horses, and they all rode back towards the ranch.

While this reunion had been taking place, Colonel Bledson's two girls had commandeered Anne, and had taken her for a walk. Near the ranch-house was a wooded copse with a number of tallish trees and thick undergrowth, and a large rock.

The two girls were talking in a very animated fashion to Anne, and all the time she was a very interested listener, although she still maintained her attitude of illness. She never forgot the part she was supposed to be playing.

After a while the party sat down by the rock for a rest, and the younger of the two girls pointed in the direction of the ranch-house.

"Look, Miss Robers," she said, making use of the name which Anne had assumed. "That's your room; you can see it from here."

Anne looked in the direction indicated. This fact was of more importance to the girl than her companions realised, and in order that her anxiety should not be noticed, she speedily changed the subject.

Sharpe Arrives.

IRON HAND and his gang of outlaws had now reached the wooded trail. It was getting near meal-time, and the leader and his party alighted from the vehicle, and prepared for food. While some of them were getting this ready, Iron Hand surveyed the landscape through his glasses. Presently he called Black Flag to him.

"There's Bledson's Ranch," he said, "away in the distance. Sneak over and see how the land lies!"

The man at once set off on his own, while the others continued their preparations for food.

Anne and her companions were now strolling casually back to the house, when suddenly their attention was attracted by a loud shout. Presently Sharpe and the cowboys arrived on the scene, and pulled up in front of the corral.

Bledson heard of their arrival, and he at once went over and greeted the detective, for whom he had such great admiration. Sharpe was equally delighted to meet his old friend, and explanations were speedily exchanged. Meanwhile, the cowboys had departed, and were putting their horses away.

(This amazing story will be continued next week. Look out for our appealing new serial called "What Have You Against Me?" Something quite new.)

CHAT ABOUT ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS.

I hear that Harry Noble, the Kangaroo, is making rapid strides on the greensward, and promises to be a coming star for the junior cricket eleven. Evidently he anticipates "leaping" over the heads of some of the Shell cracks.

Alonzo Todd never wears rubber-heels on his boots. Probably this is due to the fact that his walk is already "soft" enough.

Great excitement has been caused through the sudden disappearance of Ernest Levison of the Shell Form at St. Jim's. You can all guess the anxiety it is causing his younger brother, Frank. I should esteem it a favour if all my readers will keep a sharp look-out in their districts. Any information that may lead to the bringing back of the lost sheep to the fold will be greatly appreciated by myself or any of Ernie's chums. A search-party has already set out for the missing junior, but no news is to hand at the time of going to press.

Where is Ernest Levison?

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 693.

It certainly is true that everything has its uses. The fat carcass of William George Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove has been found useful enough for rolling the famous cricket-pitch.

I hear from good authority that burglars have again made a visit to St. Jim's. Fortunately, they did not lift much, the Head's safe showing no signs whatsoever of having been tampered with. Probably it was far too heavy for them to "lift."

I have been told that Harry Manners had insufficient cash with which to pay his cricket subscriptions. So sorry to hear of one being "stumped" so soon.

Harry Wharton seems greatly upset at not being able to put in any cricket practice at the nets owing to his hand being bandaged up, caused through a splinter in the finger. Sure enough, it's the captain of the Remove's own fault, as he's been repeatedly warned about clumping William George Bunter's fat head.

Tom Dutton, the deaf junior of Greyfriars, has made known his intention of visiting some of the interesting sights of London. Perhaps the Whispering Gallery at St. Paul's will appeal to our worthy.

I am told that there is no possibility of the St. Jim's batsmen coming out on strike yet awhile. In fact, they seem determined not to come out at all this season.

Baggley Trimble informs me that he feels convinced that he will find the missing Ernest Levison if he is to be found at all. This enterprising youth has always got his "ear" to business.

News is to hand that Banks, the bookie, has again been hanging around the school walls looking for fresh pigeons to pluck. Rest assured, he has had a long innings, but he'll be "bowled out" ere long.

"The Lad From the Lower Deck!" is the name of a wonderful new serial which will shortly appear in the "Boys' Herald." You must read it!

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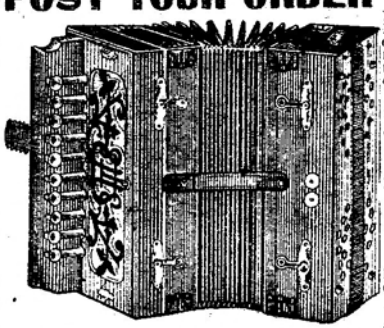
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