

"TOM OF THE AJAX!" Rattling New Training-Ship
Story in This Issue!

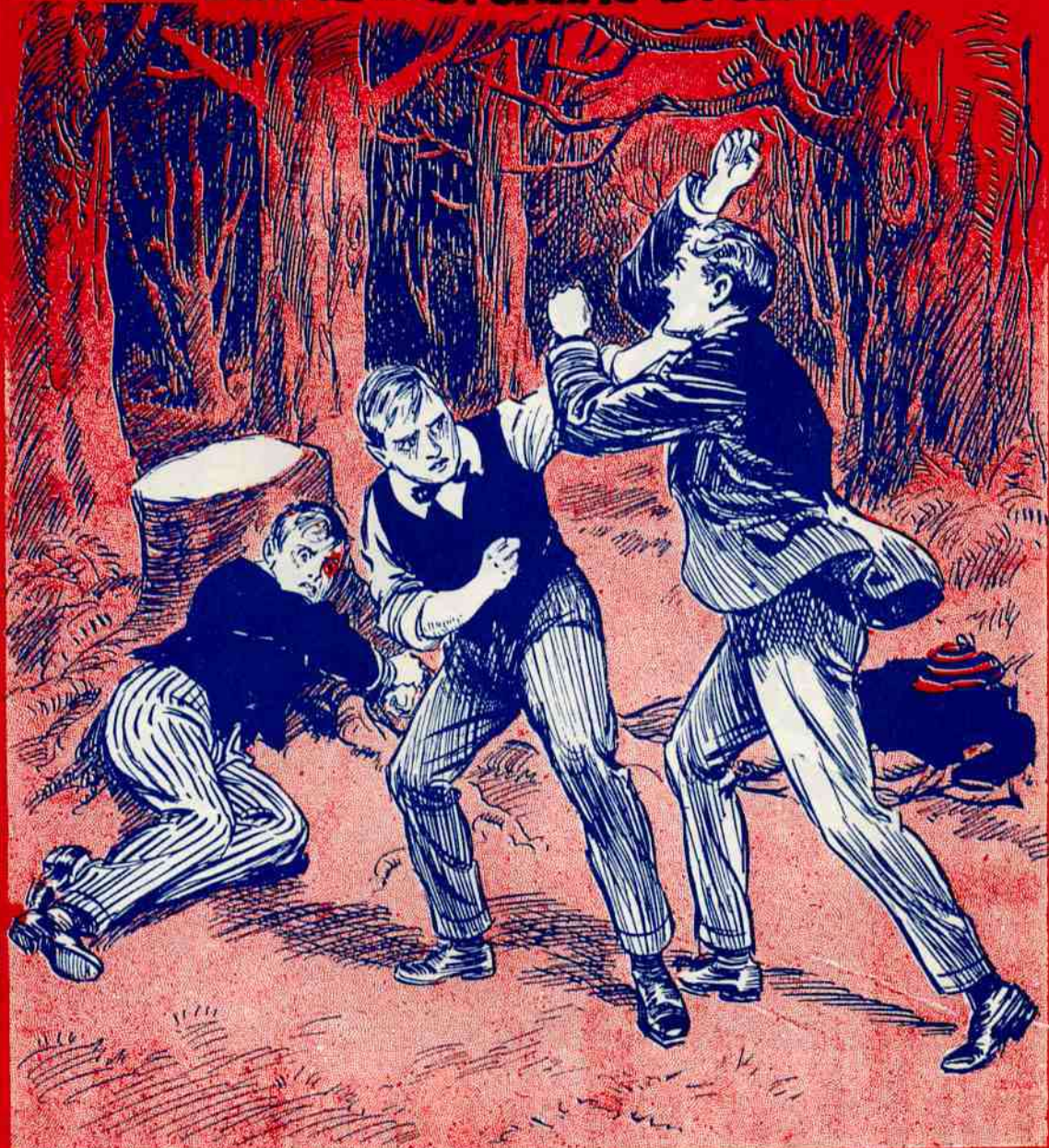
EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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DEFENDING HIS FOE!

Tom Merry hits out at Cutts, the bullying Fifth-Former, and saves his sworn enemy, Cardew, from a severe handling. (An exciting incident from the grand long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. contained in this issue.)

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Ralph Reckness Cardew, junior captain of St. Jim's, is saved from serious trouble by another fellow's unselfish pinch; and that fellow is Tom Merry, the object of Cardew's relentless enmity!



TOM MERRY'S FOE!

A Rattling Story of St. Jim's,
telling of further dramatic
happenings in the great feud
between Tom Merry and
Ralph Reckness Cardew.

BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Back to St. Jim's!

"**H**EAH we are again, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark. A swarm of St. Jim's fellows crowded the platforms at Wayland Junction. From all corners of the kingdom they were gathering for the new term.

There was a buzz of cheery voices, an incessant trampling of feet, a bumping of baggage, and shouting for porters. Fellows who knew one another exchanged greetings at the tops of their voices over countless intervening heads.

"Hallo, Tom Merry!"

"Cheerio, Gussy!"

"Haven't you washed during the vac, Trimble? You don't look like it!"

"Keep off my feet, you ass!"

"Is that Gussy, the one and only——"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Buck up, you fellows! The local's going!"

There was a swarming across the bridge over the line to the platform where the local train for Rylcombe waited. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy waved a delicately gloved hand to his chums, Blake and Herries and Digby.

"Wally wound, you chaps! We shall be left behind at this wate!"

Study No. 6 linked arms and shoved through the crowd. There were loud and wrathful protests on all sides as they shoved.

"Keep back!"

"Don't shove, you School House cads!" roared Fatty Wynn of the New House.

"Weally, Wynn, you are in the way," said Arthur Augustus. "In the circs, deah boy, we have no wesource but to shove."

"Yooop!" roared Fatty, as he sat down suddenly, and Study No. 6 trod gently over him.

"Whom are you shoving?" demanded Figgins, also of the New House, in heated tones.

"You, old bean!" answered Blake genially; and, suiting the action to the word, he strewed George Figgins by the side of Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're catching the first local," remarked Blake. "These New House boudners can wait for the second train."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There's Kerr! Give him a shove for luck!"

Kerr of the New House was not really in the way. But the chums of the School House were in great spirits, and they gave Kerr of the Fourth a shove for luck. Kerr sat down with a bump.

"Ow!"

"Take a little west, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, as Study No. 6 pursued their destructive course.

Kerr scrambled up behind them.

The swarm of fellows had closed up, and a dozen pushing juniors intervened. Kerr could not reach the enemy, but he jerked an apple from his pocket, and took aim over a dozen heads. The silk hat of Arthur Augustus gleamed in the wintry sunlight, high over the tumult, like the plume of Navarre at the battle of Ivry. Only for a moment more did that gleaming topper gleam in the sunlight. Then Kerr's apple smote it, and it flew.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus, suddenly hatless, halted.

"Come on!" roared Blake.

"My hat——"

"Come on!" shouted Herries.

"Yaas, but my hat——"

"Blow your hat!" howled Digby. "We shall lose the train!"

"Blow the twain!" retorted Arthur Augustus warmly. "I would wathah lose the twain than lose my hat!"

And Arthur Augustus plunged among innumerable legs in pursuit of his topper.

"Clear the way, there!"

"Gerrou!"

"Come on, Gussy!"

"Wats!"

The throng surged on to the local platform, carrying on Blake and Herries and Digby. Arthur Augustus was left in chase of his hat. It was a difficult chase. Redfern found the hat floating against his knees, and passed it on with a really good kick, considering how quick it was, and the hat sailed away across the platform. It almost bonneted Levison of the Fourth, who, however, headed it, and sent it sailing on. After it rushed Arthur Augustus, red and wrathful, with his celebrated eyeglass flying at the end of its cord.

He rushed into Clive and Cardew of the Fourth, and sent them spinning. Clive staggered against an automatic machine; Cardew staggered against Kangaroo of the Shell, and Kangaroo staggered in his turn.

Arthur Augustus had almost reached the elusive hat, when Levison minor of the Third passed it to Manners minor. Reggie Manners sent it sailing again, with a well-directed kick, over the head of its owner.

"You young wottahs!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's spun round after the hat.

It had dropped behind him, at the feet of three Shell fellows who were coming off the bridge over the line.

"Don't twead on my hat, Tom Mewwy!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "Keep your feet off my hat, Mannahs!"

The Terrible Threes of the Shell halted.

"Dear me!" said Monty Lowther. "Here's Gussy playing a game of chasing his hat, like a kitten chasing its tail. All right, Gussy, we'll play!"

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And Monty Lowther, who had evidently returned for the new term in his accustomed humorous state, proceeded to double the hat along the platform.

"You uthah wottah—"

"Pass!" roared Figgins.

"Here you are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Figgins, you bwute—"

"Take the pass, Fatty!" yelled Figgins.

"This way!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"You fwightful wottahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "You are wuinin' my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are askin' for a feabful thwashin'—"

"Pass! Pass!"

The hat sailed up and down the platform, looking less and less like a hat every moment. Fellows seemed to care little even whether they lost their train, so long as they obtained a free kick at the sailing topper. Even Blake took a kick at it—which could not be considered chummy, good chum as Blake was.

"Blake, you wottah!" gasped the breathless swell of St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dig, you beast, if you kick my hat—"

Crash!

"Oh ewumbs! Stop it, somebody!"

Somebody stopped the hat. Kildare of the Sixth, captain of St. Jim's, came striding along the platform with Darrell, and he stopped the wrecked hat, quite unintentionally, with his nose. Kildare uttered a sharp exclamation as the unexpected missile smote him.

"Oh gad!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Goal!" yelled Monty Lowther.

The shattered hat fell at Kildare's feet. Arthur Augustus rushed up breathlessly, to be transixed by the glare of the captain of the school.

"D'Arcy! Is that your hat?"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Take a hundred lines!"

"Wha-a-a?"

"Play any more silly tricks, and I'll cane you."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Kildare—"

The great man of the Sixth walked on, unheeding. Arthur Augustus gathered up what was left of his hat. Blake yelled to him from an open carriage door.

"Come on, Gussy! We're moving."

Arthur Augustus raced for the carriage and jumped in. The train moved out of the station, crammed with St. Jim's fellows. They waved their hats and sent cat-calls at the fellows left crowding on the platform. But Arthur Augustus did not wave his hat, or his hand, or utter a word. He sat with his silk topper on his knees, gazing at it, and gazing, as if by force of gazing he could gaze it back into something like the shape of a hat. Until the train arrived at Rylecombe Arthur Augustus sat in mournful contemplation of that which had been a thing of beauty, but had not been destined to be a joy for ever.

CHAPTER 2.

Not a Double Event!

TOM MERRY looked thoughtful.

The new term was only a day old, and the Terrible Three were in their study, No. 10 in the Shell. Winter mists lay thick on the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, but inside Study No. 10 all was bright and cheery. Tom Merry stared at the glowing fire, and wrinkled his youthful brow in thought.

Manners and Lowther watched him, perhaps guessing what was in his mind, and waiting for him to speak.

"Give it a name!" said Monty Lowther suddenly.

Tom looked up.

"You're thinking about Cardew?" asked Manners.

"Well, yes."

Monty Lowther glanced at the study clock.

"You've been thinking for about ten minutes," he remarked. "Now let's have the result."

Tom laughed.

"It's a bit difficult," he said. "You know that Cardew of the Fourth bagged the junior captaincy last term, and I—"

"And you let him do it," said Monty.

"Well, it wasn't for me to make a fuss, if the fellows wanted a change," said Tom. "But never mind that."

"We do mind it, in this study," said Manners.

"We did, we do, and we shall!" added Lowther categorically. "But what about it now?"

"I thought I ought to give Cardew a chance to make good, and back him up," said Tom. "It turned out badly. He's made a fairly rotten junior captain, as I think all the school knows."

"Perfectly rotten!" agreed Lowther. "If you made up

your mind to it, Tom, you could hook him out of it, and down him, and it would be a case of 'as-you-were.'"

"Well, I don't know about that," said Tom, thoughtfully, "I've been thinking of it during the holidays."

"I'm glad to hear it!"

"But I don't know. Certainly, I think the football would be safer in my hands than in Cardew's. But he was elected, and the election stands. But—" Tom wrinkled his brow again. "You know that Cardew made a feud of it; he wasn't content with being my rival, but had to constitute himself my enemy. We had trouble while we were staying at Gussy's place for Christmas."

"I know."

"Cardew left Eastwood House," went on Tom. "But—well, while he was there, and we were there, you know he played trick after trick on me, and that I lost my temper and smacked his face. It was understood that as soon as we got back to school I should give him a chance of returning that smack with interest—if he is able to add the interest," said Tom with a laugh.

"Which he couldn't do," said Manners.

"I've seen him once in the quad since we came back," continued Tom Merry. "He was walking with Levison and Clive, and he took no notice of me, or I of him. Some of the fellows are saying that he intends to cut me out of the football for the rest of the season, but I dare say that's only idle talk. But—"

Tom rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Go it!" said Monty.

"When he was bothering me so much at D'Arcy's place, in the vac, I made up my mind to give him the licking of his life as soon as we were back at school. But he left, and I cooled down. I'd rather the thing dropped, if Cardew is willing. There's no need for us to punch one another that I can see."

"You never could let the sun go down on your giddy wrath, old scout," grinned Lowther.

"Well, I believe I've never felt vindictive," said Tom.

"I hate to keep anything up against a fellow, if it can be helped. I'd rather let Cardew severely alone, all the more because I'm on friendly terms with his friends, Clive and Levison. That's what I was thinking out. There was an understanding about a meeting with the gloves on, but if Cardew says nothing about it, I suppose I need not."

And Tom looked inquiringly at his chums.

Both of them smiled.

It was like Tom Merry to forget old offences, even in the case of so persistent and irritating an enemy as Ralph Rockness Cardew had been to him.

"I'd rather you licked him," said Manners.

"Much rather," said Lowther.

"But if he doesn't begin—"

"Oh, he'll begin right enough," said Monty Lowther confidently. "Cardew hasn't done with you yet."

Tom looked a little worried.

"Blessed if I see why he should be so much up against me," he said. "I've never done him any harm, and he's done me a good deal. But suppose we let it go at that—leave Cardew alone, unless he goes on the war-path of his own accord?"

"I suppose you can let it go at that," assented Monty Lowther, rather reluctantly; and Manners nodded, after a pause. Both Tom's chums resented his loss of the junior captaincy more than Tom himself did.

"That's settled, then," said Tom cheerily. "It's rotten to begin the term with a row."

And Tom proceeded to sort out his books for prep, his chums following his example.

There was a tap at the study door, and it opened to admit Aubrey Racke of the Shell.

Racke of the Shell lounged into the study with an insolent air. The Terrible Three looked at him rather grimly. The blackguard of the Shell was not a welcome visitor in Study No. 10.

"Want anything?" asked Manners, with more directness than politeness.

"Nothin'."

"Take it and go, then," suggested Lowther.

"I've got a message for Tom Merry."

"Well, here's Tom Merry," said the owner of that name. Racke sat on the edge of the table and swung his legs.

"I've come from Cardew," he explained.

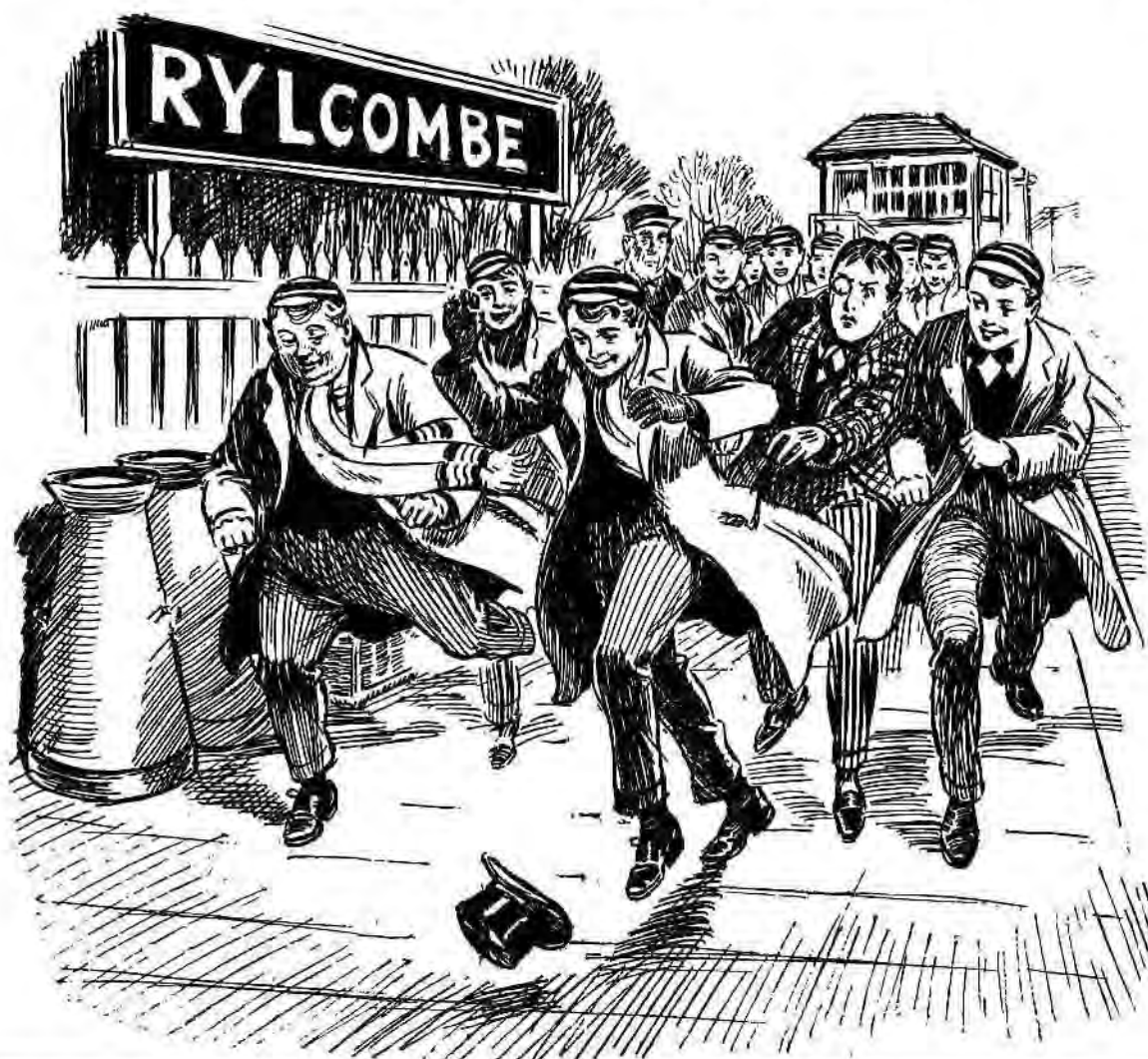
"Oh!" said Tom, his brow darkening.

Monty Lowther grinned at Manners, who laughed. It did not seem, after all, that Tom's peaceable desires would be realised.

"Cardew's expected to hear from you before this," said Racke.

"Has he?"

"You had a row at D'Arcy's place over Christmas, I understand," drawled Racke. "You undertook to fight it out when you got back to St. Jim's. As Cardew hasn't heard from you, he's asked me to call in, as his second, and make the arrangements."



"ON THE 'BALL' ST. JIM'S!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's shining toppler sailed up and down the platform, and fellows seemed to care little about their train so long as they obtained a free kick at it. (See page 4.)

"I should have thought he would have asked Levison or Clive," said Tom.

"Well, he asked me. Are you backing out?"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed at the cad of the Shell.

"You can tell Cardew that I'll meet him when and where he likes," he answered quietly.

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther together.

"Mean that?" asked Racke.

Tom half-rose from his chair. Aubrey Racke's manner was as insulting as he could make it. But Tom sat down again.

"Yes, I mean it. Now get out, please!"

"Well, you see, you seemed so backward in comin' forward, you know," drawled Racke. "I really began to think it was an attack of cold feet in this study, or somethin' of the sort."

Monty Lowther rose to his feet with a gleam in his eyes.

"You really thought that, Racke?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"Quite a mistake on your part," said Monty. "Quite, I assure you. Tom's ready to meet Cardew and give him the licking he was asking for all last term. Manners will second him, and I shall be at liberty to make a double event of it, with your assistance."

"What?"

"A double event will be quite interestin', and start the term in style," said Lowther. "Tom and Cardew, and you and little me, Racke. Who's your second?"

"I—I'm not fightin' anybody, you silly ass!" exclaimed Racke, with a considerable diminution of insolence in his manner.

"Your mistake. You keep on making mistakes," said Lowther genially. "You're fighting somebody. You're fighting me, you know."

"I'm not."

"You are, old man! Who's your second?" persisted Lowther.

"I'm Cardew's second, and so—"

"My dear man, Cardew can get another second, and a third and fourth, if he wants them. You're my mutton."

"Look here—"

"You wouldn't care to stand idly by while a fight is going on, with the warlike blood of the Rackes boiling in your veins," continued Monty Lowther. "Think of the Racke record in the war—always right at the front—at least, where the profiteering was going on. You'd be yearning for a scrap. Racke, and I'm going to oblige you. It's arranged?"

"It's not!" growled Racke, slipping from the table and moving towards the door. "I'll give Cardew your answer, Merry."

"Do!" said Tom, laughing.

"Don't forget your appointment with me, Racke," said Lowther.

"I've no appointment with you, you ass!" snapped Racke.

"Dear me," said Monty. "I begin to think that there must be cold feet in this study, after all; only dear old Racke must have brought them in with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure you don't want to fix up that appointment, Racke?"

"No, you dummy!"

"Then take your cold feet away, and yourself along with them," said Monty Lowther; "and you may as well take my boot, too!"

Racke made a jump into the passage as Monty Lowther advanced on him.

Crash!

A boot caught Racke as he escaped, and he staggered across the Shell passage.

"Ow!"

Racke spun round in the passage and glared at Monty Lowther, smiling in the doorway, with a glare that ought to have withered the cheerful Monty on the spot.

"You rotter—ow!—you cad—wow! 1—1—"

"Like to fix up that appointment, after all, and make a double event of it?" asked Lowther blandly.

Aubrey Racke slouched away down the passage without replying. Apparently it was to be, after all, only a single event!

CHAPTER 3.

Cardew's Way!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW yawned.

He seemed tired.

It was not prep that had tired him; he had not touched his prep. But since the opening of the new term Cardew had had several things to do, and a number of matters that required attention. The post of junior captain at St. Jim's was not all "beer and skittles," as Cardew found; and, although he cheerfully neglected all the duties that could be neglected, there were some that couldn't be treated in that easy manner. And so Cardew found his post a firing one.

Levison and Clive were at work, setting Cardew an example that he did not follow. Cardew was stretched elegantly in the study armchair; a place he often occupied while his study-mates were at work. Possibly he found exertion enough in watching them.

"No prep this evening, Cardew?" asked Sidney Clive, rather sarcastically.

Cardew shook his head.

"Too exhaustin'," he explained.

"You may find Mr. Lathom still more exhausting in the morning."

"Old Lathom's an easy-goin' bird at the beginnin' of term," said Cardew easily. "Luckily, we're not in the Shell, under the eagle eye of Linton. I can manage Lathom."

Clive grunted, and dropped his eyes to his books again.

"There's a lot of work and responsibility on my hands, you see," went on Cardew plaintively. "I've had a lot to do. Interviews with Kildare, as head of the games—interviews with the Housemasters—no end of jawin'. Lots of things to fix up. I've made no end of arrangements for the term—"

"Good!" said Levison.

"I've forgotten most of them already."

"What?"

"Can't remember half of them," said Cardew coolly. "Dash it all, fellows here seem to want to make work of football. I always thought football was a game."

"You needn't have butted into Tom Merry's job if you didn't want to take the trouble he took," said Clive.

Cardew nodded.

"A hit—a very palpable hit!" he replied. "You're right, as you always are, with your solid common-sense, Clivey."

"Oh, rats!"

"But I did butt in, and here I am," said Cardew, "junior captain, with all sorts of worries and woes on my young shoulders. There's only one way of gettin' through my hereculean task."

"What's that?"

"Leavin' it alone," said Cardew. "Jobs often do themselves if they're thoroughly left alone. Otherwise, they remain undone, and usually nobody's a penny the worse. There's a lot of unnecessary work done in this world. Leave things alone, and they right themselves somehow. What do you think of that for a programme?"

"All right for a lazy slacker," said Clive.

"Exactly; then it will suit me down to the ground. Hallo! Here's the one and only!"

Cardew smiled and nodded to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he appeared in the doorway of Study No. 8 in the Fourth.

But Arthur Augustus neither nodded nor smiled.

He fixed his eyes upon Cardew, and his eyeglass gleamed at the slacker of the Fourth.

"So glad to see you, old bean," said Cardew affably. "I missed you sorely, Gussy, when I was so suddenly called away from your hospitable home during the vac. I'd been goin' to ask you lots of important things, about silk hats and neckties and socks, and I never had the opportunity."

"Weally, Cardew—"

"Take a pew, old man. Let's have a friendly pow-wow," said Cardew. "It will interrupt these fellows' work, and it's always painful to me to see work goin' on."

"You are an uttah slackah, Cardew."

"Right on the nail," assented Cardew. "But take a pew. It makes me tired to see a fellow standin'."

"Wats! I have come heal to speak to you seriously, Cardew."

"Here beginneth the first lesson," said Cardew. "Go it, Gussy. Anythin' to interrupt work."

"I heah that you have fixed up a fight with 'Tom Mewwy,'" said Arthur Augustus sternly.

Levison and Clive started and looked quickly at Cardew. That cheery youth smiled and nodded.

"You've heard right, old bean," he said.

"Is that how you are startin' the term, Cardew?"

"Just like that."

"I wegard it as wotten," said Arthur Augustus. "There were vows enough last term. Tom Mewwy has kept clear of you this term, as I know vewy well. I heah that you sent Wacke of the Shell to him as your second."

"Never thought of you," said Cardew regretfully. "I'd have asked you if I'd thought of it, Gussy."

"I should have uttably refused to act for you, Cardew."

"Then it wouldn't have been much use askin' you, would it?" asked Cardew agreeably. "What are you grousin' about, then?"

"I wepeat that I wegard it as wotten! I twust," said Arthur Augustus sternly—"I twust, Cardew, that you will withdraw this wotten challenge and pwerserve the peace."

"What a trustin' fellow you are!" said Cardew admiringly. "I like a fellow with a trustful nature. So refreshin'!"

"Is that all you have to say, Cardew?"

"Oh, no! It's a fine evenin'!"

"What?"

"For the time of year, of course. We must expect a little mist," said Cardew gravely.

"You uttah ass!"

"But I hope the weather will get worse—"

"Worse?"

"Yes. That will stop the football!"

Arthur Augustus' eyeglass gleamed with scorn.

"It is weally not much use speakin' to you, Cardew," he said at last.

"Not much," agreed Cardew. "Yet you keep on doin' it. I suppose you find the impulse to wag your chin irresistible?"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"I wecommend you, Cardew, to drowp this fight with Tom Mewwy and to give your whole attention to the duties you have taken on yourself," he said sternly.

"Jolly good advice!" assented Cardew.

"Then you will act on it?" asked Arthur Augustus, his noble brow clearing a little.

"Oh, no! I never act on good advice!" said Cardew cheerily. "Give me some bad advice and I'll see what I can do for you."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked at Cardew—a long look—and then turned and walked out of the study. His temptation was strong to administer a "feahful thwashin'." Fortunately, he resisted the temptation.

"Dear old Gussy!" smiled Cardew, when the swell of St. Jim's had shaken the dust of Study No. 9 from his aristocratic feet. "Always a pleasure to see him and hear him chin. I believe his mission in life is to cheer fellows up and make a brighter St. Jim's."

"You're fighting Tom Merry?" asked Levison abruptly.

"Yes."

"You've asked that cad Racke to act as your second?"

"Yes," Cardew nodded. "You see, I knew you fellows would be against it, so it saved argument not to mention it to you till it was fixed up. Argument is a waste of energy."

"You're satisfied with what you are doing?"

"Quite!"

"Very well, then," said Levison quietly, and he said no more.

"You will come, of course?" said Cardew. "You disapprove, but you'll come. Only as 'lookers-on in Vienna,' as the johnny says in the play."

Levison shook his head without speaking.

"You, Clive?"

"No!"

"Then there will be only jolly old Racke to see me through," sighed Cardew. "As Racke seems to be my only friend, I think I'd better amble along to his study and give him a friendly word. Ta-ta!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew detached himself with an effort from the armchair and strolled out of Study No. 9. Clive called to him.

"Banker in Racke's study, I suppose?" he said.

Cardew smiled back from the doorway.

"You know Racke's little ways," he said. "When a fellow's in Rome he must do as Rome does—what?"

And Cardew walked away. Sidney Clive compressed his lips a little, and his eyes met Levison's for a moment. Ernest Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose it's no good talking to him!" said Clive.

"It never is!"

"This won't do!"

"I know it won't."

And prep went on in Study No. 9 rather moodily.



AN "UPHEAVAL" IN THE FIFTH FORM STUDY! "You were askin' for fags, Cutts," said Cardew, "so we've come to oblige!" The Juniors up-ended the table, and the crockery and the provisions shot off it in a crashing stream. (See page 8.)

CHAPTER 4.

Cardew Takes the Matter in Hand!

"CUTTS—" "The cad—" "The cheeky rotter—" "The rotten bully—"

Cutts of the Fifth was the topic. Gerald Cutts of the Fifth Form at St. Jim's often was the topic of indignant discussion among the juniors.

Cutts of the Fifth was not only a sportsman and a good deal of a blackguard—which did not concern the Lower School very much—but also he was a bully, which concerned them very much indeed.

In the junior Common-room a dozen fellows were discussing Cutts of the Fifth in tones of indignation and wrath.

Cardew strolled into the room while the discussion was going on. Cardew had been out of gates—possibly because he had business out of gates, and possibly because there had been games practice that afternoon.

Certainly it was not a junior captain's business to go out of gates when games practice was on. But Cardew had his own peculiar methods of dealing with the captaincy.

"Oh, here he is!" exclaimed Tompkins of the Fourth. "Talkin' about, me, dear boy?" asked Cardew cheerily.

"You've cut games practice this afternoon," said Blake. "Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Pressure of important business," explained Cardew gravely. "I asked Talbot to take my place. Surely Talbot gave satisfaction?"

"Better than you could!" grunted Herries. "Then all parties ought to be pleased," said Cardew. "But what's the matter with Tompkins?"

Clarence York Tompkins was the centre of the indignant group in the junior Common-room. Tompkins was red with

wrath—which was very unusual with him, for Clarence York was a decidedly mild youth as a rule.

"It's that cad Cutts!" said Tompkins.

"Awful boulder, isn't he?" assented Cardew. "Quite a bad hat! And, what is worse, he has serious errors in taste. No harm in a chap bein' a blackguard—I'm a blackguard myself—but there are ways of doin' these things. But what has the unspeakable Cutts been doin' this time? You fellows look waxy."

"He has been twyin' to fag the Fourth," said Arthur Augustus. "A cheeky cad in the Fifth, you know, makin' out that he can fag fellows, like a Sixth Form prefect!"

"What a neck!" yawned Cardew.

"Made me fag for him!" howled Tompkins. "Fag for the Fifth, you know! Made me light the fire in his study, and laid into me with a fives-bat when I said the Fourth didn't fag for the Fifth!"

"It is impos for this to be tolewatred, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "Cutts would neva have dared to fag the Fourth when Tom Mewwy was captain!"

"No fear!" said Digby.

"Tom Merry would have brought him up sharp enough!" said Blake. "But what's a chap to expect when the fellows have been crass asses enough to elect a lazy slacker captain of the House and the school?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gently, old beans!" murmured Cardew. "Bein' kept out of gates by games practice—I mean by pressin' business of a personal nature—I wasn't on the scene when Cutts committed this crime. Therefore, how could I stop him? Even the great Thomas couldn't have done anythin' without bein' on the scene at the time."

"Well, you're on the scene now!" grunted Kangaroo of

the Shelf. "What are you going to do? I hear that you've got a fight on with Tom Merry for Saturday afternoon."

"Quite so!"

"Well, most of the fellows will tell you that a junior captain has more important business than picking rows with the most peaceable chap in the House!" snapped the Australian junior. "And among other things, it's his business to keep our end up against the seniors when they get over the limit."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What's the good of talking to Cardew?" said Blake scornfully. "What does he care about Cutts bullying and fagging the Fourth? He's too jolly busy dodging games practice, or playing banker in Racke's study."

Cardew's handsome face coloured a little. Whatever popularity he had had as junior captain seemed to be diminishing fast.

"Give a fellow a chance," he said. "If Cutts has committed this crime—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"It is a crime to fag the Fourth," said Cardew gravely. "Why, I belong to the Fourth myself. He might have tried to fag me! That makes the matter really serious."

"Weally, Cardew—"

"If he has done this awful deed," said Cardew, "Cutts must be dealt with. I shall regard it as my bounden duty to strew the hungry churchyard with his bones."

"You uttah ass—"

"Or—as that would perhaps be a little too drastic even for Cutts of the Fifth—I think perhaps a raggin' would meet the case," said Cardew. "Cutts laid into you with a fives bat, Tompkins?"

"Yes, he did!" hissed Tompkins.

"How many?"

"Six—just as if he was a prefect!"

"Then I sentence Cutts of the Fifth to six," said Cardew calmly. "It only remains to carry out the sentence."

"Only!" jeered Dig.

"That's all!" said Blake, with deep sarcasm.

"That's all," assented Cardew. He glanced at the Common-room clock. "Cutts will be in his study now at tea. If Cutts is at home, it's a good opportunity to call on him. Anybody comin'?"

There was a buzz among the juniors.

"You mean it?" asked Blake.

"Naturally. I'm takin' this matter up as junior captain, and I'm goin' to try to prove myself worthy of my famous predecessor, the great and admired Thomas. I shall want some help. Cutts has asked for it, but he's not likely to take it from me without raisin' irrelevant objections. His objections will have to be overruled."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Cardew, if you mean business—"

"I—I say, it's jolly serious to rag the Fifth," said Tompkins. "The Housemaster might butt in."

"Or a prefect," said Crooko of the Shell. "You'd better go a bit slow, Cardew."

"Cutts has asked for it," said Cardew cheerily. "We can't refuse Cutts what he has asked for so earnestly. It wouldn't be kind."

He glanced over the juniors.

"I shall want you, Blake—and Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, Julian, Tompkins, Kerruish, and Kangaroo. I think that will be enough to overrule any irrelevant objections Cutts may raise to receivin' what he has so earnestly asked for. Are you ready?"

"Bai Jove!"

There was a momentary hesitation. A raid on the Fifth Form passage was not a simple undertaking, nor an easy one. Cutts of the Fifth was a powerful fellow, and it was probable that one or two others of the Fifth might be in his study. And certainly, at a call from Cutts, a crowd of the Fifth would turn out to drive an invading mob of juniors from the seniors' quarters. And the best fighting-men in the Lower School were not, of course, of much use against hefty seniors.

Cardew's eyes roamed over the group of juniors ironically.

"I asked you if you were ready," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Yes!" said Blake. "We'll follow you if you'll lead—if you don't dodge round the first corner and scoot!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Follow on, then!" he said.

With rather grim faces, the juniors he had named followed him from the room. They reached the corner of the Fifth Form passage in the School House. There Clarence York Tompkins paused.

"I—I say—" he stammered.

"Well?" smiled Cardew.

"I—I say, I—I hardly think it's worth while going for Cutts," said Tompkins. "I don't want a row."

"Dear man," said Cardew. "It's a little too late for that!"

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"There's going to be a row—a royal row! But if you've got cold feet you can clear."

"I—I've got some lines to do."

"Go and do them," said Cardew politely. "You mustn't neglect lines—it would be disrespectful to our kind masters."

Tompkins disappeared.

"Any more of you fellows got lines to do?" asked Cardew satirically.

"No!" grunted Blake.

And the party marched on to Gerald Cutts' study in the Fifth Form passage.

CHAPTER 5.

Six for Cutts!

CUTTS of the Fifth was at tea in his study, with Gilmore, of the same Form. It was quite a nice tea, and there was a cheery fire blazing in the grate—the fire lighted by the hapless Tompkins under persuasion from the fives bat.

Cutts was in a good humour. Having licked Tompkins of the Fourth, and finally kicked him out of the study, Cutts was naturally in a good humour—such proceedings had a mollifying effect on his temper.

There was a tap at Cutts' study door, and he called out "Come in!" expecting to see Frye or St. Leger enter.

Instead of which, the door was opened by Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth Form.

Cardew gave the Fifth-Formers a cool nod.

Cutts stared at him.

"What do you want?" he snapped. "Get out!"

"I hear that you've been lookin' for fags in the Fourth," said Cardew amiably. "We've come."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Cardew walked in, and D'Arcy followed, then Blake, and then the rest of the junior crowd. Cutts rose to his feet, puzzled. Gilmore stared at the juniors. The last of the invaders being in the study, the door was closed, and the key turned in the lock.

"Look here, what does this mean?" exclaimed Cutts. "If you kids are thinking of a rag—"

"Not a rag, old scout," said Cardew chidingly. "We've come to fag. We're goin' to fag for you, Cutts."

"I don't want a fag."

"Changed your mind?" asked Cardew. "A short time ago you were lookin' for fags in the Fourth Form. Now we've come to oblige you. Begin with the tea-table, you fellows, and make it nice and tidy."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

The fags, or raggors, whichever they were, began with the tea-table. It was a simple process, though it certainly did not make it nice and tidy. They up-ended the table, and the crockery and provisions shot off it in a crashing stream.

Crash! Crack! Smash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young villains!" roared Cutts.

He made a rush at the mob of juniors. They were ready for him. Five or six received him as he came on, and the next moment Gerald Cutts was rolling on his carpet, with the juniors clinging to him like cats.

"Back up, Gilmore!" yelled Cutts.

Gilmore backed up, but it was not of much use. Gilmore of the Fifth went to the floor, and Kangaroo sat on his chest, and Herries on his legs, while Kerruish took a businesslike grip on his ears, and banged his head on the floor.

Gilmore's wild yells filled the study.

"Keep that chap quiet!" yawned Cardew. "Sit on his head, or stuff somethin' into his mouth. Sorry, Gilmore, but you've got a rather unmusical voice, and my nerves are delicate."

"Grooooooh!" was Gilmore's reply, as a handful from a loaf was crammed into his mouth.

"You keep quiet, Gilmore, old top, and you won't get hurt," continued Cardew. "It's Cutts that we're here to deal with. You'd better take it quietly. Bang his head if he moves, Kerruish."

"What-ho!" grinned Kerruish.

Gilmore seemed of Cardew's opinion, that he had better keep quiet. At all events, he kept quiet. The odds were too heavy, and the door was locked against reinforcements. Gilmore decided to take it philosophically.

Cutts was struggling with savage determination.

But the raggors were equally determined, and there were too many of them for the bully of the Fifth.

Gerald Cutts was spread-eagled on the floor, with his nose grinding into the carpet.

A junior knelt on each arm and leg, and Gerald Cutts was pinned to the floor.

Cardew looked round the study.

"Where's the fives bat, Cutts?"

"You young hound—"

"I don't seem to see it. Where is it?"

"Help!" roared Cutts.

"Will you tell me, where the fives bat is—the one you whacked Tompkins with?"

"No!" howled Cutts.

"Pull his ears till he does, Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow-wooop!" came in a fiendish yell from Cutts of the Fifth.

"Will you tell me now, dear boy?"

"In the cupboard!" gasped Cutts, almost speechless with rage.

"Thanks!"

Cardew sorted out the fives bat.

"Keep clear, you fellows!" he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Whack!

"Yow!"

There was a heavy knock at the door, and the voice of Lefevre, the captain of the Fifth, shouted through. Two or three more of the Fifth could be heard outside.

"What's this row?" shouted Lefevre.

"Not a row, dear man," answered Cardew coolly. "I've come here in my official capacity, as junior captain, to give Cutts six."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Gettin' deaf, old bean?"

"Open this door at once!" shouted Lefevre.

"But Cutts hasn't had his six yet."

Whack!

"Rescue, Fifth!" shrieked Cutts.

Whack!

"You cheeky young rascals, open this door!" roared the captain of the Fifth. "I'll teach you to come here ragging!"

"Thanks. We're not in need of any instruction on the subject, Lefevre. We know how."

Whack!

"They're really whackin' Cutts," came St. Leger's voice from the passage. "Poor old Cutts!"

Whack!

"Fancy Cutts gettin' six from the juniors!" chuckled another Fifth-Former. "Oh, my hat! Poor old Gerald!"

Gerald Cutts writhed with rage and pain. Cardew was laying on the strokes with great energy, and there was no doubt that Cutts was hurt. But he felt the bitter humiliation more keenly than the strokes of the fives bat.

"One more!" chuckled Blake. "Make it a good one, Cardew!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Whack!

Undoubtedly the last whack was a good one. It elicited a fiendish yell from Cutts of the Fifth.

Outside, there was a sound of chuckling. Cutts of the Fifth was so lofty and supercilious a fellow, that his humiliation was not wholly unsatisfactory to his Form-fellows in the Fifth. The Fifth intended to avenge this affront to their dignity; meanwhile, they chuckled over Cutts' discomfiture.

"Is that enough, Cutts?" asked Cardew politely.

"Ow, ow! I'll—I'll—Ow!"

"Are you sorry you fagged the Fourth?"

"Ow! I—I—"

"Are you sorry? If not, I regret to say that I shall have to begin again with the fives bat."

"I'm sorry!" gasped Cutts. And there was a fresh chuckle from the Fifth-Formers outside, as they heard that confession. They could hardly believe that the lofty Cutts had been brought so low. But he had!

"Good!" drawled Cardew. "Now, as we've done the business quite in the style of the late lamented Thomas, we may as well clear."

"You see what you'll get as soon as you open the door!" came the voice of the captain of the Fifth.

All eyes turned on Cardew. Cutts had been punished, and humiliated in a way he was not likely to forget for the remainder of the term. The dignity and independence of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's had been vindicated. But there was still retreat from the enemy's quarters to be contrived—and that was a problem for Cardew's strategy.

Cardew picked up the poker, and thrust it between the bars of the grate.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Good!" grinned Blake.

As soon as the poker was heated red and glowing, Cardew twisted a handkerchief round the handle and drew it from the fire. Blake unlocked the door and threw it open.

"Now!" exclaimed Lefevre, making a stride into the study.

He halted suddenly.

"Put down that poker!" he roared.

Cardew made a pass at him with the glowing end of the poker, and Lefevre jumped back hurriedly into the passage. Cardew followed him out.

"You young rascal—"

"Put down that poker—"

"Keep back—"

"Follow the man from Cook's!" said Cardew, and he led the way down the Fifth-Form passage, red-hot poker in hand.

The Fifth-Formers backed into the study. They were prepared to mop up the passage from end to end with the cheeky juniors, but for the poker. But a red-hot poker put quite a different complexion on the matter.

Instead of handling the juniors, they hurled remarks from their study doorways as the enemy retreated—under guard of the red-hot poker.

"Bai Jove!" grinned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when the avengers were safe in the junior Common-room again. "Bai Jove, you know, Cardew is not such a wotten skippah afiah all, you know."

And all the fellows agreed that he wasn't.

"But Cutts will remember this, Cardew," remarked Blake. "You'd better keep your weather eye open for Cutts."

Ralph Reckness Cardew shrugged his shoulders carelessly. Evidently he was not alarmed.

CHAPTER 6.

Foes!

TOM MERRY paused before the notice-board, and glanced at a paper there, written in Cardew's elegant hand.

It was the list of players for the House match on Saturday afternoon; the first junior match of the new term. Cardew's name, as captain, certainly should have been there; but Cardew's name was not there. Tom Merry's name, as that of the best junior footballer at St. Jim's, certainly should have been there also. But neither was Tom Merry's name there.

Tom wrinkled his brow a little.

After all the trouble that had occurred between him and the new junior captain, it seemed hard to believe that Cardew seriously planned to keep him out of junior football for the season. If that was really Cardew's object, there was strenuous resistance to be expected on Tom's part.

Cardew, through his second, had arranged the fight with Tom Merry to take place that afternoon in Rylcombe Wood. He had chosen that retired spot to avoid interruptions; and perhaps, too, Cardew did not want an audience. Bitterly determined as he was to beat his rival in fisticuffs as in other matters, Cardew probably knew very well that he had taken on an extremely difficult task, which it was doubtful if he could carry through.

If the fight ended in his defeat—as was likely enough—probably Cardew preferred not to have a ring of spectators staring at him at the time.

As Tom had agreed to meet him at any time and place specified, he had no objection to raise. But as the junior House match was taking place at the same time, it kept both of them out of the football.

A good many fellows were commenting on the football list. Talbot of the Shell was named as captain in Cardew's place. That was a wise choice on Cardew's part. Talbot was a good man for the post. But the comments of the juniors were derisive.

"Might as well make Talbot captain for good and all," remarked Blake. "Precious sort of a skipper to fix up a fight simultaneously with a House match!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm down to play for School House," remarked Manners. "That means I sha'n't be able to second you, Tom—if I play."

"You must play," said Tom at once.

"I'm down, too," said Lowther, frowning. "Look here, Tom, this looks to me as if Cardew's bent on keeping us both off the scene when you meet him and lick him."

"Pewwaps he doesn't want you fellows to see Tom Mewwy lick him," suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

There was a laugh.

"I would act as your second with pleasah, Tom Mewwy," continued the swell of St. Jim's. "But Cardew has put me down to play—and Blake and Hewwies and Dig, too."

Herries granted.

"He's put me down for goal," he said. "He did it before, and changed his mind. I rather think I sha'n't give him a chance to change his mind again. I'm not keen on playing under Cardew's lead."

"Well, he's put the whole study in," said Blake. "Better back up the House, Herries. Cardew can't very well let you down again, now your name's posted up in the list."

"Well, that's so," assented Herries.

"Tom Merry's left out!" giggled Trimble of the Fourth. "I agree with Cardew there! I never did think Merry much of a player."

"Weally, Twimble, you sillay ass—"

Tom Merry laughed. "Cheek" from Baggy Trimble was not likely to disturb his equanimity.

"It's silly rot," growled Kangaroo. "He's got my name

down, and I've a jolly good mind to tell him to cross it out and put yours in, Tom."

The captain of the Shell shook his head. "Don't do that," he said. "Anyhow, I couldn't play this afternoon, as I've got to meet Cardew."

"Utter rot! No need for the scrap at all; and, anyhow, it could be put off. I'd speak to Cardew about it, if I were you."

Tom Merry nodded, deciding to act on the Australian junior's advice.

He looked for Cardew, and found that youth sunning himself by the steps of the School House in the quadrangle. Cardew gave him a nod, with a steely look in his eyes. Levison and Clive had been talking to Cardew, and both of them were frowning as they moved away. Both were down in the House eleven.

"Look here, Cardew," said Tom abruptly. "It's awkward our scrap coming off the same time as the House match. If you're going to keep on as junior captain you ought to be in the match."

"Thank you for tellin' me my duties," said Cardew. "When I want another tip from you I'll ask for it." Tom set his lips.

"Most of the fellows think I ought to be in the team," he said.

"Most of the fellows seem to be rather asses."

"You don't care to postpone the scrap?"

"Not at all."

"If you hold me to my word, I shall turn up in Rylcombe Wood as arranged," said Tom. "But I think—"

"Never mind what you think, it's a fixture," said Cardew.

"Will you excuse me for mentionin' that you bore me?"

"You've got my second down to play," said Tom.

"Can't you find another?"

"Yes; but—"

"What's the good of seconds?" yawned Cardew. "If you're left without one I'll tell Racke I don't want him, and make it square. I don't see why we can't settle our little differences by ourselves."

"I don't care one way or the other," said Tom curtly. "As a matter of fact, nearly every fellow I should care to ask is down to play football this afternoon."

"Well, Racke isn't down to play," grinned Cardew. "But I dare say he'd rather go off for a quiet smoke than turn up to second me in a scrap. I'll give him his head."

Tom looked at him fixedly.

"I think I know why you've arranged all this," he said.

"You want the fight to take place without any witnesses."

"Why should I?" yawned Cardew.

"I don't know; unless it's to save your face when you get licked."

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not licked yet," he remarked.

"You will be," said Tom. "I fancy you know that you're not up to my weight. But have it your own way—with or without witnesses is all the same to me. The old oak in Rylcombe Wood at three."

"That's it."

"I shall be there," said Tom. "Are you taking gloves?" Cardew's eyes glittered.

"No!" he said.

"Do you want me to take them?"

"No."

Tom knitted his brows.

"I don't like the idea."

"Dear me!" said Cardew lightly. "Racke said somethin' the other day about cold feet in your study. Was he right?"

Tom Merry did not answer that question. He turned his back on the dandy of the Fourth and walked away. Cardew, perfectly well aware of how narrow an escape he had had of being knocked spinning off the steps, smiled. Cutts of the Fifth came out of the School House as Tom walked away, and he looked at Cardew with a gleaming eye.

Cardew gave him a cool nod.

"Feelin' better for that battin', Cutts?" he asked genially. Cutts made a motion towards him, clenching his hands. But he thought better of it and walked on. There were plenty of juniors within call, and Cutts was not looking for another ragging. He had already learned how little Cardew recked of his lofty position as a Fifth-Former.

Cardew laughed, dismissing Cutts of the Fifth from his careless mind. But, as a matter of fact, he would have done well not to dismiss Gerald Cutts so lightly from his thoughts.

CHAPTER 7.

The Worm Turns!

FIGGINS of the New House grinned.

Figgins seemed amused.

It had been the opinion of George Figgins at the time of the election that, for the sake of the school generally, the St. Jim's fellows should have rallied round and

elected a New House chap skipper. New House chaps saw the matter in the same light as Figgy, without a dissentient voice. School House fellows, on the other hand, saw it in quite a different light; and even fellows who did not like Cardew had voted for him, to escape the irretrievable disaster of getting a New House chap in as skipper. Views on this subject in the two Houses at St. Jim's were wide as the poles asunder.

The School House vote being numerically much stronger than that of the New House, Cardew had been elected, and Figgins & Co. gloomily prognosticated that St. Jim's would go to the dogs. And now, in Figgy's opinion, signs were strong that the school was already on its way dog-wards.

"First House match of the term, and the giddy captain absent!" said Figgins to his chums Kerr and Wynn. "That lazy slacker Cardew is junior captain of School and School House, and he's not turning up the first time his House goes into the field."

"Just like him!" remarked Fatty Wynn.

"I wonder how long the chaps will stand it," said Kerr.

"Tom Merry was a good captain enough, School House chap as he is. But Cardew—" Kerr shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I hear that he's put the Fifth in their place in his House," remarked Redfern.

Figgins sniffed.

"That's neither here nor there. Ought he to be here on the football ground, or ought he not?"

"He jolly well ought!" agreed Redfern.

"So glad to hear your opinion," said a gentle voice behind the New House juniors, and they turned to see Cardew.

The dandy of the Fourth was in Etons and an overcoat. Evidently he was not thinking of football that afternoon. He gave the rather grim-looking juniors a cool smile and nod.

"Not playing for your House—what?" said Figgins.

"Quite so—not!"

"Call that playing up as captain?"

"Dear man, my ambition is not to play up as captain. I find it a bore," explained Cardew.

"Why not chuck it up, then, and let a better man in?" demanded Figgins.

Ralph Reckness Cardew shook his head seriously.

"I've been thinkin' of chuckin' it up," he answered. "But I couldn't let a better man in—there isn't one at St. Jim's! Ta-ta!"

Cardew strolled on, smiling. Figgins resisted a strong inclination to go after him and punch him.

Cutts of the Fifth was strolling at a little distance. It was very unusual for the lofty Fifth-Former to turn up on little side; he could not be supposed to be interested in lower-school football. Kerr glanced at him, and saw that Cutts' eyes were on Cardew.

"He's stalking Cardew!" grinned the Scottish junior.

"Look at him! I've heard that Cardew gave him six the other day for ragging the Fourth! I fancy Cardew would be safer on the footer-field this afternoon than off it!"

"Oh, that fellow can look after himself," said Figgins carelessly. "Hallo, here come the School House bounders!"

Smith major of the Fifth, in Norfolk jacket and whistle, little side with the School House footballers, but not to play. Little side with the School House footballers, but not to play. Cardew strolled round the field, nodding and smiling to fellows, apparently unconscious of the general condemnation of his line of conduct. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave him a glance of great severity.

"The cheek of that boundah weally passes all limits," he told Blake. "The least he could do is to keep out of sight if he is going to desert the side this afternoon."

"Sheer neck!" agreed Blake.

"He weally seems to be twyn' to make the whole school fed up with him," said D'Arcy. "He hasn't vewy far to go, at this water."

"Cheeky cad!" grunted Herries.

Cardew called out cheerily to Levison and Clive as they lined up with the School House side.

"Play up, you chaps! Keep up the credit of the study."

His chums did not answer. They felt that Cardew was showing the worst of taste in sauntering on the field in that nonchalant manner in the circumstances. It really seemed that D'Arcy was right, and that Cardew was seeking to make the fellows "fed up" with his captaincy.

"If they keep up the credit of the study it's more than you will do, Cardew!" called back Blake.

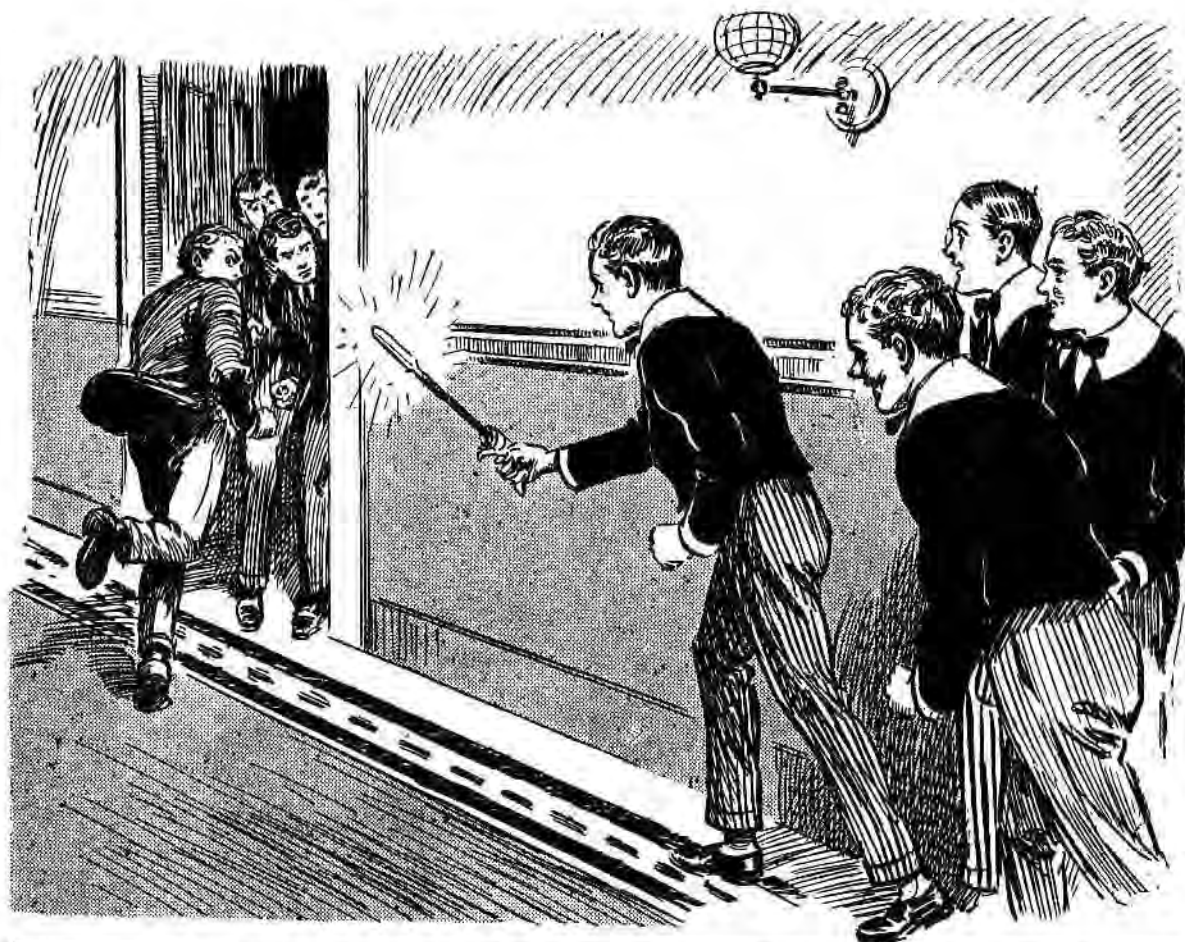
"Right on the wicket, old bean!" assented Cardew.

"Oh, get out of sight, do!" growled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Just goin', old top! So happy to oblige you," drawled Cardew; and, without waiting to see the ball kicked off, he strolled away towards the school gates.

And Gerald Cutts of the Fifth, who had been looking carelessly on, with his hands in his overcoat pockets, strolled in the same direction. Cardew was not giving a single thought



AT THE POINT OF THE POKER! Forced to back away from the glowing end of the red-hot poker Outts & Co. are unable to wipe up the floor with Ralph Reckness Cardew and his followers. (See page 9.)

to Outts of the Fifth, and it never occurred to him to glance back.

Had it occurred to him, and had he noticed the glitter in the eyes of Gerald Cutts, even Cardew might have taken the alarm. But he was thinking of other things, and he had forgotten the existence of the Fifth-Former to whom he had given six, and who, since that incident, had writhed under the mockery of his Form-fellows. It was an incident that Cutts was not likely to forget, even if the other seniors had allowed him to forget it, though Cardew dismissed it from his mind so carelessly.

Cardew turned out of the gates and sauntered down the lane, between hedges that glistened with frost.

He turned into the footpath in Rylcombe Wood, and sauntered on at a leisurely pace, whistling. He was early for his appointment with Tom Merry, and had plenty of time on his hands.

The old oak in the glade was a well-known landmark, and it was by the old oak that the meeting was to take place. Cardew turned from the footpath and plunged into the wood. Once, as he thought he heard a footstep and a rustle, he glanced round; but he saw nothing in the frosty woods.

He reached the glade where the gnarled old oak stood, and found Aubrey Racke of the Shell there, smoking a cigarette. Racke took the cigarette from his mouth, and nodded and grinned at the dandy of the Fourth.

The careless expression faded from Cardew's face; his features hardened and his eyes glinted.

"Early on the spot, you see," grinned Racke.

"I see."

"Merry won't be here till three."

"It's not far off three now, I think."

"Then I suppose I'd better get out of sight," chuckled Racke.

"I suppose Tom Merry hasn't smelt a rat?"

Cardew shook his head.

"He wouldn't," agreed Racke. "I'm blest if I thought you'd pull it off, Cardew; but it was a good wheeze fixing it for the same time as the House match. That settled the

matter for most of the fellows; otherwise, a good many would have managed to get on the spot somehow."

"I know that."

"As the matter stands, Tom Merry will be here without even a second."

"Yes."

"And he doesn't suspect foul play?" said Racke, with contemptuous scorn.

Cardew winced.

What he contemplated could scarcely be called by any other name than the one Racke applied to it. But the words jarred on Cardew's nerves.

"He suspects nothin'," said Cardew, with a lightness he found it difficult to assume. "I don't like the fellow; but, to do him justice, he isn't your sort—or mine. He never suspects foul play, and if a fellow told him I was plannin' to get him alone here to take a rotten advantage of him he wouldn't believe a word of it."

"More fool he!" sneered Racke.

He extended his cigarette-case to Cardew. The dandy of the Fourth selected a smoke, but threw it away unlighted. Racke nodded.

"Wiser, when you're just goin' to fight," he agreed. "Smokin' won't help your wind. Not that it's likely to be a strenuous tussle—what? Ha, ha!"

Cardew did not reply. The black look was settling deeper on his handsome face. Racke watched him with a grin. He was quite ready to oblige the grandson of Lord Reckness in fair play or foul—especially if it was a move against Study No. 10. Racke had not forgotten Monty Lowther's boot, and other offences of the Terrible Three.

"It's all cut and dried?" he asked. "You're sure Tom Merry will come alone?"

"Quite sure."

"He's not to see me, and I'm to watch. If you get the better of him, I'm to remain simply a witness. That's the game."

"That was it!" said Cardew, in a low voice.

"If he begins to get the upper hand, somethin' is to hit him and give you a chance," grinned Racke. "Well, I must say he's askin' for it, in comin' here alone to meet a fellow he knows is his enemy. Catch me playin' the fool like that."

"Not likely," said Cardew, with a curl of the lip.

"I fancy not! I shall have to take jolly good care that Merry doesn't see me," said Racke. "A story like this wouldn't sound well in the Common-room, would it?"

"No!"

"But it's all right. You can't lick him——"

"Can't I?" said Cardew fiercely.

"No, you can't," said Racke coolly. "You know you can't, or you wouldn't be fixin' up this trick. You can't lick him; as I said; but you'll keep him too busy to be lookin' round him. I'll choose the right moment—you can trust me for that. I'll see that this stone catches him fair and square—and after that you ought to have a walk-over."

Cardew did not speak.

"He'll never know what hit him," went on Racke, with great enjoyment. "Afterwards, he may fancy it was some village kid chuckin' stones. Even if he suspected you of fixin' it up, he couldn't prove anythin'. And he won't even see me."

"You're safe," said Cardew contemptuously.

"If I weren't safe, I shouldn't take a hand in it," said Racke coolly. "I don't intend to be sent to Coventry by the whole school, and perhaps bunked by the Head! Not this infant!" He looked at his watch. "Merry's not due for ten minutes yet. Time for another smoke."

Racke of the Shell lighted a fresh cigarette. Cardew took a turn or two up and down the glade. His brow was growing blacker and blacker.

He had planned this, and his plan had been a success. Tom Merry—the last fellow in the world to suspect black treachery—had fallen blindly into the trap; it was not a difficult matter to hoodwink an open, frank nature like that. Cardew was to beat him by fair means if he could—he passionately hoped that he could. All his strength, all his courage, should be spent in the attempt. But if he could not beat his foe by fair means, defeat must be staved off. Fair play if possible—otherwise, foul!

Blacker and blacker grew Cardew's brow.

He had planned this—in cool blood, with a smile on his face, over a cigarette in Racke's study. He had carried through his scheme without repentance. But—

There was a "but."

Cardew was not the only fellow in the world who fancied himself to be worse than he was, and whose better nature rose within him, when the test came. As he paced there, thinking—thinking, the blackness grew in his frowning brow, and the dark blood surged in his cheeks. Was it really he, Ralph Reckness Cardew, who had planned this thing with the worst blackguard at St. Jim's—or was he dreaming? He turned suddenly on Racke.

"You rotter!"

Racke stared at him, as well he might. The cigarette dropped from his lips in his astonishment.

"Wha-a-at?" he stammered.

"You reptile! Get out!"

"What?" yelled Racke.

"Get out, while I keep my hands off you!" said Cardew, between his teeth. "I'm fed up with you! Get out!"

Racke stared at him, his eyes blazing with rage. He clenched his hands, and his voice was husky with rage as he spoke.

"You cur! You've changed your mind?"

"Yes. Get away from me!"

"You've changed your mind—after bringin' me here, and now you turn on me and call me names!" Aubrey Racke choked with rage. "Why, you cheeky cad, you—you——"

"I'm done with you! Get out!"

"Do you think Tom Merry won't keep the appointment?" hissed Racke. "Do you think you are gettin' out of the fight? Is that it? You're afraid to stand up to him in a fair fight, and you know it! You insolent rotter——"

"Smack!"

Aubrey Racke staggered back against the tree.

"Oh, you rotter!" he panted. "I—I——"

Cardew had broken with his valuable ally now, with a vengeance. Perhaps he was glad to make it impossible for himself to change his mind again. Certainly Aubrey Racke was not likely to help him now, in fair play or foul.

"Is that plain enough?" asked Cardew. "I'm done with you! You'd better go, Racke!"

"I—I'll go, but—but——"

There was a footstep, a rustle of branches. Racke broke off, and the two juniors turned, expecting to see Tom Merry. But it was not the captain of the Shell who appeared. It was Cutts of the Fifth—Cutts, with a mocking grin on his hard face, and a merciless glitter in his eyes.

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CHAPTER 8.

Cutts' Vengeance!

CUTTS of the Fifth stopped, and fixed his eyes on the two juniors. There was a light cane under his arm, and he let it slip down into his hand. Cardew eyed him coolly. It was easy to guess that Gerald Cutts' intentions were hostile; but Cardew was insensible to fear. Racke looked from one to the other, and the rage in his face gave place to a grin of triumph. He knew all about the ragging of Cutts, and he knew that the vengeful Fifth-Former had followed Cardew to this lonely spot to "take it out" of him.

What Racke would have done but for his sudden break with Cardew, was uncertain. It was not likely that he would have backed up the Fourth-Former in a struggle with so redoubtable an adversary as Cutts of the Fifth Form. As matters stood, he openly rejoiced in seeing Cardew cornered by his enemy.

Cutts raised his hand, and pointed in the direction of the distant footpath.

"You can hook it, Racke."

"Just goin'," said Racke coolly.

And with a leer at Cardew he went, and his footsteps died away in the wood. Ralph Reckness Cardew did not move. He knew that Cutts' grasp would be upon him the moment he attempted to follow Racke. He knew that there was serious trouble for him now, and he faced it with his usual icy coolness.

Gerald Cutts stood silent, without moving, till Racke's footsteps had died away in the underwoods. His eyes were on Cardew like a cat's.

"You're takin' it coolly!" he remarked.

"Takin' what?" drawled Cardew.

"You know what I've run you down for."

"Because you're so fond of fashionable society?" suggested Cardew. "Because pushin' outsiders always like to thrust themselves on a gentleman, asked or unasked."

Cutts set his teeth.

"You batted me the other day," he said.

"Oh, yes!" said Cardew, as if making an effort to remember. "I believe it was you I batted, Cutts. I know it was some bullyin' cad!"

"The Fifth haven't let me forget it yet."

"Bit of a come-down, wasn't it?" agreed Cardew. "You carry your head so jolly high, Cutts—though there's little or nothin' in it—that there's bound to be a sort of general rejoicin' when you're taken down a peg or two. And it's a bit of an event for a Fifth-Former to be given six by the Fourth."

"I think you'll be sorry for that six, by the time I've given you sixty!" said Cutts, with deadly calmness. "You're for it, Cardew! I can't imagine what made you come here, to this lonely place, alone, exactly as I should have wanted you to. But it's very convenient."

A dark and bitter look came over Cardew's handsome face. It was his own intended treachery that had brought him alone to that lonely place. There was self-mockery in the bitterness of his look. His treachery, so tardily repented, had placed him at the mercy of an enemy who knew no mercy. He might have said, with Laertes of old, "I am justly slain with mine own treachery!"

Cutts made a stride towards him. Cardew put up his hands. He knew that he was no match for the Fifth-Former; there was only one junior at St. Jim's who could have hoped to stand up to Cutts of the Fifth in a fight, and that was Tom Merry of the Shell. But there was no escape, and Cardew intended to fight as long as his strength lasted. At least, he would not submit tamely.

Cutts burst into a harsh, mocking laugh, as the Fourth-Former put himself in an attitude of defence.

"You'll make it worse for yourself," he remarked.

He came on grimly.

Cardew was fighting the next moment. So fierce and savage was his resistance, that for a few moments the powerful Fifth-Former was held. And luck favoured Cardew at the outset, and he landed a heavy blow fairly in Cutts' right eye that made him stagger back dizzily.

An oath dropped from Gerald Cutts' lips, and he rushed furiously on the junior.

It was impossible for a Lower boy, of Cardew's light build, to resist that savage rush. He went down like a ninepin.

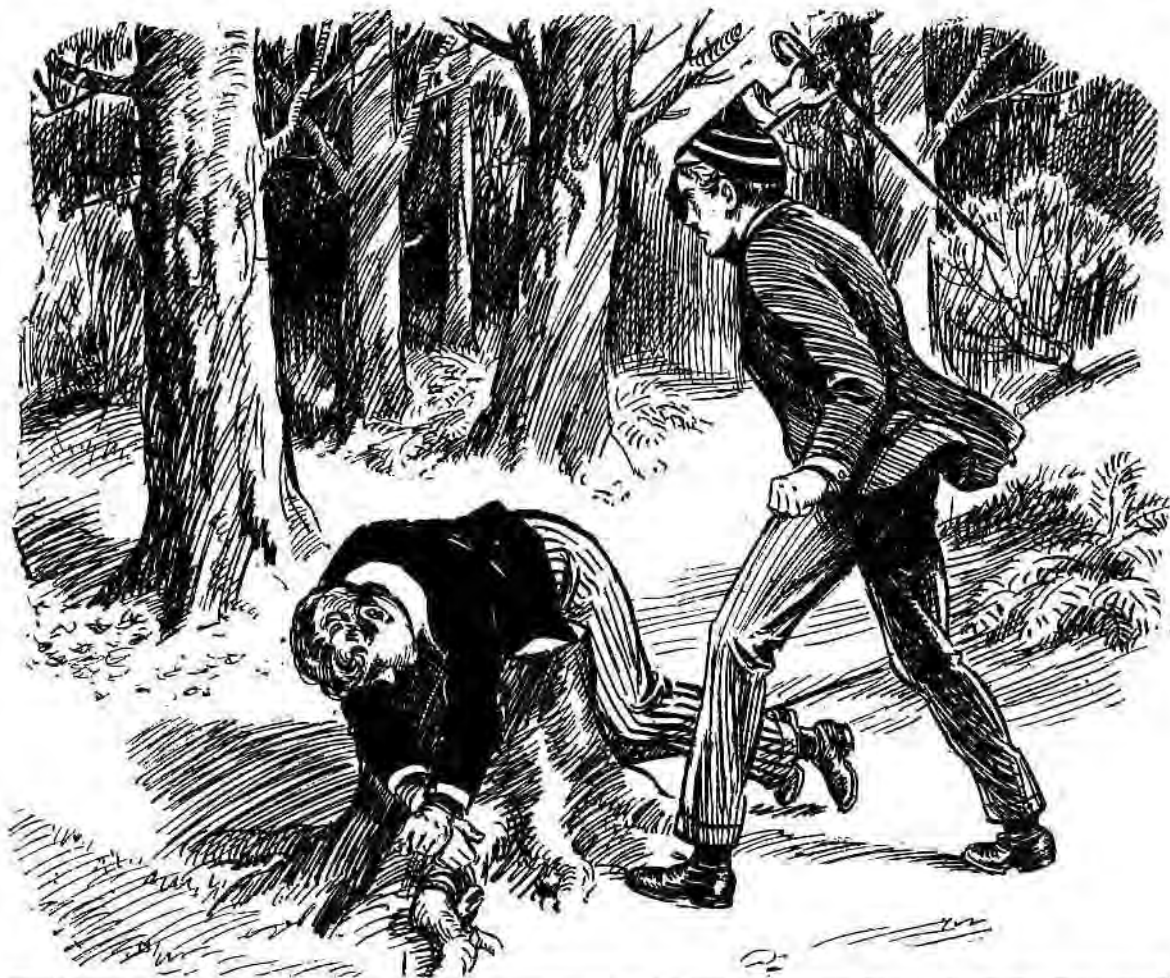
Cutts lost his footing and sprawled over him. A second more, and he had a sinewy knee planted on Cardew.

"Now, you young cad——"

"You coward!" breathed Cardew.

He twisted round, and struck up at the Fifth-Former. Cutts' bending face caught the blow, and his nose streamed red. He returned it with a savage blow that dazed the junior.

Cardew still resisted; but Cutts dragged him over, dragged his hands together, and knotted a short, thick cord about his wrists. It was evident that the bully of the Fifth had come



CUTTS' REVENGE! Enraged to a pitch of ungovernable fury Cutts stood over Cardew, swishing his cane in the air. Lash! Lash! Lash! The blows came down with all the force of Cutts' powerful arm. (See this page.)

prepared. Cardew, with his hands tied, was wrenched to his feet.

"Now!" breathed Cutts.

He dragged the junior to a tree-stump, and forcibly bent him over it. The ends of the cord were securely tied to jutting knots in the stump.

Cutts stepped back.

Cardew was quite helpless now, and "bending over" in the approved fashion for punishment. The dandy of the Fifth paused to dab his nose with his handkerchief, and to feel his eye with his finger—an eye that was already growing purple. Cutts' face was white with rage. He had intended to thrash Cardew without mercy; but he had not expected any serious resistance—far less any serious damage to himself. But he knew now that he was going to have a black eye, and that knowledge enraged him to a pitch of ungovernable fury.

He looked about in the frosty grass for the cane he had dropped, and picked it up. Then he stood over Cardew, swishing the cane in the air.

Lash!

The blow came down with all the force of Cutts' powerful arm. In spite of Cardew's courage, a cry of pain burst from his lips.

"That touches you, does it?" snarled Cutts.

He raised his arm again.

"You rotten bully!" breathed Cardew.

Cutts laughed.

"You gave me six!" he said "I've givin' you sixty—and a few over for this eye! Look out!"

The cane slashed down again. This time Cardew uttered no cry; he set his teeth like iron, and by sheer force of will kept back every sound of pain. Again the cane lashed.

Lash! Lash!

Cardew's face was white, and set hard. A Head's flogging was nothing to the punishment he was receiving now. But still he bore it in iron silence.

Lash!

"What's this—what—" It was a breathless voice, as Tom Merry of the Shell ran through the bushes. "Cutts—you brute—you bully! Stop!"

CHAPTER 9. Just Like Tom!

TOM MERRY was a few minutes late for his appointment. He had stopped to see the kick-off in the House match; and then a vigorous attack by Figgins & Co. on the School House goal had held him chained to the spot, to see how it turned out, and then a smart rally of the School House held him still enchained. But he remembered at last his appointment with Cardew, and tore himself away from the football-field, leaving New House and School House going great guns, cheered by crowds of juniors of both Houses.

Tom Merry looked at the clock tower, and hurried away towards Rylcombe. It was already close on three o'clock, and his meeting with Cardew was to take place at three, in the heart of Rylcombe Wood. The Shell fellow broke into a run.

He was sprinting along the footpath when he almost ran into Racke of the Shell. Racke called to him.

"Hold on, Merry!"

Tom paused in his sprint.

"Can't stop, Racke; I'm late already."

"It's all right; Cardew doesn't expect you," said Racke. The cad of the Shell was keenly anxious that Tom should not arrive on the scene until Cutts had had time to finish with Cardew. Racke's was not a forgiving nature, and Cardew's change of mind—and of manners—dwelt bitterly in his revengeful mind.

"Not expecting me?" said Tom, stopping. "How's that?"

"It's all off, you see," explained Racke. "Cardew got me there—"

(Continued on page 16.)



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

WE were talking about adventure the other day in our study, and it occurred to me that it would be a jolly good idea to have the subject in the "St. Jim's News."

Adventure is one of the most wonderful words in the English language, in my opinion. It brings up all sorts of ideas to one's mind, and probably no two people imagine the same thing when they hear it. One would picture exciting events in South America; another would think of stirring scenes such as we hear about in connection with Antarctic Expeditions; while I don't suppose there's one of us who hasn't imagined himself the hero in some thrilling adventure.

Seeing that it was a topic likely to interest everybody, I spoke to the other fellows about it, and they were all very keen. They turned in yarn after yarn, and it took me some time to make my final selection. I was sorry to have to turn Kerr's yarn down, but I am afraid it was rather too wild and woolly for the "St. Jim's News." Anyway, it won't stop him from contributing to another issue.

The Towser yarn is first-rate, but there's more Herries about it than Towser, I can assure you; though Herries declares he can understand that dog as well as he would if it could talk, and sometimes I think he can. It doesn't do to take too much notice of Gussy's remarks on Towser.

The great George Alfred Grundy has excelled himself! It was unfortunate for him that we heard the real truth about his thrilling adventure, but we weren't at all surprised. It was just like old Grundy! When he found that the cat was out of the bag he nearly went mad, and threatened to smash us and our study to smithereens if we put his story in print. So there are looking out for earthquakes now!

To hear him on the subject of adventure you would think that it was something very different from my dictionary version of it. I looked it up, and it says that an adventure is "an event the issue of which is determined by chance." When I told George Alfred that, he said: "Rats!" I must say that I think it's a bit tame, too.

The yarn of Digby's I should very much liked to have turned down, but, as it deals with myself, it would have been unparliamentary of me to confute it to the waste-paper basket. How Digby got to know of the affair beats me, I suppose Trimble's tattling tongue had got busy.

Tom Merry

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HEROISM!

By
George Alfred Grundy.

OF course, I don't see why I should waste my time turning out stuff for Merry, but seeing that he thought this week's "News" would not be complete without a contribution from me, I thought I might as well oblige.

All the same, I consider that it's absurd to ask a fellow like me to write about adventure in the skinny space of a column. If I'd been asked to write a book on the subject, there'd have been some sense in it.

You see, I'm a fellow who goes in for adventure as naturally as a donkey goes for carrots; and it's a funny thing, but I'm always the hero in my adventures. (Naturally!—Ed.)

Of course, it's no good going in for adventure if you haven't got plenty of pluck.

The latest affair was the other night in the village. I'd had a special late pass to go and see some friends, and it was very dark when I started back to the school. I was going down the High Street when I heard a bloodcurdling yell in one of the little side streets.

For a moment my heart stood still with horror. I felt certain that someone was being murdered—a yell like that could have meant nothing else.

Did I hesitate? Not for an instant! There was no telling what danger I might be running into, but I dashed in the direction from which the scream had come, and when I got near enough I saw that a gang of hooligans had got someone down on the ground!

I rushed at one of them and bowled him over with a blow from my mighty fist, and in a flash I swung round and caught another of them on the side of the jaw.

Perhaps they thought there was an earthquake breaking out; but whatever they thought, the effect of my attack was marvellous.

The two I had bowled over scrambled to their feet, and then they all ran for their lives! Really, I was surprised myself at the easy victory.

I assisted their victim to his feet, and was relieved to find that he wasn't much hurt; only badly shaken up. He was trembling with fear, though, and I could see that he had had a nasty shock, for he could not control his voice enough to speak.

I didn't worry him, because I knew he would soon pull himself together, and when he did he thanked me, with tears in his eyes, for saving his life. He said he was certain that if I hadn't arrived at the moment I did he would have been killed.

It's splendid to be a hero.

(We happened to hear afterwards that the "gang of hooligans" was a couple of Fourth Form youngsters from Rylcombe Grammar School ragging another kid.—Ed.)

A FEW GROWLS!

BY TOWSER.

I'VE been asked to say what I know about adventure. If I'd been asked to say what I don't know about it, I could have answered easily enough. I should just have growled: "Nothing!"

My life is all adventure. Directly I step out of my kennel I meet with an adventure of some kind, and when I go to the village with my master—well, there's nearly always trouble in some way or another, which is a very strange thing, because I'm as peaceful as a lamb.

I'll just tell you about a funny little affair the other day. I went into the village with my master, and we were walking along the street as quietly as a couple of old ladies. Suddenly a girl came round a corner a little way in front of us, and she had a dog with her—one of those fluffy things with little legs and a silly kind of bark—Poms, I believe they're called.

Well, of course, I never take any notice of things like that, and I pretended not to see it, but just after the girl had turned the corner a fellow came round, rather in a hurry. He happened to overtake the girl and the dog just as they were going to pass my master and me.

He was going to hurry along between us when he suddenly saw me, and darted aside; why he should do so I don't know, because I was perfectly clean, having had a bath only the day before.

Anyhow, he bumped into the girl and nearly knocked her over. Now, although I don't like Poms, I must say the one who was with that girl had got plenty of pluck, and was pretty sharp, too. He darted forward, and in a jiffy he had got a piece out of the leg of that fellow's trousers.

Evidently nobody noticed the actual deed but me, but you can imagine my surprise when the fellow started hopping about on one leg and accusing me of biting him! Well, you could have knocked me down with a fishbone! I might say that he wouldn't have got off so lightly if I'd gone for him!

At first I didn't take much notice, but when I heard him threatening to go to the police station, and demanding my master's name and address, I thought I'd better look into the matter. I smiled (people never seem to like it when I smile!) and strolled up to the man's leg to examine the damage more closely.

Before you could have said "Jack Robinson" that leg, and the rest of the fellow with it, was on the way to the end of the street at top speed, and in less than a minute it disappeared round the corner!

My master didn't say anything as we walked on; he just bent down and patted my head.



FIGGINS' FIDDLE!

By Robert Arthur Digby.

something more than imagination. And although his nerves were fairly steady, he felt a slight tremor run down his spine. What could it be? What should it be? Should he go back and investigate? Or—No, he'd awaken Manners and Lowther first.

Swiftly mounting the staircase, he tiptoed towards the Shell dormitory.

Manners and Lowther were asleep. But a gentle shake of their shoulders soon awakened them to the fact that something was wrong. "Come quickly, chaps!" whispered Tom Merry tensely. "There's something jolly mysterious downstairs. The queerest noises imaginable."

Slipping trousers and coats over their pyjamas, Manners and Lowther, with thumping hearts, followed Tom Merry along the corridor, and passed noiselessly down the stairs. Everywhere was silent and still.

Half-way along the Shell passage Tom Merry halted. A faint, far-away sound reached his ears, ending in a ghostly, uncanny moan.

"Hush!" he breathed. "Listen, chaps! Can you hear anything?"

"I can!" murmured Lowther. "What the dickens is it? It's jolly rummy!"

Manners shivered a little. "What are we going to do?" he muttered. "Going on, chaps, or—"

"Yes, certainly we are. If it's anyone having a joke at my expense, I'm going to collar him; and the joker's going to get it in the neck."

And with Lowther bringing up the rear, the trio crept forward along the passage.

A dozen yards from their study they halted. The walling came again, distinctly, within a few yards of the crouching juniors. But they could see nothing.

"Come along, chaps!" whispered Merry tensely. "We'll fathom this blessed mystery!"

Creeping along the passage wall, they reached their study. Tom Merry opened the door, and the three juniors passed within.

The fire, still flickering, cast weird, ghostly shadows upon the walls.

"Switch the light on, Tom," whispered Manners, "then we'll get a candle and search the passage. The sounds came from there, I'm certain."

Fortunately, there was a piece of candle on the mantelpiece. Monty Lowther applied a light from the fire, and holding it aloft, led the way into the passage.

The Terrible Three stood and peered around, utterly bewildered. They could see nothing. No sign of anyone, or anything.

Midnight boomed its mournful notes from the old clock-tower. As the last note died

away there came a faint, but fearful, moan—very near, almost at their feet.

The juniors stood tense, scarcely daring to breathe, yet trying to penetrate the darkness beyond the candle's glimmer.

Suddenly Monty Lowther gave a gasp, and bounded forward.

"What's this, chaps?" he cried quickly.

He had picked something up from the floor. It was a small oblong wooden box with a round hole in the top. Two or three strings were fastened at either end of the box, running across the hole.

Tom Merry gazed at the thing in disgust. "Oh, my blessed hat!" he cried. "Figgins' home-made string fiddle. Have we ever been had?"

There was a gasp of relief.

"B-but, I say, chaps! What's caused the giddy rumpus?" asked Manners. "The thing couldn't make those noises on its own. Someone must have—"

"I've got it!" said Lowther quickly.



"Crums!" said Tom Merry. "It's not pins. It's Figgins' tame porcupine!"

"There's something inside here. Half a tick, I'll just feel—and—Yur-o-o-oh! Yuro-o-oh!"

Monty Lowther dropped the instrument as though it had suddenly become red-hot. His yells of anguish rang through the night.

"What the thump—" began Merry.

"There's a thousand blessed pins inside there!" howled Lowther, nursing his fingers.

"If Figg's done this, I'll spifficate the ass!"

Tom Merry bent down and picked the box up gingerly.

"Come inside the study, chaps!" he said.

"We'll have a look at it. Figg wouldn't do a trick like that. He'd bar putting—Crums, they're not pins, either. It's something alive! It's Figg's tame porcupine!"

"Oh, my hat!" shrieked Manners. "We've been spoofed! That accounts for the queer noises we heard. Every time the blessed thing moved, its stiff quills caught the strings. The joker must have known that you were sitting up, Tom."

"Yes, he did!" said Tom Merry. "He's done us fairly this time. But we'll collar the bouncer in the morning, chaps!"

"Yes, rather!"

And they did.

WHAT on earth's that?"

Tom Merry laid his pen gently upon the study table, sat bolt upright, and listened.

A slight sound had broken the stillness of the night. It was only slight, but it was curious, weird, and uncanny.

The time was well after eleven o'clock. The remainder of the school was wrapt in slumber.

Tom Merry had obtained permission from his Form master, Mr. Linton, to stay up beyond his usual bed time, to finish the editorial of the "St. Jim's News." He had almost finished when the curious sound came to his ears.

For a moment Tom Merry was startled. But he pulled himself together.

"Blessed mouse, I suppose," he muttered. He sat motionless, straining his ears for a repetition of the sounds.

It came again. A strange wailing squeak, ending in a long-drawn-out moan. Very faint, but obviously quite near at hand.

"It's not a mouse!" he muttered. "And it doesn't sound human. What the dickens can it be?"

Tom Merry peered round the study, bewildered.

"Wonder if it's from the passage?" he muttered. "Probably one of the chaps having a game."

The sounds came again. This time quite distinctly from without the study in the passage beyond.

Rising softly from his chair, Tom Merry switched off the light, tip-toed to the study door, cautiously turned the knob and peered without into the dark, black corridor.

But he heard nothing. The strange sounds had ceased. Everything was now quiet and still.

"Perhaps my imagination," he said sleepily. "I'll get to bed, and finish the editorial first thing in the morning. I've done enough for to-night."

Closing the study door after him, Tom Merry groped his way along the passage towards the staircase leading to the Shell dormitory.

He stopped suddenly, however, as the wailing sounded again. This time ending in an uncanny shriek.

Merry was convinced, now, that it was

"ADVENCHAHS!"

By Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

ADVENCHAHS! Bal Jove, yes! I considah that's a toppin' subject to talk about. When Mewwy spoke to me about it, he said: "Could I w'ite anything on advenchahs?"

Bal Jove! That was widiculous, of course! If he'd said "would" instead of "could" he would have shown his common sense, because there isn't a fellow in St. Jim's who knows more about advenchahs than I do. Why, bal Jove, I've had enough advenchahs of my own to fill a woppin' big book.

There was that affair of my twosahs when that howwid bwute Towsah wau between

my legs in the High Sweet and made me sit down in a puddle. Then there was the case of my best toppah, bal Jove, when I found that Blake's white mice had made a nest in it! (Not exactly an adventure, Gussy, except for the mice!—Ed.)

I knew old Tommy would put his spoke in before long: he always does, y'know. He came in and looked ova my shoudahs just now. Weally, it's too bad intewwuppin' a fellow when he's w'itoin' about advenchah; puts him wight off his stwoke.

Let's see, where had I got to? Bal Jove, yes—the white mice in my toppah! Wotten affair that was. Eweveryone used to say when I went near them after that: "Oh cwums, what a howwid suell of mice!"

Bal Jove! I'm wandewin' away fwom my subject—as the parson would say. Advenchah, isn't it? Weally, y'know, I'd almost forgotten all about it!

Of course, it all depends on a fellow's ideahs of advenchah. It's not so easy to w'ite about advenchah as it sounds. (He made out that it was the simplest thing possible when I asked him!—Ed.) What one

fellow might think was an excitin' advenchah I might think nothin' of. (Quite likely.—Ed.)

The twouble is that I've had so many advenchahs that I don't know which one to w'ite about. I've had at least twenty with that beast Towsah, but I expect you've heard about most of those. That animal's been more twouble to me than anything at St. Jim's, y'know; it isn't wight that a fellow should be allowed to keep a bwute like that to wowwy ewewybody else. What would the Head say if I was to ask permission to keep a lion?

Bal Jove, I can hear old Tommy comin' along the cowwidow again. I must buck up!

"Time's up, Gussy!"

"I've hardly started yet, deah boy!"

"Sorry; it's time to go to press! Come on with that rot!"

"Weally, y'know, I haven't started on my advenchah yet. I—"

(But Tom Merry had picked up the copy, and bolted.)



"You!"

"Yes; I was to chuck a stone at you from behind a tree, if you began to get the better of him," said Racke coolly. "Catch on? That's why Cardew fixed it up for the same time as the House match, and managed to have no seconds, and the fight out of gates."

"Impossible!"

"Honest Injun!" said Racke.

"And you—" exclaimed Tom, his eyes blazing at the blackguard of the Shell.

"I was only pullin' his leg, you see," said Racke, backing away a pace. "I let him run on, till a few minutes ago, and then I told him I'd have nothin' to do with it. See?"

Tom eyed him.

"It looks as if there's some truth in what you say, Racke," he answered quietly. "Cardew's rather queer arrangements look like it. If he thought of playing such a dirty trick, I hope he changed his mind."

"He didn't; it was I—"

Tom interrupted him scornfully.

"You'd have played it out—that's your sort, Racke," he said. "It's not Cardew's sort, I believe. Anyhow, I know he isn't dodging a fight; he's got plenty of pluck. I'm going on."

"I tell you—"

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Merry started on again, and Racke caught him by the arm and pulled him to a halt.

"Look here, Tom Merry, I tell you—"

"Let me alone!"

Tom Merry angrily shook off the grasp of the Shell fellow, and ran on. Racke stood in the footpath, and looked after him with a sneering grin.

"After all, he can't handle Cutts," he murmured. "And I suppose he wouldn't chip in to help Cardew, anyhow! I know I wouldn't in his place! Cardew's for it!"

And with that satisfactory reflection, Aubrey Racke walked on towards the school.

Tom Merry, giving no further thought to the end of the Shell, ran lightly along the grassy footpath, and turned off through the wood towards the glade of the old oak. Cardew's first—and only—cry of pain reached his ears as he hurried on through the thickets. He started as he heard it.

"What the blump—" he ejaculated. He quickened his pace, and ran breathlessly into the glade. Then he saw.

Tom Merry burst on the scene, breathless with haste, his eyes blazing with indignation. He had come there to fight Ralph Reckness Cardew—he had almost come there to be a victim to Cardew's treachery. But he did not think of that now. The junior, his hands tied to the tree-stump, was writhing under the savage lashes of the cane, and Tom caught a glimpse of his white, set face and the bitter pain in it. That was more than enough for Tom.

"Cutts, you bully!" he panted.

Cutts spun round in astonishment. Tom Merry's arrival there was a complete surprise to him.

He glared angrily at the Shell fellow.

"Clear off!" he exclaimed sharply. "You're no business here, Tom Merry!"

Without answering, Tom Merry sprang at him and wrenched the cane from his hand. So sudden was his action that the cane was whirling away among the tree-tops before Cutts realised what was happening.

"You rotten bully!" shouted Tom.

"You—you—" stuttered Cutts.

Cardew looked round. He could not escape from his position, bound as he was; he could render no aid to Tom Merry if the captain of the Shell took up his cause against so formidable an adversary as the big Fifth-Former. Not to save his life would Cardew have called to his enemy for aid. But there was a gleam of hope in his pale face now. Tom Merry's look and words showed that there was little doubt of the line he would take.

Cutts raised a hand that trembled with rage.

"Get out of this, Merry, or I'll give you the same as I'm givin' Cardew!"

"Let him loose at once!" rapped Tom Merry.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Stand aside while I do it, then, you rotter!"

Tom Merry came fearlessly on. Cutts sprang in his way, his fists clenched.

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"You—you dare to stand up to me, Tom Merry—"

"Yes, you cur!"

Tom Merry sprang back, but only to throw off his coat and cap and then his jacket. Cutts glared at him in angry amazement, scarcely believing that the Shell fellow seriously intended to stand up to him in defence of Cardew. But he soon had proof of it.

"Now, you cad—" exclaimed Tom.

"I'll smash you!" roared Cutts.

He came on with a rush. Cardew had been swept under by such a rush; but Tom Merry was made of more sinewy stuff. He met the rush with left and right, and it was Cutts who staggered back, and, stumbling over Cardew, fell to the ground.

"Well hit!" shouted Cardew involuntarily.

Cutts of the Fifth sprawled, breathless, amazed to find himself on the ground, amazed, and boiling with rage.

"Look out!" panted Cardew.

Tom Merry was looking out. Cutts scrambled to his feet and came at the Shell fellow like a tiger.

What followed was wild and whirling. Cardew, staring on, strained frantically at the cord on his wrist, passionately eager to get loose and go to the help of his defender. But he could not get loose—he was too securely tied for that—and he could only look on at the hardest fight Tom Merry had ever put up since he had come to St. Jim's.

For in weight, in muscle, in strength, in reach, Cutts of the Fifth was far and away ahead of the junior. And he had skill in boxing, too—which he needed now. At the first glance it would have been said that Tom Merry had no chance of success—that in a minute or less he would be as helplessly at the bully's mercy as Cardew now was.

But it did not prove so. Tom was as light as an eel on his feet, and a great deal quicker in movement than the big Fifth-Former. And he was strong and sturdy, though nowhere near the size and weight of Gerald Cutts. And he was the best boxer in the Lower School at St. Jim's, and that counted for a great deal.

Again and again a quick leap, a side-step, a backward spring, saved him from Cutts' heavy attack; and when he had a chance he never lost it. Cutts' right eye, already half-closed by Cardew, was quickly closed entirely, and there was a blue bruise forming under the other. His nose streamed crimson.

Tom Merry showed signs of severe punishment, too. But he did not heed his punishment.

It was Cutts who first drew back from the struggle. Deep down, the bully's heart was craven.

He backed away, panting; and as he backed Tom Merry came on with a lightning rush. Cutts' defence was nowhere; and Tom's right crashed into his face, followed up by his left under the chin. Cutts staggered back and fell heavily.

Tom Merry stood over him, panting. The Shell fellow seemed hardly aware that blood was streaming from his nose, oozing from his mouth, and that a dozen bruises showed on his face. He was ready for Cutts when the Fifth-Former came up to the scratch.

Gerald Cutts staggered up.

But he did not come on. Possibly if he had pushed the fight to the last extremity Cutts might have triumphed. But a fight to a finish with an adversary who was game to the last gasp was not in Gerald Cutts' line. He did not come on.

"Beaten, by gad!" yelled Cardew, as the Fifth-Former backed away.

Cutts' face flamed with rage. That taunt brought him on again, and he rushed savagely at Tom Merry.

Tom Merry went down, but he was up again like a cat, fighting desperately—hammer and tongs, hammer and tongs—till Cutts panted:

"Stop!"

The Fifth-Former dragged himself loose, and, without a look at Tom, plunged into the bushes. He disappeared, and Tom Merry stood panting, almost reeling with his exertions, and wondering whether he had, in actual fact, beaten Cutts of the Fifth in a stand-up fight. But there was no doubt of it—he had!

Cutts was gone, and Tom Merry leaned against the old oak to get back his breath. He passed his hand dazedly before his eyes and blinked at Cardew.

There was a strange expression on Cardew's face as Tom stepped towards him and cut the cord with his penknife. Cardew rose from the stump, his eyes strangely on Tom Merry.

"You're hurt!" he said at last.

"Yes, a bit," gasped Tom.

"I never saw such a scrap! And I—I was goin' to scrap with you!" Cardew laughed. "You wouldn't have left much of me, I suppose."

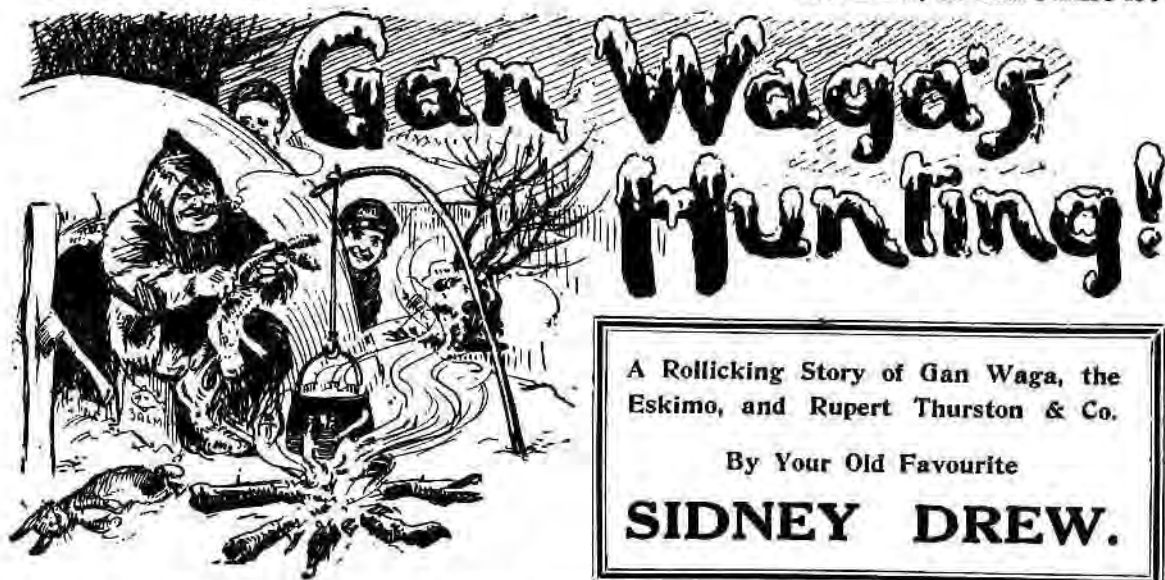
"Cutts hasn't left much of me, I think," said Tom Merry ruefully. "We shall have to put off our little affair, after all, Cardew. I couldn't stand up to a bunny rabbit now."

"Put it off!" said Cardew slowly. "Oh, yes, we'll put

(Continued on page 20.)

This splendid yarn of the
quaint Gan Waga-

—has been specially written for
the GEM, so don't miss it!



A Rollicking Story of Gan Waga, the
Eskimo, and Rupert Thurston & Co.

By Your Old Favourite

SIDNEY DREW.

CHAPTER 1.

The House Wreckers!

SNOW may not be pleasant stuff for people who are inclined to have red noses or suffer from chilblains, but away from towns where the traffic churns it into black slush, it can often transform ugliness into beauty. Darrancombe Village did not need snow to render it beautiful, for at all seasons it was one of the prettiest villages in England, and England can boast of possessing the prettiest villages in the whole wide world.

But with snow on its thatched roofs, on trees and hedgerows, and on the village green, and icicles hanging from the eaves, Darrancombe resembled a charming Christmas card designed by a first-class artist. And when Squire Thurston's hounds came through, the scarlet coats of the huntsmen and whip gave it a charming touch of colour. The hounds, of course, were merely out for exercise, for beneath the snow the ground was frozen as hard as rock, and until a thaw came there could be no hunting. The Darrancombe foxes were having a holiday and running up bills against the squire for ducks, fowls, and geese that disappeared mysteriously, leaving only a few feathers behind to tell the tale.

The railway-station was two miles away, and after tramping two miles through the snow, it was only natural that Mr. Thomas Prout should enter the quaint village inn to obtain something to keep out the cold. There he discovered a couple of friends of his—Mr. Benjamin Maddock, and Mr. Barry O'Rooney, playing a game of dominoes in the cheerful warmth of a roaring fire of logs.

"By honey, you're a couple of nice pals, you are!" said Prout. "Why couldn't you come and meet me or send a car? I telegraphed, didn't I?"

"Swate bhoys of mine," said Barry O'Rooney, pushing the dominoes aside, "so you did. Exactly four minutes ago your telegram came. Oi'd been round to the post-office to inquire, and when it did arrive the kid brought it in to us. You see, darlint, that blizzard on Thursday night flattened out a lot of the telegraph wires. Ben and me reckoned that av the thrain didn't get lost, you'd be here sooner than the message."

"Have a drink and don't grouse,

Tom," said Maddock. "What's the best news from Porthampton, souse me?"

"Not much," answered Prout. "It's a sight colder there than it is here. The painters have had to pack up, for it froze their brushes stiff. They're putting a new engine in the yacht. It's a big job, and she don't look like getting out of dock afore the spring. I fetched your packets along, and little you deserve them, either. You ought to have been paid off instead of drawing full wages while you're lounging ashore doing nothing but eat and drink."

They were undoubtedly having an easy time of it while the yacht Lord of the Deep was being reconditioned and refitted. Maddock and O'Rooney grinned as Prout threw down a couple of plump envelopes containing their month's pay. Not only were they receiving full wages, but they were living on the fat of the land free of charge at Darrancombe Hall as Squire Thurston's guests.

"There are toimes, bhoys, whin the thought that Oi was ever fool enough to come to say has brought bitter tears to my bright blue oies," said Barry O'Rooney, as he pulled a packet of Treasury notes out of his envelope. "There are toimes—and this is wan of them—whin the same thought makes my heart bubble wid joy. Oi'm niver happier at say than whin Oi'm ashore and the spondulicks are rolling in. How many of these have you pinched, Tom?"

"Mine seem all right, souse me," said Maddock, "so he must be turning honest in his old age. This is a very nice life, this is, and while it lasts I'll not try to do any man out of a job. You'll pay what we owe, won't you, Tommy, and save us the trouble of unbuttoning our coats again to get at the money."

"I'll see you both shot first!" growled Prout. "I say, how's that Eskimo going on? Has he gone mad lately?"

"Bedad, since the frost and snow came the spalpeen has been as lovelly as a linner," answered Barry O'Rooney. "There's three or four inches of oice on the lake. Good luck to the oice and the snow for clearing that oily Iskimo out of the house. He's built himself a snow igloo and put on an old suit of mangy sealskin. All the basto wants now to make him really happy, is a few wpruses and a bunch of Polar bears."

"We've got a good hour to kill afore lunch," said Maddock the bo'sun, consulting a large silver watch. "Let's go round and have a look at the reptile and push his igloo flat. There's nothing so bad for a chap as idleness. If we dance on his igloo, he'll have to build another, souse me, and it will be a kind action, for it will keep the blubberbiter out of mischief. There's nothing I hate worse than an idle man, barring whelks."

Passing the main entrance, they walked through the crisp snow to a door in the wall of the park. In the centre of the snow-clad lake was a small island on which a few leafless willows grew, and here Gan Waga the Eskimo had built his igloo, a dome-shaped snow hut with a tunnel for a front door, and a slab of ice for a window. Outside this mansion thin smoke was rising from a wood fire over which an iron pot was suspended. The owner of this palace was squatting outside it in his front garden, skinning a rabbit.

"Bedad, ut reminds me of the toime Oi discovered the North Pole," said Barry O'Rooney. "Ahoy, blubberbiter! How d'ye find things at all, at all?"

Gan Waga's sealskin costume looked rather patchy where the fur had worn off it. He smiled at his visitors and reached for a hatchet with a bright, keen edge. As hatchets are rarely used for skinning rabbits, the action seemed to suggest that the Eskimo had a suspicious mind.

"Oh, I all merry and brightness!" he said cheerfully. "So yo' back, hunk, Tommy, old dear, and just as uglifal as ever."

"I don't think," said Prout. "And a very nice house ours is, by honey, a lovely house, bath-room, drawing-room, and billiards-room all complete. I don't see no garage, so p'raps you've given up your Rolls-Royce, Gan. I should like a house like that myself, only I don't think I could run to the rent. Warm in winter and cool in summer, ain't they? Hot water all over, day and night, and electric lifts to every floor. And what a jolly kitchen!"

"Bedad, next to the swate home of my childhood's days, Ballybunian Castle, ut's the fonnest place Oi ever clapped oice on," said Barry O'Rooney. "None of your silly towers and ugly chimney-pots,

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bloys, but all as smooth and lovely and round as a dumpling, and so clane. And Oi loike the front dure. No silly sheeps to wash, and no silly brass knockers and dure-knobs to polish. Oeh, ut's a gem of a house, and Oi suppose you'll grow some roses round the dure, Gan, whin summer comes again. But phwat is home, however beautiful, widout a woiife? There ought to be a Mrs. Blubberbiter. Oi can imagine her shoving out her head to welcome you, Gan, her face all smoiles and shining wid blubber, whin you come back at noight wid a walrus undher wan arm, and a barrel of whale-oil undher the other. In my mind's oie Oi can see her sylph-loike form as graceful as a sack of flour wid a rope tied round ut, chivvying you round the garden wid a harpoon, because you forgot the bear's grease for her bonny black hair. Phwat a lovely vision of domestic bliss! Wance more whin Oi shut my oies Oi can see—

Carried away by these beautiful imaginings, Barry O'Rooney closed his eyes once too often. Maddock gave him a violent push. In happy England it is not only considered a breach of good manners to enter a gentleman's house without being invited to do so, but it is also a breach of the law. Barry staggered and reeled up against the igloo. Had it been built in the land of Gan Waga's birth, it might have withstood the shock; but it was too frail. As Barry O'Rooney, unable to save himself, went sprawling across it, the roof caved in, and Barry O'Rooney, except for his boots, was lost in the ruins.

The rabbit hurled after him by the owner of the wrecked mansion smote Maddock on the back of the head as he fled with Prout across the frozen lake. When they gained the bank they stopped to look back and grin. O'Rooney, very red in the face, had just heaved himself out of the wreckage. He vanished again as Gan Waga jumped at him.

Boots and clenched fists emerging from the tossing snow, and yells and grunts told of fierce strife.

"Souise me, I hope Gan will give it him good and hard, Tom," said the bo'sun. "It's a low-down trick to wreck a man's home."

"Nearly worse than murder," Prout agreed. "Only a heartless rogue could do a thing like that. And after praising the house like he did, too!"

"Let's go away," said Maddock. "I can't bear such sights. And besides, by honey, don't forget that the blubberbiter can hop along over snow faster than we can. When he's finished with Barry he may take it into his thick head to make sail after us with that nasty little chopper. Ugh! Fair disgusting!"

The bo'sun had been the cause of it all, but instead of going back to rescue Barry O'Rooney, he turned away callously and abandoned him. Barry, having spat the snow out of his mouth, bawled for mercy, and informed the angry Eskimo, who was on top of him, in a tired voice, that he had his fingers crossed. Then they both crawled out of the ruins of the igloo, for Gan Waga granted the truce Barry had appealed for, it being quite understood that when a gentleman asks for mercy and declares he has his fingers crossed, it is unfair to hit him. All the same, the Eskimo grasped his hatchet.

"Gan, bhoy," said Barry O'Rooney, scooping out the cold snow that lay between his collar and his neck, "ut's a mighty shame your noice house has got busted, but, honour brouht, my swate youth, Oi didn't do ut. Phwat Oi mane to say is that Oi didn't do ut intentionally. Wasn't Oi imagining all koinds of lovely things for you and roses round the dure wid both oies shut toight? Arrah,

then, whoy this thussness? Ut was that rogue Maddock who shoved me, bad luck to him, and may his shadow never grow whiskers. And for that man's voile act Oi'm banged on the nose, biffed in the ear, pounded in the ribs, choked wid snow, thrampled on in forty-noise different places. Gan, ould sport, ut's in my mind to give you a real fourpenny wan and knock your thick head clane over the wall of the parrk, only you did ut out of ignorance, and, besides, you have that ugly chopper. Instead, Oi howld out the hund of friendship. Let us be brothers, and give ut the bo'sun hard in the neck for this foul deed. Phwat sayest thou, my homeless blubberbiter? Spake on!"

Gan Waga rose and picked up the rabbit. Grasping that skinless rodent by its hind legs he swung it close to Barry O'Rooney's ear and spoke.

"Hops it quickfuls, yo' uglifuls old rascals," said Gan Waga.

Having no appetite for uncooked rabbit just then, Barry O'Rooney departed. When out of the immediate danger-zone, he lingered.

"Oi'll tell you phwat Oi'd do wid them ruins, Gan," he said. "Oi'd build a snow man wid a face on him about as handsome as your own and just as loike you as possible. Then Oi'd get a bucket of blubing wather and pour ut over the face. After that, Oi mane av Oi was you, Oi'd take that little hatchet, cut a hole in the oice, and shove meself through ut, and everybody would be happy. And, bedad, Oi'm joyful that Oi did bust your rotten old house."

Left alone in the bleak and desolate snow, the Eskimo sat down and crooned a sad little song to himself in his native tongue as he cut up the rabbit. A bleak wind began to blow as he put more sticks under the fire, and grey clouds drifted across the wintry sky. When the pot was simmering, Gan Waga lighted a cigar and lay down with a heap of snow for a pillow. Suddenly the parkland was blotted out in a smother of falling flakes.

Half an hour later, the Eskimo was lost to view. He had found another house without having had the trouble to build it. The snow had covered him, and only a small hole from which an occasional puff of cigar-smoke ascended betrayed the fact that there was something alive beneath it.

Then the cigar went out, and so did the fire, extinguished by the drifting snowflakes, and Gan Waga fell asleep, only to start up with a howl wearing the iron pot as a helmet and drenched with luke-warm rabbit stew. And then Gan Waga heard roars of laughter.

CHAPTER 2.

A Raid That Failed!

THE people who did the laughing were Rupert Thurston, Squire of Darrancombe, and his almost inseparable friend Prince Ching Lung, for Gan Waga was not laughing at all. The squire and the prince stood with the snow up to the knees of their rubber boots. They had come out to see how the Eskimo was getting on in what to him was delightful weather. They had not missed the igloo, for they were not aware that Gan Waga had built one. They did see his cooking-pot and something else that as owner of a pack of fox hounds interested Mr. Rupert Thurston a good deal.

A couple of fine foxes had been attracted by the appetizing scent of Gan Waga's rabbit stew. Thurston pulled Ching Lung behind a tree. After a preliminary sniff or two one of the foxes

gave a well-judged spring and managed to balance himself cleverly on the swaying pot. Then he put in his head and the gulping noises he made as the stew slipped down his throat roused the envy of the second fox. There was not room for two of them. For a second or so they snarled and struggled and yapped, the pot swinging, and then toppling from its hook, the pot turned over and fell, Gan Waga started up out of the snow, and two scared foxes, one going north and the other south, streaked away across the snow-clad lake for their lives.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" laughed the prince and the squire of Darrancombe. "Oh, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Gan Waga riddled himself of his iron hat, scraped some of the warm stew out of his eyes, grasped his hatchet and prepared to murder somebody or other.

"Kamerad!" yelled Ching Lung and Rupert Thurston, holding up their hands. "We surrender."

"We didn't do it, Gan," added the prince. "It was a couple of foxes after your fodder. And do put your tin hat on again, my fat and beautiful one, for it suits you splendidly. You only want a silk band-round it and a feather stuck in it and you'd look a jolly handsome chap."

Gan Waga did not think that Ching Lung and Thurston would play such a shabby trick on him, but he was not quite convinced of their innocence until he saw the tracks of the foxes in the snow. A rub with a handful of snow removed the stew from his face and hair and a roll in it cleaned his sealskin suit after a fashion.

"It seems to me, Chingy, old dear, I jolly badness downs on my luck," he sighed. "That my igloo, those lumps. That wickedful rascal, Barry O'Leonatic, he smash that flatness fo' me. And my niceness rabbit-stew, he gonod west, too, Chingy. Yo' and yo' rotten old sneak-thief foxes, Rupert. What yo' gotted all those silly hounds fo' if yo' can't catch the foxes? How I go on, hunk, if I not able to make a stew without having it pinched?"

"Only an insane idiot with a nice warm house to go to and lots of good food would want to boil rabbits out in the snow," said Rupert Thurston. "Only that or a savage."

"Well, yo' catch yo' savages foxes," said the Eskimo. "All the idjitness seem morer to keeps all those hounds eating their heads off. Fifty or sixty hounds and idjits on horses in red coats and sometimes they never catches one fox in a day. That's what I call idjitness, Chingy. I catch twenty foxes in a day easyness."

"My poor fat friend, my forlorn Eskimo pal from the ice-bound land of Blubberpook, you don't understand the noble sport of fox-hunting and never will," said Ching Lung. "A fox is a sacred sort of animal. He must not be trapped, shot, or poisoned. He must die only one way, to be bowled over by the pack. Men who trap, shoot, or poison foxes are in this country boiled in oil. A queer sort of game killing foxes with hounds, Gan, and an expensive one. I'll wager it costs Rupert a pile of money every fox his pack roll over. A jolly lot more than eighteen-pence a time, eh, Rupert?"

"I not care what it cost, Chingy," said Gan Waga. "Tells yo' old foxes not to touch my stews no more, Ruperts, or I make them sorriness for it."

The Eskimo declined to go back with them. After the sharp snowfall, the temperature had fallen, and it was bitterly cold. They left Gan building another igloo.

"Queer merchant, but I suppose he's happy," said Thurston.

"As happy as a hungry thrush with a big fat worm, old scout," answered Ching Lung, "but like the worm he'll turn. If Barry O'Rooney and his two accomplices start smashing down his homesteads, he'll get ratty. He'll also get ratty if the foxes make free with any more of his Irish stew. You ought to have warned him."

"I think there are only a couple of foxes in the park, and I don't want foxes in the park," said the squire. "If he can rid me of them so much the better. If what Prout says about the yacht is correct we shall be stuck down here for a couple of months. It's not likely that we shall actually bore each other to death, but I'm tired of shooting, and you're much too hot for me at billiards. So let's hope this beastly Arctic weather will break and give us a chance to go hunting."

It did not take Gan Waga very long to construct another igloo. Later he chipped away the ice in various places round the little island to protect himself from intruders and covered these man-traps with snow, for Gan did not feel inclined to build igloos to give other people the pleasure of pulling them down. Then he visited the snares he had set for rabbits. There was no wild thing, furred or feathered, that the Eskimo could not trap. There were eight rabbits in his snares. He skinned a couple of them and put them in the pot and hung the others in a willow tree out of the reach of foxes. Then, having relighted the fire and cut a dead branch for fuel, the Eskimo put on a pair of snow-shoes he had made that morning and went to Darrancombe Hall.

Thurston's servants could not make the Eskimo out at all. They could quite understand the positions of Prout, O'Rooney and Maddock, but the squire and the prince seemed to look upon the snub-nosed gentleman with black, tallowy hair as an equal. Gan Waga certainly looked upon himself as anybody's equal. He clumped over the Turkey carpet in his snow-shoes and stopped as he saw O'Rooney and Prout smoking their pipes in front of a blazing fire.

"Some folks, badad," said Barry, "go through loife, Tom, and never do wan koin'd action, not even to plase a friend. Oi axed that Iskimo to do wan koin'd little thing for me, and he hasn't done it, a throifling little favour that wouldn't have taken foive minutes. Oi only axed him to cut a hole in the ices on the lake where the wather was noice and dapo and he wouldn't do it. Would you belave ut, only a toiny koin'd action loike that?"

"He's got a nasty mind, by honey," said Prout. "I can't bear these foreign chaps, with oily hair, flat noses, mouths like open cellar flaps and eyes like two currants stuck in a lump of dough. What's the use of talking to such riff-raff about kind actions. The only thing they understand is a biff on the ear from an honest British fist. That's the only way to larn 'em, my lad. An Eskimo, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you biff 'em the better they be."

"Yo' comes near my igloo any morer and I do some biffingnesses, old dears," said Gan Waga. "I going to watch outs. You dare comes and I shows you, my mouldy old bananas. Yo' t'ink it a mer-rifuls jokes, breaking ups my happy homes, hunk? Yo' dares come nears and yo' gets swatted hard, that's all."

"Phwat d'ye mane dare? Why, you overgrown barrel of whale oil, av you give me any sauce, Oi'll be along to-noight and roll on your ould snow shack. Grab him and shove his head in the coal-box, Tommy, and shut the lid. He's daring

us, d'ye notice—daring us! He's gone clane up the loop."

"Oh, gets off it," said Gan Waga. "This is what I comed fo', so takes yo' great ugly hoofs off it."

In his indignation, Barry O'Rooney had risen and was standing on the edge of a fine bearskin rug. Gan Waga gave the rug a tremendous jerk and Barry seated himself unexpectedly in Prout's lap. This abrupt action shot some of the hot ashes from Prout's pipe down O'Rooney's collar and he got up quickly and danced about claving madly at his spine. By the time he had cooled down, Gan Waga and the bearskin rug were gliding away over the snow to the igloo.

"What a blunderer you are, Barry, by honey," grumbled Prout, "making me waste half a pipe of 'baccey, and 'baccey the price it is."

Barry felt the blisters on his neck very tenderly, clenched his fist, and glared at Prout. The arrival of the butler made him gulp down his wrath.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the butler, "but there has been an accident—a burst water-pipe. Unfortunately, it has flooded both your bed-rooms. There's a large, airy room on the ground floor. The housekeeper wishes me to ask if you would mind occupying it if she had two beds put up till she can make other arrangements?"

"Never a bit!" said Prout. "We're old sailors, by honey, and we could sleep on planks with spikes in them. Ask the lady to stick up a bed for Maddock, for we're used to being together. What rotten things do happen on land, Barry! All the time I've been at sea I can't remember a bust water-pipe, though I've had a busted water-spout drop on me. What with pipes busting, kitchen boilers exploding, and chimneys blowing off, I wouldn't live ashore for a pension. It ain't safe!"

"Nor me!" said Barry O'Rooney. "Oi don't loike policemen, especially noight policemen. The very fact that they have 'em shows that the place must swarm wid rogues and rascals. We want no police aboard. Tom, so the merry ould say for me all the toime, bhoy!"

Presently Maddock joined them, and they were invited to inspect their new

quarters. It was a long, low-ceilinged room in the front of the house, and three nice beds had been placed in it with crimson eiderdowns and feather pillows.

"There's a bath-room, through that door," said the butler; "but only cold water, I'm sorry to say. And I can only give you candles. The late squire was very old-fashioned, and I must say Darrancombe Hall is a bit out-of-date. I'm pleased to learn that the new squire is making big alterations in the spring—electric light, lifts, telephones, and central heating. On your next visit, gentlemen, I have no doubt we shall be able to make you much more comfortable."

"If I never get anything worse than this you won't catch me grumbling a lot, souse me!" said Maddock. "Hi, Tom! You're nearest! Pick up the fender quick, my lad, and sling it at that! Never mind breaking a few panes of glass as long as you hit it hard!"

There was a face at the window—the plump, grinning face of Gan Waga, the Eskimo—but, like most beautiful things, it quickly faded away and vanished.

After dinner Thurston asked the prince to excuse him, and went to his desk to write some letters.

"I'm off to have a pow-wow with Gan," said Ching Lung. "I shall be back in less than an hour. Where are the three wasters?"

"Playing billiards, I think, Ching. I heard the balls clicking as I came past the billiards-room."

"Then they're out of mischief, and not trying to rag the Eskimo," said Ching Lung. "I'll just wade along and find out what he's up to."

The sky was bright, with frosty stars shining down on a white and silent world. Ching Lung was wise enough to whistle when he reached the edge of the lake; and Gan Waga, who knew that whistle, dived out of his igloo, with a shout of warning.

"Don't yo' moves, Chingy, till I fetches yo'!" he cried. "Else yo' get a wet shirt, old dear! I dugged a lot of holes, so be very carefulness!"

Gan Waga guided Ching Lung safely to the igloo; and, crawling through, the prince squatted down on the bearskin



"Yaroooh!" cried Gan Waga, as the contents of the stewpot trickled all over him, and the two foxes went streaking across the snow-clad lake for their lives!

rug to smoke a cigarette. The Eskimo's lighting and heating apparatus consisted of one candle, but the snow-hut was bright and fairly warm.

"Rupert says you may snare those foxes if you want to, Gan," said Ching Lung. "He thinks there are only two in the park—and he doesn't like them in the park."

"Old Rupert not know muchness, Chingy, ifs he thinks there only twos," said Gan Waga. "I bet there's twenty-twos and morer. I catches them quickfuls when I starts. I jolly soon—"

The Eskimo raised a warning hand and leaned forward to listen. Ching Lung had sharp ears, but he heard nothing. The grin of joy that suddenly widened Gan Waga's mouth told him that something was going to happen very cheerful from the Eskimo's point of view.

"They coming, Chingy!" chuckled Gan Waga, rubbing his hands together. "Dears, dears! They coming to push my igloo overs, Chingy, all three of them!"

"Careful, old warrior!" said Ching Lung. "Make sure, Gan. It may be one of the gamekeepers, and if you drown a gamekeeper the coroner will be rude to you."

For all Gan Waga knew about coroners, a coroner might have been something to eat. He listened again.

"Three of them, Chingy! I hears the snow crunch, crunch, crunch!" he whispered. "Ha, ha, ha! I only hopes they do try to push my poor old igloo flat!"

Gan Waga wormed his way through the tunnel, and Ching Lung followed. If Prout, Maddock, or O'Rooney got hurt or wet, the prince was of opinion that they fully deserved it.

Even if it is an easy thing to push down a man's house, no honest-minded person would ever dream of doing so. And to steal out in the still and gloom of the night for such a foll purpose was monstrous. The three mariners seemed to want to make a kind of hobby of it.

Three dark figures, outlined clearly against the white background of snow, were slowly approaching the lake. Of

course, Gan Waga had dared them to come, and threatened to swat them hard if they did come; but that was a poor excuse to descend three strong on that solitary and simple-minded Eskimo.

"Whisht! Go nisy, bhoys!" said Barry O'Rooney. "Oi spy footprints in snow. Somewan has come along in front of us and left his tracks. Phwat says Sexton Blake?"

"The prince, souse me!" said Maddock. "You don't need to call in Sexton Blake to know that. That's a foot, Barry—not a great beetle-smasher, like yours!"

"Bedad, then, the prince is unlucky!" grinned Barry O'Rooney. "Av he's foolish enough to kape bad company, he'll have to go through ut! We'll do ut in style; not wan of your chape smashes, but a rale collapse! Get round the igloo, and when Oi say the word fall on ut loike wan man. Then up, bhoys, and scuttle for home, swate home. And by the toime they've done bellowing and got the snow out of their oies they'll never know we've been there."

"They'll see our tracks, silly!" said Prout.

"And phwat matter av they do see our tracks! How were we to know the prince was inside? Oi ax you that. Aren't we gentlemen? Would we ever dhrame of being so unmannerly as to peep through a strange window to see who was inside? A swate little house, isn't it? Wan of the happy homes of England! How beautiful they stand, wid roses round the dure! Oi'll wager Gan has gulped down enough rabbit-stew for six—the fat glutton—and gone to slape to dhrame about more grub! Grub, grub, grub, and still more grub—whale-oil and blubber and butther and tallow candles and bacon-fat and suet—that's all he lives for!"

"Shut up!" said Maddock. "Give it a rest, for the sake of Mike, Barry! Can't you keep that chin of yours from wagging for ten seconds at a stretch? Souse me! If he is asleep, he sleeps light, and his great ugly ears are as sharp as needles! If he hears us he won't stop

inside to have the shack shoved down on him; he'll pop out of his hole quick as a weasel. Besides, you chump, he ain't likely to be asleep, with the prince there. The proper way is to rush it and get it over quick."

"That's the ticket, by honey!" agreed Prout. "Of course he isn't asleep! Rush in, push in, and rush out! 'Go!'"

The house-wreckers made a dash for the ice, though it was not a very tremendous dash owing to the depth of the snow.

"Murther! Ow! Help! Oi'm gone!" shrieked the frenzied voice of Barry O'Rooney.

"Souse me! What—Ow! Help!" shrieked the no less frenzied voice of Benjamin Maddock, the bo'sun.

The ice had given way beneath their feet, and feet foremost they sank into the icy flood, squirting up fountains of water. For the moment Prout had escaped. He tried to grab at the nearest head, which happened to be the bo'sun's, and stopped a snowball, thrown by an unseen hand, with his left ear. To level things up, a second snowball smote him in the right ear. Not liking it at all, and heedless of the frantic yells of his drowning comrades, Prout passed the igloo and Gan Waga's fire across the little island. It seemed safer to go that way, but unfortunately it was not so, for the Eskimo had fortified his igloo very effectively. There was a third splash and a third howl.

"Got him, Chingy!" shouted Gan Waga, dancing in his delight. "He inside too, Chingy—rights in the merry old soup. Dears, dears! Oh, ha, ha, ha, haah!"

The water was not very deep, but it was very cold, and as soon as the unhappy housebreakers discovered that they were more likely to freeze to death than drown, they stopped caterwanling and got out. As they slunk away Gan Waga hugged Ching Lung and wept a little on the bosom of the prince's fur overcoat.

(Continued on next page.)

TOM MERRY'S FOE!

(Continued from page 16.)

it off! You came here to fight me, Tom Merry. What did you interfere with Cutts for?"

Tom stared at him.

"Wouldn't you have interfered?" he demanded.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope so; but probably not."

"Rot!" said Tom, dabbing his streaming nose with his handkerchief. "Oh, my hat! I feel pretty done! Ow!"

"I should have been pretty done if you hadn't come up!" said Cardew quietly. "Cutts was givin' me jip, and he meant to give me more! But I think you've got worse than I should have got. You chipped in on my account—like a fool!"

"Thanks!" said Tom, still dabbing.

"Like a fool!" repeated Cardew deliberately. "But—but I'd give most of the things I possess, Tom, to be a fool like you! Can you guess that I had Racke here to play foul if you got the better of me? I'm glad to say I changed my mind and kicked him out—some rag of decency left that I'd overlooked, I suppose. When we were at Eastwood House at Christmas, Tom, you smacked my face, and I've thought of nothing since but revenge. You can smack it again if you like."

"I don't like—and I'm sorry—"

"That's all right! I asked for it, same as I've asked for what you've given Cutts. This fight of ours isn't postponed; it's off. No need for you to demonstrate that you can lick me; you've licked Cutts, who is good for three of me. Still, we'll have it out one of these days if you're keen on it."

"I'm not keen on it."

"There's a pool in the wood where you can bathe your face," said Cardew. "Let me help you; you're fairly done! And—and if you feel inclined to kick me, go ahead! I don't mind!"

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"Fathead!" said Tom, laughing.

He leaned on Cardew's arm as they went through the wood, No one seeing them then would have guessed that the two juniors were rivals and foes.

Tom Merry, indeed, did not know whether Cardew was still his enemy in the following days. Cardew seemed to avoid him. He was still junior captain, and Tom Merry's name did not appear in the football list. On all sides it was felt that Cardew's tenure of the junior captaincy was precarious, and that a struggle was coming between Cardew and Tom Merry—a struggle the result of which was doubtful, but which was certain to be determined and obstinate. Possibly even Ralph Reckness Cardew himself did not fully know whether, after what had happened in the wood, he was still Tom Merry's Foe.

THE END.

(Another extra-long school story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, chums: "JUST LIKE CARDEW!" By Martin Clifford. Don't miss this splendid treat!)

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"Do yo'-do-do yo' think they—they come backs any morer, Chingy?" he sobbed.

"I cannot tell, dear heart, but I think not," said the prince, as he watched the half-drowned mariners floating it over the snow. "Why do you ask? Do you wish them back?"

"Yes, Chingy, I do," said the Eskimo, "only so that I could push them in again. Oh, ho, ho, ho, hoo! Oh, dears, dears! I think I shall start to laugh in a minute, Chingy. We swatted and biffed them lovelyfuls, hunk? Ha, ha, ha, ha, baah! I teaches them to push over my igloos! I larn them, and I'll larn them morer soonfuls, old ducks!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Good Catch!

PROUT, Maddock, and Barry O'Rooney were too tough and seasoned for their soaking to do them much harm. They were miserable, and they were also angry. They slunk into the house, and were glad that they had not to go upstairs, for it is not easy to climb a staircase when wearing trousers frozen at the knees almost as stiff as boards. Their fingers were so numbed that they could scarcely get their clothes off, but they towelled each other briskly till the circulation came back again.

"It's not worth dressing again to-night!" growled Prout as he wiped out his damp pipe. "It's lucky I've got a watertight 'baccy-pouch, so I'm getting into bed to have a smoke. If your 'baccy's wet, Ben, sing out, and I'll sling mine across to you. By honey, we didn't half fall into it, did we? Drat that blubber-chewing Eskimo!"

"Bedad, he must have bored holes all round that rotten oiland!" said Barry O'Rooney. "Br-r-r! Oi'm about as cold as a frog in a snow-blizzard, and Oi can't kape my knees from hitting aich other. Bad luck to Gan Waga! Br-r-r! Me-my teeth are beginning to rattle! Ochone! They must have fetched these sheets straight off the iced afore they put them on the bed! Tommy, be a sport. Shove your head out of the dure and yell to the butler chap to bring a hot-water bottle!"

"And some hot rum, souse me, Tommy!" added the bo'sun. "Tell him to put plenty of rum in it, with some lemon and two lumps of sugar, and make it boiling hot!"

"If you want hot-water bottles and hot rum, my lads, get 'em for yourselves," said Prout. "I'm feeling cosy at last, and, by honey, I'm not shifting out of it till morning!"

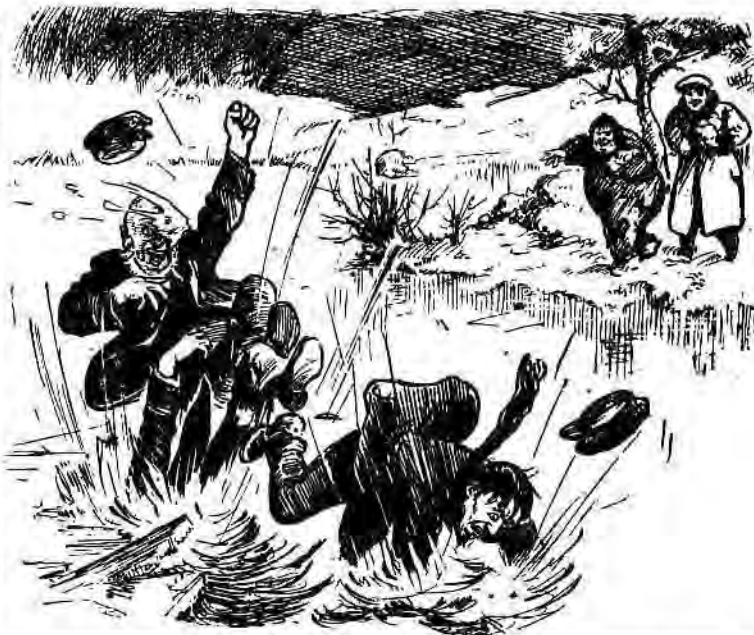
"Ochone! Oi'm sure my fate have dropped off, for Oi can't faal thim!" moaned Barry O'Rooney. "Phwat a loife. Fool that Oi was ever to lave awate Ballyunion and come to say. Who sharrted that stunt about going out and bashing in the igloo? Show me the man and let me curse him! Where's my fate? Oi must have left them in my boots, for Oi'm sure they're not in bed with me. That treacherous monsther! Oi hope Oi haven't lost my fate, for Oi'm longing to kick him!"

"There's no getting away from the fact, it was the Eskimo's game," said Prout. "He got us fine that go, by honey, but our turn next. I can wait, so good-night, boys!"

Prout knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and extinguished the candle by squeezing the wick between his finger and thumb.

"You were in bed last, Ben," said O'Rooney. "Did you lock the dure?"

"I ain't sure, but I think I did," answered the bo'sun. "If you think I



The ice gave way beneath the housebreakers' feet and they sank into the icy flood. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Gan Waga, as he pelted them with snow-balls from the bank.

didn't, show a leg and lock it yourself. I'm fed-up to the teeth, souse me, and I'm going to sleep!"

There was one person in Darrancombe who did not sleep that night, and that person was Gan Waga the Eskimo, for Gan Waga the Eskimo was hunting. To be more accurate, Gan Waga had gone trapping, which is not exactly the same thing. The keen weather had made the wild creatures fiercely hungry, and therefore bolder and less cautious. The Eskimo understood their ways, and he could have taught Rupert Thurston's head gamekeeper in a few hours more than he had learned in years. And if Gan had cared to turn poacher he would have sent the head gamekeeper raving mad, for in a week he would have stripped the park bare of fur and feather.

And Gan Waga's trapping was very successful, considering that he was trying to capture one of the wariest of all four-footed beasts. In the grey of the dawn he shouldered two bulky sacks and plodded away, keeping a wary look about him, though there was not much danger of encountering any of the keepers in such weather and at such an hour. Curiously enough, the moment Gan Waga mounted the steps of Darrancombe Hall the front door was opened by Prince Ching Lung.

"S-sh! Don't make a row!" said the prince, who was wearing a dressing-gown and slippers. "Did you do any good?"

"Nines of them, Chingy," grinned the Eskimo. "I knew betterer than Rupert. I gotted nines, but I not gotted them alla, Chingy."

"Where?"

"In a strong sacks, Chingy. They not started to fight yet, but they will if I not let them out sooness. I let them outss, Chingy, and then I go backs to my igloo and have some rabbit stew fo' breakfasts and play shut-eye, fo' I a bit tiredness."

"Well, I promised to open the door for you at six, and here I am!" said Ching Lung. "I didn't expect you to trap nine live foxes, though I know you're a real dandy at the game. Rupert will be jolly pleased, for he has too many foxes.

They won't do in that sack, for, if they don't bite their way out, they'll start scrapping with each other, or get smothered. Where can you put them where they'll be safe till we can take them outside and turn them down?"

Gan Waga smiled in the pale light of the candle Ching Lung was holding, and pointed across the hall.

"They be all rights in the sacks, Chingy," he said. "I shoves them in theres. Yo' only gotted to tell the huntsman to fetch them."

Gan Waga went out to fetch the sack, but before bringing it in he cut a short slit in it, knowing well what would happen and very quickly, for no sack with the tiniest slit in it will hold a fox for long. Then Gan Waga crossed the hall and turned the handle of the door. He could have howled with delicious joy when the door which Maddock had not locked swung open. Gan Waga tiptoed in and placed the writhing, evil-smelling sack at the foot of Barry O'Rooney's cot.

"So that's done, Chingy!" he said. "I gladness I catch those foxes for old Ruperts! Dears, I tiredness! I smoke one of yo' cigarettes, and then I goes."

Ching Lung had no idea that the room was tenanted, but he knew it before Gan Waga had finished his cigarette, for three howling, bare-footed men in night attire bolted out of it, their eyes goggling and their hair standing on end.

By the light of his candle Ching Lung saw foxes scurrying over the cots, foxes trying to climb the window curtains, and foxes trying to scurry up the chimney! Foxes, foxes everywhere, and not a hound to hunt them.

On his way back to his igloo Gan Waga fell down in the snow seventeen times through laughing so much,

THE END.

(Look out for another of the ripping yarns by famous Sidney Drew. Meanwhile, make a point of reading: "HAT-TRICK GUY!" a rattling football story, written specially for next week's GEM.)

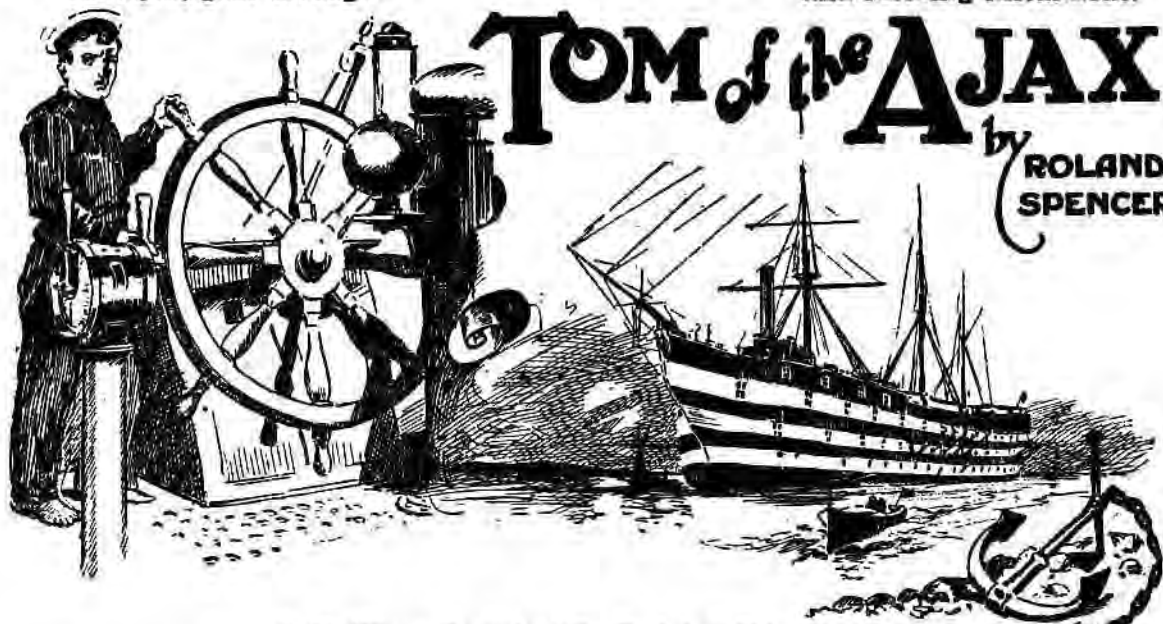
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Tom Gale, the plucky young hero of the Ajax, goes through—

—much trouble in this powerful and thrilling instalment!

TOM of the AJAX

by ROLAND SPENCER



A Thrilling, True-to-Life Training-Ship Story.

The Scissor Trap!

AS the steamer's bows sawed up and down in the great hole it had torn in the plates of the Ajax, pandemonium reigned on that low-positioned deck of the ship.

Boys ran shouting in terror here and there, tripping over the hems of their long nightshirts. Dicky West had been flung against the lockers; while Tom, gasping with horror, stared round and shouted for order. His voice was drowned in the melee.

Desperate, the lad realised that something must be done to maintain order. He leaped up and charged, shouting, for the crowd of boys fighting and pushing and yelling at the ladderway leading to the decks above. It was a bottle-neck there, resulting in such a crush as Tom had never before witnessed on the ship.

Above the shouts of terror came cries of pain, as younger boys were crushed and pressed against the railings on either side of the ladderway. Tom meant to get there and force some sort of order. It was his duty as a chief petty officer.

The young leader of the Hoods, however, tripped over his nightshirt, and fell flat on the deck, the heavy fall winding him. But he at once scrambled to his feet, and found that he had fallen on his own working clothes, thrown on to the deck at the first impact of the collision.

Like a flash, Tom drew on his trousers over his nightshirt. He had noticed that the long garments were impeding the movements of the others, and making panic worse than ever. Then he rushed at the surging mass near the ladderway. Above the cries, shouts from the steamer and the upper deck of the Ajax could now be heard. But the orlop deck was the greatest danger point in the ship.

The young chief of the Hoods sprang over the heads of the boys at the outskirts of the throng, bearing them down under him. Stoniky Burr had been one of the panic-stricken fighters, pushing and crushing down the smaller boys. It

was he who first went down under Tom's attack.

"Order!" bawled Tom, and his voice at once quietened the din immediately around him. Tom seized his opportunity. "Parade in front of your hammocks!" he yelled. "Chiefs of divisions, march off! Quickest way! Don't be a lot of idiotic fools—fighting like a school full of girls because someone yelled 'Mouse!'"

This raised a laugh, and the din subsided as if by magic.

"Chief P.O.'s, get busy!" roared Tom, in a pretended rage. "Let's hear from you! Back, you Grenvilles! Hi, there! If you Blakes want to disgrace the ship, you can. The other divisions won't!"

Tom gave the lead himself by yelling to all the Hoods to get back to their hammocks. He led the way for his own division, and the rest, though some of the smaller boys were white with terror, placed themselves under the orders of their leaders.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

TOM GALE, a sturdily-built youth and chief petty officer of the starboard watch aboard the famous old training-ship Ajax, which is moored near the southern bank of the River Thames, a quarter of a mile down the river from Fleetditch.

STONIKY BURR, C.P.O. of the port watch, a bully of the first water.

DICKY WEST is a cheerful ginger-headed youth and a staunch chum of Gale's. Trouble arises when Tom Gale is detailed, together with Stoniky Burr, as a hare in a cross-country hare-and-hounds that is to take place. Burr—unlike Tom, whose whole heart and soul is in the chase—soon gets fed-up, and suggests holding back. But not so with Tom. He is anxious to elude the hounds, who are hot in chase. Burr's anger is at once aroused, and when Tom is running across a plank bridge Burr manages a spill, and Tom falls headlong into the creek below. His words and a flight follow, and Burr is thrashed and left. It is then that a mysterious, sinister man in green spectacles approaches Burr. He gives him the name of KALOE, and he enlists the aid of Burr in a plot against Tom Gale, without, however, giving any reason for this.

Later, when on the yardarm, sixty feet above the water, Burr tries to force Tom off, but he himself is precipitated into the water and is rescued by Tom, although the latter realises that Burr's attempt was deliberate.

Tom is puzzling the whole thing out in his hammock at night, when he is startled by a rending crash, and he feels the Ajax quiver from stem to stern. The next moment he utters a startled cry as a jagged hole appears in the ship's side, torn like paper by the stem of a huge red-rusty steamer which crashes into the Ajax.

(Now read on.)

Thus, as Mr. Landfar, the chief officer-instructor, and Mr. Dennithorne of the "physical jerks" class came leaping down the ladderway, they were agreeably surprised to see that there was not a break-neck panic in progress on the orlop deck.

The Grenville division nearest to the staircase, began to scramble up hurriedly for the upper deck. They were followed by the Blakes, but Tom noticed that Stoniky Burr, in the rear of the Blakes, looked back and then dodged behind the ladderway.

Tom was about to see the Hoods off in the wake of the Blakes, when a series of yells sounded out from above. The clang of the steamer's engine-room telegraph followed, the churn of her screw, and then the great rusty bows began to draw out from the hole in the side of the Ajax. Tom shouted a warning to the boys of his division to stand clear, and a voice boomed out through a megaphone from the quarter-deck of the Ajax.

"Full speed ahead, you on the steamer, there!" bawled the officer. "Keep her jammed in! We're damaged!"

At that instant the lights on the orlop deck went out, and again shouts of terror sounded out from the boys, the roar of the chief officer-instructor, and Mr. Dennithorne bawling for order echoing above the din. Tom felt the air from the hole in the ship, now that the bows of the steamer had drawn out, blow cold on his face again. He shouted to the Hoods to stand fast, but a startled exclamation terminated his order.

Out of the darkness a pair of hands had gripped his throat. They seemed to be choking the life out of him. He struggled, but he was forced back—back towards the hole in the training-ship's side.

It was all so unexpected that it seemed to overwhelm the plucky youngster, but he clawed at his assailant's arms and grabbed at his face. He could feel the heavy breathing close to his cheek. Then the flash of a lantern from the steamer's bows shone through the hole and lit up the face of the person attacking him.

Stoniky Burr!

Swiftly dodging down, Tom let drive at Burr's body. What was the fellow's game? Why was he attacking just now—at this desperate moment for them all? Had he suddenly gone mad?

Young Gale fought like a tiger. Burr and he swayed about in the now even thicker darkness, the noise of their fighting drowned by the shrieks of the boys and the vibrating roar of distress from the steamer's siren. Through it all, Tom heard the shouts from the deck of the steamer:

"All clear ahead to run home sir! Ay, ay; a hair-line! Full speed ahead, there!"

The steamer's engine-room telegraph rang out, followed by the powerful stamp and quiver of her engines. Tom felt, rather than saw that the great rusty craft was forging ahead again to jam her bows back into the hole in the Ajax, to hold them there with her beating screw to minimise the inrush of water through the hole.

Burr was clinging to Tom like a tiger to its prey. Tom lashed out weakly, for Burr's grip had left him breathing with difficulty. Then the bully of the Ajax crashed his head into Tom's teeth, and the young leader of the Hoods went back with a strangled cry.

Tom was suddenly conscious that he was in the open air, but he had nothing solid below him. His brain worked like lightning. He was through the hole in the training-ship's side.

The steamer's bows were crashing in again. He would be crushed to death when rusted steel should meet the jagged torn edges of the plates of the Ajax. Young Gale's feet were scraping on the edge of the tarp wooden orlop deck of the training-ship. His hand had caught a curled and jagged strip of steel hanging from its mother plate. The lad pulled himself up, meaning to scramble into the hole again, for he was actually outside, and could see things dimly, but instead of leaping in he sprang back with a swift cry of fear.

The great rusty bows of the steamer were just boring forward into the hole. Tom saved himself by a hair's breadth, and that only by diving backwards into the water between the steamer and the Ajax. The lumpy, curdling, troubled water met the back of his head like the blow from the hand of a giant.

Luckily, Tom did not lose consciousness. His head rose above the surface, and he saw through the wraiths of fog the rusty steamer towering above him on one side and the tall black and white side of the Ajax on the other. The steamer's heel had been caught by the tide and was being pressed down river, while her stamping engines and thrusting screw kept her great bows jammed tightly into the hole in the Ajax.

A swift exclamation escaped Tom at the realisation of his new danger. The steamer was closing in towards the Ajax! He would be caught like a badger in a hole! He would be crushed like an egg-shell under a steam-hammer.

His heart seemed to miss a beat, as he struck out desperately down the tide, arm over arm, lashing the water to foam as he swam. Could he race the tide and so defeat the scissor trap into which he had fallen? Would he clear before rusty iron crashed against painted steel?

Tom Gale got clear under the steamer's high quarter, just when both fabrics quivered and groaned, as eight thousand tons brought up solid against the four thousand of the training-ship.

The plucky young Hood felt a wave of relief surge in his breast as he swept clear of the two ships, but he had only escaped one danger to be swirled in a riot of lashing and curdling water into another. He struck out gamely for the great, slimy, weedy mooring chains at the stern of the Ajax, but he could make no headway against the current, and was whisked clear without being able to get within fifteen yards of the chains.

"Well, I'm alive and kicking," said Tom to himself. "But I've no sense of direction. Goodness knows where I am swimming to. Must keep on, though, to prevent cramp."

His teeth were chattering with the cold and the reaction, but he put his head down to it and swam on with an easy side-stroke—a stroke with which he had once swum over two miles in a swimming test. The water was choppy, but, being swept along with the current as he was, and closed in by a narrow circle of fog, the direction of the water's run could not be determined by him. He did not know whether he was swimming with, across, or against the current.

Sounds, muffled and mysterious through the fog, conveyed nothing to him. And soon even they could not be heard, for the water became very broken and lumpy.

"A tide-rip," muttered Tom. "Must be the one off—"

He broke off suddenly. He had distinctly heard the thump of a screw. He began to tread water, cocking his head to listen intently. Yes, it was an approaching steam-driven vessel. He listened for the sound of its siren.

It came soon, seeming to rip through the fog, so near it was. Tom turned quickly and looked in the direction of the sound. He trod water briskly, all his nerves strung up to highest tension. If the boat should run him down, that would be an end of him for sure.

"Must be a tug just put out from the shore," muttered the young swimmer, peering into the whiteness ahead of the narrow rim of tossing water. "Gosh, I can hear the wash now! Jingo, it must be quite close!"

Bracing himself for the task in mind that of throwing himself sideways if the stem of the tug should be pointing direct for him—Tom waited with his heart in his mouth.

The wash could be heard like a roaring torrent in his ears now. Then, quick as a thought, a dark form leapt swiftly

out of the mists with its red and green eyes and the white glimmer of the mast-head light above.

Straight at Tom it came, and the plucky youngster literally threw himself sideways. The wash of the boat had him in its grip. It surged the lad under, almost choking the life out of him, and Tom struggled frantically to keep himself down, fearful as he was of the beating screw of the little vessel.

His ears buzzed and his head felt fit to burst. He remained below water as long as he could, then struck out savagely for the surface for a breath of life-giving air.

His head shot up from the depths, and as he filled his lungs with a hiss, he saw the stern light of the tug just glimmering away in the thickness of the foggy night.

Full of thankfulness at his escape, though his half-formed idea of bawling for help had been frustrated, Tom swam steadily on on his breast. He followed the direction of the tug with his eyes, then set off at right-angles, trying to sense his direction by the feel of the wind on his face.

How much longer Tom swam he could not judge. He only knew that he was getting to the last of his strength. His arms were becoming leaden and the ginger he had previously put into the kick with his legs was now beyond him. He could only go steadily and hope for the best.

Blue with cold, aching in every limb, sluggish of movement and laboured of breathing, the only thing in Tom that remained buoyant was hope. And that seemed to brace him up to keep on keeping on. It was all he could do.



Like a giant of blackness the coaster sprang forward from the mists, pointing dead for the buoy. Tom Gale shouted in a frenzy of alarm, and dragged himself to his feet, clinging desperately to the reeling cage-work of his refuge.

A Fight for Life I

THE swirling waters helped Tom. As the great bulk of the two vessels moved closer and closer, the water was squeezed out of place, assisting the natural current of the ebb.

"While there's life there's hope," he chattered through his teeth. "Better this than being squashed by the steamer or churned to death by a tug's screw."

Tom now realised that he was doing little more than supporting himself, while the tide swirled him rapidly seawards. The brave lad struck out as strongly as he could, but it was a very weak best, and the boy could not but realise that he was about done.

He floated on his back for a luxurious two minutes, but had to get down to his stroke again to try to keep the blood circulating through his veins. He trudged for a few yards, just like a dog swims, then a swift cry, half of alarm and half of delight, escaped him!

He had seen something! A dim, ghostly light glimmering in the thickness ahead. But it disappeared suddenly.

Then he heard something! The clank of a ring-bolt and the rattle of chain on iron, followed by an ominous swirling and sugging of water.

The sounds were ones Tom could easily interpret. It was a buoy, swirling and swinging in the tide. It must be a gas-buoy, for he had seen the light. He hardly had time to think about it, when the black, conical shape leapt at him from the fog, and the rushing tide crashed the lad heavily against the swirling monster.

Weak hands clutched at the hanging chains and slipped on the weeds clinging to the buoy. The tide gripped the boy's legs and swept them round the side of the rounded buoy, but gamely he hung on, his fingers seemingly having no grip left in them.

He held, though! And he was able to raise his right hand and get hold of one of the uprights of the cage-work of the buoy. Then he began to claw upwards, to try to haul himself to comparative safety, clear of that gripping and tearing water.

How he managed it, Tom never knew; but at last he was lying round the upper part of the buoy, clinging to the conical cage-work with the light flashing its double flash out into the fog every five seconds.

The down-river wind seemed to be cutting through him like a knife, but Tom knew that the buoy was his only salvation, so he fought to retain his senses. It was a terrific effort of will, but Tom won! He clung there shivering and longing for the fog to lift and for rescue to come to him. He could keep covering and uncovering the light, if the fog cleared, so that someone would come out to investigate, find him, and take him ashore.

The boy went through the plan in detail, again and again, during those terrible hours on the heaving and clanking buoy. It would work without a hitch. Only let the fog lift.

Suddenly, Tom's deadened senses were on the alert. He heard the rattle of sheetblocks as a big sailing craft manoeuvred somewhere a little up-river. He knew the sound well—had heard it often through the steel side of the Ajax while lying wakeful in his hammock. A sailing craft gybing!

Young Gale dragged himself to a sitting position. He shouted, but the weakness of his own voice frightened him. He realised the present futility of shouting, so just waited, strung up to high

ALL SPORTS
THE TOPICAL ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 830.

tension by the suspense. Would the approaching craft come near enough to hear a cry, sent out at just the right second?

A steady surging in the water was the next sound that came to the boy's ears. The rumbling of agitated canvas had ceased; the sails were once more 'asleep'—filled out on the other gybe by the fresh wind. Tom could hear the drone of a voice—"Four fathom; three-an'-a-half"—as a man made soundings with the lead; could even now hear the creaking of the jaws of the gaffs and booms. Then, like a giant of blackness, above which was a pinnacle of leaning canvas dissolving to nothingness overhead in the fog, the coaster sprang forward from the mists, pointing dead for the buoy!

The lad shouted in a frenzy of alarm, and dragged himself to his feet, clinging desperately to the reeling cage-work of his refuge. A shout rang out from the foredeck of the coaster:

"Hellum har-rd up! Battery Ledge Buoy!"

There was a shouted order from aft, followed by the grinding of the wheel-chains as the rudder was forced promptly over, then the clumping of two pairs of seaboots on the wooden decks, the roar of disturbed canvas, jerking of sheets and rattling of masthoops, followed by a sickening crash as the vessel's booms smashed over on to the other gybe! Tom felt the wash from the seemingly over-powering mass of the boat surging about his knees, the buoy lurched heavily, nearly throwing the exhausted youngster off. But in a flash, being a sailor, he knew that danger of collision was past. The helmsman of the ketch—for coasting ketch it was—had gybed all standing to alter course and escape collision.

The coaster was smashing by! Tom had not been seen! The lad shouted as loudly as he could, but the men on the coaster had other work to do than stand and gape at the buoy. The youngster felt the chance of rescue again slipping from his grasp, for the ketch was now well clear—her jibboom already disappearing in the fog down the tide.

Tom's senses seemed to reel. This was almost beyond human endurance. But a heavy bump on the buoy brought him back to quick thought, and, no sooner seeing than understanding, the lad braced himself for a spring. The boat which was being towed by the coaster had swerved as the ketch suddenly altered direction, and had hit the buoy before being jerked clear by its mother craft.

Even as he tightened his muscles Tom felt that this was further torture—another chance of escape being snatched from him. The boat was now a couple of yards from the buoy, the painter snaking in the water, loose, to the counter of the ketch. In another second it would tauten, and the boat would be jerked round and away before Tom's feet could clatter on to its bottom-boards. Then he would fall into the water and lose boat, buoy, and all other slender chances of life! For Tom was about at the last of his strength.

Another hour would see him senseless, with nerveless fingers slipping from the buoy, to let his exhausted body slide down into the yellow depths of the river-mouth.

Even as he doubted his ability to spring to the boat he was in mid-air, hurtling towards his last chance of rescue. He saw the boat's painter tautening, and saw the boat itself jerk round while he was still in mid-air. Then, joy of joys, his bare feet thumped into the stern-sheets, and he crumpled up, completely at the end of his strength.

The lad did not immediately lose consciousness. He heard a shout—it seemed from afar, a disjointed, mumbling sort of string of words:

"Split me . . . in the boat. . . . Ay, ay, jumped over from the buoy. . . . Lyin' senseless now . . ."

"Haul in; then, ye fool . . . Get 'im aboard . . ."

A jerky sort of motion that seemed very pleasant followed. Then—

"Blink me eyes, if it ain't a trainin'-ship boy . . . From the Ajax, o' course . . ."

The voices trailed off into nothingness; but before the exhausted youngster had entirely lost his senses one burning realisation was throbbing in his brain.

He was saved!

The Fight in the Lane!

TWENTY minutes later, with his clothes steaming before the stove in the cabin of the coaster, and clad in a pair of tarry trousers and a shirt—the property of the mate, and consequently about six sizes too big for him—Tom learned that he was aboard the 250 tons coasting ketch Breadwinner, bound round the Ness for Great Yarmouth.

The skipper—a big, bearded man with a tanned, hard-bitten face—sat sucking at a clay pipe in the little cabin as he surveyed the youngster. Tom was still looking very exhausted, but he was built of tough stuff, and where many other boys would have been utterly played out, he was already feeling almost chirpy again.

"So y'mean t'say, lad, that yer've spent most o' the night on that there buoy?" said the skipper of the Breadwinner, in amazement. "Shiver me, if that don't beat all! But I reckon it's mighty lucky we blew along when we did. You couldn't ha' stuck it much longer, I'll warrant!"

Tom nodded.

"That's a fact! I was just about done!"

Briefly he told the wondering old coasting skipper how he had come to be on the buoy at all. The other whistled.

"Sounds more like a bloomin' cinema show, don't it?" he said at last. "You're mighty lucky not to be feedin' the fishes in Sea Reach by now!" He puffed thoughtfully at his pipe. Up above Tom could hear the grate of the wheel-chains, the creaking of the mizzen-boom, and the occasional patter of reef-points on the sail, like a flurry of rain on a window-pane, every time the running ketch yawed so that the wind was partly spilled from her sails.

"We're bound for Great Yarmouth, as I say," went on the skipper. "Can't put you ashore afore we get there, y'know. But wi' this wind we'll be there in twenty-four hours, especially if this blamed fog lifts soon."

Out of the murk the fog-bell of the Chapman lighthouse, off Canvey Island, came to their ears. The skipper glanced at the clock on the fore bulkhead. Six o'clock.

"This fog should be liftin' mighty soon," he said.

He was right. With the coming of day the fog winnowed to little more than trailing mist-wraiths. The sun soon dried these up, and, climbing up on deck, Tom found the broad waters of the Thames estuary bathed in the glorious light. Off Leigh the bawley-boats were running seawards. Tom drew a deep breath. A true sailor at heart, the night



There was a trampling of feet, and Tom felt the grip on his shoulder relax as the boys of the starboard watch came dashing upon the scene.

quicken his pulses, causing his eyes to shine.

All that day the Breadwinner ran before the wind. The sight and feel of the sea did more to pull Tom round after his terrible ordeal than all the tonics and rubbing of the skipper. By nightfall he was almost his old self again.

He turned in at last, in an unoccupied bunk in the cabin. He fell asleep to the sound of washing waves, creaking spars, and the occasional slap of a halliard against one of the masts. Throughout the night the Breadwinner ran on, lifting forward powerfully as the waves rolled under her quarters. When dawn broke the roar of the anchor-chain woke Tom. They were at Yarmouth.

"I wonder what they're thinking on the old Ajax?" the youngster mused, as he sat in the ketch's boat later that morning, as it was rowed shorewards. "And I wonder what damage the old ship suffered? I'll see by the papers."

The skipper of the Breadwinner shook hands warmly with the youngster as they said good-bye at the police-station to which he had accompanied Tom. The police, who seemed to imagine at first that it was a case of a runaway, telegraphed to the Ajax. Tom had learned with great relief that the ship was safe.

An hour later a reply to the wire came through, and Tom was put in charge of the guard of a train bound Londonwards. The train steamed slowly out of the station, gathered speed, and soon the beautiful Suffolk countryside was flying by rapidly.

It was, however, a tedious journey for Tom to Fleethithe; but at last, when

evening was closing in, the training-ship youngster alighted at his destination.

"Run! Doesn't seem to be anyone to meet the prodigal son," he told himself, as he glanced round the familiar station. "I didn't expect a red carpet and a band, but I should have thought someone—even if it was only old Dicky—would have been sent along."

Outside the station he looked round again. Once more his hopes were dashed. So, with a shrug of the shoulders, Tom set off briskly to walk the two miles that separated him from the training-ship.

The sun was setting as he left the houses of Fleethithe, and when he turned down the long, tree-bordered lane known as Black Dell Lane, that led to the jetty opposite the Ajax, the lonely road ahead was gloomy with the swift-gathering darkness.

"This is a cheerful home-coming. I don't think," said Tom to himself. "Still, I suppose I must reckon myself mighty lucky to be doing this home-coming stunt at all."

His feet crunched softly in the road, the only sound that broke the somewhat eerie silence of that gloomy spot. Black Dell Lane, dark and shadowy at the best of times, was not a cheery thoroughfare on a dark night. Tom, anxious for the warmth and light aboard the Ajax, quickened his steps.

"I wonder why on earth no one was at the station?" he repeated, puzzled. "I—"

He broke off abruptly. The next instant he had leaped backwards, a swift, startled cry breaking from him, for out

of the darkness to his right a shadowy form had come leaping. Tom had a swift glimpse of a long, sallow face, and then he was struggling desperately, senses whirling, with his unknown adversary.

A dozen conflicting thoughts raced through his brain. What could it mean?

Even as he asked himself the question his fist crashed home with staggering effect on the jaw of the man who had attacked him so suddenly, so mysteriously. Tom, taken off his guard though he had been, was fighting now with all the fierce determination of his dogged pluck. The man came at him again. Tom saw the bearded face contorted with fury in the dim light. Again the youngster sent the other reeling back with a straight left that would have felled a professional pugilist. And this time the strange figure of the darkness lay where he fell, apparently knocked clean out!

Tom was breathing hard, trying to collect his wits. Then he heard swift footsteps behind him, and was just in time to swing round and meet the attack of another dark figure that came leaping at him through the gloom.

The next instant Tom was fighting in desperate silence against two more assailants—men whose purpose in attacking him he had no further time to wonder over.

The youngster had retreated till his back was against the hedge, only his exceptional skill as a boxer enabling him to gain that strategic position. One swift glance up and down the dark lane

had showed him that it was deserted, and he knew that in that lonely spot the chances were a hundred-to-one against anyone turning up to help him against the terrible odds.

Already the man lying in the road was staggering to his feet, cursing, to come forward menacingly towards the combatants. Three to one! In his heart Tom knew the game was up.

But he fought on, with teeth clenched. His blood was up, and he scarcely felt a stinging blow on the side of the head as a clenched fist crashed on his temple. He felt his own fist smash into the open, gaping mouth of the man—felt the skin of his knuckles break on the other's teeth. And then another blow struck Tom between the eyes. He crashed back into the hedge, blinded and dizzy. The next moment strong hands had grasped him, pinning him down, and a harsh voice grated in his ear:

"Lie still, you cub! Lie still, or—"

But that last blow had finished the youngster. He had not even the power to struggle as he was hauled roughly to his feet. Dimly he heard muttered voices, felt himself half-led, half-carried down the lane. A black shape loomed up before him. A motor-car was waiting there, and already one of the men had set the engine purring.

The door was opened swiftly. Strong arms thrust him forward.

It was the sight of that waiting car that roused Tom from the dizzy stupor into which that smashing blow had sent him. He had no time to wonder as to the reason. All he realised was that these mysterious assailants meant to abduct him. In a flash the dazed stupor fell from him.

With a sudden fierce twist he flung himself free. There was a shout of rage from the bearded figure who had started the car. He came in leaping pursuit, and in the light of the car's headlamps, which he had switched on, the man's eyes gleamed strange and green. Green spectacles. Tom sprang aside, struck out at a second assailant, and then his heart gave a bound of joy.

Down the lane, from the direction of the river, he heard the crunch of feet, the rattle of wheels. But above those sounds came to his ears the words of a song that he had heard only in one place—aboard the Ajax:

"There's good chaps in the port watch—
As good as on the sea!
But my number's two-'itty-fif',
So starboard's the watch for me!"

A fatigue party of the starboard watch from the training-ship—it could mean nothing else! And two-fifty-five—Dickie West's number!

Tom turned to race towards the oncoming youngsters. But a foot was thrust out before he could get clear away, and he went sprawling. The next instant he was lying in the road, pinned down by the man on top. A hand came groping for his mouth, but not before he had yelled with all the power of his lungs:

"Help! Quick—Ajax! Ajax!"

Then the hand closed over his mouth, choking back the words. But as it did so he heard an answering shout come out of the darkness—a shout of amazement. Then he heard the racing of footsteps down the lane. Boys of the starboard watch were racing to the rescue!

Perplexity!

"FORWARD the starboard watch!" It was the voice of Dicky West that Tom heard echoing down the lane as the training-ship youngsters came racing through the darkness to where the young leader of the Hoods lay pinned beneath the man with green spectacles.

He heard the muttered oath that broke from his captor, felt the grip on his shoulder relax in sudden startled doubt. Then the boys of the starboard watch were in among them, fists flashing!

The man with the green spectacles—Kalche—sprang to his feet and struck out at the surging crowd of youngsters round him. Tom dragged himself to his feet, saw the whirling shapes of the combatants as they fought in the light from the car's lamps. Then Dicky West was at his side.

"By gum, Tom!"

Tom laughed shakily.

"Guessed right first time, Dicky!" he said. "They attacked me. I don't know what it means—who they are—"

A reeling form staggered back towards them—one of Kalche's men, driven back by the fist of one of the youngsters of the Ajax. He regained his balance immediately and turned to race off into the darkness. But Tom sprang forward, and his leg shot out. The man crashed heavily, and then Tom and Dick were the centre of a struggling group, as half a dozen youngsters fought to drag down the third man.

"Into the car, fools! Into the car!"

It was the voice of the man in green spectacles, almost incoherent with fury and chagrin. His two companions heard it, and sprang for the waiting motor.

"Don't let 'em get away! Catch hold of the rotters!"

Dicky West was yelling gleefully. Dick always enjoyed a scrap. But although there were a dozen youngsters against the three men, those three were desperate. Boys fell back like ninepins before the heavy blows, and the next instant Kalche was at the driver's seat.

The car's engine was still running, and as Kalche opened the throttle he jerked in the clutch. The motor-car leapt

forward like a live thing, and the next moment, with a powerful roar from its exhaust, it had flashed past where Tom and Dicky West were standing. They leapt back just in time, and stood panting in the dark road as they watched the ruby rear-light disappearing down the lane.

"They've got away, blow 'em!" gasped Dicky. "Of all the rotten luck!"

Tom did not answer. His brow was wrinkled. What could it all mean? Who could these men be? And what possible object could there have been for their mysterious attack?

The other youngsters clustered round Tom, asking a dozen questions at once. Tom told his brief story.

"Hanged if I know much more than you chaps do!" he concluded. "It's an absolute mystery! And now they've got away, it doesn't look as if we shall ever find a solution to it!"

Dicky West grunted.

"I should say it is a thundering mystery! It's rum enough to beat the band, this is! What do chaps like that, with a car and all, want with you, Tom?" He broke off with a puzzled frown, to add: "But what are you doing here? We were just off to the station to get some stuff that's turning up there by the seven-thirty train. We were told you'd be blowing along in that train, too. We were to meet you."

Tom felt his jaw tenderly where it had come into hearty contact with a man's fist.

"Some mistake over the train, then—that's all," he said. "I turned up by the train before that. Seems to have been unlucky I did, too! What are you chaps fetching from the station?"

"Oh, some junk or other for patching up the hole that steamship kindly made for us in the orlop deck," answered Dicky. "Three hundredweight of special-sized bolts, or something. There's only a temporary patch there now. Lucky the old Ajax wasn't sunk, too, I can tell you! But the ship that rammed us had the sense to keep her nose in till the engineers on the Ajax were ready with a standard patch. That's a wooden one, you know. But what about you?" he added quickly. And there was something in Dicky's voice that told Tom more than mere words could do. "We all thought you were done for, till we heard from the police at Yarmouth."

"No; I'm far from done for," said Tom shortly. He did not intend to mention Burr's part in the affair till he and Dicky were alone together. "Well, I suppose I'd better blow along with you to the station. And I'll just drop in at the police-station to let 'em know what's happened in the lane. We failed to catch the swabs, but the police may have a bit more luck. They'd got their number-plate covered, I noticed; but we can give a description of the car, at any rate."

The youngsters returned down the lane to where the two handcars had been left. On the way to the railway-station Tom told his story to the police, and the inspector set off immediately to the Ajax for an interview with Commander Boyce.

Tom had a rousing reception on the orlop deck when he had reported himself and had finished with his interviews with various officers. There was only one youngster who was not pleased to see him, and that boy was Burr.

The bully of the Ajax had learnt of Tom's arrival before he saw him, so that Tom had missed the queer look that had leapt into Burr's eyes at the news that

(Continued on opposite page.)



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A WEEK FOR LIFE
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Cup-Tie Competition No Entrance Fee

MUST BE WON

For full Particulars see this week's

ALL SPORTS

Every 2nd. Friday.

Tom Gale was back aboard the ship. But Tom's own eyes were grim as he found an opportunity of taking Burr aside that evening in a deserted corner of the mess-deck.

"What was the idea, Stoniky," asked Tom bluntly, "shoving me through the hole that night?"

Burr had dropped his eyes. He was scowling, but there was also a look of fear on his face.

"What d'you mean?" he stammered.

"I—I dunno what you mean."

Tom chuckled grimly.

"You don't—eh? Well, let me tell you, my bonnie lad, that I jolly well know who it was who shoved me through the hole when the ship was rammed! It was you! And I mean to know the reason why! See?"

"Don't talk like a fool, Gale!" snarled Burr. "I didn't know. It was as dark as pitch, and I got the wind-up and made a bolt for the ladder-way. I know I banged into someone—knocked someone flying. But you must be mad to accuse me of—"

He broke off, stammering.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, cut out that yarn, Stoniky! Think I don't know jolly well? You tried to do for me on the yardarm that same day, only it didn't come off! For some reason of your own you're out to make things hot for me, Stoniky! Goodness knows why. But I can look after myself. But let me tell you this. I can fight my own battles; but if I see you trying the same game as you're playing with me on anyone on this ship who's not able to stand up to you I shan't take it in my own hands to interfere."

"What, you'd go and peach, you sneak?" sneered Burr.

Tom did not answer, but swung on his heel and strode off towards the ladder-way leading down into the orlop deck.

Burr stood looking after the young leader of the Hoods with darkened eyes.

And then on the lower deck, as he made his way towards the Hood division's section, Tom Gale came to a sudden standstill. His lips opened in a low exclamation; a swift thought had flashed into his mind.

"My gum!" he muttered, his face startled. "I wonder? No, hang it, it's not possible!"

But as he turned in that night the thought returned to him, in spite of his words. Could it be that there was some strange connection between Burr's sudden hatred and equally sudden wealth, and with that other attempt on Tom by the man of the green spectacles in Black Dell Lane?

He shook himself impatiently.

"Rot!"

But there was a thoughtful frown on Tom's face as he turned over to go to sleep.

Sleep did not come at once. Before Tom's eyes there was a hideous gleam from countless green eyes. The young C.P.O. turned over, with a grunt, and half buried his head under his blanket in an effort to get rid of the mocking eyes. But still he saw them.

He made up his mind that he had not seen the last of the man with the green spectacles, and that it behoved him to keep his own eyes wide open for further trouble.

He was to be glad that he made that resolution!

(There will be another thrilling instalment of this grand new serial next Wednesday. In the meantime, all my readers who like stories of the sea should start reading "Topsoil Tony!" by the famous David Goodrich, in our companion paper, the "Boys' Friend," now on sale.)



My Readers' Own Corner

Send Your Latest Ribtickler to Me!

TUCK HAMPER AND MONEY PRIZES AWARDED FOR WIT! (If You Are Not a Prizewinner This Week You May Be Next.)

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

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER.

BOTH WRONG!

Two dear old ladies were listening to the band, and arguing whether the piece being played was the Barcarolle from the "Tales of Hoffman" or the "Soldiers' Chorus from "Faust." At last one said that she would go round to the side of the bandstand and see if it was written up. When she returned she said, "Matilda, we were both wrong. It is not the Barcarolle from the 'Tales of Hoffman,' neither is it the Soldiers' Chorus from 'Faust.' It is: the Refrain from 'Spitting!'"—A Tuck Hamper has been awarded to Sidney Lemel, 9, Ebbesfleet Road, Cricklewood, London, N.W.2.

IT WORKED!

"Good morning, madam," said the canvasser. "Here is a polish for cleaning silver—best on the market." "Don't want any!" snapped Mrs. Jones. "Sorry to have troubled you, madam, but I thought the lady next door was mistaken!" "What did she say?" "She said I need not waste my time calling here, as you had no silver to clean." "The impudent thing! Give me half a dozen boxes!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Mitchell, 5, North Shore Street, Campbelltown, N.B.

NO SALE!

A man was looking at some new trunks displayed outside a shop. The dealer, with an eye to business, politely asked him if he'd like to buy one. To his astonishment, the man said: "What's the use of a trunk to me?"—Whereupon the dealer replied: "Why, to put your clothes in, of course!" The Man (indignantly): "What! And go naked? Not me!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Preston, 31, Archway Road, Highgate, London, N.19.

A SLIGHT MISTAKE!

A gentleman went into a barber's shop in London for a hair-cut one very foggy day. When he was seated the barber tucked the cloth round his neck and remarked: "Very thick, air!" "Yes," said the gentleman, "but I'd like it cut short." "Oh," exclaimed the barber: "it's not the 'air of the 'ead I mean, but the hair of the atmosphere!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss Margaret Leslie, 41, Loons Road, Dundee.

IT JUST DEPENDED!

Mrs. Terrace was engaging a new cook. After interviewing a large number of equally large ladies, she at last picked on one Irish woman who seemed to be as nearly perfect as any cook can be nowadays. "I think we can arrange the matter of wages," remarked Mrs. Terrace. "What is your name?" "Mrs. O'Shannessy, ma'am," was the answer, accompanied by a beaming smile. "Do you expect to be called Mrs. O'Shannessy?" asked Mrs. Terrace. "Oh, no, ma'am," responded the applicant, "not if you have an alarm clock!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Malcolm G. Chattin, 1, Selborne Street, Walsall, Staffs.

HIS SUPERIOR KNOWLEDGE.

Two Highlanders, in London for the first time, were greatly amazed at the heavy street traffic. While they were standing awestruck on the pavement, a water-cart passed, spraying the dusty streets. "Hey, mon!" yelled Donald, running after the cart. "Ye're losin' a yer water!" "Come back, ye old fule," called his companion after him. "Dae ye no' ken that's the keep the bairns frae sittin' on the back o' the cart?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Donald Macfarlane, 48, Second Avenue, Clydebank, Scotland.

CORN-BRED!

An old gentleman walked up the steps of the Corn Exchange. "Is this the Corn Exchange?" he asked. "Yes, sir," replied the commissionaire. "Then can you do anything with this corn on my foot?" asked the old man. "I want to get rid of it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Ian Wright, 11, Inchaffray Street, Perth, N.B.

THAT'S ALL!

"Now, children," said the school teacher, "can any of you tell me of a greater power than the King?" "Yes, ma'am!" cried a little boy eagerly. "Very well, you may tell the class," said the teacher. "An ace of trumps!" came the lad's unexpected reply.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Jas. McCollam, Coast Guard Cottages, Magheramorne, Co. Antrim, Ireland.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 830.



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

My Dear Chums,—This week two special duties must come first. As a start, I want to wish you one and all the happiest possible New Year, with plenty of prosperity and good days in which to enjoy it. In the second place I must refer to the wonderful kick-off programme of the "Gem."

ON TOP!

Of course, the old and well-recognised position of the "Gem" is the outstanding fact. The success of the stories of St. Jim's is unqualified. No drum, big or otherwise, is required to emphasise the fame and appeal of the series.

WITH A BANG!

Next week's yarn is tremendous. It brings a much vexed question to a head. Mr. Martin Clifford marshals his facts like a first-class military commander. I want to impress upon you that the tale of Tom Merry and Cardew next Wednesday is one to put the old paper several pegs higher.

"JUST LIKE CARDEW!"

By Martin Clifford.

This dramatic wind-up to a wonderful series showing the bitter feud between Tom Merry and Cardew is simply astounding. Truth may be stranger than fiction, but fiction which owes its popularity to a deep

knowledge of human nature on the part of the writer is, often enough, the strangest of either. Next week's story is out and out convincing. You know something of the odd, fantastic temperament of Cardew. He likes to win, but once he has won he is disgusted with the result of victory. I'll be bound you have run up against just such a walking contradiction in your tramp through the world.

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There need be no hesitation in so styling this splendid yarn. We see Cardew the possessor of the spoils of conquest, as it were. And he feels fed up with himself, with St. Jim's, and with the world in general. It is natural enough, of course. Cardew's eccentricities are not really so uncommon, only in his case these conflicting idiosyncrasies are more pronounced. Only one more word concerning this glorious story, which will be in your hands next week, and I have done. There is poetic justice in it. We get an election. There is, of course, enormous excitement over this contest. And what happens? Who said stalemate? Well, just wait and see!

A SLIGHT DIFFICULTY!

Over and over again I feel nonplussed. Suggestions come in asking me to bring into

the limelight again certain characters who have scored in former tales. All this is generous and complimentary to authors, but it puts the editor in a dilemma. You know the "Gem" is prepared considerably in advance of publication. That being so, it is next door to impossible to run in some special story to please a reader. A series of yarns has to come to an end. You would hardly believe, too, the eagerness for novelty among large numbers of my supporters. I am just saying this to show that it is not easy to carry on for ever and a day with, say, Anthony Sharpe, or some other favourite. It has to be turn and turn about. The same remark applies to some of the St. Jim's characters. Not that I like to cause any disappointment.

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