

Grand New
Serial

"THE SECRET OF THE CALLEONS!"

Starts in this
Issue!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2ND

LIBRARY
OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

No. 855.
Vol. XXV.
June 28th, 1924.



THE BOTANIST'S DISCOVERY!

Clarence York Tompkins discovers a rare "specimen" in the shape of Ralph Reckness Cardew—the demon bowler of St. Jim's! (A startling incident from the grand long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.)



Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

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.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
"THE MAGNET" Every Monday
"THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
"JUNGLE JINKS" Every Thursday
"THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

MY dear Chums,—As you may guess, I shall be looking for a budget of letters about the Grand Serial which starts in this issue. I shall not wait in vain. This story, "The Secret of the Galleons!" written by the same author as "Tom of the Ajax!" is a sure thing—just what GEM readers dote on. The yarn has a kick-off this week which will long be remembered. You are plunged right away from the start into the midst of as thrilling a set of adventures as anybody could imagine.

"THE HERO OF THE HOUR!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's yarn of St. Jim's provides a brilliant and magnetic thrill. Everybody thought there would be disaster and defeat when the absence of Cardew cast a cloud over the great match. Cardew had been relied upon for a thousand good reasons, one of which was that he has an all-conquering way with him when he takes part in a cricket match, especially when he forgets his moods in the enthusiasm of the game. But he was not there! The story grips. "The Hero of the Hour!" is undoubtedly the cricket yarn of the season. You will be swept off your feet by the very magic of it, and the high inspiration which gives fire to all the many happenings. That Cardew does get back we may take for granted, but just how, when, and why, and exactly what results from his eleventh-hour advent you will see when you get hold of next week's GEM.

"THE ST. JIM'S NEWS."

A Special Photography Number for our next issue! It has been asked for. What Gemites demand they get on every occasion that I can possibly manage. Photography is an extra important business in summer, for in the open-air season, owners of pocket cameras go snapping around, taking nice bits of scenery. I think the new supplement will be found just to fill the bill.

"A BLACK BUSINESS!"

By Cecil Fanshaw.

A topping tale of African adventure, which records the discomfiture of a certain foreign adventurer by two old school chums who are trading among the natives far up country. The two chums are Ford and Tubby, and excellent fellows. Imagine their dismay when they make the unpleasant discovery that a certain rival in trade is offering

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

articles to the blacks which ought not to be on sale. The manner in which they turn the tables on the unscrupulous and soft-spoken Bergman wants reading about. It is a thrilling yarn.

"THE SECRET OF THE GALLEONS!"

By Roland Spencer.

Next Wednesday's instalment provides high adventure of the best. The good ship Result, under the command of Sarky Marline, sails in quest of the hermetically-sealed case containing the treasure which went down to Davy Jones' locker in the old days when the ill-fated galleon, the Maria de Castellon, sank with all hands. Don Alonzo, who has financed the expedition, realises the peril of the enterprise, for it is not merely a fight against the sea and the ravages of time which the salvage ship has to face, but a company of relentless adversaries as well.

TO THE END OF TIME!

That the GEM may prosper to the end of time is the fervent wish of a very good supporter of mine in Belfast, the hardworking capital of northern Ireland, where the linen comes from. Much thanks! The GEM is booming now in a style which gives reason to hope that the desire is safe. This correspondent would like to see a story-finishing competition in the old paper, as he is keen on writing stories. Maybe when the winter comes again we might be able to think of the matter. As for writing stories, well, the only way is to stick at the game and learn. An author has to go on taking in facts all his life.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

This is great news! In September the new volume of the "Holiday Annual" makes its appearance. Just make a point of ordering your copy in good time. The Annual on this occasion will out-do all past issues. Its programme is immensely attractive, and there will be such a demand that late comers may, if they are not very careful, find themselves left out in the cold. Therefore, be sure and you will not be sorry.

STILL ANOTHER!

A Canadian reader tells me he would like something about Grundy and Mulvaney and Cardew thrown in now and then. They would be against Figgins & Co., and Redfern. That is a point to be considered, and so it shall be! As this reader says, Grundy, though simple, is a nice fellow, and is liked by everybody—well, almost everybody! Wilkins and Gunn sometimes have mixed feelings concerning their study mate. Grundy is inclined to be wrathful and didactic at times. The wind up of a good letter puts the cap on it. "I never miss one week for getting the Companion Papers, but my rush is always for the GEM first."

Your Editor.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

OUR TUCK HAMPERS ARE PRIME!

Remember, boys and girls, we award a delicious Tuck Hamper for the best storytette sent us each week—also half-a-crown is paid for each other contribution accepted. Cut out the coupon on this page, and send it, together with your joke, to me.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER!

Almost Identical!

The young man entered the outfitters in order to buy a hat. He caught sight of a stand on which were placed several hats of various colours and sizes. It bore the legend: "Bankrupt stock. 2s. 6d. each." Presently he picked out one, examined it, tried it on, and decided that it was just what he wanted. Handing it to the shopkeeper, who by this time was disengaged, he said: "I will take this one." But the shopkeeper declined to sell it. "I am sorry," he said, "but that particular hat is already sold. Now, here is one that will suit you—same shape and size, but a different colour." "That will do," said the young man. The hat was made into a parcel, and the young man picked it up, laying a penny on the counter afterwards. As he walked to the door he remarked to the dazed shopkeeper: "The same shape and size, but a different colour!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to H. P. Welch, 49, Victoria Street, Warwick.

THE RABBIT DIDN'T KNOW!

Pat and Mike were out shooting, with one gun between them. Suddenly a rabbit sprang up. Pat lifted the gun to fire, when Mike stopped him. "Stop!" he said. "The gun isn't loaded." "Shure," said Pat, "that doesn't matter, the rabbit doesn't know!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. G. Maynard, 37, Dale Road, Luton.

NO NEED FOR A SCARECROW!

A lady, having taken up residence in the country, remarked to a farmer that he seemed to have a very large amount of corn under cultivation, and inquired if the crows did not annoy him a good deal. "Not to any extent," said the farmer. "And I see you haven't any scarecrows," added the lady. "No, ma'am," said the farmer. "You see, I am out here a good part of the time myself!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. A. Packwood, 36, Edward Street, Higher Openshaw, Manchester.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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

OPENING INSTALMENT of a thrilling and powerful story, telling of the quest for a vast Spanish treasure which lies buried deep 'midst rotting timbers in the great wastes of the mighty ocean. **START READING NOW!**



THE SECRET OF THE GALLEONS!



By **ROLAND SPENCER.**

(Author of our Recent Success: "Tom of the Ajax.")

CHAPTER 1.

Dan Derrick!

IN the attic of a poor lodging-house behind Tottenham Court Road, London, a youth of sixteen, tall, well-proportioned, strong, with crisp, dark hair set close on his well-shaped head, sat beside a poor sick bed.

Dan Derrick was a cheery youth, but this night his brow was clouded with sorrow. On the bed lay his father, a rugged-faced sea captain of some sixty-five years, the thin hair of his head and his stubbly beard as white as snow.

As a younger boy, Dan remembered that, while his brothers and sisters were petted and stormed at in turn, he himself received nothing from his sire but hard words and rough treatment. And yet Dan was the only one of the family courageous enough to take on the burden of this hardened man, now he needed help and succour.

The form on the bed stirred, and as Dan looked at his parent a thin, wasted, horny hand crept out from the bed-clothes and gripped the boy's wrist. Dan watched the wasted face unflinchingly.

"Dan, boy, I've been a brute to you. Say you forgive me, lad. You're stuck by me right to the end. An' I was hardest of all on you, by boy. But I've lived straight and honest, if I was a hard father. I'm a man's man, lad, and none such as me should ever have been blessed with a wife and family. Yes, boy, I've lived straight and honest, whatever I might have been at home."

"Go to sleep, father," said Dan. "You've nothing to worry about, and you're going to hospital to-morrow. The doctors and nurses there will soon put you on your sea legs again. Don't worry yourself about the past. You regret, and that puts all things right."

The sick man sighed, and turned his face to the curtainless, blindless window, an ugly black square of night. Then such a look swept into his eyes that Dan started forward with a cry. The feverish look of mingled horror, defiance, and revulsion that shone from the sunken, steely orbs of the man was terrible to see. The bulky, wasted body was raised on one elbow, the other arm was held out, and a quivering, roughened finger was pointing to the window.

Then the sea captain's voice rang out, harsh and vibrant, almost in a shriek.

"Stand by, Dan! Watch him! Keep a front to him! There he is, looking in on us like a fiend from the pit. There's his single yellow fang bared as his thin, crooked mouth opens in his devilish laughter! See his wispy, grizzled hair, see his sunken cheeks and his snake's eyes, see the wrinkles quivering round his long, thin, ugly nose—"

Dan swung round towards the window in alarm, but he could see nothing. Then suddenly the sick man fell back on the pillow, panting heavily. Dan pressed a cold, damp cloth on the vein-distorted brow.

The old man lay quietly, still panting, but calmer. The delirium in his brain was still raging, but the soothing touch

of Dan seemed to check it. Suddenly the old man began to babble and laugh.

"There's another face at the window, but he's a good 'un, Dan. Sarky Marline, the best man God ever made. I was a hard man wi' Sarky, but Sarky smiles. See his round, red face grinning in at us now. Sarky'll keep watch an' ward, Dan, barrel figure, bowed legs, and all! Good old Sarky! See that scar down his cheek? He got that which was meant for me—and the Rat got something in return from Sarky—"

The body quivered and heaved under Dan's hands as the hard old sea captain laughed.

"Good ol' Sarky Marline! Same old red-spotted neckerchief. Same old lamb's glance that can change to a tiger's snarl, by thunder, when called for. Sarky's come, Dan! Our troubles are halved! Ha, ha, ha! I'll lay the Rat will make himself scarce now Sarky's nigh!"

Dan, awed and nervously furtive at his first experience of delirium, though he had been warned by the doctor that it would come, looked cautiously and slowly round at the window. The black square was unbroken by any round-faced, confidence-inspiring picture.

"Ah, Dan, I see y' can see him!" babbled on the sick man. "He's a treasure, is Sarky, an' I'm glad he's come, glad he's come!"

The man began to breathe laboriously, but more peacefully—and Dan turned the damp cloth on his brow. At last his father looked up with those eyes that were even more sunken and worn-out looking now.

"I've something else to say, boy! When I'm in hospital, if you want settin' up and given a chance, I know the man who'll do it. I did him a service, and he told me to let him know if I want a favour of him. He's been advertising for me of late. But me alone asks no favour of any man, and I'll not be seen in poverty by any old acquaintance. I ask no favour of any man, but me with a son who has lost his job and sat patiently by me wi'out any reason to respect me—me gone to hospital and leaving a son like that is a different thing. It'll be doing a kindness to Don Alonzo Guadiana de la Mancha, who lives in Bayswater, if you go and ask him for a job, saying you are my son. Promise me you'll go to the Don? You'll find his address in Kelly's—I don't rightly remember it from his advertisements for me, which I wouldn't answer. Promise me!"

The fevered eyes seemed to bore into the boy, and Dan could see that a refusal to ask a favour of the Spaniard, if indeed he existed anywhere but in the fevered brain of Captain Derrick, would result in a paroxysm of passion.

So Dan promised!

The night drew on, and the candle guttered in the rusty tin candlestick. Shadows fluttered on the walls and ceiling of the attic room. Outside, all was as still as the grave. London slept.

Suddenly Captain Derrick woke with a jerk. He heaved

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

himself up on his elbow, and his yet more sunken eyes glared at the window. Again he raised his finger, which quivered and shook as with the ague.

"The Rat! The Rat! The breed! There he is again—and me helpless!" he cried. "There's his villainous, skinny face, all wrinkled in his devilish laugh! There's his yellow fang, yellower than ever, hanging in his crooked, main-hatch of a mouth. An' me helpless! Sarky Marline! Sarky Marline, where are you, y' lubber? Where are—you?"

The quivering form fell back, and Dan pressed the damp cloth on the tortured man's head again, according to the doctor's orders.

And out of the black square of night which was the window dodged the peering face, so that when Dan looked round the moonless sky and a winking star-point or two were the only things that pryed into the sordidness of that poverty-stricken sick room.

CHAPTER 2.

In the Storm!

TWO days had passed, and Dan, after his return, wet and weary, from his tramp round dockland, where, it seemed, he had been instinctively drawn to look for work, heard a knock at the door of his bare, comfortable attic. It was Mrs. Granby, the landlady.

The woman stood on the carpetless landing, hands on her hips, and looking very grim. Dan looked a question, but the hard mouth of the woman softened as she noted the boy's soaked, threadbare clothes, his thin shoes, and his weary expression.

"Don't 'e think me hard, Dan," she said, "but a gennelman wants your room—to-night. I'm feared you'll have to go, Dan; but look here, lad, never mind that two week's rent you owe, unless you can get it easy—"

"You are very good, Mrs. Granby. But I'll bring it some time. I'll get out right away."

"You're a good lad, Dan," she said. "Where'll you—"

The landlady broke off, and turned abruptly away. She meant to say "Where will you sleep to-night?" but she, hardened as she was, hadn't the heart to hear the answer. She pulled up sharp at the head of the stairs, however, as another door on the landing opened and a well-dressed young man of nineteen, with twinkling eyes, fresh complexion, short-cropped black hair, and a determined-looking chin set below regular features, appeared framed in the doorway.

"Sorry," he said, grinning at Dan, who grinned back in return. "I'm the 'gentleman' Mrs. Granby referred to. I want the two rooms. I couldn't help hearing, of course, being on the same landing. Say, I'll take the room right away, Mrs. Granby, to secure it; but I'll not want it yet, so Dan can hang on."

Dan blinked.

"Eh?" he said. "But you're a good sort, Mr. Carr. Still, rather than increase my debts, I'll clear, thanking you very much all the same—"

"Not at all, Dan Derrick. I'll pay the ten shillings you owe Mrs. Granby, as well as any week in advance; and I've a job you can do for me to earn your rent."

One work-hardened hand of the landlady was extended towards the neatly dressed young man. Six half-crowns clinked into the palm, and the woman, smiling her hard smile at such a happy ending to the tragedy, left the youngsters alone on the landing.

"Honour bright—about the job?" asked Dan.

"Yes, honour bright, Dan."

"Not a put-up affair to make me think I'm not accepting charity?" said young Derrick.

"No fear! I'm a worker, I am, not a blithering philanthropist. Come in and have a yarn. Wait a minute, though. I'll tell you when to come in."

Dan waited on the landing, and heard a gentle thumping in Carr's room. Then the lid of a wooden box was heard to bang down, and Carr called to Dan to enter. Obviously, the young man had been concealing something from Dan's eyes.

"Sorry, Dan," he said, as the boy entered, "but that's my invention. Nobody must see it."

Dan grinned again.

"Don't worry," he said. "What's the job?"

"Wait a minute, my buck! Where did you mean to sleep to-night?"

"Oh, anywhere! On the Embankment, probably. I should be undisturbed there, at all events."

"H'm—yes! By policemen, but not by the weather! I'd prefer a casual-ward to that."

Carr glanced at the window, which was half-curtained over. The rain beat in squalls on the panes, and the wind howled over the roof-tops and round the chimneys and attic windows.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

"No, it wouldn't have been pleasant," said Dan.

"First of all," now voiced Carr, "strip off those wet clothes, and I'll put some coal on the fire. Strip and have a rub down. Have some of my dry duds. Then we'll have a meal, for I'm famished. Then after that we can talk business."

"Honour bright about that job—"

"Yes, you young ass! Dry up, now, while I get some sosses in the pan. Shut up now, mind, for I always burn sausages and bust 'em when I'm cooking if I'm disturbed and forget to stab them. I cook and eat my grub seriously. That's what I want your room for—for a dining-room. I greatly dislike cooking and eating and working and sleeping in the same room."

"You're a blessed plutocrat," said Dan brightly, happily stripping off his clammy, wet clothes. "Two rooms! Great Jupiter! Why don't you take that house at the corner of Park Lane? It's to let, and I believe the rent's only a few thousand a year!"

Brian Carr laughed.

"Gosh, Dan, you're the sort of chap I like! Just the sort for the job I've got in mind. A fellow who can grin and nip about like a sandboy in rain-soaked clothes—"

"Nip out of 'em, you mean!" said Dan. "Nothing wonderful in grinning about that, is there?"

Brian Carr laughed his loud, infectious laugh again, and Dan joined in.

The boy was soon snuggling in an old flannel suit rather too big for him, and the sausages were sizzling merrily. The two young fellows sat in silence for a while, then both looked up sharply as a streak of lightning flashed across the window.

"Crumbs! Wouldn't it have been pleasant on the Embankment?" said Dan.

Another glare of lightning lit up the window-panes, and this was followed by a rumble of distant thunder. At each flash the youngsters looked up to the window.

The storm raged while the two ate. After the four sausages had died a natural death and the loaf of bread on the white table-cloth had been reduced to a remnant, the lightning and thunder were at their worst. Dan was beginning to feel like a man again, when, as a more vivid streak than ever glared across the window, he leapt up with a swift, startled exclamation. Carr, too, had swung round, hand on the back of a chair, his eyes staring.

For there, framed in the window during that brilliant glare, a face set on broad, round shoulders had appeared. It was the face of a Mexican half-breed—a thin, evil, distorted face, lined and wasted, the brown skin like old parchment. Two beady eyes glittered below the wrinkled, bony brow. Scraggy wisps of grey hair showed beneath the dripping brim of the hat. The mouth, a thin, evil line, set crooked in the face like an exaggerated sneer, wrinkling up the thin nose at one side, was something never to be forgotten.

"The Rat!" gasped Dan. "Thunder and lightning, the Rat! And I thought him the picture in a fevered brain!"

"So you know him?" gritted out Brian Carr, his jaw stuck out in an ugly manner as he leapt to the window and threw the sash open wide.

Both peered out into the blackness, and the rain, beating on their heads and running down their faces, waiting for what the next flash of lightning would reveal on the roof of that tenement house.

CHAPTER 3.

Don Alonzo Guadiana!

EVEN before the roll of thunder which followed the flash of lightning had died away, another flash came, showing up in bold relief the sordid attics and tall chimneys of the crowded houses. Dan had been peering one way, and Brian Carr the other. There was no sign of the Rat. He might have disappeared into thin air, for all that could be seen in the blinding, instantaneous glare.

The youngsters dodged back into the room, and looked at one another.

"No good chasing, I s'pose?" said Carr.

"No fear," replied Dan. "A man with one leg could get clear away on a night like this. And he evidently has the entry into another attic room on these roofs."

"What do you know of that awful-looking waster, Dan?" asked Carr, in wonder.

"I have never seen him before, but my father babbled about him in his delirium. He's evidently an enemy of my father's, and, no doubt, he has been watching to see if my dad would die. He's puzzled that my father isn't here now, I expect."

"H'm!" Brian Carr looked doubtful as he eyed the big wooden chest in the corner.

At last the young fellow looked Dan straight in the eyes.

"Can't you tell me a bit more, Dan?" he asked. "Er—I'd like to be sure it was your father he was after."

Dan forthwith launched into the story of his father's illness. At the end of the yarn, which Dan delivered in a low voice and with a serious expression on his pleasant face, Brian Carr whistled.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated. "Your dad has seen something in life, I'll bet! So did mine. But you're a young ass for not going round to that Don Guadiana chap! Why, he must be panting to hear of your father—"

"Well, I—I meant to make an effort to find the Spaniard, of course, but I had no faith in his existence. But now I've seen the Rat, just as described by my father—well, I expect I shall find Don Alonzo Guadiana, too."

"No time like the present! Here's an oilskin. Run round to the North London Safe Depositories, Ltd., will you, and tell 'em to send a car round at once for a three-hundredweight box? Here are two pounds, if they want a fee in advance. Get off, now. The job I had for you was companion to me, and messenger—shopper, and so on. I came to the conclusion a couple of days ago that I must never leave that box unguarded, and to-night's business is the finishing touch!"

Dan looked surprised, but left the attic on the mission. Two hours later, Brian Carr's box was safe and sound behind steel doors, and the youngsters were speeding westwards in a bus, en route for Bayswater.

Don Alonzo Guadiana de la Mancha lived in a small, but expensive, house. A foreign manservant opened the door

to the callers, and at once showed them into a lofty, windowless library, where the Spanish gentleman sat surrounded by books and before a huge fire which sent its comfortable, red, flickering glow into the farthest corners of the room. The Spaniard had not been reading. He was pondering as the chums entered, and he swung round towards the callers, who had first telephoned, with a smile of welcome and an extended hand.

"Which of you is Dare-devil Derrick's son?" he asked.

"I am, sir," replied Dan, taking the soft, slender-fingered hand of Guadiana. "I have come because I promised my father to—"

"I'll wait outside," put in Carr.

"Er—I've come in with Dan because—well, it all seemed a bit funny, and I meant to see that everything was square. I feel it is. I'll wait outside in the hall—"

"Stay!" said Guadiana. "Who and what are you? I, too, must be cautious. What's your name?"

"Carr, sir."

"Carr! I knew someone called Carr—or, rather, I knew of him."

Brian grinned.

"I know of scores who are no relations of mine, sir."

"True, true," mused the Spaniard.

"I don't suppose you knew my father, sir."

"Was he Amphibious Carr?"

Brian's jaw dropped, and he seemed to relax suddenly. Guadiana, noticing the effect of his question, half rose from his chair, his hands grasping the leather-covered arms. He stared at Brian with wide-opened, fine dark eyes.

"Amphibious Carr!" repeated Guadiana. "Would that he were living to-day! And you—his son?"

"Yes, sir," replied Brian proudly, seeing that now denial would be useless; "and trained by Amphibious Carr, too. But my father left something incompleted in his works—left me to complete it, and I've done so. All who know me know I guard an invention, but I've slammed it into the North London Safe Depositories now. thank goodness!"

"Having known of Amphibious Carr, I can guess at your invention—"

"I beg your pardon, senor, I can't talk about it—or not

now. But if you happen to be a financier who could help me we might talk later to our mutual advantage. At the moment I'm afraid I'm butting in where I ought not to be. But you must forgive me, sir. I—I've been mixed up in a funny business or two myself, and I was rather afraid for Dan at first."

"Stay!"

The Spaniard's voice rang out in more of an appealing than an authoritative manner, and a hand was held towards Brian.

"I am the man who can help you. I had not hoped for this. I know more of your invention than you think. I had heard of your father's progress with it, young man. My whole efforts of late have been not only to trace Captain Derrick, but to trace the invention of Amphibious Carr. I have found both together. Young man, stay! I have no secret that I can yet tell Dan Derrick which you may not share, and I want you to listen to our conversation. Stay, I implore you!"

The dark eyes were burning with eagerness; but Guadiana turned to Dan, making an effort, obviously, to put Carr and his invention out of his mind.

Before long Dan's story was told, and Guadiana rose in excitement, the hot blood of his race pulsing in his veins.

"This is wonderful—wonderful!" he cried.

Guadiana put his arms behind his back under his luxurious dressing-gown and paced up and down along the Turkish hearthrug. There was a silence save for the falling of red coals in the grate. The fire, unattended, was dying down.

The Spaniard suddenly stopped and swung round to face the chums.

"Listen! Derrick, I must see your father at the earliest possible moment. I have in my possession the means of picking up fabulous wealth from the very gates of the British Isles now. But I wanted Amphibious Carr's knowledge. I could not trace the invention—"

The Castilian looked at Brian, and that young man grinned.

"Yes, sir; I covered up the tracks pretty well," he said. "You're not the only one who has been trying to trace it—"

"And if I am a judge of men," continued the Spaniard, looking at Brian's well-shaped head and at his square, strong

jaw, "that knowledge is now bound up in his son. You must both listen without interrupting. I have a story to tell."

"I come of a very old Spanish family, though we are only commoners. We were rich, very rich, we Guadianas, and wanted for nothing on this earth till now. Great wealth has been handed from father to son for a few generations. Great wealth and something else. Now the wealth has dwindled, and the 'something else' is all-important to the Guadianas of La Mancha. It is that which has brought me to England."

"A forefather of mine commanded one of the Spanish ships which sailed in the Great Armada—cursed be the day its keels ploughed the English Channel—against your own fair shores! That ship's name was Maria de Castellon. Well, she was wrecked, as were most of the others, but my forefather, Miguel Rodrigo Guadiana de la Mancha, escaped and prepared a parchment which he decreed should be handed down to Guadianas till the family fortunes fail. Then the scion of the house should act on the paper. The Guadiana fortune is now down to a sum which cannot, by its interest, support the estates, so it is my business to keep the estates from the sale catalogues by the use of our parchment information."

"See! Here is the paper. How my fingers do tremble—"

The Spaniard knelt down beside his safe, having asked Brian to switch on the electric light since the fire had died down so low, and eagerly he worked the combination. Soon

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 855.



At the sound of the Rat's name the Spaniard uttered a swift, choking exclamation, staggered forward and clutched at the table, letting the parchment flutter to the floor. At the same moment there came a splintering of glass above, and a heavy form thumped down into the room.

a crackling sheet of yellow parchment was in the hands of Dan.

The boy stared blankly at the badly-written Spanish words, and Guadiana took the paper.

"I will translate," he said.

Clearing his throat, the man began to read:

"Know this that in the reign of Philip of Spain, by the grace of the Holy Virgin, I, Miguel Rodrigo, of Guadiana in la Mancha, survived the sea battles of our glorious country and send greeting to all scions of our house. Whenas the galleon under my command, by name Maria de Castellon de la Plana, by the might of the hurricane which is the will of God, struck and sank off—' Here Guadiana mumbled over a word or two. "I caused to be placed and hermetically sealed in a leaden box part of the log of the ship bearing the exact positions of three other galleons of treasure in whose company the Maria de Castellon sailed in the evasive movement of the fleet by the Northern Isles of the bitter seas to the north of Great Britain. The depth of the water in which the galleons sank is unknown, but it is thought the vessels descended to rock, and will remain for centuries unsifted by the sand which shifts and banks continuously round all coasts. The Maria de Castellon holds that leaden box which was dropped through the lazaret hatch just before the vessel sank, and the bearings where the Maria sank are—"

Guadiana held the paper towards Brian and Dan with a meaning look, and the wondering chums noticed that the parchment had been cut off to that point, so that it did not bear the vital information. The Don continued his own personal narrative as he drew finger and thumb aimlessly across the top edge of the parchment:

"In an effort at trade, not yet thinking the time ripe for the treasure galleons, I sailed for the Pacific. I commanded my own ship, and one day came mutiny. It was terrible, terrible! Captain Derrick arrived just time to rescue me from the hands of the mutineers, and your brave father, boy, and his men saved my life—"

Brian's eyes were now shining, and it was plain he was itching to talk.

"My father's diving-dress!" he burst out suddenly. "The invention which I have perfected was made for this. Those galleons may be in deep water. Amphibious Carr's diving-dress takes no count of depth, reinforced by hoop steel as it is. Independence from boats above, the ability to rise and sink at will without the aid of ropes, no clumsy tubes—everything a diving-dress should be. Senor, I offer myself and my invention to you, share payments to be made to me, and my patent rights in the invention undisturbed—"

Guadiana smiled.

"A business man, I see. Well, I congratulate you, Carr! Provided I can be sole charterer of your gear until our job is finished—yes. I believe all you claim for your father's invention, having heard of your father's exploits in the pearl beds—"

"One moment, sir!" put in Dan, holding out his hand. "Do you know a man called Marline?"

"Sarky Marline? Indeed, yes! He is working with me now. He is arranging for the charter of the Result, a salvage ship at the moment in Bow Creek. Your father told you of him?"

"Yes, in his delirium. Have you heard of anyone called the Rat?"

Guadiana stepped back a pace, and his dark features blanched.

"The Rat!" he breathed. "Yes! He was one of my crew who mutinied. He—did your father speak of him?"

"Yes; and I've seen him to-night!"

The Spaniard uttered a swift, choking exclamation, staggered forward, and clutched at the table, and the parchment fluttered to the floor. Then there was a sudden splintering of glass above, and a heavy form thumped down into the room.

Brian shouted in wild alarm and sprang to a position of defence, while Dan hit out at the figure before him. The man dodged, and another form came dropping down through the skylight of the library, the only means by which the apartment obtained daylight. Two more figures followed, and soon the room was a struggling mass of humanity, with the Rat standing in the corner, his round shoulders humped up, and his features set in a fearful sneer.

The Rat watched intently with his snake's eyes amongst the feet of the struggling men, and at last he saw the

parchment. The crooked, thin line of his mouth opened to an abysmal laugh as he leapt forward to pounce on the coveted document.

As the half-breed's clutching fingers closed on the parchment the electric light cluster above broke with a series of pops as one of the attackers struck at it with a stick.

They were now in pitchy darkness—and surrounded by enemies!

CHAPTER 4.

The North Star Inn, Wapping!

IN the darkness the fight went on grimly for a few moments, each of the defenders hitting out instinctively to guard himself from the flailing sticks and sand-bags which swished through the air.

Crash, crash! Thud-thud-thud! Swish-swish! The heavy breathing of men and long-drawn-out gasps as blows got home. The occasional smash of glass as a struggling pair came up against the panes of the glazed shelves which lined the room.

The sounds of the fight spoke of the grimness and determination of the fighters.

Suddenly a streak of flame shot across the room, revealing that the flash had come from the form of Guadiana, standing in a corner, gripping an evil-looking, blue-glinting automatic in his right hand. The shot had been sent high, purposely, but though the bullet found no suitable billet, the flash served to disclose to the defenders the lay of the land.

A stout rope snaked down from the broken skylight, and the form of the Rat, with the parchment gripped in his mouth, his single tooth gripping the document against his thin lower lip, was half-way up to the roof. The man, crooked and hump-backed as he was, could climb like a cat. Guadiana fired in the direction of the form, but the shots resulted in nothing but the harsh, uncanny laugh of the half-breed.

People now began to hammer on the door of the library. The villains, however, had been thorough, for one of them had turned the key of the door in the lock.

Dan and Brian sprang forward as soon as they had located the rope, and spent all their efforts in trying to tear down the men who were endeavouring to make their escape thereby. Guadiana was at hand, too, but the result of the efforts of the three allies were kicks in the faces by men half-way up, Brian being laid out effectively by one of the kicks.

Then the people from the hall burst into the room, but they were just too late to make a capture, for, as the light from the hall flooded into the library, the rope was seen to be bare of any clinging form, and the last violent oscillation from above ceased.

The attackers had disappeared completely.

Brian began to stir, and Dan helped the young man to his feet. Guadiana was examining his pistol to ascertain the cause of a jam which had occurred while he was firing. The Spaniard was scowling darkly, but his hand no longer shook. He was a warrior, the heat of the fight having recalled all the fighting blood of his race. The chums afterwards learnt that the Don, though excitable and nervous under ordinary circumstances, was cool and deadly in a fight. The examination of the pistol was completed with a grunt, and Guadiana turned towards the chums.

"They've got the parchment," he growled, "and I don't propose to drag the police in on this."

Then he flashed round on his servants, sending them cowering across the room.

"Las doncellas!" he rasped with scathing scorn, gesticulating with his hands as if threatening to set about his laggard servants. "You let your master be attacked by villains? You laggards to delay so in coming to aid. Bah! What are you but a crowd of doncellas? Go, before I fall on you and tear you like a tiger tears its prey."

The Spanish men-servants slunk away, glad to get clear of their furious master.

Brian and Dan looked anxiously at Guadiana.

"So the Rat has got the parchment?" asked Dan.

"No matter!" laughed Guadiana, now calm again. "What is it but a curiosity, anyway? The Rat will gnash his teeth in his rage when he finds that I have committed the exact bearings of the wreck to memory instead of leaving them, as written, on the document. I would have liked to keep the parchment

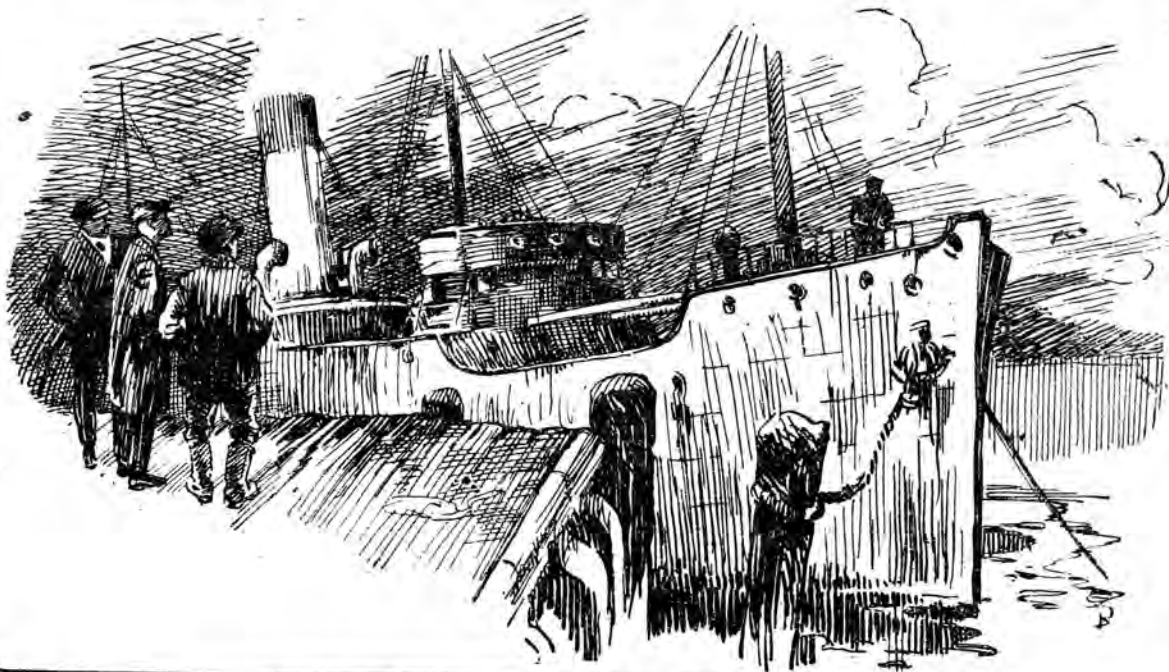
**SUPERB
ART
PHOTOS
of Famous
CRICKETERS
In Action**

Special
Supplement
FREE
in this week's



PLUCK 2

On Sale Tuesday, June 24th



The trio were approaching the ship when a grating voice rasped through the darkness: "Who in the blazes are you?" "Marline an' two new 'ands, Tom!" Sarky Marline replied.

for the sake of its escriptor—what you call author. But there! Galleon gold is our quest, not documents of mere sentimental value, so the Rat is welcome to his souvenir. But we delay! Boys, you ally yourselves with me?"

The Spaniard paused for an answer, and Brian and Dan nodded together.

"Rather, senor," said Brian. "We're your men, and at your service at once."

"Then we act forthwith! Prepare yourselves to take this letter to the North Star Inn, Wapping. It is to Sarky Marline. We must now get the Result ready for sea. By speed, promptitude and better diving gear, we must beat our enemies, who will undoubtedly follow us. Here is the letter! Off you go! I will join you to-morrow—after I have spoken with your father, Dan. And you, Brian Carr, I shall ask you to talk business with me to-morrow—"

"Right-ho, senor," said Brian. "Come on, Dan. North Star Inn for us next stop—"

Guadiana smiled as the chums slipped out of the library and dived for the open air, to get to the nearest tube station for a train to Wapping.

They found the North Star Inn easily enough, arriving there just a trifle muddy and tired, but still wildly enthusiastic over their adventure. They were, too, anxious to see Sarky Marline, though Dan felt he would be able to recognise the man from his father's vivid description.

The North Star Inn was one of the usual types of waterside taverns. It was a low, "half-built" place, that is, lower half built of brick and upper half of weather-boarding, or, as one of the seamen who had directed them said, "clinker-built like a boat."

The picture of the North Star, not geometrically perfect in its design by any means, but quite recognisable as a star and near enough for Wapping, flapped and oscillated on its black-painted board.

The chums, greatly enjoying their adventures, were about to enter the public bar, when the swing doors flew open and a man with a long scar down the right side of his face, and a red-spotted neckerchief round his neck, appeared. As the man laughed, his round, red face seemed the jolliest-looking thing Dan had ever set eyes on.

"Sarky Marline!" gasped the boy, and the seaman swung round with a deep-sea roll, and planted his short, bowed legs apart in front of the chums. His laughter, rumbling like distant thunder, faded away, and the eyes twinkled as they looked at the friends.

"So be as ye know me, shipmate," said the man, "may I henquire who you be?"

Dan grinned.

"I? Dan Derrick, son of Captain Dare-devil Derrick—" began the lad.

But he got no further, for, with a swift leap, Sarky's bowed legs took him to the side of the boy, and a great, hard-

skinned fist gripped Dan's arm till he winced with the pain of it. Two burning eyes looked into the lad's, the round, red face, now grim and tense, not six inches from the boy's.

"Ef that's a lie, heaven help ye! Ef that's the truth, 'ere's your pal for life, lad, an' may I be shivered ef that's an idle promise. Follow me up to my room, both o' ye. Up this way, an' mind where the stairs alter course. This 'ere door on the left. There! Shut an' locked—quick done! Now, then, shipmate, out wi' the news, an' prove to me as you're Cap'n Derrick's son an' I'll—"

"This letter, Mr. Marline! It's from Don Alonzo Guadi—"

"Don't say it all, for the love o' Mike, sonny. The Don's good enough for me. What's this 'ere letter? I'll read it careful, then we can talk."

Sarky turned the letter towards the dismal blue flame from the gas-jet, pretending to find difficulty in seeing. Very laboriously he spelt out the words Don Alonzo had written. At last he had the gist of the short letter, and he slapped his thigh and rumbled his distant-thunder laugh.

"Action! That's me all over. An' Cap'n Derrick alive but in horspital! I'm to see the 'old man' to-morrow, wi' the Don. An' the Result is to have a full head o' steam up ready to slip from Bow Creek by to-morrow evening's tide. Boy, how did ye know as I was Sarky Marline when ye clapped eyes on me?"

"My father talked a lot about you in his delirium," said Dan, "and he described you in detail. He thought the Rat was trying to get him, but that you were protecting him—"

"Did 'e now?" said Sarky in a throaty voice, and something suspiciously bright glistened in his eyes. "Ay, well an' I would, too. I've seen that there breed hangin' round here this mornin'. I was goin' out to tell the Don, 'cause we reckoned we wasn't going to be disturbed by the Rat, but I reckon we be, now. But what's yer yarn, mate? Let's 'ave it, and the latest noos o' Cap'n Derrick, bless 'is fiery old 'eart!"

Dan told his story to the old sailor, who sat on the side of the little bed, his great horny paws spread out on his knees, and his big, red, round face thrust forward attentively. As he finished, Sarky rose and put his great hands on Dan's shoulders and looked into the boy's eyes.

"Boy, good for you," said the sailor. "Cap'n Derrick was a fair devil, I know, but a straight gentleman, although which he had a rough tongue. It's the thanks o' Sarky Marline ye get, my lad, an' a friend for life ef ye so choose to make me. Boy, ye're a plucked 'un to stick by the cap'n in his illness. Great guns, I know what Dare-devil Derrick was like on a sick-bed, wither me ef I don't. An' you, sir? You're Amphibious Carr's son, and, so the Don says, are in

on this game, too. Ef you're like your father, shipmate, you'll be a useful man. Well, I've to introduce you to the Result's berth, an' find you a bed for the night, and tomorrow the Don will call for you, Mr. Carr, to talk business over something."

"Good!" said Brian, holding out his hand. "Sarky Marline, we're going to have the rattlingest adventure ever anyone had. I like you, shipmate, and we'll be sworn pals, for, from what I can see, we're up against trouble as well as galleon gold."

"Howly smoke, you're right there, mate. I'm your man, an' there's my hand on't. Let the blinkin' foolish an' ignorant sail off to the South Seas in search of treasure. We'll search in the world's dumpin'-ground for treasure—round old Great Britain and Ireland."

Dan laughed.

"It does seem funny," he said. "It's a reversal of things. Instead of starting in England and going abroad for the boodle, you start abroad and come to England for it."

"An' only right an' proper," boomed Sarky, bringing one fist down into his other hand. "An' what's more, we'll get it. A cracked skull or two on the way don't matter, where it's them as asks for cracked skulls."

And so the glamour of a great adventure began to excite three minds there in the little bed-room above the North Star Inn, Wapping.

CHAPTER 5.

On Board the Result!

AFTER half-an-hour's talk in Sarky's bed-room, the trio set out for Bow Creek, where the Result was moored.

"What a deserted spot!" exclaimed Dan, as he peered at the ugly outlines of the Result in the gloom, and then round at the clinker heaps on shore, and, in the black, oily water, the big wooden tarred piles which were dignified by the name of "wharf."

"An' so it should be, shipmate," said Sarky. "On'y spot well up towards the town we could get from the Port o' London Authority."

"Why's that?"

Sarky Marline chuckled.

"Cause she's a salvage ship fully found for commission, mate," he said. "There ain't any spare space below decks, and so I tell 'e. Packed tight wi' explosives, suction-pump, armoured hoses, tons an' tons o' coal wherever it'll go, see? There's lots o' it on deck. And there's big boilers down below an' engines o' all sorts; in fac', the Result is all boilers and engines, an' jammed between the workshops an' benches, the boilers and engines, is enough explosive to carry on a war, by thunder. There's enough gelignite on this ship as to make the blowin' up o' the Beekton gas works somethin' to larf at, comparin' it wi' the blowin' up of the Result. That bein' so, sonny, the Port o' London Authority don't want us to take up a berth under London Bridge, y' understand?"

"Crums, no!" gasped Dan. "And that's the company we'll have to keep, chums, when we set off for galleon gold. Gosh, a careless hand might easily blow us all to blazes!"

"You're right!" chuckled Sarky Marline. "Come aboard."

The trio approached the ugly little ship—converted to salvage use from an ocean tug—and pulled up sharp as a grating voice rasped through the darkness.

"Who in blazes are you?"

Sarky Marline replied.

"Marline, an' two new 'ands, Tom. Good for you, bully. I reckoned I was goin' ter catch yer dozin'. Keep a sharp look-out like that always, lad."

"Ay, ay, Mr. Marline!" replied the watchman. "Comin' aboard?"

"To show our new 'ands round, Tom. Switch on the lights for the stores, will 'e?"

With that, the three went down below, to squeeze in and out amongst the various stacks of gear crammed in every available part of the little ship.

The engines were examined, and the youngsters gasped as Marline proudly led them through the cramped engine-room. The workshops and benches were the last word in miniature repair shops. But Sarky said that for their own particular work, the raising and diving gear, the explosives

for blasting, and the suction-pumps to clear sand from the galleons if they should find them silted up, would be the chief gear they would call upon for service.

"That there's the explosive store," said Sarky, jerking his head towards a dimly-lighted apartment set well forward in the ship.

"Crums, where do we sleep, then?" asked Brian.

"Anywhere, shipmate," replied Sarky. "'Ere's one place. Ye got ter give up comfort when ye take on salvage. See, that's a store for paints and oil. What's the matter wi' three or four men curlin' up in blankets on the floor o' that little cabin?"

Sarky kicked open the iron door, which went back on its big hinges with a clang.

Interested, the chums stepped into the apartment, which was lit by an electric globe in the deck above. Sarky Marline poked his round, red, grinning face in behind them, and chuckled.

"Tain't exactly like a room in the Hotel Cecil," he grinned, "but I reckon as we'll be glad to caulk down in it whenever we get the chanst."

Suddenly, the man lurched forward with a jerk, and Brian yelled a warning, while Dan uttered a sharp exclamation. The sailor butted his head into Carr's stomach, and crushed the youngster up against the side of the little vessel.

The iron door clanged to and a key grated in the lock. Then harsh laughter was heard from the passageway. It was the watchman whom Sarky had called Tom.

"That's what ye get for comin' monkeying round at all hours, Mr. bloomin' Marline!" shouted the watchman, showing his coarse-featured face at the ventilation opening above the iron door. But Dan, like lightning, sent a rim of paint straight and true for the opening. The missile got home, and, with angry curses, the man disappeared from view. But he shouted out some words as he kept his distance from the doorway.

"Ha, so much the worse for you bein' on the Result tonight!"

Marline twisted his head out of the opening above the iron door.

"Shiver me, me hearties!" cried the sailor, "the blarney fool's mad! 'E's pokin' about in the explosive store!"

"Sure it's not foul play?" asked Brian Carr calmly.

At that second the man came out of the explosive store. He ran along the passageway, dodging low to miss the deadly swipe Sarky Marline made at him as he passed the paint-store doorway. He stopped farther along the passage, near a bulkhead ladder leading to the deck. Here he took out a box of matches and turned towards the prisoners.

"Stow it, ye fool! Don't ye dare strike a match 'ere!" bawled Sarky Marline. But the man only laughed.

He stooped on to one knee, struck a match which proved to be of the fusee type, and applied the glowing end to the fuse at his feet. Then, when the fuse was well alight, he scrambled up on deck and leapt ashore with another harsh laugh.

Sarky Marline, wild-eyed, his veins standing out knotted and blue on his temples, laid his great fists on the iron door and tugged and strained like a madman.

"It's foul play—foul play!" he bellowed. "Shout for help, boys—shout! We'll be blown to smithereens in a few minutes!"

The iron door rattled and clanked as Sarky laid frantic hands upon it and strained and jerked at it. The sailor shouted in a frenzy as he tugged, but at last he gave it up, and three strained faces looking out from the ventilator-opening above the store cabin door saw the fuse leading straight along the alleyway past their prison. And the smoke, hissing and spluttering, was travelling along the fuse at the rate of a foot every half-minute, straight towards the explosive store further forward.

"Boys, we're done!" muttered Sarky dully. "This is a scheme o' the Rat's to upset us, or I'm a Dutchman. And, by thunder, it's going to upset us perticler three all right!"

Sarky spoke with grim reason, for the smoke of the fuse was now only a matter of three yards from the explosive store. When it reached the store the Result and all she contained would go up sky high in one mighty, deafening explosion! In grim silence the chums awaited their fate!

(Will the Result be blown up, or will fortune favour the chums? Be sure you read next week's exciting instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)

Next Week's "THE HERO OF THE HOUR!" By Martin Clifford.
BIG BUMPER

Splendid PHOTOGRAPHY issue of the "NEWS"!

NUMBER . .

"A BLACK BUSINESS!"

Contains . . . Extra-special yarn of African adventure; and an extra-thrilling instalment of our New Serial.

At the crucial moment when Ralph Reckness Cardew, the demon bowler of St. Jim's is wanted to fend off defeat at the hands of the Rookwood fellows, he fails to put in an appearance! You will find, when you read this splendid yarn how he earns for himself the name of—



THE DESERTER!

A New and Exciting, Long,
Complete School Story of
Popular Tom Merry & Co.,
at St. Jim's.

By Famous

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Cardew Chips In!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, stopped.

Cardew was in flannels, and had a bat under his arm. He was loafing lazily along from Study No. 9, in the Fourth Form passage, towards the stairs, when he came to a sudden halt as he was passing Study No. 4.

From Study No. 4 came a loud howl.

Cardew smiled as he stopped.

"That's jolly old Tompkins!" he murmured.

Study No. 4 belonged to Clarence York Tompkins and Mulvaney minor. The latter was at games practice on Little Side just then, as most of the School House juniors were. Cardew was on his way to join them, when the howl from Study No. 4 arrested him. Tompkins of the Fourth, evidently, was at home; equally evidently, trouble had come the way of Clarence York Tompkins.

The School House was almost deserted that sunny summer's afternoon. Fellows who were not at cricket had gone out of gates, or gone up the river. Hardly anyone lingered indoors on that glorious afternoon. Cardew had lingered, from sheer laziness, and Levison and Clive, his chums, had left him to it; games practice did not happen to be compulsory that day, so Cardew was able to please himself. But the spirit had moved him at last to sally forth and join the cricketers, though it moved him in a slow and leisurely manner.

"Sit on his head, Crooke!"

"Jolly old Racke!" murmured Cardew.

There was a laugh from Study No. 4, and another howl. Crooke of the Shell, apparently, was sitting on the head of the hapless Tompkins, as Aubrey Racke bade him.

Cardew's lip curled.

Racke and Crooke, the black sheep of the Shell, were evidently filling up an idle afternoon by bullying Tompkins—an inoffensive youth. Tom Merry & Co. were far off, and there was no one at hand to interfere with the two Shell fellows—unless Cardew should interfere. And he was not inclined to do so. "Butting in" into anything was not in Cardew's line; and he had a contempt for any fellow that allowed himself to be bullied.

"Let my specimens alone!" came Tompkins' voice.

"Racke, you rotter, let them alone!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders, and walked on.

Tompkins, the quiet and inoffensive, was a sedulous member of the Natural History Society, under the patronage of Mr. Lathom, his Form master. Tompkins' stunt was botany. What a fellow could see in botanising was a mystery to Cardew—who, indeed, often appeared to see very little in anything at all.

Cardew reached the stairs and stopped again.

It was no business of his, he told himself; Tompkins was an ass, a botanising ass, and a ragging would do him more good than harm. As for his silly specimens, it did not matter in the least what Racke of the Shell did with them. The afternoon was too warm for rowing, and Cardew was already late for cricket. There were all these reasons for

going on and taking no heed of what was passing in Study No. 4. Nevertheless, Ralph Reckness Cardew stopped when he reached the stairs, turned round, and walked back to Study No. 4.

He pushed the door open with his bat and looked in.

Clarence York Tompkins, the inoffensive, lay extended on his back on the carpet. Crooke of the Shell was sitting on his head, and Tompkins was struggling and wriggling wildly. Racke had a book of botanical specimens in his hands, and was coolly jerking out the contents and scattering them around the study.

"You awful rotters!" came in muffled tones from Tompkins. "I'll tackle either of you, if you'll let me gerrup!"

"Sit tight, Crooke!" said Racke.

"You bet!" grinned Crooke.

"You bullying cads!" gasped Tompkins.

"Dear me!" said Cardew, in his softest tones. "What a game! What's the name of that game, you fellows?"

Racke and Crooke looked round at the cool, handsome face that was looking in at the doorway.

Cardew nodded to them pleasantly.

George Gerald Crooke nodded back, rather uncertainly, and Aubrey Racke gave the dandy of the Fourth a savage scowl. There had been recent trouble between them, and Racke's harsh features still bore the traces of Cardew's knuckles. Cardew seemed to have forgotten it; as perhaps, indeed, he had; in Cardew's eyes Racke of the Shell was a person of infinite unimportance. But Racke certainly had not forgotten.

"Well, what are you buttin' in for, Cardew?" growled Racke. "No bizney of yours, I suppose?"

"None at all," agreed Cardew.

"Then get out."

"Only a lark on Tompkins," explained Crooke. "We're makin' hay of his botanical rubbish. He sucks up to Mr. Lathom with this rot. He's a rotten smug, ain't you, Tompkins?"

"Gerroff!" gasped Tompkins. "I say, Cardew, lend me a hand, will you?"

"Certainly."

"Look here, you keep clear, Cardew!" snapped Crooke.

"Two to one isn't fair play," said Cardew. "I'll tell you what. I'll stand by and keep time, while Tompkins fights you one after the other."

"I'm ready!" gasped Tompkins. "I've licked Mulvaney this term, and I can lick either of them."

"Is it a go?" asked Cardew.

"No, it isn't!" snapped Racke. "Mind your own business. I suppose we can rag a smug if we like, without you buttin' in!"

"You don't like the idea?"

"No. Get out!"

"Then I've another proposition to make," said Cardew. "We never really finished our little scrap the other day, Racke. Let's finish it now, while Tompkins scraps with Crooke—what?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"You don't like that idea, either?"

"Get out!"

"I suppose that means no. You fellows are rather hard to please," said Cardew gently. "I'm tryin' to be as

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

accommodatin' as possible. Of course, I'd rather clear off and not meddle—I hate meddlin'. But that wouldn't satisfy Tompkins."

"Lend me a hand, old chap!" panted Tompkins.

"Right-ho! Get off his napper, Crooke."

"Look here—" began Crooke.

"Or else I shall jab you with this bat—like that—"

There was a roar from Crooke.

"And like that!"

"Yaroooh!"

Crooke rolled off Tompkins' head. He sat in the fender, roaring. Clarence York Tompkins scrambled to his feet. He took no heed of Crooke, but rushed across the study at Aubrey Racke. Racke of the Shell dropped the book of specimens, and put up his hands in a great hurry.

"Go it, dear boy," said Cardew. "I'll look after Crooke."

Tompkins did not need bidding. He was "going it" with great energy.

Inoffensive fellow as he was, Tompkins of the Fourth could put up a fight; and the outrage on his book of specimens infuriated him. The study was strewn with fragments of leaves and flowers that Tompkins had painfully collected in the woods and meadows round St. Jim's, and had carefully marked and numbered. He gave Aubrey Racke right and left, left and right; and Racke, though a much more powerful fellow than the Fourth-Former, fairly spun under his attack.

"Back up, Crooke!" gasped Aubrey.

Gerald Crooke scrambled out of the fender.

Clump!

Cardew's bat lunged at his chest, and Crooke sat down again suddenly, with a crash and a roar.

"Haden't you better sit it out?" suggested Cardew gently.

"I'm seein' fair play, you know."

"Ow!" gasped Crooke.

"Go it, Tompkins!" said Cardew cheerily. "Pile in! By gad, you're makin' the fur fly! Racke, old man, this looks to me like the giddy knock-out!"

A knock-out it was; for a minute later Aubrey Racke went spinning through the doorway, and landed with a crash in the passage.

Tompkins stood panting and triumphant.

"Comin' in again, Racke?" called out Cardew.

There was a gasping groan from the passage. Aubrey Racke did not come in again. He limped away to bathe a streaming nose.

"Down and out!" commented Cardew. "Now it's your turn, Crooke. You can get out of the fender."

Crooke jumped up and made a rush for the door. Cardew's foot came in his way, and he stumbled and fell headlong.

"No hurry, old bean," said Cardew. "Tompkins hasn't done with you yet, have you, Tompkins?"

"No fear!" grinned Tompkins.

"Ow!" gasped Crooke. "Lemme alone! I'm goin'! Keep your hands off me, Tompkins, you cad!"

He staggered to his feet. Tompkins came at him with his hands up, and the light of battle in his eyes. Crooke dodged round the table, and made another rush for the door. But Tompkins was too quick for him; and Crooke's head went into chancery.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Whoop!" roared Crooke, struggling wildly. "Leggo! Oh, my hat! Oh gad! Ow! Wow!"

He tore himself loose at last and bolted out of the study. Tompkins of the Fourth gasped for breath.

"What a giddy warrior!" ejaculated Cardew. "You'll soon be boxin' champion of St. Jim's at this rate, Tompkins."

"I've jolly well licked 'em!" gasped Tompkins.

"You have, old bean."

"I say, Cardew, I'm awfully obliged," said Tompkins. "It was decent of you to come in and help. I couldn't handle the two of them. They've made a muck of my collection, the cads!"

"Too bad!" murmured Cardew.

"Of course, I can make it all right again," said Tompkins. "Like to come with me on Wednesday, Cardew? Botany's awfully interesting, you know, and I can give you no end of tips."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'd be glad if you'd come," said Tompkins, beaming.

Cardew suppressed a desire to chuckle. He could not see himself rooting about Wayland Woods with Tompkins of the Fourth, hunting for botanical specimens.

"Jolly rippin' idea, old bean," he said.

"You'll come?"

"Pleased as Punch," said Cardew gravely. "But I believe Tom Merry wants me to play cricket on Wednesday. It's the Rookwood match, you know."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

"Is it?" said Tompkins indifferently. "Well, you're not keen on cricket."

"Not at all."

"Then come—"

"Thanks, old man! I'm sure it must be no end rippin' to go rootin' about after roots an' things, but I think I'd rather—"

"You'd rather play cricket?"

"I'd rather be hanged, drawn, and quartered, old bean," said Cardew, as he lounged out of the study.

Tompkins stared after him.

"You silly ass!" he ejaculated.

Ralph Reckness Cardew laughed, and lounged on his way. Clarence York Tompkins sniffed, and turned his attention to his wrecked collection. And in one of the House bath-rooms Racke and Crooke bathed noses that streamed crimson, and vowed vengeance.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Puts His Foot Down!

TOM MERRY frowned as he came across to Levison of the Fourth, on Little Side.

"Where's Cardew?" he asked.

Levison gave a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"I believe he's coming down," he answered.

"He ought to be here," said Tom Merry, frowning. "It's only a few days to the Rookwood match, and he knows jolly well we're depending on him. I suppose this is some more of his dashed swank!"

"I'm sure he's coming," said Sidney Clive. "But it's not a compulsory day, you know."

"That makes no difference, when he's down to play for St. Jim's in the Rookwood match!" snapped Tom Merry.

"Wathah not," chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. "Cardew ought to be fidgettfully keen, you know."

"Catch Cardew being keen about anything!" growled Jack Blake. "The silly owl makes it a point not to be keen."

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps it would be a good ideah, Tom Mewwy, to scwatch Cardew, and play old Dig against Wookwood!" suggested Arthur Augustus. "You can wely on old Dig, anyway."

Robert Arthur Digby, of the Fourth Form, grinned and nodded. He regarded the suggestion as a good one; but he did not expect Tom Merry, the junior cricket captain, to regard it in the same light. But Tom looked very thoughtful.

"It's pretty rotten," he said. "Talbot's still away, and Fatty Wynn is still in sanny. We're weak in bowlers, and Cardew has turned out a really wonderful bowler—when he likes. He ought to play for us against Rookwood."

"Yaas, wathah! Howevah—"

"Dig's keen, at any rate!" growled Herries.

"Keen as mustard," said Digby. "I know I'm not Cardew's form, Tommy, but— I'm here, anyhow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry bit his lip. Of late, his responsibilities as junior captain of cricket had weighed heavily on his young shoulders. Figgins & Co., of the New House, were still down with flu; and Talbot of the Shell was away from the school. Cardew's amazing development as a deadly bowler came in the nick of time, as it were—it was like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years. Had any other junior of St. Jim's, of either House, shown Cardew's form, Tom Merry would have been very elated, and very much "bucked." But Ralph Reckness Cardew was an uncertain quantity.

He regarded, or affected to regard, cricket as a bore. He turned up to games practice always with an air of reluctance; he was generally late to come and early to go. Indeed, Baggy Trimble averred that Cardew wouldn't have played cricket at all, had not Levison and Clive knocked his head on the study table till he yielded the point. Whether such drastic measures had been taken in Study No. 9 could not be said with certainty; but undoubtedly Cardew was an extremely unreliable cricketer. He had given Tom Merry trouble enough over the match with the Grammar School the week before; up to the very last moment Tom had not really known whether Cardew would play. Cardew certainly had atoned for his sins by playing a wonderful game, and helping to beat the Grammarians, performing the hat trick twice in the match. Nothing succeeds like success; and Tom, in his hearty satisfaction at Cardew's performance, had fully forgiven him. Nevertheless, he felt that he could not rely upon him; and he was worried a little, or more than a little, about the match with Rookwood.

It would be just like Cardew to turn down the offer of a place in the junior eleven; affecting to despise what the other fellows were tremendously keen on winning. Even if he agreed to play, he could not be depended on to keep to practice; indeed, he could scarcely be relied upon not to clear off on some escapade, on the day of the match itself, leaving his skipper in the lurch.

Tom Merry set his lips hard as he thought of it. Games practice was almost over for the day, and Cardew had not appeared. Tom very much wanted Cardew in his eleven for the Rookwood match; but he felt very much inclined just then to look for Cardew and give him the licking of his life.

"Bai Jove! Heah he comes!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suddenly.

Levison and Clive looked relieved as the handsome figure of Cardew appeared on the field. Most of the juniors glanced towards Cardew—Tom with a frowning brow—but the dandy of the Fourth did not seem to observe it. He lounged up easily.

"You men goin' strong?" he yawned.

"Weally, Cardew—"

"You're late, Cardew!" snapped Tom Merry.

"Better late than never, old bean!"

"That's not good enough," said the captain of the Shell.

"You know your name's down for the Rookwood match next Wednesday, Cardew."

"Very kind of you!"

"It's one of our biggest fixtures—the most important after the Greyfriars match, in fact," said Tom. "We've lost our best bowlers, and I think any St. Jim's fellow but you would be jolly glad to come to the rescue, if he could."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I shall be gettin' a swelled head, at this rate!" murmured Cardew. "You don't mean to say that I'm a valuable recruit, Thomas?"

"You know you are," snapped Tom.

"Thanks no end!"

"But I'd rather play a man I can rely on, even if he isn't your form," said Tom.

"That's easily done," said Cardew urbanely. "Lots of fellows standin' here who are not my form, and you've only to pick your man."

Some of the juniors laughed; but Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"This isn't a joking matter, Cardew!" he said.

"Isn't it?" asked Cardew.

"No!" said Tom, with a glint in his eyes.

"Sorry—my mistake!"

There was another laugh, and Tom Merry's face flushed. Tom never quite knew whether he liked Cardew or disliked him, but he knew that he was oftener tempted to punch Cardew's head than any other head at St. Jim's.

"Look here, Cardew, cut it out!" said Manners of the Shell. "If you want to slack and frowst, instead of playing cricket, you can say so!"

"So!" said Cardew.

"I suppose that's meant to be funny?" said Monty Lowther.

"Not at all—it's a statement of fact," said Cardew.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Very well," he said; "you can please yourself, Cardew. I've offered you a place in the eleven—and I'm not asking any man twice. You can stand out of the Rookwood match, and we'll do without you."

"Tom—" began Levison.

"That's settled!" said Tom Merry, turning away. "We're not so hard up for cricketers that it's necessary to beg and pray a conceited ass to accept what any other fellow would jump at. It's settled—Cardew doesn't play next Wednesday. So as it's not compulsory to-day, Cardew, you can clear off as soon as you like—and frowst in your study or smoke cigarettes behind the wood-shed."

Cardew coloured a little. With all his airy unconcern, he was touched by the scorn in the junior captain's words and manner. Perhaps, too, he was not so insensible to the claims of his school as the fellows generally supposed.

But he recovered himself in a moment, and smiled.

"Floored!" he said. "Thomas has come down heavy! Poor little me! Floored and flummoxed by the indignant Thomas—the justly indignant Thomas!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" growled Clive.

"Not at all, old fellow! That's your province, and I'm not poachin'."

"Weally, Cardew—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy severely.

"Is this games practice, or are we here gathered together to watch Gussy exercisin' his jolly old chin?" inquired Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I weally think—"

"Oh, get on with it!" growled Levison of the Fourth. "You've let down our study, Cardew, and I hope you're satisfied!"

"My dear old bean—"

"Oh, chuck it!" snapped Levison crossly. And he turned away with Clive.

"Dear me! I seem to be in the soup generally," sighed Cardew. "Even mine own familiar friend lifts the heel against me! Gussy, old man, you're a distant relative of

mine. Would you mind if I leaned my head on your manly chest and wept a little?"

"I wegard you as an uttah ass, Cardew, and I wefuse to weply to your fwivolous wemarks!"

"Floored again!" said Cardew. "Any of you fellows like me to send him down a few before I crawl away and hide my diminished head?"

"Come on, you ass!" called out Clive.

Cardew smiled, and took the ball. There were a good many fellows on the field who were feeling angry with the dandy of the Fourth—some, indeed, who considered Cardew had asked for a House ragging, and ought to get what he had asked for. But all of them gathered round to watch as Cardew put in the bowling.

He was worth watching.

Seniors came strolling over from Big Side to see him. There was no doubt that Cardew was a born bowler, and that he would have been a tower of strength in any junior team. Good batsmen, like Kangaroo and Redfern and Blake found it difficult to stand against him; even Tom Merry found his bowling hard to stop. Some of the fellows said that his style was showy; but there was no doubt that it got the wickets, and that was, after all, the important point. Cardew, with all eyes on him, smiled as he glanced round, and found Tom Merry watching him intently. He knew what his value would be to the St. Jim's junior eleven, especially when Fatty Wynn and Talbot were not available, and he fully expected, when games practice was over, that Tom would have reconsidered his determination, and would give him a hint to that effect.

But he was mistaken.

After games practice, Tom Merry walked back to the School House with Manners and Lowther, without a look or a word to Cardew. Tom had not made up his mind in a hurry, and when he had at last put his foot down he meant business. Cardew realised the fact, and realised, too, that he did not find it pleasant.

CHAPTER 3.

Not Nice!

"TURNED down—what?"

Aubrey Racke of the Shell made that jeering observation, as he came on Cardew the following day in the Form-room passage. Cardew stopped and looked at him, cheerily smiling, but with a glint in his eyes.

"I don't quite follow, Aubrey, old bean," he said gently.

"Don't you?" grinned Racke. "I hear that you're turned out of the Rookwood match. Serve you jolly well right!"

"Possibly you don't always hear the jolly old facts!" suggested Cardew.

Racke laughed.

"You're not playing Rookwood—that's a fact," he said. "Your name's not in the list now."

"Quite so."

"Lots of the fellows thought Tom Merry a fool to play you—a slacker like you!" said Racke. "He shows some sense in getting rid of you. Now you can swank that you didn't care to play—but you won't get anyone to swallow it!"

With that, Aubrey Racke walked away, feeling that he had, to some slight extent, avenged the scene in Tompkins' study of the day before.

Ralph Reckness Cardew looked after Racke's ungainly form for a moment, and then drove his hands deep into his pockets, and strolled on, a thoughtful pucker in his brow.

He had not been "turned down" by the cricket captain. Tom Merry had been keen to play him. Many fellows knew that, and Tom did not make a secret of it.

Certainly, he had been dropped out of the eleven, but that was on the grounds of slacking, swank, and general unreliability. As a cricketer, as a bowler especially, certainly he would not have been turned down. Racke of the Shell knew it well enough, and knew, as most of the fellows did, that it was Cardew's own fault that he was not to figure as a player for School.

Nevertheless, there was a sting in Aubrey Racke's words—there was something decidedly unpleasant in the words "turned down."

It pleased Cardew to keep up a lofty attitude towards games, and to affect to look on the cricket matches from an Olympian height of indifference. To keep up that attitude he had to put in enough work to keep up his form, for such an attitude would have been ridiculous enough in a fellow who was not wanted in the matches. In fellows like Trimble or Crooke or Racke it would have caused laughter; in Cardew it caused a great deal of irritation.

But Cardew's favourite attitude was a little spoiled by the plain fact that the junior cricket captain had turned him out of the eleven.

Olympian indifference was all very well, but any fellow could say, if he liked, that Cardew was outside the eleven because he was no good inside it; and indeed that would have been the truth regarding any fellow but Cardew himself.

Racke had chosen to take that view, whether he believed it or not. Cardew realised that Racke was nobody, less than nobody, and that his sneers and jeers did not matter in the least. But he was rather surprised to find that they left a sting.

To stand out of an important fixture because he was indifferent to distinctions that other fellows prized was one thing. To be "turned down" by the cricket captain as not good enough was quite another.

It was annoying for even Racke to take that view, or to pretend to take it. Cardew was not, after all, so impervious to public opinion as he had supposed. Racke did not matter, and his jeers did not matter; but Cardew found himself thinking of them with a keen sense of irritation. A fat chuckle interrupted his reflections, and he glanced at Baggy Trimble of the Fourth, who was adorning the School House doorway with his podgy person.

"Too bad, old chap!" said Trimble.

"Eh?"

"Sympathy, and all that," said Trimble.

"Are you sympathisin' with me, Trimble?" asked Cardew quietly, but with rather a dangerous look at the fat junior.

"Well, it's hard cheese, after you counted on figuring in the Rookwood match, isn't it?" said Trimble. "Some of the fellows think Tom Merry was rather rough on you. Still, we want to beat Rookwood." Baggy said "we" as if he were quite a cricketer himself. "Can't afford to carry passengers in a big fixture."

Cardew drew a deep breath.

It was miles beneath his dignity to argue with Baggy Trimble. He disdained to say a word. He walked on quietly, and Baggy never knew how narrow an escape he had had of having his bullet head banged on the big oak door.

Ralph Reckness Cardew was not in his usual cool and non-chalant mood when he came into Study No. 9 to tea. Levison and Clive gave him rather a grim look. They considered that Cardew had let down Study No. 9, and they did not like it. The Olympian role was all very well, if Cardew chose to play the goat; but cricket was cricket, and two members of Study No. 9, at least, were keen on the game. There was little talk at the tea-table in Study No. 9, and what there was was mostly monosyllables. Cardew's irritation increased.

"Are you fellows goin' to sulk?" he asked, at last.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Levison. "You can't expect us to be pleased at your letting down the study."

"I don't see that I've done it," grunted Cardew. "You're in the eleven, and that's enough to keep the giddy reputation of one junior study. And Clive's tryin' his hardest to shove in, though he isn't gettin' there. We can't all be triers."

"You had the place, and now you're turned down. It's a slur on the study."

"Turned down!" repeated Cardew.

"Yes; and we think it's rotten," said Clive.

"I don't call it turned down," said Cardew. "I'm wanted in the eleven, and I'm not playin' because I'm not keen on it."

"Well, that's rotten enough, if it's true," said Levison.

"Isn't it true?" exclaimed Cardew angrily.

"No, it isn't! You're turned down because you're a slacker and a swanker!"

"Levison!"

"It's about time you had some plain English," growled Levison. "You're wanted in the team, if you could be depended on. You can't! You gave our skipper no end of trouble over the Grammar School match last week, with your crying on and crying off, and never letting a fellow know where to have you. I'm not surprised that Tom Merry's fed-up, and thinks it better to have a fellow who can be relied on to do his best, even if he's not such form. But it's rotten, and you ought jolly well to be ashamed of yourself."

"Hear, hear!" said Clive.

Cardew looked at his study-mates with glinting eyes. But he did not speak.

"Now you know what we think," said Ernest Levison.

"Thanks, no end," yawned Cardew. "You're a bit of an ass, Ernest, old bean, and Clive's a good deal of an ass. But there's somethin' in what you say. I'll play in the Rookwood match if Tom Merry asks me again."

"You needn't trouble, he won't ask you again," said Levison. "Your number's up in that direction."

"Dear man! If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet can always trickle off to the mountain," smiled Cardew. "Suppose I put my swank in my pocket, and ask Tom Merry, as he won't ask me? How's that, umpire?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

Levison shook his head.

"N.G.," he answered. "He can't trust you, and he's right."

Suppose you played some fool trick after he relied on you?"

"What do you mean, you ass?" exclaimed Cardew, reddening. "Do you think I'd let him down if I'd promised to play?"

"I think you might follow any silly stunt that came into your silly head, and forget all about the cricket."

"By gad!" Cardew breathed hard. "Do you really think so?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Dear me! I've got a reputation to retrieve in this study," said Cardew. "I'm really not such a slackin' ass as that, old man. If I tell Merry I'm playin' for him on Wednesday, wild horses wouldn't drag me away from Little Side on the great day. Honest Injun!"

"You may get Merry to believe that—and you may not."

"I suppose he would take my word?" said Cardew savagely.

"He might."

"Only 'might'!" Cardew set his lips. "Do you know that you're askin' me to punch your head, Levison?"

"You're welcome," said Levison dryly.

Cardew looked at him for some moments, and then, without another word, walked out of the study.

CHAPTER 4.

The Eleventh Man!

TOM MERRY gnawed the end of his pencil, and looked at his cricket list for about the hundredth time. Manners and Lowther regarded him in sympathetic silence. The question of the eleventh man was not yet settled, and it was giving Tom Merry some unaccustomed intellectual exercise. With the Rookwood match coming on, it was hard that Talbot of the Shell should not be available, and that Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn should be on the sick list. Such unlucky chances were, perhaps, to be expected now and then, but it was harder still that Cardew should not be available. For Cardew was just the man that was wanted, and he was at the top of his form, and he was there, on the spot. Tom Merry did not regret having done with him. He felt that that was the only dignified course, and the only sensible one, taking Cardew's peculiar manners and customs into consideration. But he could not help feeling a deep resentment on the subject. It was rotten that he should have to run over his list of reserves, again and again, picking out a man of lesser powers, knowing that whomsoever he selected for the vacant place, the selected man would not be anything like Cardew's form. If batsmen had been wanted the matter would not have been so serious. But it was in bowling that the team was weak, and Cardew had turned out the best junior bowler at St. Jim's, with the single exception of Fatty Wynn, now in sanny. Tom Merry's usually sunny face grew dark as he thought about it.

"It's rotten," he said, at last. "I suppose it will have to be Dig, or Julian, or Hammond—much of a muchness, anyhow. It's rotten. Jimmy Silver's crowd from Rookwood aren't an easy proposition, at the best. It's pretty rotten not to be able to put our strongest team in the field."

"No good giving Cardew another chance, I suppose?" said Manners.

Tom shook his head decidedly.

"No. I suppose I could order him to play, as cricket captain; but he would be quite likely to clear off on the day of the match to show his independence. Ragging him afterwards wouldn't do much good. As for asking him to play, I've had enough of his swank and his cheek. If I went to him now and asked him to stand by the school, what do you think I should get?"

"Lip, I suppose," assented Manners.

"And I should jolly well punch his head. If I put him in the team again he would get more swelled head than ever. Besides, I can't trust him."

"I suppose not."

"He might fail us on the day—you never know, with Cardew. Even with the match only a few days off he wouldn't take the trouble to turn up for practice yesterday. No: I think I was right to shift him out. But who's going to take his place?"

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy."

"Hallo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sailed gracefully into Study No. 10. He glanced at the cricket list in Tom's hand, and smiled.

"Thinkin' it out, deah boy?" he asked.

"Yes," grunted Tom.

"Bettah wely on Studay No. 6. Dig's the man, you know."

"Hem! Perhaps."

"But I've dropp'd in to mention somethin' I've heard f'rom Tompkins of the Fourth."

"Eh! Who's Tompkins?"



As Ralph Reckness Cardew pushed open the door of Study No. 4 and looked in he beheld the inoffensive Tompkins lying extended on the carpet. Crooke of the Shell was sitting on his head and Tompkins was struggling wildly. Racke had a book of botanical specimens in his hands, and was coolly jerking out the contents and scattering them around the study. "You awful rotters!" came in muffled tones from Tompkins. "I'll tackle either of you if you'll let me gerrup!" (See page 9.)

"Tompkins, you know! It seems that Cardew was late for games practice yestahday, because he drowped into Study No. 4, to stop Cwooke and Kacke fwom bullyin' old Tompkins. He nevah explained that to you, deah boy; but pewwaps it makes a diffewance."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"Just like his swank," growled Monty Lowther. "Why couldn't he say so?"

"He is wathah an ass," agreed Arthur Augustus. "I thought I would mention it, in case you thought of playin' Cardew aftah all. We want to beat Wookwood. But if you don't play Cardew, old scout, wemembah Dig. Dig is a weally good man, you know, and in my studay."

And with a nod, the swell of St. Jim's sailed gracefully out.

Tom Merry looked thoughtful. But after some minutes of reflection, he shook his head, as if in answer to his own thoughts. Cardew was wanted in the match; but he was more trouble than he was worth; it was impossible to risk being let down at the last moment.

"Hallo, here he is," said Manners.

Ralph Reckness Cardew looked into the study.

Tom Merry gave him a grim glance. He was in no mood for Cardew's airy persiflage; he was, in fact, in a mood to throw Cardew out of the study if he was given any banter. But Cardew seemed to be in an unusually serious mood.

"You turned me out of the team yesterday, Tom Merry," he said.

"You're staying out!" said Tom curtly.

"I've come here to ask for another chance."

"What?"

"Jolly old Mahomet comin' to the mountain, since the jolly old mountain declines to budge," said Cardew with a touch of his old manner. Then, as Tom's brows knitted, he resumed his serious manner. "The fact is, I want to stand by St. Jim's, if I'm wanted; and if you decide to play me, I'll give my word to turn up at regular practice until the match comes off, and my word of honour to be on the spot on Wednesday. Is that good enough?"

Tom Merry looked at him.

He was still doubtful.

The colour came into Cardew's cheeks, as he met the dubious glance of the captain of the Shell. With all his faults, and their name was legion, Cardew was a fellow of his word; his word was his bond. He was capable of many things; but he was not capable of breaking his word. But he realised, too, that he had given Tom Merry only too much cause to regard him as a volatile fellow who was never to be relied upon.

"I mean it," he said quietly, "and I don't think you'll find any fellow at St. Jim's, Merry, who can say that I've broken a promise."

"I suppose I can take your word," said Tom, at last, slowly.

"I hope so."

Tom hesitated a few moments longer. Then he wrote the name "R. R. Cardew" in the list.

"Done!" he said. "I rely on you, Cardew."

"Safe as houses, old bean."

Cardew sauntered away, leaving Tom Merry greatly relieved. Perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, a slight doubt still lingered; but if so, it was only slight. And it was an immense gain to the team, to include the best junior bowler in the school—it was very likely to make all the difference in the match with Jimmy Silver and Co. of Rookwood.

Cardew walked back to Study No. 9 in the Fourth, with a smiling face. Clive and Levison were still there.

"You fellows talkin' cricket?" smiled Cardew.

"Oh, we'll chuck that, now you've come in," said Clive. "What shall we talk about—flat-racing, or billiards, or banker?"

"Clivey, old man, sarc doesn't suit you. Besides, you ought to be civil to a member of the eleven."

"You're not—" exclaimed Levison, starting.

"I am!"

"Then Tom Merry—"

"The dear man has overlooked my many and various sins, and decided to play me. I've given him my word to stand the racket."

"He wouldn't have trusted you, without that. Blessed if I expected him to trust you, anyhow," said Levison bluntly. "Thomas isn't so suspicious as you are, old bean—he does trust me," drawled Cardew. "He thinks my promise good enough."

"Then it's got to be good enough! For goodness' sake, Cardew, don't play the fool again after this," said Levison earnestly. "Keep your rot till after the match. If you let Tom Merry down after giving your word—" He paused, as Cardew broke in savagely.

"Confound your impudence, Levison! Do you think I'd let him down when I've given him my word?"

Levison eyed him calmly.

"No, I don't," he said; "I can't think so. But you're such a goat—"

"Oh, go and eat coke."

Cardew left Study No. 9 and slammed the door after him.

CHAPTER 5.

Racke Takes a Hand!

AUBREY RACKE scowled.

It was Tuesday, the day before the date of the Rookwood match, and Racke of the Shell had strolled on to Little Side to look at the cricket.

In cricket itself Racke found little interest; but he watched the play keenly, all the same. Crooke, who was with him, wondered at his keenness, and yawned several times as he lounged about. Tom Merry was putting his men through their final paces, as it were, in an informal game between two sides picked from the juniors of both Houses.

Tom Merry's face, as Racke looked at him, was very cheerful. He was handicapped by the loss of Talbot and Fatty Wynn; but the eleven was shaping very well. Blake and Kangaroo, who had had to stand out of the Grammar School match were both available now—and still more important, Cardew was available. Every day, since that talk in Tom Merry's study, Cardew had been at the cricket captain's beck and call—he seemed one of the keenest fellows in the team. Tom Merry was more than satisfied with his keenness, and it was indubitable that Cardew was in great form. He was bowling now, and Redfern's wicket had gone down, and some of the fellows cheered him. Hence Aubrey Racke's scowl.

"Cardew's comin' out strong, isn't he?" remarked Crooke, following Racke's glance, and guessing his thoughts. "Who'd ever have expected that slacker to turn out such a demon bowler?"

Racke gritted his teeth.

"The fellows seem to think no end of him now," went on Crooke. Gerald Crooke was Racke's pal, but he was the kind of pal who found pleasure in saying discomforting things, and he was enjoying Racke's expression. "Levison and Clive are no end bucked about it. I heard Tom Merry say that he was a rod in pickle for the Rookwooders. Tremendous bowler, isn't he?"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Racke.

Crooke grinned.

"I'm goin' to put a spoke in his wheel, somehow," muttered Racke. "He let us down over the Grammar School match. He led me to believe that he was goin' to give the game away, and he was pullin' my leg all the time, an' I lost a tanner on it."

"And I lost a fiver," said Crooke. "We might have known that he was pullin' our leg, come to think of it."

"I'll make him pay for it," said Racke savagely. "The rotter! Takin' a fellow up one day and lettin' him down the next!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

Crooke grinned again. Racke, the son of the wealthy war-profitteer, had striven hard to become friendly with the grandson of Lord Reckness. Cardew, in his more reckless moments, had allowed himself to be friendly with Racke; but when the mood passed he had always developed a blissful unconsciousness of Racke's existence. More than once Aubrey Racke had counted on an invitation to Reckness Towers for the holidays; but he had always been disappointed. It was his own fault; it is the fate of the tuft-hunter to be treated sometimes with patronage and sometimes with disdain. But it was bitter and galling to Racke, and it had bred in his heart a deep and bitter hatred of the dandy of the Fourth. And the incident of the Grammar School match had been the finishing touch. Cardew had simply fooled the blackguard of the Shell to the top of his bent, and then—as Racke regarded it—let him down. And then had come the incident in Tompkins' study.

Racke had found some solace in taunting the dandy of the Fourth with being "turned down" in the cricket. Even that solace was gone now. Cardew was in the eleven, and was generally regarded as one of the most important members of it.

There were few things at which Racke would have stopped to wreak his malice. Many schemes had passed through his mind, and he was thinking deeply and savagely as he watched the cheery cricketers.

"They're makin' much of him now," he said, in a low voice. "All the same, I fancy Tom Merry hasn't really altered his opinion. He can't be sure that Cardew won't let him down."

"Don't count on that," grinned Crooke. "Cardew may be a swankin' goat, but there's a limit, and Cardew knows just where it is. He would be cut by the whole school if he let the team down to-morrow. Even his own pals would be down on him. My hat! I fancy they'd boot him out of Study No. 9. Cardew's no such fool."

Racke nodded gloomily. He knew that Cardew was not likely to play into his enemy's hands so simply as that. But he followed up the thought in his scheming mind.

"But if he did—" he said.

"He won't!" said Crooke.

"If he did, he would be fairly ragged out of the school," said Racke. "He would get a raggin', as a matter of course; he mightn't mind that. But he would be turned down by all the House. Fancy Cardew sent to Coventry—his own friends passin' him by—even Baggy Trimble refusin' to speak to him. What?"

Racke's eyes gleamed at the thought.

"He's not such an ass," said Crooke. "I'd like to see it; but he isn't out to please us, Racke."

"Suppose he were missin' to-morrow when the game starts—"

"He won't be, you ass!"

"Suppose he were missin'?" repeated Racke doggedly. "Only suppose! What would all the fellows think?"

"They'd think he's gone off on some stunt, and let them down, of course. So he would have, if he were missin'. But he won't be missin'."

"I think he may be!" said Racke, in a low voice.

Crooke started and stared at his chum.

"What the thump have you got in your mind now, Racke. You can't make Cardew cut the match to-morrow."

"I'm goin' to try," said Aubrey Racke, between his teeth.

Crooke glanced round uneasily. It was dangerous for such a thing to be said, even in a whisper.

"Let's get out of this," muttered Racke. "We can't talk here. Come on."

"But I say—" stammered Crooke, deeply uneasy.

"Come up to the study and talk it over, over a fag," said Racke. "I've got an idea in my head. It may work, and it mayn't. We'll see."

"But the risk—"

Racke laughed scoffingly.

"You ass, do you think I'd run any risk in a thing like that? I wouldn't touch the idea with a barge-pole if it wasn't as safe as houses not to come out."

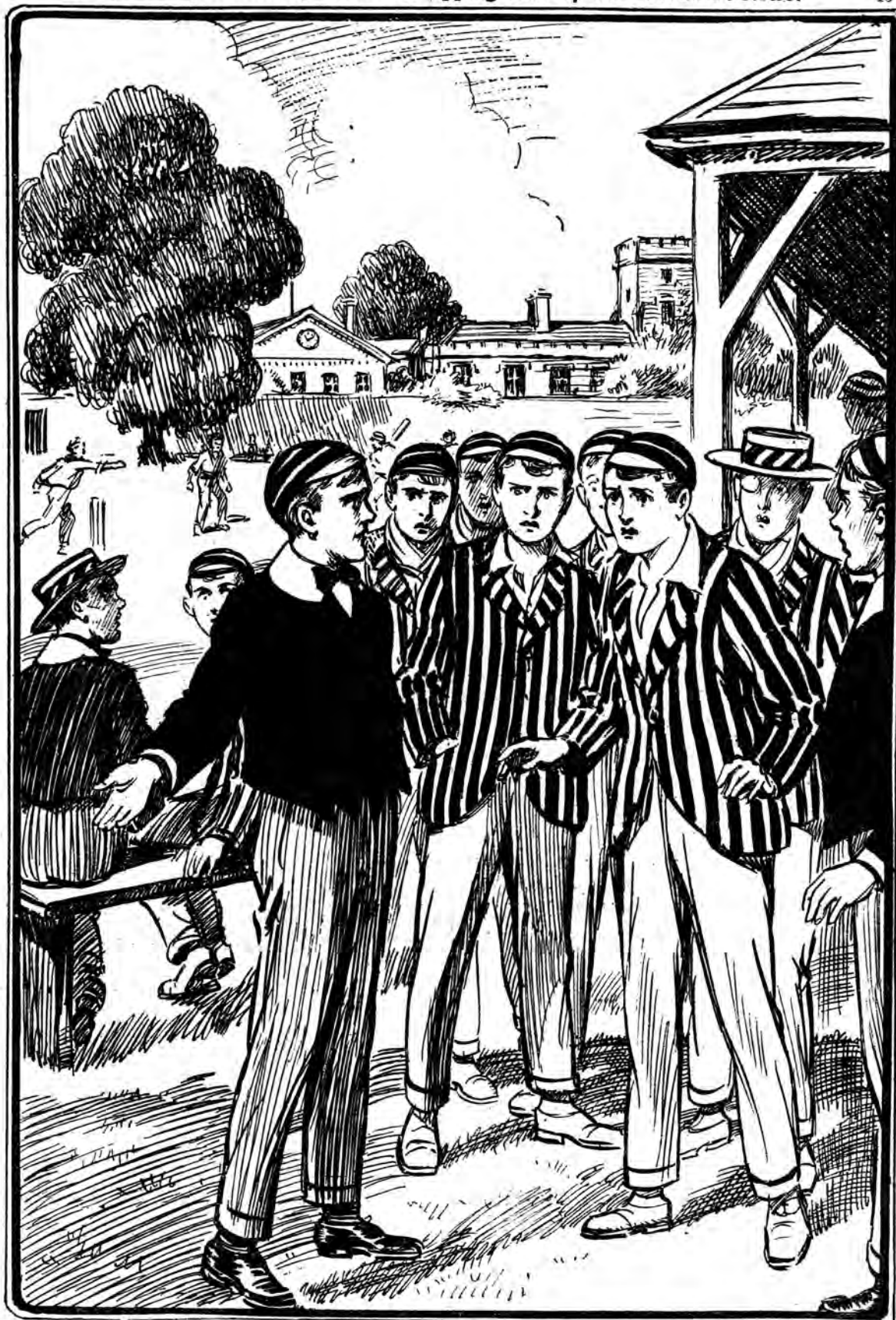
"Well, that's all right," said Crooke, relieved, as they walked off the cricket-ground. "All the same, I don't see how— Besides, to-morrow we were going for a run in your pater's car. You told me the car was comin' down to the school for you, as it's a whole holiday. We don't want to waste a holiday rooting round after a cad like Cardew."

"The car will come in useful, I dare say," said Racke, with an evil smile. "I've got the germ of the thing in my mind. It wants thinkin' out."

"It will want a lot of thinkin' out, I fancy, to make Cardew cut the Rookwood match, an' make the fellows think he did it of his own accord."

"Well, we're goin' to think it out," said Racke. "I'm goin' to make Cardew sorry he let me down over the Grammar School match and cost me a tanner, and sorry for buttin' into Tompkins' study the other day—sorry for a lot

(Continued on page 16.)



Tom Merry & Co. were on Little Side in cheery mood, when Clampe of the Shell approached them. "Message for Merry," said Clampe. "Cardew can't play for you to-day—" "What?" roared the junior captain, his face blazing. "Don't tell us rot like this! Do you mean to say Cardew's not coming?" (See page 17.)

of things, hang him! By gad! I'll get him barred by the school, with any luck!"

Crooke looked doubtful as he followed Racke into the School House. But he was willing to give his precious pal a hearing. Blackening the dandy of the Fourth in the eyes of all St. Jim's was, from Crooke's point of view as well as Racke's, a consummation devoutly to be wished. But it was quite certain that Gerald Crooke would not take a hand in the proceedings if any risk seemed to be involved. Revenge is said to be sweet; but it did not count with Crooke in comparison with the safety of his own skin.

In the study in the Shell the two young rascals talked a long time, and smoked a good many cigarettes.

Cricket was still going on on Little Side when they came down and left the School House and walked away towards Rylcombe.

There was a satisfied expression on Aubrey Racke's face. His scheme, whatever it was, had apparently been worked out satisfactorily. Racke and Crooke spent half an hour in Rylcombe, in a back room of the Green Man, in low-toned talk with a dingy, disreputable gentleman of the name of Lodgey, who smoked a strong cigar and sipped whisky-and-water while he listened and nodded. They walked back to St. Jim's just in time for lock-up.

In the Shell dormitory that night Racke heard Tom Merry and his friends talking of the morrow's match. They talked in a cheery, hopeful strain; and Cardew's name was mentioned a good many times, and always with commendation. Racke smiled sourly. He made no remark; but there was an emphatic remark from Grundy of the Shell.

"You're a silly ass, Tom Merry!" was Grundy's contribution to the discussion.

Tom Merry laughed.

"How's that, umpire?" he asked.

"Cardew will let you down," said Grundy scornfully. "I'd as soon trust Baggy Trimble as Cardew. You shouldn't play a man you can't depend on."

"Oh, I think I can depend on Cardew all right," said Tom cheerily. "Why should he let us down?"

"There's racing at Abbotsford to-morrow!" jeered Grundy. "That's more in Cardew's line than cricket."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom, though he felt a momentary twinge of uneasiness. "He's given me his word."

Snort from Grundy.

"Well, I rely on his word," said Tom, rather tartly. "If he broke it he would never be spoken to again by any decent fellow at St. Jim's."

"Lot he would care for that."

"Rot!" said Tom again.

"Well, I've warned you!" snorted Grundy. "But you always were an ass. I've offered to play against Rookwood, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a ripple all along the dormitory.

"Thanks!" said Tom, with a chuckle.

"I wouldn't let you down at the last moment, anyhow!" roared Grundy.

"Better for us of you did if you were in the team, old man," chuckled Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All serene, Grundy, old scout!" said Tom. "Cardew won't let us down."

"Well, I think he will," said Grundy obstinately. "And when he does don't say I didn't warn you."

"Right-ho, I won't!" said Tom, laughing.

Aubrey Racke grinned in the darkness. When Cardew was missing from the cricket-ground on the morrow Grundy's warning would be remembered. And Racke's plans were now cut and dried for Ralph Reckness Cardew to be missing.

CHAPTER 6.

Left in the Lurch!

TOM MERRY'S face was bright the following morning. It was a glorious sunny morning, giving promise of a perfect summer's day. It was a whole holiday, and there was a cricket match coming off, and Tom Merry had got his team into a state which, if not absolutely satisfactory, was very much better than he could have hoped at one time. Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood were a hard crowd to beat, but Tom Merry had every hope of a victory.

So the junior captain of St. Jim's had cause to be merry and bright, and merry and bright he was.

There was a First Eleven match that day. Kildare and Darrell and Monteith and the other great men of the Upper School meeting a team from Abbotsford. But in the Lower School the senior match was scarcely spoken of. There were likely to be few spectators below the Fifth on Big Side that day. The junior match occupied the thoughts of the juniors. From the point of view of the Lower School, Tom Merry was for the nonce a more important man than the mighty Kildare himself.

"Wippin' weathah, and it's goin' to be a wippin' match," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy told his comrades. "What with Cardew's bowlin' and my battin', deah boys, we shall give the Wookwoodahs somethin' to think about, what!"

"Not to mention my battin' and Tom Merry's," remarked Blake sarcastically.

"Yaas, wathah, old chap. But I was weferrin' to the first-class membahs of the team," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"That's Racke's car outside, you fellows," said Baggy Trimble. "He's going out for the day in it. Swankin' cad, you know."

"Weally, Twimble," said Arthur Augustus, "I do not see that Wacke is a swankin' cad for goin' motowin', as he is not in the ewicket."

"Trimble means that Racke hasn't asked him to go," grinned Herries.

"Of course, I wouldn't go," said Baggy loftily. "If I want a car for the day I should simply have to telephone to Trimble Hall, and the pater would send the Rolis-Royce."

"Weally, Twimble—"

Aubrey Racke of the Shell came along with Crooke. A good many fellows had looked at the big car with interest. Undoubtedly it was a very expensive and handsome car, and must have cost Sir James Racke a great deal of money. The liveried chauffeur stood like a stone statue, waiting till it should please Master Aubrey to step into the car. But Aubrey appeared to be in no hurry. He spoke a few words to the chauffeur, and then chatted with Crooke, the big car standing waiting on the drive. Quite a number of fellows would have been pleased to join Racke in motoring that day. He had already declined, without thanks, offers from Trimble and Mellish and Mulvaney minor, and five or six other fellows. Cardew sauntered along with Levison and Clive, and glanced at the big car and smiled. Racke caught the smile, and if Racke had thought of relenting that ironical smile would have hardened his heart.

Redfern of the Fourth, a New House junior, came scudding over from Mr. Ratcliff's house.

"Cardew about?" he called out as he arrived at the School House steps.

"Yaas, wathah, Weddy," answered Arthur Augustus. "Standin' ovah yondah near Wacke's cah."

Redfern hurried towards Cardew.

"You're wanted in the New House, Cardew," he said.

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"Anythin' up?" he drawled. "Have I ruffled the serenity of the jolly old Ratcliff bird, by any chance? If so, I'm goin' to give him a miss."

"It isn't a row," said Redfern. "You've been asked for on Mr. Ratcliff's telephone, and he's sent me over to tell you so."

"Good gad! You don't mean to say that Ratty is takin' a call for a junior, and not a fellow of his own House, either?" exclaimed Cardew, in astonishment.

"I fancy it's something important from his look," said Redfern. "He told me to mention that the call was from Reckness Towers."

"That accounts," yawned Cardew. "Dear old Ratty dearly loves a lord. I suppose I'd better go, though I really don't see why they couldn't have rung me up on a School House phone. Why give a fellow the trouble of trottin' across the quad?"

"Better go if Ratty's holding the line," said Levison.

"What a frightful bore!" yawned Cardew.

The dandy of the Fourth walked across to the New House. He did not hurry himself.

Aubrey Racke glanced after him with a curious expression on his face. He spoke to the chauffeur and took his seat in the car with Crooke. The big car glided down the drive and stopped outside the New House. Clampe of the Shell, a New House fellow, was going out with Racke and Crooke, and the car stopped to pick him up. Clampe came out of the House as Cardew entered it.

Levison and Clive walked away to Little Side, where Tom Merry had gone to look at the pitch. The Rookwooders were expected at an early hour. Cardew, for the moment, was not in the thoughts of the other cricketers. Aubrey Racke had a clear field for carrying out his secret plans.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY....PRICE 2:
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

Racke and Crooke, in the big car, sat and chatted with Clampe outside the New House, Clampe standing by the door of the car. The three black sheep seemed in no hurry to get off.

Meanwhile, Cardew walked to Mr. Ratcliff's study and presented himself.

The New House master gave him a quite affable nod. Mr. Ratcliff was not a good-tempered gentleman, nor an obliging gentleman. But he had a great regard for the peerage, a little weakness of his that was well-known at St. Jim's. Any one who had used his telephone to speak to Figgins or Redfern or Kerr would probably have been snapped very short. But a call from a belted earl was a different matter. Mr. Ratcliff did not like Cardew, because he did not like any boys at all. But Cardew was the grandson of a lord, and that made a difference.

"A gentleman has rung me up from Reckness Towers, Cardew," said Mr. Ratcliff, quite graciously. "It is a message from your grandfather—Lord Reckness."

"Yes, sir," said Cardew. "Thank you very much for takin' the call, sir! It's very kind of you."

"Not at all, Cardew. It appears that your grandfather's secretary was given a New House number instead of a School House number. But as it is a trunk call from such a distance I thought I would send for you to save delay as the matter seems serious."

He pointed to the telephone.

"Serious, sir!" repeated Cardew, and his own handsome, careless face grew serious as he spoke.

"It seems that your grandfather is very ill, Cardew, I am sorry to say."

"Oh!"

Cardew almost ran to the phone, and caught up the receiver.

From the manner in which Cardew talked of his grandfather, when he mentioned him, no one at St. Jim's would have supposed that there was any deep bond of affection between the two. That the old lord was very indulgent to his grandson, the fellows knew—but Cardew did not strike them as a fellow who was likely to be either very grateful or very affectionate. Even Levison, a very keen fellow, did not suspect it. From Cardew's light, ironical talk, indeed, anyone might have supposed him absolutely indifferent to the claims of relationship. But he did not look indifferent as he grasped the receiver and jammed it to his ear. His handsome face was almost white.

"Hallo!"

"Is that Master Ralph?"

"Yes, yes! Who is speakin'?"

"His lordship's secretary. Lord Reckness had a very bad turn in the night, and the doctor advises that you should be called home at once. Lord Lilburn is already here. A telegram has been sent to your headmaster, so it will not be necessary for you to delay. When can you be expected here?"

"Is my grandfather very ill?"

"We fear that he is sinking, sir!"

"I'm comin'."

"But when—"

"In an hour. I can get a car at Wayland, and come right on."

"Then I will tell the doctor—"

Cardew rang off; he had heard enough. He drew a quick, deep breath as he turned from the telephone. For a moment a strange faintness came over him. Mr. Ratcliff's study seemed to swim about his eyes. He pulled himself together with iron determination, and remained cool and calm.

"Thank you very much, sir!" he said quietly, and he left the study.

At the door of the New House he paused a moment. Cricket matches did not weigh much with him just then, and he had not a second to spare. But he had to get quickly to Wayland, and a word could be sent to Tom Merry.

"Hallo! Anythin' up?" called out Racke. "You're lookin' a bit queer, Cardew!"

Cardew looked at him.

"Will one of you fellows tell Tom Merry I'm called away suddenly?" he said. "Tell him my grandfather is dangerously ill."

"Certainly!" said Clampe. "I'll cut across."

"You're goin' home?" asked Racke.

"Yes, yes!"

"We're just startin'. I'll give you a lift to the station if you like."

Cardew hesitated a second. He did not want to be obliged to Racke of the Shell. But the offer came as a god-send. It was a long way to Wayland, and a bike ride was slow, and telephoning for a taxi meant still more delay. The thought of the old man lying on a bed of pain and

sickness was enough to banish from Cardew's mind the momentary thought of his personal feelings.

"Thanks!" he said quietly. "If you'll do that, Racke, I'll be glad—and I sha'n't forget it!"

"Here, wait for me!" called out Clampe, who had already started for the cricket-ground with the message for Tom Merry.

"We'll come back for you!" called back Racke. "Cardew's in a hurry; sha'n't be long."

"Oh, all right!"

Clampe went on his way, and Cardew jumped into the car. A minute more, and it was turning out of the gates of St. Jim's. With a burst of speed that satisfied even Cardew's burning impatience, it raced away for Wayland.

Tom Merry & Co. were on Little Side, in cheery mood, when Clampe of the Shell came up.

"Message for you, Merry!"

"Cough it up!" said Tom cheerily.

"Cardew can't play for you to-day—"

"What!" roared Tom.

His face fairly blazed.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is weally too thick! Why, the Wookwood chaps will be heah in a quatah of an hour."

Levison strode towards Clampe.

"What's this yarn?" he exclaimed angrily. "Don't tell us rot like that! Do you mean to say— Where is Cardew?"

"Gone!" snapped Clampe.

"Gone! Where?" shouted Blake.

"Home, I think!"

"He's gone home!" repeated Tom Merry dazedly. "Impossible! He wouldn't—he couldn't—he wouldn't dare—"

"Give a fellow a chance to speak," said Clampe impatiently. "He's had a call on the phone, and his grandfather's ill, and he had to clear off in a hurry. At least, that's what he said."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"If that's true, all right," he said.

"But is it true?" roared George Alfred Grundy, who was on the ground with the cricketers. "Is it? What did I tell you? Rats!"

"Cardew wouldn't tell a lie about it," said Levison, though his face was deeply troubled.

"He wouldn't!" muttered Clive. "No, he wouldn't! It's all straight, Tow. If his grandfather's seriously ill, and had him telephoned for—"

"I know he had a telephone-call in the New House," said Redfern. "I came to tell him."

"Why in the New House?" jeered Grundy. "They'd naturally use a School House phone!"

"Might have got the wrong number—"

"Oh, rot!"

"He's gone already?" asked Tom.

"Yes; Racke's given him a lift in his car."

"Racke! He's gone with Racke!"

"Gone on a giddy joy-ride with Racke!" jeered Grundy.

"That's the fellow you've trusted, and it serves you jolly well right, Tom Merry!"

Tom's brow grew black. He was not a suspicious fellow, but his doubts of Cardew had never quite been banished: they had lingered faintly, but they had lingered. If this was a trick—just one more of the irresponsible escapades of the dandy of the Fourth—

"I'm sure it's all straight," said Clive.

Tom did not answer.

"Anyhow, we shall know later," said Blake. "We can easily know whether old Lord Reckness is dangerously ill, and whether Cardew was phoned for and whether he went home. In fact, one of us can phone to Reckness Towers and ask. There's time before the Rookwood chaps get here."

Tom Merry nodded. Levison of the Fourth scudded away to the School House. It was twenty minutes before he came back. He had had to wait for the trunk call. His face was a little pale, and his brow gloomy.

"Well?" said Tom.

"I—I've asked them, and—and—" Levison faltered.

"Well?" repeated Tom Merry.

"They say that Lord Reckness is in his usual state of health, and they know nothing of any telephone-call to Cardew."

There was a deep silence among the cricketers for some moments. Tom Merry broke it.

"It's a trick, then," he said. "Cardew has left us in the lurch at the last minute—and rigged up a telephone-call to cover it. He's gone joy-riding with Racke after giving his word—" Tom Merry broke off. It was futile to talk.

"Here come the Rookwooders!" said Blake.

Tom Merry, with feelings too deep for expression in words, went to greet Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood.

CHAPTER 7. Caught in the Snare!

THERE was a sudden grinding of brakes. The big car came to a halt, in a deep and rutty lane. Ralph Reckness Cardew, plunged in deep and troubled thought, had been sitting with unseeing eyes fixed on the window; he started, and bit his lip hard, as the car halted. On either side, almost touching the car windows, were heavy trees thick with summer green. It was a by-lane leading into the Wayland Road, arched over by foliage—a lovely spot, but the charm of scenery was quite lost on Cardew just then. Racke and Crooke exchanged a quick glance, and Racke smiled slightly. The chauffeur jumped down.

"Anythin' up, Tomlinson?" asked Racke, putting his head out of the window.

"I'm afraid it's the magneto again, sir."

"Buck up! We're in a tearin' hurry."

"I'll do my best, sir."

Cardew trembled with enraged impatience.

The offer of a lift in Racke's car had come as a godsend; he had not foreseen a breakdown. He knew there was an express from Wayland Junction at ten, and there was just time to catch it, in the car. Five minutes lost meant the express lost. And the look of the chauffeur seemed to indicate that it was a question of a good deal more than five minutes.

"Sorry, old man," said Racke. "Couldn't foresee this. You'll catch the next train."

"That's an hour," said Crooke.

Cardew rose.

"I can hire a car in Wayland and go by road," he said. "That was my first idea, really. If your man can't get going, I'll cut on to Wayland—the express will be a goner."

"How long, Tomlinson?" called out Racke.

"I'm afraid I can't tell for some minutes, sir, but I hope—"

"That does it," said Racke. "Look here, Cardew, we're only half a mile from Wayland, and there's the short cut through the wood. Trot it, and you'll catch the express, perhaps; anyhow, you'll get a car from Wayland Garage. I've saved you some time, anyhow, by bringin' you this far."

"You have—thanks!" said Cardew.

He jumped from the car.

On the left of the shady lane was a stile that gave admission to a footpath through the wood. It seemed by sheer good fortune that the breakdown had occurred at that precise point—for the footpath cut off more than half the distance into Wayland Town. Cardew stayed for no more. He jumped the stile, and started up the footpath at a run, and in a few seconds was lost to sight in the thick green of the wood.

Crooke's eyes met Racke's.

"And that's the keenest and deepest fellow in the House!" grinned Racke. "Taken in like a baby!"

"It looks like a sure thing now!" muttered Crooke.

"Quite. Lodgey's on the watch."

Racke and Crooke smoked cigarettes in the car, and the chauffeur no longer bending anxiously over the bonnet, stood and waited. Why Master Aubrey had played this trick on his passenger, the chauffeur did not know; and he did not care—it was no business of his what jests the schoolboys played on one another. Racke, having finished his smoke, and being sure that Cardew was out of hearing by that time, signed to the man, and he mounted into the driving-seat, and the car glided on. The breakdown had been a pretence, but Cardew, keen as he was, had no suspicion of it, so far.

Indeed, the dandy of the Fourth was thinking of anything but the sullen enmity of Aubrey Racke.

He hurried on through the woodland path—a path thick with grass and daisies, barred in places by low boughs, seldom trod by the feet of passengers. He was thinking of the faint chance that remained of catching the express at the junction. Certainly no thought of danger was in Cardew's mind.

When it came, it found him utterly off his guard. A figure leaped suddenly from behind a tree as Cardew passed, and the St. Jim's junior went reeling forward, to fall upon his face in the thick grass, in the grasp of his scarcely-seen assailant.

A knee was planted in his back, pinning him down helplessly.

Cardew panted.

"Who's that? What— Let me go, you scoundrel—quick! I'm in a hurry!"

He heard a harsh laugh from the man. He tried to twist his head round to look at him, but a hard grasp was on the back of his neck, jamming his face down in the grass again. He caught a momentary glimpse of his assailant, and that was all—and all he saw was that the man had a red-spotted handkerchief tied across his face.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

Cardew began to struggle savagely.

He supposed that he was in the hands of a footpad—there seemed no other explanation of the sudden and savage attack. But he was helpless under the knee that ground into his back.

"You villain!" he panted. "You rotter! Look here, I've got to catch a train! Let me up, and I'll give you all the money I have about me—do you hear?"

There was no answer.

No groping hand sought his pockets, or his watch and chain. Cardew realised with amazement that it was not for robbery that he had been attacked. Then why—

He struggled hopelessly, but desperately. The ruffian, still kneeling on the helpless junior, grasped his wrists and drew them together behind him and tied them together with a cord. In utter amazement Cardew realised that he was being made a prisoner.

"Help!"

He shouted desperately.

In that lonely part of the old wide wood there was little hope of being heard, of obtaining help. But it was a chance, and he tried it.

But only one shout for help was uttered. The next moment a rough hard hand was clapped over Cardew's mouth, and he was savagely silenced. Then a dirty handkerchief was thrust between his teeth, and he choked and gasped. A cord was drawn round his head, and knotted, to keep the gag in place.

Then the ruffian released him, and Cardew, his hands tied behind him, staggered to his feet.

His eyes burned at the ruffian. The man was dressed in shabby old horsey-looking clothes, and the red-spotted handkerchief quite concealed his features. Cardew could not even guess his identity, or whether he had ever seen the man before. Two gashes cut in the handkerchief revealed two evil-looking eyes—that was all.

Cardew made desperate efforts to speak. Gladly, at that moment, would he have handed over all he possessed to be released, to speed on his way to the sick-bed of Lord Reckness. Whatsoever the motive of this ruffian in kidnapping him, surely he would release the junior if he knew the circumstances—at least, that was Cardew's only hope. But he could not speak. His face grew crimson, and the veins stood out on his forehead, in his frantic efforts.

The man eyed him curiously.

"Foller me, young 'un," he said, in a hoarse, husky voice, which was evidently disguised.

Cardew bit madly at the gag.

"Look 'ere, you'll blooming well choke yourself at that rate!" said the man. "Chuck it! You ain't going to yell, not if I 'ave to knock you on the 'ead, see?"

Cardew's face was almost purple now.

Possibly the ruffian was a little alarmed by his look. There was a hesitation in his manner now.

"You want to say something?" he asked.

Cardew nodded.

"Promise not to 'owl out if I let you speak?"

Another nod.

The man removed the gag, holding it ready, however, to jam back into the schoolboy's mouth if he should break faith. But Cardew was not thinking of that. He panted, and found his voice.

"Let me go! Listen! My grandfather's sick at home—perhaps dying! I must get home. I'll say nothing about this. I'll reward you. Let me go at once!"

He could see that the man was grinning under the red-spotted handkerchief.

"That's all right, young 'un," answered the ruffian. "Don't you be scared about your blinking grandfather. He's all right."

"What do you mean?" panted Cardew.

"You'd know by to-night, I s'pose, so I may as well tell you now. I was the bloke that telephoned."

Cardew staggered.

"You!"

"Little me!" The man chuckled. "You thought you was rung up from Reckness Towers—what? Well, you was rung up from no farther off than Wayland post-office. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Cardew stared at him dazedly.

He did not believe the statement, yet somehow he felt that it was not mockery. It was too strange and startling to be believed at once.

"Can't you understand?" exclaimed the man impatiently.

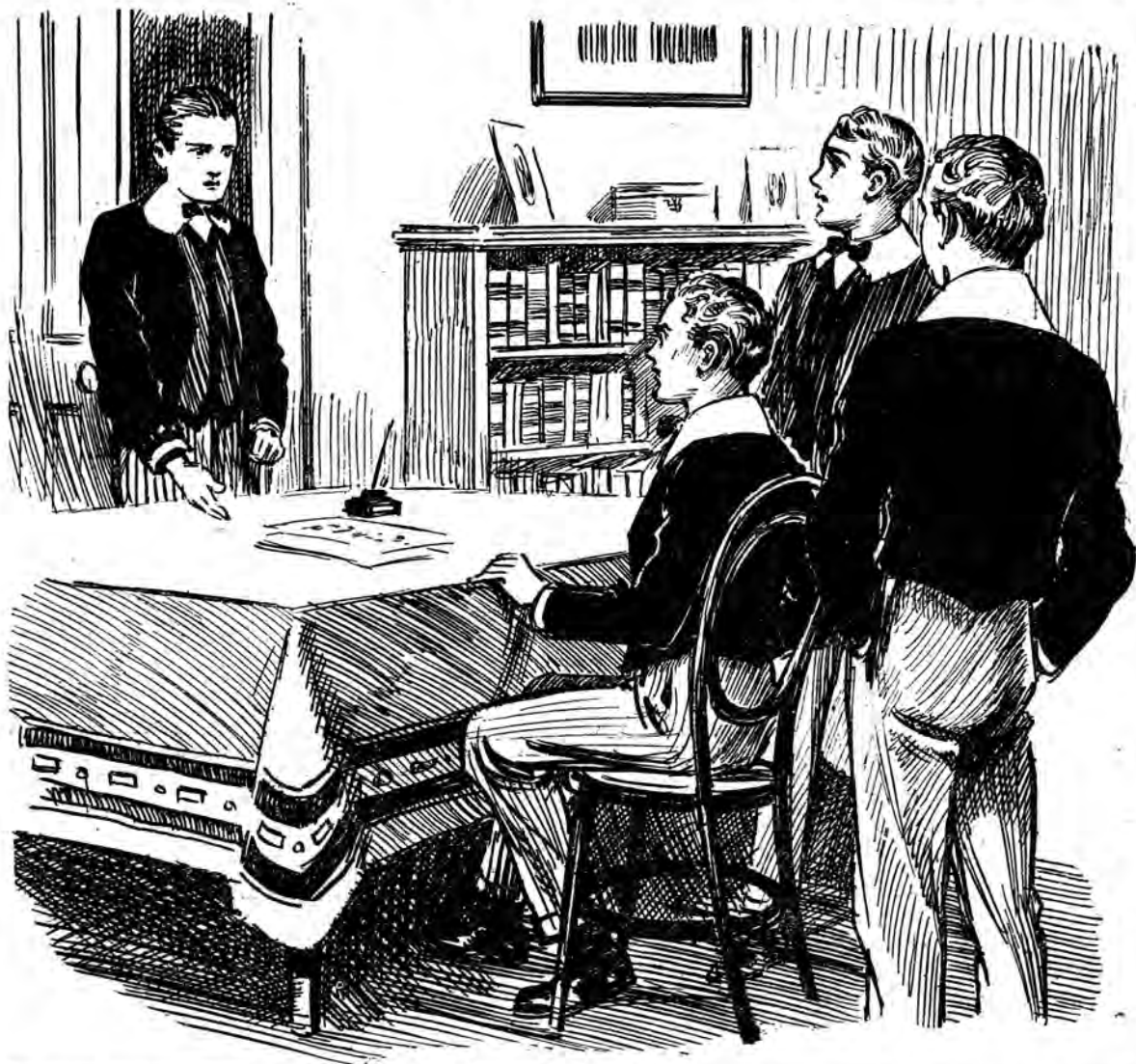
"It was a joke of mine—just a joke on you, Master Cardew, because you served me a trick once."

"Who are you?" panted Cardew.

"That's telling!"

"How 'ave I ever harmed you?"

"Never mind that; I've got my reasons. But if you're anxious about the old gentleman at home, set your mind at rest. He's all right—leastways, so far as I know. I tell you it was little me that telephoned to you."



Ralph Reckness Cardew entered the study and Tom Merry gave him a grim glance. "You turned me out of the team yesterday, Tom Merry," he said. "Yes," answered Tom Merry curtly, "and you're staying out!" "But I've come to ask for another chance," continued Cardew. "I want to stand by St. Jim's, and if you decide to play me I'll give my word to turn up at regular practice until the match!" (See page 13.)

"But why—why?" panted Cardew, belief forcing itself into his dazed mind at last.

"Jest to get my own back on you, that's all."

"But—but—"

"That's enough jaw. You've got to come along with me."

The man grasped Cardew and forced the gag into his mouth again. Cardew did not attempt to resist; with his hands bound, that was futile. The man grasped him by the shoulder to lead him away from the footpath into the thick-ness of the wood. The junior did not stir.

"Will you get a move on?" muttered the man savagely. He glanced uneasily up and down the footpath. Lonely as the path was, it was not impossible that some pedestrian might come in sight from the direction either of Rylcoubc or of Wayland.

Cardew's eyes gleamed. He made no movement. The man muttered a curse, grasped him savagely by the shoulder, and dragged him away by sheer force into the wood, his feet dragging helplessly in the grass.

CHAPTER 8.

Down and Out!

DEEP and deeper into the thick wood, through tangled bush and briar, the ruffian plunged, with the St. Jim's junior in his grasp. Evidently he knew the ways about Wayland Wood; he was carefully avoiding the footpaths, and Cardew's faint hope of being seen and rescued died away. Dazed and dizzy, the junior was flung

down at last at the foot of an oak-tree in the heart of the wood, where even the sky was blocked out by dense foliage.

The man panted after his exertions. Mr. Lodgey, the billiards-sharper, was not in good condition; he consumed too many cigars and too much whisky for that. He was bedewed with perspiration when he stopped at last and flung Cardew to the ground. He stood for some minutes panting and glaring savagely at the junior in the grass, leaning on the oak while he recovered his breath.

He stirred at last.

Cardew was lifted and placed against the oak, and a cord was run round the trunk and knotted to his arms.

He was an utterly helpless prisoner now, fastened to the oak, with no possibility of getting at the cord that secured him.

"That will do, I fancy?" muttered the rascal.

Cardew's eyes glittered at him, but he could not speak. He was trying to "place" the man—to guess who he was, what his motive might be for this amazing and apparently meaningless outrage. That he had ever harmed the man, and that this was an act of revenge he did not believe for a moment; that had been said to mislead him, he was sure. The man had been set on to do this. By whom, and for what reason, was a mystery.

Cardew had enemies—he had many enemies. He had more enemies than friends at St. Jim's, and he knew it. But it was hard to believe that any St. Jim's fellow could be at the bottom of this. Yet it seemed to be the only explanation.

The man examined his fastenings carefully and stepped back.

"You won't get loose in a hurry," he said. "I'll come along later and see you agin. Take a rest till then."

With that he turned away and disappeared into the wood. For a few minutes he could be heard brushing through the thickets, and then there was silence—broken only by the twittering of birds in the thick branches and the sigh of the wind overhead.

Cardew was left alone.

Angry—bitterly angry—as he was, his chief feeling for a time was relief. He knew now that the supposed telephone message from Reckness Towers had been a delusion and a snare. The news that had cut him to the heart was false. Lord Reckness was not in danger; the old man was not on a bed of sickness waiting for his favourite grandson to come to him. That was an immense relief to Cardew; and with that anxiety gone from his mind he was able to concentrate his thoughts on his own situation.

For some minutes he tested the cords that bound him, seeking to release himself. A very few minutes sufficed to show him that the attempt was hopeless.

He was a prisoner, bound to the tree, until it should please his captor to return and release him. He had to make up his mind to that.

Chance of rescue there was little or none. Who was likely to penetrate into that pathless, almost impenetrable, recess of the wood and discover him? He was invisible to anyone six or seven feet away; and he could make no sound even if he heard a footstep close at hand.

Suddenly there came back into his mind the remembrance of the match that was to be played that day at St. Jim's. By that time the Rookwood team must have arrived.

It was an illuminating thought to Cardew. What had utterly perplexed him grew clear now.

The motive for this outrage was supplied. He had been kidnapped in Wayland Wood to keep him away from the Rookwood match. Now that the thought was once in his mind it was a certainty. There was no other reason why anyone should have desired to trick him away from the school and keep him away.

And who—

"Racke!"

The name leaped into his mind.

This was Racke's revenge. Cardew could have laughed as he thought of it, so easily and simply had he been taken in. The man who had handled him—obviously one of the scoundrelly loafers of the Green Man—had been hired to do it; and Racke was on familiar terms with the disreputable gang at the Green Man. It was clear now why the telephone-call had come to the New House, instead of the School House—it was so that Cardew would be at a distance from his friends when he received the false message. And Racke, with his car, had been waiting outside the New House, ready to offer him that lift to the station. Cardew had walked blindly into the trap.

And that breakdown of the car in the lane close to the woodland footpath—a trick, of course. The masked ruffian had been already waiting in the wood, and Racke had landed Cardew fairly into his hands.

It was clear enough. There was no proof, but it was clear. For the man had been waiting for him on that lonely path, knowing that he would come. How could he have known that Cardew would take that path if the lift in Racke's car and the breakdown had not been arranged in advance?

There was a deep, cold rage in Cardew's heart, but at the same time he felt something like admiration for the way in which Aubrey Racke had laid his cunning scheme. Not a point had been left unguarded; and, still more important from the point of view of the schemer, there was no shadow of proof of Racke's complicity. Cardew could feel quite certain on the point. But what could he prove? Even if the ruffian who had handled him could be found and forced to confess—which was very unlikely—the word of such a man would weigh nothing against Aubrey Racke's denial. The strictest proof would be required before it would be believed that a St. Jim's fellow had entered into such a scheme with a disreputable outcast. Racke in these very moments was doubtless congratulating himself on his success—and on his certainty of immunity.

And now—

He was out of the Rookwood match, and booked for a dismal day in the woods. For the cricket match Cardew cared little; but there was his promise to Tom Merry. There was the reliance placed on him by the St. Jim's cricketers—a reliance founded on his word of honour. There was the rub.

Racke knew that missing the match would not cut Cardew very deep. But for his promise to Tom Merry, he would very likely have missed it from sheer indifference.

But what would Tom Merry think? What would all the fellows think? It would come out, soon enough, that Lord Reckness was not sick, that no telephone message had come

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

from Reckness Towers. Cardew could tell of the trick that had been played—would anyone believe him?—when he returned after the match was over. Would his own chums believe him? Would it not be clear to all the school that he had deserted his side, that he had left the cricketers in the lurch from sheer light-minded indifference, and had manufactured a feeble story to account for his absence?

Cardew's mind was clear on this point. He knew that he could not expect belief even from Levison and Clive. His waywardness, his forgetfulness of all claims that did not square with his momentary inclinations, were too well known. When he should return to the school with a lame story on his lips he had to expect the angry scorn of all the fellows, who would believe that he had deserted and betrayed them. That was what Racke had planned. And, cool and hardy as Cardew was, he shrank from such a prospect. To dislike and enmity he was indifferent; but to be held up to scorn as a deserter, as a fellow who had broken his word of honour, who had left his own friends in the lurch—that hit him hard. What was his life likely to be at St. Jim's afterwards?

Black and bitter thoughts raced through Cardew's mind as the birds twittered over his head and the soft summer wind rustled the leaves. He must get loose. Somehow he must get away. At the last moment, somehow, he had to defeat Racke's cunning scheme of revenge. And, with savage, frantic strength he struggled with the cords that bound him—struggled till his wrists were sore, till his limbs ached, till he was breathless, exhausted. And still he was a helpless prisoner—helpless and hopeless.

He leaned back against the oak in misery and despair. He was helpless. He was down and out! The Rookwooders were at St. Jim's now, the match was beginning, and if the St. Jim's fellows were thinking of Cardew, he could guess what they were thinking. The scorn, the anger, the bitter resentment, the shamed silence of his friends in the midst of the general torrent of condemnation. Cardew could picture it all. And then—a sound of hope to his ears—there was a footfall in the dense wood!

He started, and strained his ears.

Was it the ruffian returning? Surely not, so soon! Some birds-nester, perhaps! Cardew strove to make a sound, but he could not. He listened almost in anguish.

The footfall was repeated, a mass of foliage was pushed aside, and a face appeared. And Cardew, in amazement and gladness, looked on the simple, innocent face of Clarence York Tompkins of the Fourth Form.

CHAPTER 9.

Free at Last!

CLARENCE YORK TOMPKINS was enjoying his holiday that day.

He was not interested in the cricket. Neither the First Eleven match on Big Side, nor the junior match on Little Side at St. Jim's, drew Clarence York to the cricket-ground. More important matters—from his own point of view—filled the mind of Clarence York Tompkins. It was a fine summer's day, and there were no classes, there was no compulsory games practice, and the mind of Tompkins of the Fourth was filled with thoughts botanical.

On Big Side, Kildare of the Sixth might hit mighty swipes to the boundary; on Little Side, Tom Merry & Co. might sustain a manful struggle against the Rookwooders, but Clarence York Tompkins bestowed no thought on such things. For he had to repair the damage Racke and Crooke had done to his collection of botanical specimens. He had to search the deep glades of Wayland Wood—a happy occupation which caused Tompkins' simple, cheery face to expand in happy smiles.

It was said of old that the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley. Certainly when Racke and Crooke, from sheer love of bullying, had ragged Tompkins' botanical collection, they had never dreamed of this result. Yet, if that ragging had never taken place, almost certainly Tompkins of the Fourth would not have been rooting that sunny morning in the untrod depths of Wayland Wood.

Cardew, as he recognised Tompkins, realised what had brought the Fourth-Former there. But it did not matter much what had brought him there—he was there!

Tompkins did not for the moment observe the junior bound to the tree.

He was moving along, bent almost double, with his eyes on the ground, and the light of anticipation in his eyes. Doubtless he was on the track of some much-desired specimen.

It really seemed that Tompkins might pass within a few feet of Cardew without observing him at all.

Cardew made a desperate effort to call. He succeeded only in uttering a faint, gasping sound.

Tompkins heard it, started, and looked up.

He stared blankly at Cardew. Even at that anxious moment, when hope had so suddenly followed despair, Cardew



Before Clarence York Tompkins realised the situation Ralph Reckness Cardew had seized his bicycle, mounted it, and ridden away. "I say," bawled Tompkins, "you ain't allowed to ride on the footpaths here. You have to wheel the bike——" But Cardew, riding like a madman, was already disappearing. (See this page.)

could not help laughing at the almost idiotic expression of bewilderment in Tompkins' face.

"Oh!" ejaculated Tompkins. "What—— I say, Cardew old—— Well, you ass! What's this game?"

Cardew could not speak, but his look was eloquent. Tompkins came over to the oak.

"Some fellows tied you up like this for a lark?" he asked.

"What have you got in your mouth? Oh dear!"

Tompkins removed the gag, and Cardew gasped for breath.

"Untie me—quick! No, cut the cord if you've got a pocket-knife!" he panted.

"But, I say, why?"

"Never mind why! Let me loose!" panted Cardew.

"Oh, all right!"

Tompkins fumbled in his pocket—with maddening slowness—and produced a pocket-knife. He sawed at the cords, and in a minute more Ralph Reckness Cardew was free.

"I say, that's a rotten joke, tying a fellow to a tree," said Tompkins. "Glad I came along, old chap!"

"I'm glad, too!" said Cardew grimly. He leaned on the oak, and breathed deep. "Has the match started yet?"

"Eh? What match?"

"The Rookwood match, you ass!"

"Oh, I don't know! I came out on my bike," said Tompkins. "I've left my bike on the footpath. I think it's safe. I couldn't bring it here with me. Too thick, you know. I say, Cardew, if you'd like to help me look for my specimens, I'll give you some tips about botany. It's an awfully interesting subject, old chap, if you once get really on to it. F'rinstance——"

"Where's your bike?"

"On the footpath, about a hundred yards away. But I was going to tell you——"

"Show me where it is!"

"But——"

"Come on, you ass!" roared Cardew.

"Look here——" protested Tompkins.

Cardew grasped his arm, and Tompkins unwillingly accompanied him. He could see no reason for all this hurry and excitement.

In a few minutes they were on the footpath, and Cardew seized the bicycle. There was a chance yet!

"I say, I can't lend you that bike. I want it to get back for dinner," called out Tompkins, in dismay.

Cardew did not even answer. There was no time to explain matters to Tompkins, even if the enthusiastic botanist would have understood. The dandy of the Fourth jumped on the machine.

"I say!" bawled Tompkins. "You ain't allowed to ride on the footpaths here! You have to wheel the bike——"

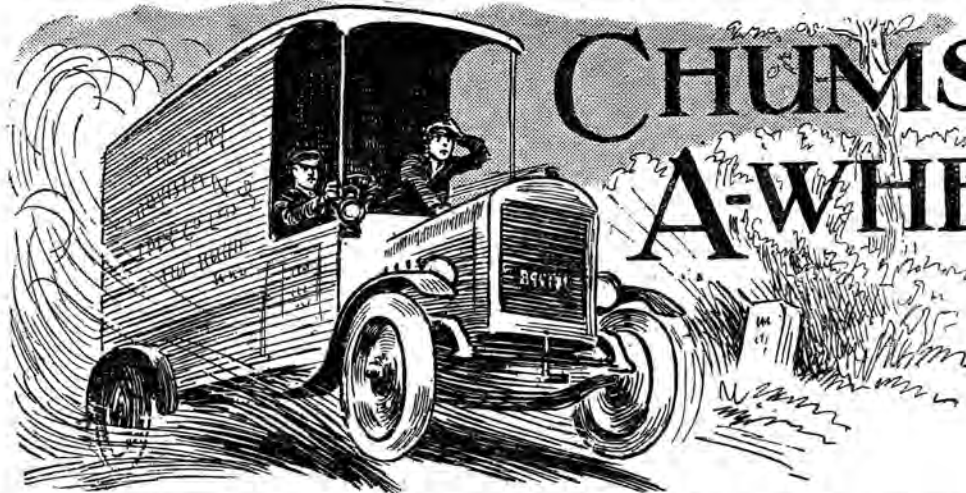
Cardew, riding like a madman, was already out of hearing. Tompkins stood staring after him in a state of hopeless bewilderment. In a few minutes Cardew was out in the road. Then, with teeth set, his eyes gleaming, bending low over the handlebars, he rode for St. Jim's as if he were riding for his life.

THE END.

("THE HERO OF THE HOUR!" is the title of next Wednesday's wonderful story of St. Jim's and of Cardew's desperate fight for his honour. Do not miss it!)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

The first of a thrilling series of adventure yarns of the road, introducing a trio of good fellows—sworn chums—in Denny Burdett, Bob Harkley, and young Sandy Munro. These three doughty comrades find themselves up against a knotty problem, and like true knights of the road they tackle the difficulty in real sporting style!



A Magnificent
Yarn of Exciting
Adventure.



By
**GEOFFREY
PROUT.**

CHAPTER 1.

"It's An Ill Wind——"

ONE day, conspicuous by his air of languor amongst the hurrying Londoners, all intent on business, an immaculately-dressed youth strolled along Old Compton Street, Soho, as if the whole district belonged to him.

His name had been chosen for him in these unenlightened days, when there is still no law to prevent parents from naming their male children Denverholme. Denverholme Burdett it was, and a good name, too, he had been told, made better in the opinion of his pals by the substitution of Denny for Denverholme.

Well, Denny Burdett, immaculate youth, was on his way to see two of his pals—his only real pals—and his laggard steps seemed to denote that he was not the bearer of good news.

He turned into a narrow passage beside a shop, mounted a groaning stairway, and knocked with a perfectly gloved hand at a cracked and blistered door on a bare landing. There was no answer, so he turned the handle, and, knowing from experience that that door required a hefty shove to swing it clear of the jamb, proceeded to put his shove into execution.

That shove exceeded Denny's wildest expectations. The grinning youth behind the door, inside the room, gave a mighty heave at the handle on seeing it turned, and the consequence was a bit of ginger and hurry in the entry of Denverholme Burdett into the august presence of plain Bob Harkley.

Harkley wasn't really plain—that is, of feature. He was, in fact, a handsome youth, with thoughtful grey eyes worth looking at more than once. He was tall and strong, had closely cropped black hair, a square jaw, and determined mouth; this in his serious moments. Not, we would hasten to add, that his hair changed colour in his non-serious moments, but his mouth and eyes relaxed from their determined expression. At the moment of Denny's hurried entry he held his sides and roared with laughter at the sprawling form of his friend on the floor.

Denny picked himself up, dusting his clothes with his gloved hands. There was more pain than anger in his glance at the hilarious Bob.

"Chump," he said, "ass, mug, idiot! Now you've made me forget what I came about!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

"Sorry!" said Bob Harkley, becoming grave. "Rotten luck that! Generally very important—what you come here about. I shall worry about not knowing what you've come about for weeks. It'll keep me awake at night! Won't you sit down? Much more dignified than lying down!"

"Robert, don't rot!" snapped Denny. "I remember now what I came about. My rich guardian angel—I mean, uncle—has kicked me out of our lovely little cottage in Bayswater. Kicked me out neck and crop! Told me never to show up again! Told me to work, for a change, the old brute! Work! Me! Well, what do you think of that?"

"Gosh, Denny, you don't mean to say he really and truly kicked you out? But he can't, legally."

"Oh, yes, he can! He said he was only my guardian by choice. I'm not a ward in Chancery, or anything ordinary like that. I'm a charity youth—his kindness, don't you know. And now I'm hoofed out!"

The news Denny imparted in rather an airy manner was quite true. Bob and he had been schoolfellows at a grammar school in Berkshire. After leaving school they had continued their firm friendship. But while Denny reclined in the lap of luxury in his uncle's house, Bob, by the loss of his parents, became penniless.

Still the friendship flourished, and Bob, with Denny's help, had learnt motor-driving, and had held a post as driver for a good while. Bob had turned his nose up at being a clerk, but he soon found that motor-driving wasn't like reclining on a bed of roses, for eventually had come that catastrophe known as "the sack" on account of trade being so bad.

Denny's uncle considered his nephew a young no-good. The man could not see below the dandified exterior of the youth. But Bob could. He knew that Denny was not really a lazy cub who wanted to spend his days in idleness, and he groaned as Denny gave him the bad news.

"Oh, thunder!" he said. "And here have I been out of work for so long. Still——"

"It's the wind, old bean. When the wind's in the east——"

"Let me finish, you ass! As I was going to say, happiness came to me by the basketful with this morning's post. I got a letter full of good things. Denny, old thing, it's an ill wind that blows

nobody any good. I'm on the road to a job at last! A job, my son—a j-o-b! A real live situation! Work, you know! The chance came down from the north of London this morning——"

Denny collapsed suddenly on the chair nearest to him. Even the chair collapsed, too. It had a broken leg that Bob had propped up to make the place look as much like home as possible. However, Denny, panting audibly, dragged himself to the little camp bed, collapsed again thereon, and mopped his moist brow with a silk handkerchief that had cost fifteen shillings.

"A job!" he breathed faintly. "Did you say a job—work?"

"Yes, Denny, I did. Thought that would surprise you. Read that!"

Bob triumphantly shoved a letter in front of Denny's nose—much too close for Denny to see anything but a blur of typewritten wording.

"Read it, Bob, old bean," said the cast-out one in a tired voice. "I'll trust you to read it correctly."

"Right-ho!" replied Bob. "I'll read it right through afterwards. Here's the bit that matters for the nonce:

"... Munro has told me about you, so come up to see me as soon as possible. Your references are excellent. The wages are two pounds ten shillings per week."

"And that means——" gasped Denny.

"That Mr. Canderman, who trades under the name of The Country Provision Supply, Ltd., bless him, has just had a row with one of his late van-drivers, who was insolent, so he got the sack. And I applied for the job through Sandy, who, as you know, is in Canderman's employ and knows the round the late van-driver had. I'll get the place all right."

"It never rains but it pours, old thing," said Denny. "Here I come with stunning news for you, and you have stunning news for me. My keen intellect has now grasped your meaning. You're about to get a job driving a motor-van on a country round."

"You've struck it first shot, Denny. Now, old chump, what about you? If you're really down and out there's a little grey home in Tottenham which you can share with Sandy and me till you get a job. My two-pun-ten a week and Sandy's two-and-six, or whatever it is, will keep us all at a pinch. What about it, Denny? But you've been rotting about your uncle."

"I wasn't, Bob, honour bright. And you're one of the best. A little grey home in Tottenham is what I've dreamed about for years. But lend me your ears for a space longer. My ex-guardian uncle gave me a cheque for a hundred pounds before he hoofed me out, his tender heart wrung with the sad necessity—of giving me the cheque, I mean. The old chap was in partnership with my father, so I guess that hundred's mine all right. However, he said it was given to me on condition that I didn't show up again."

"Oh, well, things are not so bad, old fellow," broke in Bob. "You'll be able to get a start on something with a hundred—"

"Anyway, I'll be able to pay my whack at the little grey home in Tottenham. Now then, let us away to the adventurous north by the next bus—"

Just at that second there was a terrific clatter on the landing outside, and a crash sounded on the door as a boot met the centre of the wood. The door flew open from its tight jamb, and in strode a boy of fifteen—a red-headed lad with a grinning, impudent face, sandy-coloured, mischievous eyes, firm but humorous mouth, and big ears that stuck out straight from his head in a peculiar way.

"What on earth— Why, it's Sandy!" began Bob. "Glad you knocked, Sandy."

"Is it young Munro?" broke in Denny. "Wherefore this hurry, Sandy? The wind coming up the stairs caught you behind the ears, I suppose."

Sandy broadened his grin. He was a good-humoured young Scot, van-boy by profession and the hardness of Fate. He took all the sarcasm from his elder pals very quietly, because he knew quite well he could repay it with interest later on.

"Canderman sent me down to tell you to come to see him at once, Bob," said the lad. "He's panting to get your services as van-driver. He's got some deliveries for my round overdue even now. You'll have to start to-morrow, I expect—"

"There's been an earthquake, Sandy," said Bob. "Denny's been hoofed out of Bayswater by his guardian, and he mustn't go back to within two hundred miles of the place or something like that."

Sandy's grin faded.

"By jingo, you've bad news," he said, a little of his Scottish accent coming back, as it was wont to do at times. "Hard luck, Denny."

"Don't mention it, old thing," replied Denny. "You should congratulate me. I am now a hundredaire. My dear, devoted uncle gave me a cheque for a hundred pounds before I left. No high-spirited refusal to accept charity from this child, you know. Now we must away to Tottenham, for duty calls, and Sandy must not be too long in delivering his message and hauling in the reply, in person, by the ear."

That afternoon the three chums had a high tea in a select restaurant at Tottenham. The reason for the tea was that Bob Harkley had been successful in his interview. He was now to be the driver of a delivery motor-van, which was one of a fleet that was rapidly earning a fortune for old Mr. Canderman, taking groceries into the heart of the country and delivering them to the country customers.

The next day Bob and Sandy were to start on the round, Sandy telling Bob the route and the houses they were to call at. They were to pick Denny up when a safe distance from Tottenham, for Denny said he would rather have his nerves braced up by a drive in the country that day, instead of tramping

about looking for work without first of all gaining the necessary strength for the task.

Bob and Sandy found work for Denny—loads of it—and for themselves, too; but it wasn't on the Country Provision Supply business, although it was in the Country Provision Supply van.

CHAPTER 2.

Off at a Tangent!

THE route Bob had to take was, roughly, Enfield, Waltham Abbey, Theydon Bois, and back through Walthamstow. They had to call at Cheshunt, for Canderman had one customer there. They got to Cheshunt, owing to Bob's careful driving, an hour before the previous driver had ever managed it. Sandy Munro said it was a record.

The house they had to call at, to deliver a box of groceries and take any further orders, was called the Laurels, chiefly because there was no laurel-bush anywhere near it. The name of the householder was Duchesne. Denny said the name was pronounced "Dushayne."

"I'll stop here in the van, while you two stagger up to the house with the box and stagger back again with the fresh order," said Denny, as Bob slipped out of the driver's seat and went round to the back, where the crash of the tailboard falling announced preliminary operations opened by Sandy himself.

Sandy and Bob took the box round to the back of the house and delivered it to the housekeeper, a stout, good-natured-looking woman who gave Sandy an apple and Bob a sweet smile. There was no fresh order that day, so Bob and Sandy quickly got back to the car, where they saw Denny in close conversation with a shifty-looking individual in a fawn overcoat and a stained velour hat.

Bob didn't like the look of the stranger. His lips were too thin, and his eyes set too closely together, and there was a cunning look on his face.

"Say," drawled the stranger, turning from Denny, "just come out from the Laurels, have you? Is Mr. Duchesne in?"

"Don't know," answered Bob shortly. "P'raps it'd be best for you to call and find out."

The man frowned. "No need to be insolent!" he snarled.

"I'm not insolent—only curt and abrupt," replied Bob. "Ready to crank up, Sandy?"

"Ay, I'm ready," replied Sandy, grinning. "Get in!"

"Look here," said the stranger, "you must know if Mr. Duchesne is in. You've just come from the house—"

"We went to deliver some groceries to the people at the back, using the tradesmen's entrance. Unhappily, Mr. Duchesne didn't come rushing out to ask us to go up and smoke a cigar with him. I don't know whether he's in or not, I say."

Sandy jerked at the starting-handle and the engine fired. Then the boy nipped round to the back, got in, put up the tailboard and called out:

"Ready, away!"

The van jerked forward, leaving the shifty-looking man standing in the road, scowling slightly.

"Funny customer, that," remarked Denny. "He was asking me what time Mr. Duchesne usually gets in after his morning walk. Thought I was a regular passenger on the van, I s'pose."

Bob grunted and accelerated speed. The car sped on to Waltham Abbey, where a good many houses had to be visited, and the shifty-looking, inquisitive stranger was forgotten.

The work of delivering the goods and taking orders went on merrily, and Denny began to say that if this was work he didn't mind it in the least.

"You're not humping these heavy boxes about, ma mon," said Sandy. "Besides, it's good weather now. Wait till we get a spell o' bad weather—rain and cold. It's no so pleasant then."

They didn't have a lot of adventures on the round. Bob was really a very careful driver, though he did let the van rip occasionally, when he could afford to do so. His skill made him a very safe motor-man to employ. He knew when to accelerate and shoot ahead, and



As the van resied and swayed along the road in the wake of the car the chums saw a stout old gentleman lean out of the window and shout something they could not catch. Then two pairs of hands clutched at him and drew him backwards.

when to apply brakes and slow down instead.

It was at Theydon Bois, when they were about to turn down the Epping Road towards Walthamstow, that adventure started. There, just before reaching the broad, forest road, a closed car, travelling at high speed, and in the same direction as the van, came tearing past them, giving only a short warning of its approach.

Bob looked across indignantly at the overtaking vehicle as it flashed past. Then he swerved the van slightly, throttled down, and looked at Denny with an alarmed face.

Bob's alarm was reflected in his chum's countenance:

"See that?" gasped Bob.

"Rather!" replied Denny breathlessly. "Stout old gentleman struggling with two other men in the car! What's it mean, I wonder?"

Bob accelerated speed suddenly, and the van reeled and swayed along the road in the wake of the car in front. The chums had seen that the stout old gentleman in the car had leant forward and had shouted something they could not catch. Then two pairs of hands had closed on his shoulders, and he was hauled suddenly back on to the rear seat of the car.

On sped the van, neither Bob nor Denny talking. The chums were watching the car ahead for any further signs of something wrong. Suddenly Denny emitted a swift exclamation of surprise.

"Pull up, Bob!" he jerked out breathlessly.

Bob needed no warning. He had himself seen the white hand grope furtively out of the window of the car ahead, had seen the fingers open, and the white slip flutter into the road. He shut off power, and brought the van to a standstill near the white object in the road—a visiting-card, it looked like.

Denny jumped down quickly, picked up the card, and read the name thereon just as Sandy came round from the back to inquire:

"What's up, Bob?"

"Great snakes! This card belongs to Mr. Duchesne, of the Laurels, Cheshunt, chums!" gasped Denny. "Look! His name printed neatly thereon!"

"In you get, then, both of you, and we'll shadow that car!" snapped Bob. "Hang on in front with us, Sandy, and we'll explain what's in the air as we go along—or, rather, Denny will. I've got to make this old bus move for once in its life!"

Bob was as good as his word. The van did move, with a vengeance. The car ahead led them off the Epping Road, across the River Roding, through Chigwell, Chigwell Row, and out across Hainault Forest, that place almost as beloved of trippers as Epping Forest itself.

Evidently without a suspicion that they were being followed, the driver of the car ahead was travelling at an easy pace. It was a high-powered car, and could have shaken off the van easily, despite Bob's superb driving. But the pace it maintained—merely an unsuspiciously fast pace—enabled Bob to keep in touch.

The miles were ticked off swiftly, one after another, as chaser and chased proceeded on the fine road cutting through Hainault Forest. The chums were excited, for they smelt adventure. Bob meant to keep on the track as long as he possibly could, and the only fear the three young adventurers had was that the chase might be such a long one that they'd have to give it up and report

to a police-station all that they had seen.

However, these fears were soon thrown out. The car ahead suddenly slowed down, and turned into the drive of a big, secluded house, whose garden boasted a number of big, old trees, seeming to dwarf the plantations of Hainault Forest—few and far between as they are—almost to insignificance.

The private car hummed up the wide drive, and was at a standstill before the front door of the house just as Bob pulled up the van at the corner of the plantation.

CHAPTER 3.

A Mistake—and a Jump.

THE friends peered through the trees of the plantation, and saw the house—a big, square, solid-looking dwelling with, as they thought, rather a mysterious atmosphere about it. But they realised that they must waste no time if they were to discover things, so they jumped down and ran to the entrance to the grounds. They scouted up the drive, saw the car with its chauffeur standing beside it, and took cover from view. The big front door of the house was just closing on three backs, one of them belonging to the stout gentleman, Mr. Duchesne himself.

Bob turned to his gaping chums.

"Funny!" he said. "Things don't seem so suspicious now, but I wonder what's in the wind. Shall we go up and try to find out?"

"You bet we won't!" said Sandy promptly. He was a real canny Scot, was Sandy. "Look before you leap," was his motto. "No," he continued; "we mustn't do anything like yon. Why, if they've collared an old buffer against his will, do you think they're likely to stick at collaring us, too, if they get a shout from that chauffeur johnnie? No barging up to the house yet awhile, sonnies! We can help the good work on much better by stratagee!"

"Sandy's right," said Denny. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—"

"Shut up, Denny!" said Bob. "None of your long-winded funniness just now. But Sandy's right, as you say. Look here, we can't storm the place with a unit of three men, or two and a half, I should say, begging Sandy's pardon. So the best thing is for you to stop here and keep watch, Denny, finding out something if your brain is equal to it, without getting caught, and Sandy and I will run back to Cheshunt and call at the Laurels there, and if there's trouble in the air, we can leave it to those at Duchesne's house to give the police our yarn while we slip back here, join you, and see what can be done as a preliminary measure."

"Right-ho!" answered Denny. "That's the programme, so off you go, and when you get back you'll find the mystery solved and the villains caught. I always was a dab at solving the mysteries in detective stories long before the end."

Sandy and Bob were not so confident of Denny's powers, but they didn't stop to argue. They just melted away, and cranked up the van for Cheshunt again.

Bob made the motor-van rip along the fairly clear roads. The engine, in perfect tune, hummed with a powerful note, and pulled the rather heavily built van along in fine style. Sandy always maintained that Bob could get any old engine to pull; but Bob, though a good

mechanic and driver, preferred an engine that was fool-proof.

They got back to Cheshunt in three-quarters of an hour, which was pretty good going. At the Laurels they left the van and went up to the house, ringing a hearty peal on the bell at the front door.

A manservant opened to them.

"Have you missed Mr. Duchesne?" asked Bob, plunging right to the heart of the matter. "Are you worried about his not coming home from his walk, or having disappeared, or anything like that?"

The manservant looked wise, and asked Bob and Sandy to enter the house. The pair went in.

"Step into Mr. Duchesne's study, will you?" said the manservant, bowing beside an open door.

Bob and Sandy stepped in in a dignified way, then shot forward like stones from a catapult in a way that was not dignified at a push from the big, strong manservant.

The door banged, the key turned, and the pair sat up on the carpet, rubbing their heads which had come into contact with the opposite wall, and staring at each other in a dazed way.

"Crumbs, Bob, this is a surprise!" said Sandy, realising the mistake that had been made. "But, by jingo, look at the room!"

Bob looked round. The place was in a terrible state. A desk was overturned in one corner, the carpet kicked about, papers lying here and there, pictures broken and awry, fireirons in different corners of the room, ornaments broken with the fragments lying on the carpet—a veritable shambles.

"Been a fight, I should say," said Sandy.

"Oh, no; not at all! Only the cat gone a bit wild," replied Bob. "Crumbs, Sandy, old Duchesne must have been nabbed from this room."

"Sure, that's what it is, Bob. But why in thunder have they— Hist! Listen!"

The youngsters cocked their ears as they heard the voice of the manservant in the hall. He was speaking into the telephone.

"That police-station?" he said. "Laurels speaking! I've got two people here, looked up in the study. They'll be able to tell you something about this mystery. They came up as bold as brass. Looks like some young fools playing a ransom stunt, or something. They're quite young—one of them merely a boy. They're evil-looking youngsters, though. I expect it's the pictures again. You'll come over? Right-ho!"

"The blithering idiot," rapped out Sandy. "Thinks we did the kidnapping stunt, I s'pose. Evil-looking youngsters, forsooth! He's a fat-headed, fuddle-brained limmer—"

"Oh, well, we can explain to the police and put them on to it!" broke in Bob. "That's what we ought to have done the moment we knew where Duchesne had been taken, of course. I—"

Bob suddenly stopped talking and stared into the grate. There, on the black marble hearthstone, protected by a sheet of glass, no doubt by the police, to preserve it as a clue, if clue it should be, he read a message that had been scrawled with a finger in the dust: "Masked men. Rescue before nine o'clock."

That was all. But it meant a lot, no doubt. The unfortunate Duchesne wouldn't have time to write out details of the assault and what not. Indeed, this had probably been scrawled while lying on the hearthrug, being gagged, or something. It conveyed a lot to Bob

and Sandy; the latter was now staring at the message, too.

Bob at last looked up.

"Sandy," he said, "if we wait for the police to come to take notes and what not, Mr. Duchesne will never be rescued before nine o'clock. We're to get away now. I'll scribble a note on this writing-pad. There, that'll enable the police to follow us. Now we must shift, and quickly, before they come."

"Ay, but how?" said Sandy, puzzled.

"By jumping into the branches of that tree and trusting to luck for whole limbs when we reach the ground," replied Bob. "I'll go first. You follow me, but not too closely."

"Right-ho, Macduff! I'm game!"

Bob, without further ado, climbed out on to the window-sill and launched himself at the tree just below. It was a thick tree, and they were only one storey up, so they had a sporting chance.

Fortune favours the brave, so Bob got safely, if somewhat heavily, to earth. At a shout from him, Sandy sprang outwards from the window-sill.

The young Scot felt the rushing wind whistle about his ears. He saw the foliage of the tree seem to leap up at him. Then he shut his eyes as he tore down through the twigs and branches.

CHAPTER 4.

The Fight in the House!

HE brought up with a heavy jar against a stout branch, got his arms round it, and hung on for dear life. He was safe enough from any serious hurt now.

Wiping the blood from his face and hands, where the tough twigs and branches had scratched him, he rapidly descended to the lowermost branch, from which he dropped to the ground.

"You're lucky," said Bob, as he helped Sandy to his feet. "I came right down through the tree to the ground. The branches broke my fall, but it was a dence of a jar, all the same. Come on!"

The chums pulled themselves together, and ran out to their van, just as the front door of the house opened and the manservant shouted. They cranked up and were off in a jiffy, and two policemen and an inspector, coming up the road, stopped and turned, surveying the retreating van suspiciously. They were evidently on their way up to the Laurels in reply to the manservant's telephone message to the police-station.

If the van had travelled swiftly before, she simply flew now. Humming along the roads, eating up the miles, she sped towards Hainault, two wheels only on the road at the corners, and Sandy hanging on to the door like grim death, with Bob bent low over the steering-wheel, his steady eyes fixed on the road ahead.

It was getting dark when they pulled up at the secluded house on the edge of Hainault Forest. Denny was there, waiting for them.

"Quick, Bob!" gasped Denny. "If we want to effect a rescue we can. Round at the back. He's in a room on the ivy-clad side of the house luckily. We could climb up, and once we could get into the room we can no doubt devise some means of getting the old buffer out. But perhaps we'd better get the police—"

"No, fear, Denny!" replied Bob. "We must work a rescue stunt before nine o'clock, and it's nearly that now. Don't know why, but we'll explain later. By jingo, it's a stroke of luck, your finding out where old Duchesne is—what room, I mean!"

"No luck at all. My natural abilities as a sleuth, I tell you—"

"Tell it afterwards, old son!" snapped Bob. "Lead on to the rescue, and quick!"

Denny darted forward through the shrubbery round the house, and Sandy and Bob followed closely. Denny pulled up in the dead-black shadow of the wall of the old mansion.

"Straight up from here," he whispered. "We can easily climb up the ivy. And the room's only about twenty feet up."

"Lead on, then!" said Bob tersely. "We'll follow close on your heels. Don't make a row about it, though."

Denny snorted with indignation at the idea that he would make any noise over the business. With no thought now for the crease in his trousers or for the toe-caps of his perfectly-fitting shoes, now that he was being warmed up to the adventure, he climbed steadily.

To agile youngsters like the chums the climb was easy. They arrived at last at the window-sill, and, their fingers clawing at the ledge, they raised their heads and peeped into the lighted room. They saw Mr. Duchesne, wringing his hands, walking softly to and fro on the thick carpet.

The room was evidently a study. It was most comfortably furnished, with big, padded armchairs, a roll-top desk, shelves of books, and an "occasional" table, on which reposed some tea-things.

Bob intimated to his fellow-adventurers by weird contortions of his features that he would act. He released his grip on the window-sill with one hand, and tapped lightly at the window.

Duchesne started like a terrier scenting a rabbit. Seeing the three white faces peering in at him, he stepped swiftly over to the window, and silently raised the sash a few inches.

"Well done, lads!" he whispered. "I wondered if you would be smart enough to see that something illegal was being done!"

"It was as plain as mud in a wine-glass, sir," whispered Bob. "The delay has been caused by our going back to the Laurels—"

Duchesne broke in.

"No time to be lost now. I am a financier with an appointment—Down, down!"

Duchesne closed the window silently, leaving the chums gaping with surprise.

Then he recommenced his pacing and wringing his hands. The door of the room opened, and the chums bobbed down quickly.

"Clever old buffer—what?" said Denny.

"Crumbs, he's got his wits about him," whispered Bob, "even if he is a financier. That's someone come to collect the tea-things, I expect."

The young adventurers waited, their arms aching, and their knees stiff and sore as their toes maintained their grip in the tough stems of ivy.

Tap-tap-tap!

The window was again opened slightly, and the head of Mr. Duchesne peered through.

"That was one of those villains, to see why I had stopped walking to and fro," he said. "Boys, how can I get down from here? I cannot very well climb down the ivy. I'm not so young and supple as I was once; but if you have no other means, I'll have a shot at it."

"Why have you been captured, sir?" asked Bob.

"Oh, matters of finance, my boy! I must be in the city in two hours' time, or my enemies will win through with their low-down scheme. I have an appointment with an American financier in regard to an amalgamation of our businesses over a certain deal, so that we can take concerted action on either side of the Atlantic. This means that certain other financiers will stand to lose; but I can't help that, of course. Now, we must waste no time, boys. Must I tackle the ivy?"

"I'll get the rope from the van, Bob," broke in Sandy. "Hang on up here, you two."

Sandy disappeared, and Mr. Duchesne, nodding with satisfaction, closed the window and recommenced his pacing to and fro.

Soon Sandy reappeared with the rope wound round his body. It was not a long rope, but it would serve to enable the stout old gentleman to get down fairly near to the ground, so that a drop would not hurt him much, with the chums below to break his fall.

The window was thrown open wide, the rope made fast to the roll-top desk near the window, and then Mr. Duchesne began to clamber out. But at that instant the door of the room burst open and three men dashed in. They laid violent hands on the stout gentleman, and dragged him back from the window. But the chums acted quickly, too.

Bob, heading the rush with a sharp cry, scrambled into the room. Denny sprawled in after him, and Sandy rolled over on top of Denny. The chums were up and attacking in a second, and, with muttered oaths, the men began to lash out.

Bob made straight for the shifty-eyed man who had spoken to him after the groceries had been delivered at the Laurels. A straight left sent the man flying backwards, chin in air. Denny swung a mighty right round and caught a stocky, red-faced man, who was trying to knock Mr. Duchesne down, a terrific blow on the side of the head. Sandy stooped low and leapt at the third man, catching him by the legs. The man went over like a felled tree.

Feet were now heard pounding up the stairs of the house.

"Now or never!" gasped Bob. "Lick into 'em, chums! Mr. Duchesne, get down the rope as best you can. Twelve-foot drop at the bottom. You'll have to chance it."

Mr. Duchesne, now free, needed no second bidding. Puffing and blowing breathless more with alarm than exertion, his stout figure disappeared through the window, and the oscillations of the rope denoted his progress down to the garden.

Sandy was the next to get clear. While Denny and Bob, shoulder to shoulder, and shouting to Sandy and Duchesne to hurry, made a solid front to the attacking villains, the boy and the man made a safe descent. Fighting now, merely to keep the men from getting a grip of them, the plucky youths held their own well.

At last Bob flashed an upper-cut at a tempting target near by—the square, villainous jaw of the stocky, red-faced man. The man went back; and Bob, not minding matters, put out a foot and tripped up the man who was pressing Denny pretty hard on his right.

The third man, the shifty-eyed individual, drew back with gasps of alarm. Then the reinforcements broke into the room. They were just in time to cut off the retreat of Denny and Bob through the window.

CHAPTER 5.

A Chase and Crash!

"THE door!" gasped Bob. "Break through, Denny!"

No sooner were the words out of Bob's mouth than Denny made a frantic lunge towards the door. One of the men who had just arrived was in the way, and he went down like a hundredweight of bricks, bringing flakes of whitewash off the ceiling from the impact.

But Denny was clear.

Shouting to Bob to dive straight forward, Denny crashed his fist behind the ear of a man who was about to lay hands on his chum. The man went down, and Bob, like a streak of lightning, was through the door, behind Denny.

The flying pair, going down the stairs six at a time, met a little knot of people running up. Denny and Bob became an avalanche, gathering volume as it proceeded. There were shouts of alarm, yells of pain and rage, and gasping grunts from the struggling heap of humanity at the bottom of the stairs.

Bob and Denny, not suffering from surprise like the people with whom they had crashed on the stairs, were the first to sort themselves out. They did not linger to apologise, but flashed across the hall towards the front door.

Shouting pursuers came crashing down the stairs from the room above as Denny and Bob were tugging and panting at the bolts of the front door.

Crash, crash, crash!

The three heavy bolts were shot back, Bob unhooked the chain of the door with a clatter, and Denny turned the handle and tore the door open.

The keen night air blew cold on the chums' faces as they darted out of the house. Bob delayed only to heave the heavy door to with a resounding bang; then he spurted up close on the heels of Denny, who, puffing and blowing, was heading down the drive.

The two chums ran like the wind. They arrived at the van just as Sandy had cranked up. Mr. Duchesne, puffing and blowing, was seated on the front seat. The stout old gentleman had had enough for one night. He was mopping his brow with a handkerchief.

Denny and Sandy tumbled in behind, over the backboard, and Bob sprang lightly into the driver's seat, muttering and grumbling to himself for not having turned the van before going up to the house.

He put in the reverse, let in the clutch, and the van sprang backwards across the road, just as the powerful closed car they had shadowed to the house swung round into the road from the drive.

Bob freed his engine and meshed in low swiftly, opened the throttle wide, and the van tore forward, curving round with two inches to spare between its front wheel and a telegraph-post.

They were just in time to get ahead of the pursuing car. The engine roared at the outrageous treatment it was receiving, but it pulled the van along like a streak of lightning. Top meshed in with a neat click, and, with only twenty-five yards in front of the pursuing car, it hummed and swayed like a mad thing in its gallant bid for freedom.

"We're outclassed!" gritted out Bob as he let the engine have all the power he could give it. "They'll catch us, but

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 855.

I'll keep to the middle of the road, so's they can't get by. Nearest police-station, sir?"

"If you can trick them, boy, carry right on to London—International Hotel. I have the appointment there with that American financier. Big thing. After eleven o'clock he'll be gone, and the deal will fall through. That's why those villains tried to detain me. I know who's paying them for this night's work. But you get me to the hotel to keep that appointment, boy, and I'll compensate you and your master for any loss, and pile in a bit besides, too. You'll not regret this night's work, my lad!"

Their lives were hanging by a thread at every bend and cross-road. But fortune favoured them. The pursuing car was close up behind. It was a powerful car, and was waiting for an opportunity to accelerate and get alongside the van. But Bob was alive to the intentions of the villain behind.

At last a revolver barked from the car in the rear. Then the voice of Sandy shouted out:

"They're potting at our tyres, Bob!"

"They'll have a job to hit 'em. But if they do we're all in the ditch. It'll mean broken necks, sir," gritted out Bob.

The revolver spoke again and again. The men were evidently reloading as fast as they could after emptying the six chambers of the weapon.

"There's only one way, sir," said Bob jerkily. "They'll get us like this. Road widens as we get nearer London. It's a risk, but the danger's more to them than to us. I'll choose a part where there's a hedge to break the force of the crash. It means damage to the van, though. They'll be able to bank up alongside soon's the road gets wider. But I think I can knock 'em out without much danger to anyone."

"Do it, son, do it!" ground out Duchesne. "I'll pay for the van. I'd pay for a dozen vans to get clear to-night and keep that appointment—a hundred vans. It's worth a fortune to me. And it's all fair business."

Bob needed nothing further. He kept more to the left of the road, and the touring-car behind accelerated suddenly.

"Tell me when the car's front wheel is level with our rear wing, sir!" gasped Bob. "The very second I want."

Mr. Duchesne, trembling visibly, poked his head out into the rushing wind.

He drew it in again promptly.

"Now!" he snapped.

Bob jerked the wheel, and the van took the centre of the road again. There was a crash behind, a loud cry of fear from the occupants of the car, and shouts of dismay from Denny and Sandy, who were not aware that Bob was taking a big bid for freedom. The van seemed to be lifted along even faster for a few seconds. But suddenly it lost the push of the car behind, and merely flew on under its own power.

"What's happened?" asked Bob anxiously.

The answer came from Denny.

"They're crippled! Swaying about like billy-o! Their steering's locked. Gosh, they gone through the hedge! Not overturned, though. They're all right. Good man, Bob!"

Bob throttled down slightly and heaved a great sigh of relief that the rear wheel of his van had proved stronger than the front wheel of the car.

"Can't keep this mad pace up for ever,

sir," he said. "Anyhow, the stunt worked. They're disabled, we're not!"

"My boy, you shall be suitably rewarded for this smart bit of work," said Duchesne through dry lips, as he settled down comfortably, his portly body relaxing in his seat now that danger was past.

Mr. Duchesne was taken swiftly to the International Hotel in London. He told the chums to wait for him. It wanted fifteen minutes to the hour of eleven. He was just in time to keep his appointment.

He came out smiling, a keen-faced, horn-rimmed, spectacled man with him.

"Here are the boys, Van Weylard," said Duchesne, who was beaming.

The American halted. It was plain he was an American, but plainer when he spoke.

"Waal, I guess you're plucked 'uns, lads," he said. "I reckon it's you who have saved me and Mr. Duchesne a pretty poke o' dollars this night. There's those who tried to prevent this business goin' through, with their goldarn false messages to me saying Mr. Duchesne couldn't keep the appointment. They won't be too pleased to find Weylard's allied with Duchesne's in this little outburst—what? Waal, here's my car, an' it's me for I'll ol' N'Yark. So long, Duchesne! Tack on another fifty for these plucked 'uns, an' put it down to me, will you?"

With a wave of the hand to the chums, the big man climbed ponderously into the gorgeous limousine that had drawn up. His baggage was hove up to the luggage grid by hotel officials, and the car purred softly away into the night, en route for Southampton.

"So that's that, lads," said Mr. Duchesne. "Come in with me for a late supper. I think we can all manage one. I've a private room here. I want to talk to you boys."

"But the van, sir?" said Bob. "I expect Mr. Canderman will be worryin'—"

"Pooh! I'll put things right with him, never fear. This way!"

The chums went up to Mr. Duchesne's room. A cold supper was brought in.

That supper revealed many things. One was that the International Hotel could do things in style, even near midnight. The other things were that the chums, having saved Mr. Duchesne from great financial loss owing to the upsetting of the plot to prevent the deal between the English financier and the American from being completed, were entitled to a fat reward for their efforts.

"I'll compensate Mr. Canderman fully," said Mr. Duchesne. "You boys ought not to be wasting your time delivering groceries. Here's a cheque for a hundred and fifty pounds, the fifty from Van Weylard. You've earned it, so don't thank me. Get going on something by which you can take advantage of your push and go, young sirs."

The chums did. They bought a motor-van of their own. And their push and go was to be called into play many times before they were much older.

THE END.

(There will be another exciting story dealing with these three staunch chums of the road soon. Keep a sharp lookout for it, chums.)

Concluding Chapters of—

"RIVALS OF THE RACECOURSE!"

By Andrew Gray.

Mat's Derby!

TALK about dog-tired, Mat was so utterly exhausted that he was fast asleep long before it was time to think of getting home. They had to lift him into the motor hired to take them back to Epsom, and even then he never stirred an eyelid.

He did wake up an hour later, to find himself on the sofa in his own drawing-room. At first he could not think where he had got to. He could hear Dick's voice, and others that were strange and yet familiar. So he sat up and stared round.

And there, poring over a table covered with deeds and documents, was his chum, and with him two strange men, whom Dick introduced as the lawyers on the "missing Lord Riplade" case. They shook hands.

"We have found Lord Riplade, and here he is," said one. "The only thing is that, after waiting here all the evening to apprise him of his inheritance and congratulate him, we find we are a day behind the fair. He has known of it all along, apparently."

"That's so," answered Dick. "But not while I was abroad. It was only when I met young Martingale here, and heard him talking about my grandfather's death and the hunt for the new heir, that I realised that I must be the chap you were all looking for. Still, I thought I wouldn't let on for a bit, because I wanted to lend a hand at Furzedown here. Then that fraud appeared on the scene, and I waited to see what he would do. They used to say that he was the exact double of me out in the Argentine. And so he was, for the simple reason that he took care to make himself so."

"He knew more about me than I did myself, apparently. He'd got on to the fact that I was likely to be the next heir to the Riplade estates, and he set himself to oust me out of them. He stole certain papers and gold chains and things which I had, and which had always been in my family. Then when he had got these proofs safe he set about trying to murder me. I didn't know about this till afterwards. I happened to go on a prospecting expedition up into the Andes just then. It was an unlucky affair from start to finish, and the end of it was that all got wiped out by sickness and niggers, except me, and even I was reported killed. As a matter of fact, I crawled down the Western slope, and, after a bad twist of sickness, I got well again. He thought he'd seen the last of me, I suppose, and that he was safe now for my title and estates."

"It was to-morrow, wasn't it, that the six months were up when Mr. Martingale could have claimed the horse under the will?" he asked of the lawyers.

"Yes, quite right," answered Mr. Scroope. "To-morrow the Derby favourite would have become Mr. Martingale's absolute property but for your appearance on the scene. Whether that might not have been upset, though, on a small point of law, is another matter."

"You mean," said Mat quickly, "that the will reads that my poor dad was to be actually at Furzedown when the time expired, whereas he is now in hospital."

"Exactly," said the lawyer, pursing his lips.

"Very well, then," answered Mat. "I am not quibbling, mind you. But supposing Whiplash had come to us, and Lord Riplade had turned up too late, my father, I know, would have insisted on handing the horse over. So whether he is in hospital to-morrow or not—"

"But he won't be," cut in Lord Riplade quietly.

"He won't be! What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Read that, sonny," said his lordship, tossing a telegram that he had opened, and that had been waiting for Mat all day. It was signed by the hospital surgeon.

"Mr. Martingale suddenly making marvellous recovery," read Mat. "Speech completely restored, also regaining use of limbs. Should urge his removal home at once as best thing possible."

"Oh, thank Heaven for this great mercy!" cried Mat, and sank back on the sofa again, sobbing out of sheer happiness.

"Still, it's great news all round, and worth sitting up for, I reckon," said Lord Riplade. "To-morrow we'll have your dad back home in style. And, between you, if you don't turn Whiplash out the winner of the coming Derby I shall want to know the reason why."

"Yes, by George," said Mat, his eyes flashing. "I'll stake my life on that! We'll send Whiplash to the post, trained to the nines, as never a racer was before."

"Yes, and you'll ride him," said Lord Riplade, with a smile.

"So that's a bargain, then, is it?" cried Mat. "You've booked me here and now to ride Whiplash for the Blue Riband?"

Old Tom Martingale did recover to do all these things. But first he insisted on standing his trial on the old charge against him of doping Sir Roger Rackstone's Stunt.

In light of the exposure of the baronet's true character at the trial, where he was sentenced to three years' penal servitude, the Jockey Club would gladly have exonerated old Tom without any further hearing.

The old chap, however, would not have this, and, needless to say, he emerged from the inquiry with flying colours, and a greater favourite than ever with his racing clients.

The great Derby Day came round at last, after strenuous weeks of preparation. Whiplash was fit as he had never been before, and so was Mat, as goes without saying.

Mat had watched many a Derby in his day, but this was the first one he was to ride in. Nevertheless, he felt and looked quite cool, as cool even as the renowned Senlake, who once again was to challenge his supremacy on Bonnybrake.

The latter was the very picture of fitness, and so was Ting-a-Ring, the Oaks favourite, and Catchpin, and every one of them, in fact.

"Mat, you son of a gun!"

It was Dick, who had come rushing up with a face as flushed with excitement as if Mat had run and won the race already.

"Congratulate me! I've done it, and now I'm the happiest man in the world."

"Done what, my lord?" demanded old Tom, as if he didn't know the answer all the time.

"Why, proposed to the sweetest girl on earth!" Lord Dick almost shouted, as if there were not sixty thousand people all round to overhear him.

"And she has accepted you on one condition. I've got to win the race for you. Isn't that her proviso?"

"Absolutely! That's exactly what she said!" cried Lord Dick.

"Then count on me. I'll win it, or bust!" laughed Mat; and with a gay flourish of his whip he whirled Whiplash round and cantered away for the preliminary parade.

That Whiplash was not the only fancy of the public eye was evident from the hearty cheers which greeted first one candidate, then another, as the horses went swinging by.

Still, the race would lie between the old trio—Ting-a-Ring, Whiplash, and Bonnybrake. All the wisecracks declared that.

A steady of the line of eighteen eager horses, an expectant hush, a single warning word, and then—swish!

"They're off! They're off! They're off!"

Oh, the magic of that cry! With a thunder of hoofs the field dashed away.

"All out, start to finish!" were old Tom's laconic riding orders to young Mat; and the boy agreed.

"All out" he went, therefore, bang from the first stride, breasting through the field and taking the lead when only half-way up the hill.

In vain they cursed Mat for a young fool. At the Bushes he was still leathering along as if it were a five-furlong race only. At Tattenham Corner it was worse. Round he came right on the rails.

"All out! All out!" His father's words dinned in Mat's ears. He never gave Whiplash a moment's rest. It was to be the fastest Derby ever run, by the look of it.

Where was Bonnybrake? Where was Ting-a-Ring? Close behind, of course. But how far away? Mat snatched a glance to see, and then he smiled. They were baked already.

Now was the distance! But was there a spurt left in the whole field? Never a one. Mat chuckled again. The Derby was his!

Yet was it? What horse was this thundering up on his flank as if the race were only just starting?

Kilclaw, of all brutes! He was pulling Whiplash down inch by inch. The roar of the crowd rose to a wild scream. Was it to be another case of Jeddah at a hundred to one?

Not if Mat knew it! Out he lay on Whiplash's neck. Two cuts of the whip and the gallant brute literally flung himself over the ground.

Neck and neck they raced, but only for a dozen strides. Suddenly Kilclaw sagged away, and the favourite shot to the front, to pass the post an easy winner by two lengths. Bonnybrake and Ting-a-Ring were beaten to a frazzle, a long, long fifty yards behind.

"Mad? He might have chucked the race clean away!" was the breathless verdict on Mat's jockeyship as Lord Riplade led the winner in.

Yes, might! But he didn't.

So Mat won his first Derby, and Lord Riplade won his wife. And his Majesty sent for old Tom to congratulate him, and to show the world by his hearty handshake that he, for one, had never believed the foul charges which less than a year ago had nearly ended in the gallant old trainer being warned off the Turf.

THE END.
THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 855.

400 MODEL
\$5.5^s
CASH



2'6 Weekly

Is all you pay for our No. 400A lady's or gentleman's Mead "Marvel"—the finest cycle ever offered on such exceptionally easy terms. Built to stand hard wear. Brilliantly plated; richly enamelled, exquisitely lined in two colours. Sent packed free, carriage paid on **15 DAYS' FREE TRIAL**. Fully warranted. Prompt delivery. Money refunded if dissatisfied. Big bargains in slightly factory soiled mounts. Tyres and Accessories 33% below shop prices. Buy direct from the factory and save pounds.

Now a seven-year-old MEAD which had traversed 75,000 miles, beat 450 up-to-date machines and broke the world's record by covering 3,366 miles in 365 days is explained in our art catalogue. Write TO-DAY for free copy—bristful of information about bicycles and contains gigantic photographs of our latest models.

MEAD CYCLE CO. (LTD.)
(Dept. B797)
Birmingham

Yours for 3^d. ONLY.

The "Big Ben" Keyless Lever Watch on **THE GREATEST BARGAIN TERMS** ever put before the British Public by one of **LONDON'S OLDEST-ESTABLISHED MAIL ORDER HOUSES.**



Free An absolutely FREE Gift of a Solid Silver English Hall-marked Double Curb Albert, with Seal attached, given FREE with every Watch.

SPECIFICATION: Gent's Full-size Keyless Lever Watch, improved action; fitted patent recoil click, preventing breakage of mainspring by overwinding.

10 YEARS' WARRANTY

Sent on receipt of 3d. deposit; after approval, send 1/9 more. The balance may then be paid by 9 monthly payments of 2/- each. Cash refunded in full if dissatisfied. Send 3d. now to

J. A. DAVIS & CO.
(Dept. B7, 25 Denmark Hill, London, S.E. 5.)

NERVOUS FEARS

How many people fear meeting others, travelling in Trains, Trams, Tubes, or Buses, mixing in Society, going into a Restaurant, or of having anything important to do. Such Nervous Fears are ruinous to any man or woman's chance of success in life. Become Nerve-Strong, Self-Confident, Bright and Happy, by sending immediately 3 penny stamps for particulars of the Mento-Nerve Strengthening Treatment. **GUARANTEED CURE OR MONEY REFUNDED.**—**GODFREY ELLIOTT-SMITH, LTD.,** 543, Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, London, E.C. 4.



HEIGHT COUNTS

In winning success. Let the Girvan System increase your height. Wonderful results. Send P.C. for particulars and our £100 guarantee to Enquiry Dept., A.M.P., 17, Stroud Green Road, London, N. 4.

LADS WANTED NOW FOR AUSTRALIA

Aged 14 to 19, good health and character. Assisted passages. Advice how to go and what to do on arrival FREE from **CHURCH ARMY**. Write or call for full particulars of opportunities awaiting you—**CHURCH ARMY**, 25, Cockspur Street, S.W. 1.

YOURS for 6^d



FULL HUNTER
Best Quality
LEVER WATCH

Offered On Our
Unheard of Bargain Terms.

Read Our Brief Description.
Gents full-size Full Hunter Watch, Heavy Nickel Silver finished case, with double back, perfectly made, dust and damp-proof. Best quality interchangeable Lever movement fitted with all latest improvements (5 gold medals) carefully timed and tested. Fully Guaranteed 10 years.

FREE Handsome pocket-to-pocket Double CURB ALBERT FREE with every Watch.

Our Unequalled Terms.
So sure are we that you will be more than satisfied, we send this handsome watch post paid upon receipt of 6d. only. After receiving watch if satisfied, the balance is payable 2/- on receipt, and 5/- monthly until only 20/- is paid. Cash with order (or balance within 7 days) 18/- only. Send 6d. to-day to—**SIMPSONS LTD. (Dep. 389)**
94, Queen's Road, Brighton.

DON'T BE BULLIED

Special offer. **TWO ILLUSTRATED SAMPLE LESSONS** from my complete Course on **JUJITSU** for four penny stamps, or a Large Illustration. Portion of Course for 2/6. 3/6. Jujitsu is the best and simplest science of self-defence and attack ever invented. Learn to take care of yourself under ALL circumstances. **SEND NOW.** (Est. 20 years.)

"YAWARA" (Dept. A.P.), 10, Queensway, Haverth, Feltham, Middlesex

MAGIC TRICKS, etc.—Parcels, 2/6, 5/6. Ventriloquist's Instrument. Invisible. Imitate Birds. Price 6d. each, 4 for 1/-.—**T. W. HARRISON,** 239, Pentonville Rd., London, N. 1.

100 Four Triangular and 100 Different Stamps FREE!!

Send postcard only requesting approval.

LISBURN & TOWNSEND, 201a, London Road, Liverpool.

BLUSHING

FREE to all sufferers, particulars of a proved home treatment that quickly removes all embarrassment, and permanently cures blushing and flushing of the face and neck. Enclose stamp to pay postage to—

Mr. A. TEMPLE (Specialist), Palace House, 128, Shaftesbury Av. (2nd Floor), London, W. 1.

MY GREAT OFFER



I supply the finest Coventry built cycles from £5-5-0 cash, or 2/- weekly. Any cycle sent **ON 14 DAYS' APPROVAL, PACKED FREE AND CARRIAGE PAID,** on receipt of small deposit. Write for **FREE BARGAIN LISTS.** Satisfaction or Money Refunded.

O'Brien The World's Largest Cycle Dealer.
Dept. 22, COVENTRY.

All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, **UNION JACK SERIES, The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C. 4.**

When Answering Advertisements
Please Mention This Paper.