

This Week's Thrilling
and Dramatic Story

"CARDEW TAKES A HAND!"

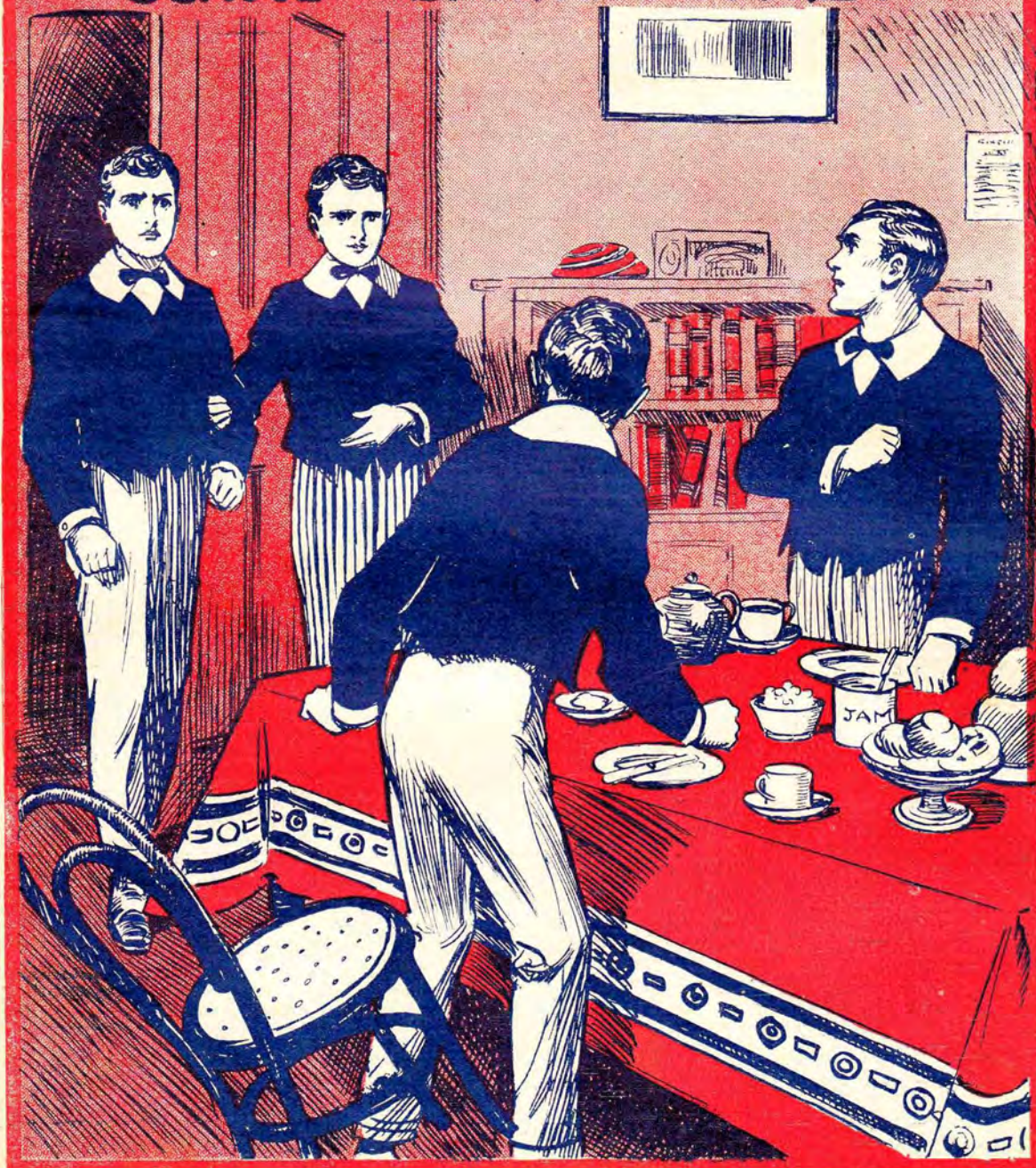
By Martin
Clifford.

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



THE UNWANTED GUEST!

As Cardew entered the study with the Outcast of the School, Clive and Levison sprang to their feet in protest.
(A dramatic situation from the grand school yarn of St. Jim's inside!)



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

MY DEAR CHUMS,—Whenever I start my little weekly Chat with all the myriad enthusiastic Gemites I always feel that you and I are in complete agreement. That is half the battle. I know you invariably give the keenest attention to the GEM, and that you believe in it. There is good reason for that. The GEM stands alone for its special kind of yarns.

"LEVISON MINOR'S PLIGHT!" By Martin Clifford.

That is our ripping tale of St. Jim's for next week. They are jolly chums, these St. Jim's fellows we all know so well and appreciate so highly. We know they are well worth all the admiration they get, all the popularity which is theirs by right of conquest. There is always a special share of esteem for the Levisons. One of the most loyal friends the GEM ever had bemoans the fact that we do not get enough of Ernest and Frank, likewise Miss Doris. That cannot be helped, for other readers also have their special favourites, and no author can give perpetual prominence to the whole bunch.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL!"

As to next Wednesday's winner, I might have much to say or I might have little. This time the little has it, for my Chat is only a small side feature of the GEM, and it can consider itself no end lucky that it manages to slip in at all. But the new yarn is important for many reasons, in part because the "Holiday Annual" plays a particular role, and, in addition, on account of the return of Frank Levison. I am well aware that a big success awaits this story. It has got the good old St. Jim's touch right away from start to the place where the tape drops. It shows us Frank Levison caught in a sinister net of extremely cruel circumstances. Mr. Selby comes on the scene, too, and ditto Aubrey Racke, that slippery eel with his caddish tricks and his plausible manner, which in some strange manner deceives some people who do not look beneath the surface. We all know what it is to be caught up in some odd little difficulty which is sprung right upon one when one is not looking. It comes as unexpectedly as a merry little whirlwind of dust on the highway which half smotherers you. It is just like that in Mr. Martin Clifford's great yarn, which is bound to take all Gemites by storm. A harmless enough action in itself leads to tragedy.

AN INEVITABLE QUESTION!

Quite so, you will say; but how and why does the "Holiday Annual" come in? I knew you would ask that. Well, as we all realise, the "Holiday Annual" has figured as the chief treasure-book of the age, and this characteristic is once again in evidence in "Levison Minor's Plight," the tale of St. Jim's which will appear in our next number, and be the cause of drawing a legion fresh readers to the standard.

"CHECKMATE!"

By Louis Affricon.

It is a whiskered wheeze to style a top-line boxing yarn as a story with a punch. But often enough the thing that has been said before will bear repeating. Were it otherwise some of the fine old crusted jokes which the wide world always laughs over would have a sorry time of it in the cupboard of neglect. Next week our Big Ben Derby tale is sure to get a rousing reception. Ben, with his grizzly little chum, Cocky Withers, and his powerful patron, Lord Keyingham, comes in for hard knocks—to which he is used, being a sportsman—but he also shows us the merit of patience and of waiting for the right moment. Life is pretty much of a game of chess, as the title above shows. Big Ben is pitted against a low-down, rotten trickster, a crafty bound who does not scruple to jump his moves and pull off a win by the foulest means. You will see the hang of it when you have the new number in your hands, and your verdict will be that "Checkmate" is just the grandest Ring yarn ever!

"DAVE, THE PIT BOY!"

By Max Hamilton.

In looking over the copy of next week's instalment of our serial before sending it along to the printer, it hit me right in the eye that one of its outstanding features was the glimpse it gave of the life of the miner. Probably there are many of us who do not think half enough about the men working in the dusk, chipping out the blocks of black fuel. There is a ringing fine situation, too, next week, a real thriller, second to none, and we get George Scott biting off a bit more than he can manage in the course of his cunning schemes.

A THIRD-FORM EDITION!

There will be two opinions about next week's "St. Jim's News." The Third has a crazy sort of notion that the Supplement does not do justice to the brainiest, most brilliant, and the really important Form at St. Jim's. Gemites will say the edition is topping. The fact is, the Supplement in the main is the work of the Fourth. Of course, I can't help the feeling on the matter. The merry men of the Third must take it or leave it! That's their affair.

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Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

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

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

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER! CAUGHT POACHING!

Magistrate (to man charged with poaching): "Well, and how many birds did you shoot?" Poacher: "Well, sir, the only bird I shot was a rabbit, and I knocked it down with my stick!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to George Williams, 161, St. Stephens Terrace, Copley, near Halifax.

FOR THE POOR!

A party of minstrels went to a country town and advertised a performance for "the benefit of the poor, tickets being reduced to sixpence." The hall was packed. The next morning a committee for the poor called upon the treasurer of the concern and asked how much the company had netted. The treasurer expressed astonishment at the demand. "I thought," said the chairman of the committee, "you advertised this concert for the benefit of the poor?" "Yes," said the treasurer. "And didn't we put the tickets down to sixpence so that the poor could come?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. E. Bramwell, 7, Payton Road, Handsworth, Birmingham.

A QUICK RETORT!

The lonely traveller alighted from the train. A solitary porter greeted him. "How far to the nearest village, my man?" "About five mile." "What! All that way? What do they have a station here for?" asked the traveller. "Oh, I suppose it's because it's a bit nearer the line!" cautiously replied the porter.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Kenneth M. Heyward, College School, Promenade, Colwyn Bay.

LOCAL COLOUR!

The old countryman was watching the artist at work. He stood motionless behind him for some time. "Interested in painting?" asked the artist. "Ay." "I'm down here for a week or two," said the artist, "to get some local colour." "You're gettin' it!" said the old man. The artist looked gratified. "Ay, you're gettin' it! I've just painted that bench you're sittin' on!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Clifford, 153, Chapter Road, Willesden Green, N.W. 2.

TRUTH'S REWARD!

Kind Old Lady: "What's the matter, sonny?" Weeping Boy: "Dad whipped me." Kind Old Lady: "What for?" Weeping Boy: "For telling the truth." Kind Old Lady: "Too bad that. What was the question?" Weeping Boy: "He asked me who put the treacle in his slippers!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Florence Hudson, 11, Hare Street, off Mount Street, Bedford.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

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

Things are looking very bad indeed for Walter Clegg, Racke's poor relation at St. Jim's, when Ralph Reckness Cardew decides to take an interest in him!



CARDEW TAKES A HAND!

~~~~~  
A Powerful and Dramatic Long  
Complete School Story of Aubrey  
Racke, his poor relation Walter  
Clegg, and the Chums of St. Jim's.  
~~~~~  
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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## CHAPTER 1. Dark Suspicions!

**T**OM MERRY, Monty Lowther, and Harry Manners of the Shell Form at St. Jim's came slowly up the steps of the School House with worried looks and gloomy faces. At the top of the steps four juniors were waiting for them. They were Blake, Herries, D'Arcy, and Digby of the Fourth Form, and, like their chums of the Shell, the Fourth Form juniors also looked anything but their usual cheery selves.

Apparently something was sadly amiss in the School House at St. Jim's.

"Well," grunted Jack Blake as the Terrible Three joined them, "what do you fellows think about it?"

"It's a rotten business!"

"Rotten!"

"I'm blessed if I know what to think about it, though," growled Tom Merry, wrinkling his youthful brow. "There's no doubt that old Clegg let us down badly over the match."

"Not at all! It was a cad's trick!"

"That yarn of his about getting a note saying he wasn't wanted for the match was all bunkum, of course," went on Tom Merry slowly. "But the other matter's different—"

"Yaas, wathah!" put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in some distress. "It is a wotten affair, deah boys. But—but it is weally too wedic to suspect Clegg of intendin' to keep that wallet of Wacke's!"

"Why is it, dummy?" demanded Blake. "The thing's plain enough. What was Clegg doing with the wallet, then? Racke and he, though they are cousins, are bitter enemies. Clegg had no right with the wallet, had he?"

"He says he found it in Wylcombe woods, deah boy."

"That's bunkum, too!" snapped Blake. "Racke swears he missed the wallet from the study last night!"

"You know what Wacke is, Blake?"

"I know what he is right enough," said Blake. "But that doesn't alter facts, Gussy. He was caught red-handed with Racke's wallet in his pocket. He fairly gave himself away. What do you think, Tommy?"

Tom Merry did not speak for some moments. He scarcely knew what to think or say. When Walter Clegg had first come to St. Jim's, some days ago, he had thought him a decent fellow enough—as had his chums. But that day something had happened which had changed that opinion considerably.

Tom had discovered the day before that Clegg was a wonderful bowler—not only that, but that he had been playing secretly for the village team. Tom had thereupon tested him, and finding him to be better even than the best St. Jim's bowler, had immediately put him in the school team to meet the Grammar School, dropping Sidney Clive to make room for him.

Clegg had demurred at first. Though keen enough to play for the school, he had promised to play for Grimes, the village captain, and he did not like withdrawing from his promise.

But under pressure from Tom Merry he had done so eventually. And then the amazing thing had happened. Without any explanation beforehand the new fellow had left

the school in the lurch and had played for the village after all. And, as Clive had gone to Wayland with his chum Levison for the afternoon, St. Jim's had been left without a "crack" bowler, and had suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Grammarians.

Naturally, the juniors considered they had been badly "let down" by Clegg, and they were furious with him. In the quad, before a crowd of fellows, Tom had demanded an explanation, and Clegg had given a surprising one.

He stated that just before the match he had received a note from Tom Merry telling him he was not required after all, and that he could go and play for the village if he wished.

The explanation had been received with scorn by the juniors, and Tom Merry had thereupon demanded to see the mysterious note, knowing, of course, that he had never dreamed of writing such a note.

Clegg had failed to produce the note, however. But while searching his pockets for it he had withdrawn—inadvertently apparently—a pocket-wallet, a wallet which everyone present recognised as the property of Aubrey Racke, Clegg's cousin and bitterest enemy.

To explain that significant discovery away the new boy had told a story that few believed for one moment.

He stated that whilst returning through Rylcombe Woods he had been attacked by several unknown fellows, who had flung a sack over his head and then left him, and that after the attack he had found the wallet lying on the grass.

The story sounded far more feeble and unconvincing than the strange story of the mysterious note, and the crowd had received it with equally scornful disbelief—especially as Racke vowed he had missed the wallet from his study the night before, the study which he shared with his unpopular cousin.

And yet, though the story seemed to be too thick even to Tom Merry, he could not help having doubts—as did Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, apparently.

"I really don't know what to think, you fellows," repeated Tom Merry again. "It was queer, his pulling the wallet out like that—and his yarn sounds too feeble for words. But—but he struck me as being as straight as a die."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we musn't forget Racke," said Tom, setting his lips. "It was Racke's wallet! And Racke hates him like poison: he's vowed to get Clegg kicked out of his study, remember."

"Well, that's so."

"The chap's played us a dirty trick over the match—there's no doubt about that!" said Tom. "But there's something behind this wallet affair, it seems to me, and I'd rather keep an open mind on the question."

"The rest of the fellows won't, though!" grunted Blake. "They'll expect you to do something, Tommy—especially over the cricket. The cad's let us down badly, and now he vows to play for the village against the school next Wednesday!"

"I know. The fool's only making matters worse for himself, taking up this defiant attitude," said Tom slowly. "Look here, I think I'll go and have a talk with him."

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"Oh, what rot!" said Lowther. "Let the chap stew in his own juice!"

But Tom had made up his mind, and, leaving his chums to go along to the changing-room, he made his way to Study No. 7.

Despite his anger with the new fellow, Tom could not help feeling sorry for him. He was a "poor relation" of Aubrey Racke's—a fellow whose fees at St. Jim's were paid by Sir Jonas Racke, Aubrey's father. And that fact alone was enough to make Tom feel sympathetic towards him. For Aubrey Racke was just the fellow to make "a song" about such a state of affairs.

But that was not all. For Walter Clegg was not popular—far from it. And Tom knew who was responsible for that. In his bitter hatred of his unwanted cousin, Racke had done his utmost to stir up popular opinion against the new fellow.

Tom found the new fellow alone in the study. He was still in cricketer flannels, and he was pacing the study restlessly, his rather good-looking face pale and haggard.

As Tom entered the study Clegg fixed a pair of burning eyes on the junior captain.

"Well?" he snapped. "What d'you want?"

Tom eyed him quietly.

"I just want a few words with you, Clegg," he said.

"I suppose it's about my cousin's wallet?" said Clegg fiercely. "I suppose you think, like the rest of them, that I stole the thing?"

"I think nothing of the sort!" said Tom promptly. "I shall want much more proof before I think that, Clegg."

"Thanks for nothing!" retorted Clegg bitterly.

Tom bit his lip.

"Look here, Clegg!" he went on quietly. "For your own sake I'd advise you to drop this attitude. You must see that it was queer, your having that wallet in your possession. You can't blame the fellows for thinking things."

"I don't care what the cads think."

"I know you don't. I haven't come about the matter of the wallet, though," said Tom steadily. "I've come to talk to you about the way you let us down this afternoon, Clegg."

"I didn't let you down," almost shouted the new fellow furiously. "I've told you what happened. You know better than anyone how it happened, Merry."

"You say I wrote you a note?"

"Of course you did. It was written and signed by you, Tom Merry. It said I wasn't wanted for the match after all, and that I could go and play for the village. I went and played."

"I wrote no such note, Clegg!" snapped Tom. "It's no good talking, Clegg. You changed your mind and decided to play for Grimes after all. And now you've trumped up this yarn about a note to excuse yourself."

"That's not the truth, and you know it isn't!" hissed Clegg passionately. "I'll tell you what it is, Merry. You're like the rest of them. You're up against me because I've come from a Council School, and because I'm here on the charity of Racke's father."

Tom Merry clenched his fists; but he held his rising temper in check admirably.

"That's rot—hopeless rot, Clegg!" he retorted sharply.

"There are other fellows here from Council Schools—fellows who are liked and popular. There's no reason why you shouldn't be, either. I know that cad Racke is doing his very best to blacken your character—to make the fellows dislike you. But what Racke says and does would never influence me. I liked you—until you played this dirty trick on the school this afternoon."

Walter Clegg's eyes blazed.

"I didn't play any trick!" he said thickly. "You're telling lies if you say that, Merry! It's you who played a dirty trick on me! You let me think I was playing for the school, and then at the last moment you dropped me! And now the school's lost the match you're excusing yourself with the fellows by saying you didn't write that note. You think I don't count—you can do as you like with me."

Tom Merry stared at him, his eyes glinting dangerously. Had any other fellow said as much to him he would have sent him spinning in a flash. But, somehow, that vague feeling of doubt—of suspicion that a mistake had been made—held him in check. Moreover, he could see that the new fellow was honestly indignant—was not acting.

He took a threatening step towards Clegg, and then he halted, breathing hard. And as he did so two other fellows entered the study. They were Racke and Crooke, and both of them were chuckling gleefully at something.

They stopped and stared at the two juniors who faced each other, with clenched fists and blazing eyes. Then Racke's eyes gleamed triumphantly—a little fact Tom was not slow to note.

"Hallo!" remarked Racke easily. "It looks as if we're intruding, Crooke. We'll look in again."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Crooke, grinning. "Come on!"

The two black sheep of the Shell strolled out, closing the

door behind them. From the passage without Tom's sharp ears caught the sound of a smothered laugh, and his eyes gleamed.

He stepped back, and his fists unclenched.

"Look here, Clegg!" he said in a low voice. "A few moments ago I felt certain that you had played a trick on the school—had left us badly in the lurch. After the look I saw on Racke's face just now I don't feel quite so certain about it. There's more behind this, Clegg. You said in the quad just now that you didn't remember what you'd done with that—that note. Can't you try to call to mind what you did with it?"

Clegg glowered at Tom Merry, and then, as if he had come to the conclusion that Tom was in earnest, he shook his head wearily.

"I told you the truth, Merry," he said huskily. "I shoved the note in the pocket of my blazer, and forgot about it. It isn't there now, though. I must have thrown it away unknowingly, or I must have lost it. Anyway, it's gone."

Tom nodded, and frowned.

"Well, if you do find it, Clegg," he said grimly, "I'd like to see it. I give you my word here and now that I wrote no note. There's trickery at work somewhere, though I don't pretend to understand how or where. Anyway, I don't want to quarrel with you. I'm afraid you'll have trouble enough with the fellows before long."

"I'm not afraid of trouble," muttered Clegg through his teeth. "I can fight my own battles, Merry."

"You'll find it no easy task," said Tom. "And now I'll tell you why I came, Clegg. It was for your own sake. You say that you mean to play for the village in their match against us next Wednesday?"

"Yes, I do. I've promised Grimes, and I'm keeping to my promise. Hang the lot of you!"

"Very well," said Tom quietly. "I advise you not to do anything of the sort, though. The fellows are wild enough with you as it is. They'll not have it. They'll rag you if you dare to play against the school after what's happened. You'd better not."

"I'm going to play!"

Tom nodded, and his lips met. Without another word he turned and left the study. He could see it was useless to argue with the headstrong new fellow. But his anger had gone now, and his face was thoughtful as he walked down to the changing-room. He had felt an uneasy doubt about the mysterious note before. But he felt it more now. That gleeful, triumphant look on Racke's face at sight of them quarrelling, and that smothered laugh afterwards, had made him wonder. Had Clegg actually received a note after all, and if so, who had forged his name and signed it? He wondered.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Cardew Is Curious!

**R**ALPH RECKNESS CARDEW strolled into Study No. 7 with his hands deep in his pockets, and his usual cynical smile playing round his mouth.

Despite the expression of boredom on the face of the languid dandy of the Fourth, his eyes were gleaming rather curiously.

Tom Merry had scarcely left the study a minute, and Walter Clegg was still alone there. He gave Cardew a far from welcome look, in which there was more than a trace of surprise. In the few days the new fellow had been at St. Jim's he had not spoken with Cardew, and he wondered what the visit meant.

"Busy, old bean?" asked Cardew genially.

"Yes," said Clegg curtly. "If you want Racke or Crooke—"

"My dear man, Racke and Crooke are fellows I never want—except to kick," remarked Cardew. "I've come for a little chat with you, old top."

"I'm busy!"

"So am I—busy minding other people's business," said Cardew blandly, seating himself on the edge of the table. "The fact is, I'm no end interested in the questions of your merry old note and Racke's merry old wallet."

Clegg's face went suddenly dark.

"If you've come here to taunt me—" he began fiercely.

"Not at all!" interrupted Cardew coolly. "Perish the thought! I'm here, like merry old Sherlock Holmes, after clues and information, old bean. You see, I rather fancy myself as a sleuth."

"Oh!" ejaculated Clegg.

He stared at Cardew, more than a little astonished. Very few fellows at St. Jim's could understand the whimsical Fourth-Former; nor could they understand his airy manner of speaking. Even Clive and Levison, Cardew's chums, often failed to understand him.

"Then—then you don't believe what all the other chaps say—that I served the school a dirty trick this afternoon?" he said almost eagerly.



Without warning Cardew leapt at Racke and crammed the old school cap down the back of his neck, then he snatched up the sack and like lightning wrenched it over the startled Shell fellow's head, and pulled it down hard. This done, he gave the struggling Racke a violent push, sending him staggering against Crooke and into the prickly bush near by.

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"Not at all!"

"And the wallet?" muttered Clegg. "You—you don't really think I stole it, Cardew?"

"Not at all, old bean!"

"But the other fellows—"

"The other fellows are asses!" explained Cardew. "They don't use their powers of observation, you know. I do, of course. I noticed, for instance, that your clobber bore out your giddy claim that you had been attacked in Rylcombe Woods this afternoon."

"My clobber!" ejaculated Clegg, looking down quickly.

"Exactly! Look at your flannels," smiled Cardew, pointing at the new fellow's white flannels. "They're covered with green moss and bits of broken ferns. You've been fairly rollin' in it, old bean. What a pity dear old Thomas, our respected skipper, failed to notice that—what?"

"Oh!" said Clegg again. "And because of that you—your think I've spoken the truth?"

"Because of that—and other little things," assented Cardew cheerfully. "You see, I happened to be interested in the movements of our mutual friend Racke. He's a bright little fellow—full of ideas and nobby schemes, you know."

"You—you know something, Cardew?"

"Not at all—merely interested!" smiled Cardew, yawning. "Only I happened to be sitting on a stile this afternoon—that stile leading on to the path through Rylcombe Woods, you know. I was studyin' Nature, and admirin' the scenery when friends Racke, Crooke, and Scrope came along and entered the wood."

"They did?" breathed Clegg.

"I've said so. If ever any fellows looked like giddy criminals caught in the guilty act," said Cardew, "they did. Racke looked quite upset at seein' me there. I thought they were goin' to turn back, but they didn't. They vanished into the merry old wood, glowering at little me like one o'clock."

"What time was this, Cardew?" snapped Clegg, his eyes gleaming.

"Not very long before you came in, old bean. They must have met you on the path, as I figure it out. You didn't see anythin' of the merry blades, Clegg?"

"No. But—"

"I thought not," smiled Cardew. "By the way, dear old Racke was carryin' a parcel. Fancy the elegant Aubrey carryin' a parcel! That made me wonder, you know. He looked like a giddy conspirator, and I wondered what was in the parcel. Now what was in that parcel, Clegg?"

Clegg looked surprised.

"That, as jolly old Hamlet remarks, is the question," went on Cardew, shaking his head seriously. "It might have been an old sack, and it might not—what?"

"You think it was that oad and his pals who attacked me on the path?" breathed Clegg.

"I think nothin', old bean. I'm merely statin' facts. I'm curious, though. I'd like to hear the full, jolly old story of your adventures, old top. That's what I've come for."

Walter Clegg stared at Cardew and hesitated. He was still suspicious. But the thought that one fellow, at least, was inclined to believe his story, made some of the bitterness leave him.

"I'll tell you, Cardew," he muttered. "You can believe me or not, just as you like. I was just about to go down to the nets this afternoon when I found the note on the table here."

"Was anyone else in the study?"

"No. The note was in Merry's handwriting, and signed by him—at least, I believed it was. It said I wasn't needed for the match, after all, and could go and play for the village if I wanted to. I was wild when I read it. I was bitterly disappointed, and I felt Tom Merry had treated me shabbily. So, as time was short, I just hurried out and rushed off to the village ground."

"And the note?" queried Cardew.

"I crammed it into my pocket and forgot about it. I suppose I threw it away or lost it, for I hadn't it on me when I got back."

"Go on," smiled Cardew.

"I played for the village and started back!" snapped Clegg. "On the way home through the woods some fellows attacked me. I did not see them—they gave me no chance. They threw a sack over my head. I struggled, of course

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—that's how I got in this mess, I suppose. Then, quite suddenly they bolted. I threw off the sack, and it was then I found that wallet of Racke's lying on the grass. That's all."

"Queer!" mused Cardew. "Very queer! They didn't harm you?"

"No. Nor did they take anything as far as I know. I did fancy they were fumbling in my pockets, but nothing had gone when I came to look."

"And you think it was dear old Racke and his pals?"

"I didn't at first. I thought it was a Grammarian's rag. I found a Grammar School cap lying in the grass, you see."

"Oh!" ejaculated Cardew. "Did you?"

Clegg nodded.

"Then I found that wallet of Racke's. I knew it at once, and I changed my opinion. The cap was an old one, with no name inside. I guessed it had been left there to throw dust in my eyes. I believe now that it was Racke. He attacked me—goodness knows what for. I believe the wallet was dropped by him."

"By accident—what?"

Clegg was silent for a moment. Then his eyes glittered. "No," he snapped savagely. "I believe it was done deliberately. Racke planted it on me, meaning to charge me with having stolen it, sometime. That's just what he did do, as you know. He hates me—he's doin' his best to ruin me, and to get me kicked out of St. Jim's."

"Dear old Racke," mused Cardew. "And is that all, my dear Watson—I mean, Clegg?"

"Yes. But, look here, Cardew," demanded Clegg, eyeing the dandy steadily. "Why are you asking me all this—why are you so thundering interested in my affairs?"

"My dear man, I'm wonderin' that myself," said Cardew quite frankly. "It's my besettin' sin of curiosity, I suppose, old bean. And it amuses me no end to try to bowl dear old Racke out. See? By the way, whereabouts were you attacked, Clegg?"

"It was near that old oak—the one struck by lightning near the path," said Clegg curtly.

"Thanks for the information, old chap," said Cardew genially. "And thanks no end for an interestin' story. Well, I'll be gettin' along now."

With that, Cardew strolled out again, still with his hands in his pockets. There was a flicker of interest on his languid features now, however, and his movements were quite brisk when once out of the study. Getting his cap, he hurried out of the School House.

Two juniors were entering the gates as he approached, and they stopped and stared at Cardew. They were Clive and Levison, just returning from Wayland.

"Hallo! Where on earth are you off to, Cardew?" asked Levison.

"I say, how did the match go, Cardew?" asked Clive eagerly.

Cardew answered Clive, ignoring the first question.

"The match went very well, old bean," he said.

"Oh, good!"

"For the Grammarians," answered Cardew blandly.

"Wha-at? You—you mean they licked us?"

"Just that. Licked us to the wide, old boy."

"But I thought that new chap was a wonder!" gasped Clive.

"So he is. He played up like a Trojan," said Cardew, smiling.

"Then how—"

"Unfortunately, he played for the village, and not for us," said Cardew, shaking his head sadly.

"What on earth do you mean, ass?" demanded Clive.

"Just what I've said. If you want further information ask dear old Merry. He's the chap who knows all about it. Well, I'll be gettin' on, old beans. Ta-ta!"

"Here, but what about tea?" yelled Levison. "Come back! Where are you off to, you ass?"

"I'm goin' detectin'."

"What?"

"Detectin'," explained Cardew, walking away. "Ta-ta!"

And Cardew hurried on, leaving his chums staring after him. Cardew had very often mystified his chums, and he had mystified them now.

The dandy of the Fourth walked on, smiling to himself. He reached the stile, and a moment later was walking along the woodland path, shady under the trees. He stooped on reaching the old shattered oak, and then he began to examine the spot keenly.

He very soon found his first clue—a patch of trampled grass and ferns just off the path. Obviously some persons had struggled there quite recently. There was no mistaking the signs.

And the next moment he found his second clue—an old sack, flung among the brambles.

Cardew smiled his satisfaction.

"Good old Sherlock Holmes!" he murmured. "I was right

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then—that chap Clegg wasn't yarnin', by gad! I—Hullo! There's the third clue, I fancy."

It was another clue—a cap hanging from a thicket scarcely a yard away from the spot. It was an old cap, and it bore the Grammar School colours.

Cardew stared at it, his eyes gleaming.

"That settles it," he mused. "Clegg was attacked as he said—and it was Racke and his pals, or I'm sadly mistaken. Now, why did the merry old blades do it? Did they do it just to plant that wallet on him, I wonder?"

Cardew pondered a moment, and then he shook his head.

"Hardly likely they'd do such a thing here," he decided. "Not at all likely, in fact. I fancy the wallet was dropped by accident. And if so, why? Gad, I have it! Dear old Racke wrote that merry old forged note, and wanted it back again. He thought of this stunt. But he happened to drop his wallet! Jove, yes! I remember how startled he looked when he spotted it in his giddy cousin's hand. And didn't Clegg mention that he fancied his merry attackers fumbled in his pockets? They were after the note—the note that might incriminate 'em, of course! I wonder if they found it?"

Cardew was still musing thus when footsteps sounded on the path, and two juniors came hurrying into view. Cardew smiled as he recognised Racke and Crooke of the Shell.

He stepped back into the shelter of a thicket and waited.

Racke stopped almost opposite. He had obviously not seen Cardew, nor had Crooke.

"It was just about here, Crooke," said Racke in a low voice. "Hunt round a bit."

Crooke gave a grunt.

"It's all rot!" he sniffed. "What's the good of it? Who's likely to try to find out if that kid's telling the truth?"

"I'm not riskin' it, I tell you!" snarled Racke. "If the sack and cap are found they'll go to prove Clegg's telling the truth, you fool! It'll make the fellows suspect something, anyway. I'm not—Oh—"

Racke's roving eyes had just fallen on Cardew, standing in the shelter of the thicket. He went suddenly white, and fairly jumped.

Cardew gave him a smiling nod.

"You here again, Racke, old top?" he remarked genially. "You know you mustn't overdo the exercise stunt. Remember your smokers' heart, old chap! Twice in one afternoon, you know!"

Racke did not answer for a moment or two. His eyes were fixed in a dead stare on the cap in Cardew's hand.

"Look here, Cardew, you cad!" he hissed through his teeth. "What are you getting at, you rotter?"

"My dear man, what should I be gettin' at," smiled Cardew, "unless it's this jolly old cap you're referin' to? Perhaps it's your property, Racke, old man?"

Racke said nothing.

"And perhaps this old sack's your property, too, Racke?" inquired Cardew blandly, kicking the sack at his feet. "If it is, my dear man, you're quite welcome to it—the cap as well. Here you are, old bean!"

And without warning Cardew leaped like a panther at Aubrey Racke. He crammed the old school cap down the back of Racke's neck, and then he snatched up the sack. Like lightning he wrenched it over Racke's startled head and pulled it down hard.

This done, Cardew gave the frantically struggling Racke a violent push, sending him staggering against the equally bewildered Crooke.

Crash!

Into the nearest prickly furze-bush went Racke, and over him went Crooke, with furious yells from both. Leaving them struggling blindly, Racke with the sack still over his head and shoulders, the humorous Cardew strolled away smiling.

The cap and sack were of no use to him. He had found out quite enough for the present, and was satisfied. With his hands in his pockets he strolled away, apparently careless whether Racke and Crooke followed him or not. But Racke and Crooke did not dream of following Cardew—either to get vengeance or anything else. And the languid Fourth-Former strolled on, smiling. He knew that beside being furious, Racke and Crooke were feeling more than a trifle scared, and the thought amused him.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Mr. Ralton Chips In!

"HANG the brute! Oh, hang the sneerin', spyin' cad!" hissed Aubrey Racke.

The black sheep of the Shell flung the sack from him savagely, shuddering as he did so. That sack was far from being clean, and though Aubrey Racke had himself flung it over the head of his cousin only a short time ago, he did not like it upon his own elegant person. Far from it! What was sauce for the goose was not sauce for the gander where Aubrey Racke was concerned.

He staggered to his feet, brushing his clothes down viciously as he did so. Crooke did likewise, also brushing himself down, and muttering savage remarks concerning Ralph Rockness Cardew. The furze bush had been decidedly prickly, and both juniors were hurt and furious.

"Hang the brute!" repeated Racke, his eyes glinting. "Oh, what putrid luck—that cad seeing us enter the woods this afternoon!"

"He suspects something!" groaned Crooke.

"Of course he does, you fool! I could see that long ago. And now he heard what we said just now; he knows we came for these dashed things. That's what he came here for—to spy round for himself! Hang him!"

"We ought never to have come for them!" grunted Crooke. "Nobody could prove anything."

"I wish we hadn't now," muttered Racke glumly. "Not that it matters much, anyway. Cardew only suspects—he can't prove anything. In any case, you know what he is: he's only doin' it to amuse his dashed self. He won't gas about it until he can actually prove something, and he'll dashed well never do that!"

"Well, that's so," agreed Crooke, his face clearing a little. "Anyway, we'd better watch the cad. He's as sharp as a razor, you know."

"I know," snarled Racke, biting his lips. "We must take care, Crooke. If it came out we'd done it—written that note and caused St. Jim's to lose, the chaps would flay us alive."

"I'd nothing to do with it, Racke!" snapped Crooke quickly. "It was all your doing, remember. As for that wallet business, you went too far there, Racke."

"Did I?" breathed Racke, his eyes glinting again. "That isn't as far as I'm goin' to go, Crooke. I've not finished with my precious cousin yet by a long way. I tell you this, Crooke. Before I've finished I'll hound that cad out of St. Jim's! I'll teach him to lay his dirty hands on me, the poverty-stricken cad!"

"Well, you made a jolly good start, anyway," said Crooke, eyeing his chum in rather a scared manner. "You've lost him the only pals he had, and you've fairly put him in the soup over that wallet. Practically every fellow thinks he must have stolen it."

"I meant 'em to," said Racke, with a nasty grin.

"I can't quite make that affair out, Racke," said Crooke, eyeing his chum sharply. "Did you drop the wallet here on purpose?"

"Of course I didn't," said Racke coolly. "It must have dropped from my pocket as we were scrapping. When the cad yanked it out before all those fellows, though, saying he picked it up in the wood here, I had to say something quickly. And I did!" finished Racke viciously. "I saw my chance then—the chance I've waited for. I told them I'd missed it last night, and I jolly well soon made the fools think Clegg must have pinched it."

"You did it jolly well, Racke!"

Racke grinned. "That's only the beginning," he said in a low voice. "It's a good start, and I'm goin' to strike again while the iron's hot, Crooke. That little scheme with that note came off like a charm. It worked just what I was aiming at—to make Merry and his lot turn against the cad. And it led to that dashed wallet business, which did more."

"My hat!" muttered Crooke, grinning. "You fairly hate your dashed cousin, old man!"

"Hate him!" hissed Racke, his face changing. "I hated him when first I heard the dashed pauper was comin' here,



PERCIVAL PRATT.

A member of the New House, sharing Study No. 3 with Adolphus Digges. Quite a nice fellow is Pratt, and although of a quiet disposition, he has many chums both in his own House and the School House. This pleasant-looking junior is always ready to join his leader, Figgins, in any jape against the rival House. Does not shine in any particular sport, but can be relied upon to fill any vacancy in the New House cricket eleven, where he is regarded as a fairly sound batsman and a useful field.

and I did my best to stop it. But I might have let him alone if he hadn't pitched into me like he did. But he licked me and made me a laughing-stock before the fellows, the beastly charity brat!"

"Well, you've had your own back now—better give him a rest, I think."

"A rest?" echoed Racke, his thin lips setting hard. "I'll give him a rest! I tell you I won't rest until I've hounded the cad out of St. Jim's. I've got another little plan up my sleeve that'll about put the finishing touch on Master Walter Clegg. Come on, let's get back!"

The two black sheep started back for St. Jim's after Racke had flung the cap and sack far out into the wood. Racke's face was hard and set, and his eyes gleamed triumphantly. But Crooke was looking scared. He was thinking of Cardew, and the thought of that airy, cynical youth taking an interest in Clegg's affairs did not make him at all inclined to help his chum in his bitter feud against his cousin.

But he said nothing more. He knew that in his present mood Racke was beyond arguing with. They reached the school and made straight for Study No. 7. Racke entered rather slowly and uneasily. He had not faced his cousin since that dramatic scene in the quad, and he was not looking forward to doing so.

Clegg was in the study—he was just clearing away his own tea-things. As Racke came in followed by Crooke, he stopped what he was doing and looked at Aubrey Racke. Crooke saw the look, and he knew at once that there was going to be trouble.

It came very quickly. As Crooke closed the door Clegg crossed the room in two strides, and his grasp closed on his cousin's collar like a vice.

"I've been waiting for you, Racke!" he said thickly. "I'm going to have an understanding with you! You're a dirty sweep—a rotten plotting cad!"

Racke's face went white—more with fear than rage. He twisted vainly in his cousin's grasp.

"Let me go, you cad!" he hissed. "Take your dashed hands off me, hang you!"

"Not until I've finished, Racke. Now, listen! When I came here I fancied I was going to find a pal in you. I was given to understand that you'd be glad to have me here, and would make things smooth for me."

"I never wanted you here, confound you! Let go!"

"I know that now," said Clegg bitterly. "You fancied I'd disgrace you, coming from a Council School. You did your utmost to stop me coming. And since I've been here you've done nothing but play dirty tricks on me and slander me to the fellows. You've poisoned their minds against me with cowardly lies and sneaking hints behind my back."

"I—I—I—"

"You can't deny it," said Clegg, his lip curling. "And now you've done this, you sweep—you've turned all the fellows against me, even decent chaps like Merry, with your dirty plotting!"

"I've done nothing, I tell you!" grunted Racke, his face red with rage and malice. "Let me go, you cad!"

"Not yet! I thought at first that Merry had actually written that note this afternoon. But I've been thinking it over since, and I fancy I can guess who's behind it. You are at the bottom of that, Racke—just as you are at the bottom of this wallet affair, you—you plotting hound!"

Walter Clegg shook the cringing Aubrey until his teeth rattled in his head.

"You planted that wallet on me," he said, his voice

trembling with scorn. "You downed me in the woods this afternoon to do it. You knew I'd pick it up and bring it back with me, you cad."

"I tell you I didn't!" almost howled Racke furiously. "I lost it last night. I know nothing about any attack in the woods."

"That's false, and you know it, Racke!" said Clegg savagely. "If you think I'm going to lie down under this, you're thundering well mistaken, my pippin! I owe it to your pater that I'm here, I know. But I owe you nothing. And whether I stay here or go, I'm not going to be plotted against and trod on like a worm by you, Aubrey! Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to drag you along to Tom Merry by the scruff of your neck, and I'm going to make you own up that you planted that wallet on to me."

Racke's face went white.

"You—you wouldn't dare!" he hissed. "I've only got to shout, and a score of the fellows would be in to back me up. They only want a chance to set about you for having let the school down this afternoon, you cad! They won't forgive that in a hurry. And now they believe you're a dashed thief—"

Racke got no further than that. He soon wished he hadn't gone so far. The grasp on his collar suddenly tightened, and his words ended in a yell as he was fairly lifted from his feet.

"Daren't I?" breathed Clegg, shaking him like a rat. "You crawling worm, I'll soon show you! Out you go!"

He almost lifted the struggling Racke towards the door, and Racke gave a choking yell, and clawed at the hands like iron that gripped him.

"Help me, Crooke, you fool!" he yelled. "Go for him! Fetch some of the fellows along, can't you?"

Crooke ignored the contradictory orders. He had already discovered to his cost that Walter Clegg was more than a match for both of them. And he had his own reasons for not bringing anyone else into the matter.

He stared on helplessly as Racke began to struggle and kick in a vain effort to resist his cousin's obvious intention. Clegg dragged the yelling Racke as far as the table, and then Racke curled his leg round the leg, and hung on desperately.

A brief struggle followed, and then, to Crooke's great alarm, the table lurched, and went over, amid an appalling crash of smashing crockery.

"Oh, my hat!"

But the struggle did not stop even then. Clegg, apparently, intended to keep his word, and he dragged away at Aubrey Racke. Finding himself unequal to the tug of war, Racke dropped to the floor, and a moment later the two enemies were rolling over and over on the carpet in a deadly clasp, fighting and struggling furiously.

Crooke looked on in scared indecision. The door opened suddenly, revealing a crowd of astonished Shell fellows. Tom Merry stepped into the study.

"You silly asses!" he called out warningly. "You'll have the beaks here at this rate. Stop that!"

"That new rotter at it again!" snorted Grundy, appearing behind Tom Merry. "Here, I'll soon deal with him! I've been wanting to lay my hands on the cad for letting us down this afternoon."

And Grundy was about to push his way in when there came a muttered cry of "Cave!" and the next instant Mr. Railton rustled up, his brow thunderous.

The crowd parted instantly, and he rustled into the study. He frowned angrily at sight of the struggling forms on the carpet.

"Racke—Clegg!" he thundered. "Stop at once! Do you hear me?"

The two cousins ceased to struggle on the instant. They scrambled to their feet, glowering at each other. The Housemaster eyed them severely.

"This is not the first time I have found you two boys fighting in this study," he said sternly. "I had hoped that this absurd and regrettable feud between your cousin and yourself, Racke, would quickly come to an end. It seems that my hope was ill-founded, Racke."

Racke scowled, but said nothing.

"This state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue," went on Mr. Railton, with some anger. "As I have already stated, I do not believe in placing boys together who are at loggerheads. As you apparently cannot live together on friendly terms, I shall be obliged to separate you, Merry!"

"Sir?"

"For the present, until other arrangements can be made, Clegg will join you in Study No. 10. He had better move his belongings at once—this very evening!"

"Oh, sir! Y-yes, sir!" stammered Tom Merry.

He exchanged glances with his dismayed chums, and groaned inwardly. Mr. Railton noticed the glances, but he merely smiled grimly.

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"You will both take five hundred lines," he went on, addressing Racke and Clegg. "And now let there be no more of this miserable quarrelling, boys. If such a happening comes to my knowledge again, I shall deal very severely with both of you!"

With that the Housemaster motioned the crowd to disperse, and rustled away, looking very grim.

The Terrible Three walked back to their study in a state of disgust that was too deep for words. Had the new fellow been the finest chap in the world they would not have been pleased at his inclusion in their study. They strongly objected to having a strange dog in the kennel—as Monty Lowther put it.

But Clegg was not the finest chap in the world in their view—far from it. Had Mr. Railton dropped his bombshell before the happening of the afternoon they might have consoled themselves that Clegg was a decent fellow—a very decent fellow.

Now, however, their opinion of Walter Clegg had undergone a decided change for the worst. A fellow who had let the school down as he had done was far from being a suitable or welcome inmate of Study No. 10. Moreover, that strange affair of Racke's wallet wanted some explaining—in the view of Lowther and Manners, at all events.

"It's awful!" groaned Manners, as they tramped into Study No. 10. "Fancy that rotter digging in with us! Oh, blow Railton!"

"Life won't be the same!" groaned Lowther. "It fairly mucks up the family circle, you chaps! What are you going to do about it, Tommy?"

Tom Merry frowned.

"I don't like it any more than you do!" he grunted. "But it can't be helped. We'll have to make the best of it. We must be civil to the chap."

"Civil! Why should we be civil to him?" snorted Manners. "What about this afternoon? All the fellows are cutting him dead, and I don't wonder. I don't say I believe he actually stole Racke's blessed wallet, though it is rummy. But he let the school down badly over the match, and no decent fellow would do a thing like that."

"I think that," agreed Lowther, nodding. "And he isn't even decently regretful. He's actually defiant—vows he'll play for the village against us on Wednesday. The fellow's a rotten traitor!"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not so sure about that, you fellows," he said slowly. "The more I think about that wallet affair the more I feel there's something queer and rotten behind it. I honestly believe the fellow found it, as he said he did."

"Yes, but—"

"About the match, though," went on Tom, setting his lips. "I'm not so sure. He seems to prefer his village pals to us, and I can't think any fellow would dare to forge a note like that. It seems plain enough; and yet—"

"What rot!" exclaimed Lowther warmly. "You silly ass, it's plain enough. There never was a note. The cad invented that yarn. He didn't want to let Grimes down—he preferred to let us down. Let the cad go to pot!"

"He's coming in here, though!" muttered Tom uneasily. "It's as well to have an understanding, you chaps. I vote we treat him civilly, anyway."

Manners was about to make a hot rejoinder when a knock sounded at the door, and Clegg himself came in. In his arms was a pile of books, which he placed on the table. He seemed to understand the tense atmosphere of the study.

He coloured up, his eyes gleamed.

"Look here, you fellows," he said thickly. "We may as well have an understanding about this. I know you don't want me in here—I know I'm no more welcome here than in Study No. 7. But Railton's shoved me in here, and here I'm sticking it!"

"There's no need for any unpleasantness, Clegg," said Tom Merry quietly. "I won't pretend that we want you—we don't. We don't want any more in this study at all. But Railton's put you in with us, and I see no reason why we shouldn't pull together and make the best of it."

Clegg looked at Lowther and Manners, and as he noted the looks on their faces his jaw set squarely.

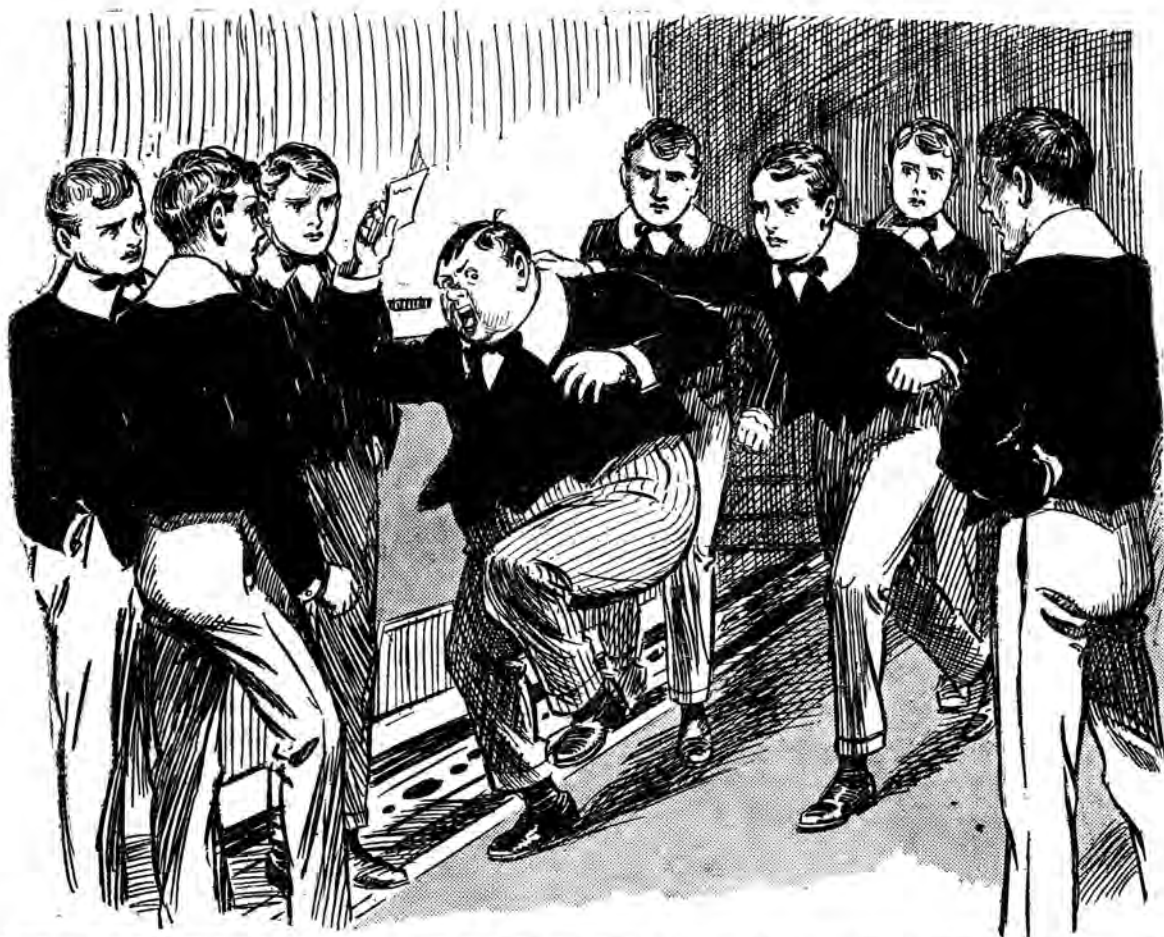
"That won't do for me, though," he said doggedly. "I want an understanding, too. I want to know if you fellows are like the rest of the cads here—if you believe I purposely let the school down this afternoon. I also want to know what your views are about Racke's wallet. I'm not blind, or deaf!"

There was a silence. The Terrible Three looked at each other uncomfortably.

Tom Merry answered at last.

"You've got a nerve to expect us to answer that, Clegg!" he snapped. "But if you want to know my views, I'll tell you. I believe you found that wallet as you stated. But in regard to the other matter I think I'd prefer to keep an open mind."

"Those are your views, are they?"



"Just listen to this, you fellows!" Baggy Trimble's voice ended abruptly in a choking yelp as Tom Merry's grasp closed upon him. "You—you fat cad!" snapped the junior captain. "Stop that!" "Here, leggo!" shouted Trimble. "Look here, Tom Merry—" "You prying rotter!" shouted Tom Merry angrily. "Whose letter is that? It isn't yours, you fat villain! Give it to me!" (See page 11.)

"Yes."

Clegg did not trouble to ask Lowther and Manners—their attitude was enough for him.

"Right!" he gritted, crashing his fist on the table. "That's enough for me. I'm not a humbug, and I don't want your sympathy or anything else. I won't be on friendly terms or on ordinary speaking terms with fellows who believe me to be a liar and a trickster."

"There's no need for that attitude, Clegg!" snapped Tom Merry warmly.

But Clegg interrupted him.

"That's enough for me—I can see how the land lies," he said, his eyes blazing. "Well, I've always fought my own battles, and I can do so here. I'm sticking it in here, but you can go to pot, the lot of you!"

With that the new fellow marched out—apparently to continue his moving in. The Terrible Three looked at each other.

"Phew!" breathed Tom Merry, almost grinning. "He's a giddy fighter, anyway. I must say I can't help liking the chap—stubborn ass that he is."

"Oh, let him stew in his own juice!" growled Manners.

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther. "If he asks to be given the cold shoulder he can have it, can't he?"

Tom Merry nodded grimly.

"Yes, he can!" he snapped. "If he chooses to act the goat and get on the high horse, we'll let him."

"Yes, rather!"

And the Terrible Three agreed upon that.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### More Plotting!

"HALLO! What's the game now, Racke?"

Gerald Crooke asked the question, with a grin, as he came into Study No. 7 the following day.

Aubrey Racke was seated at the table. Before him was his writing-case, and he was apparently writing a letter. It was also apparently of a secretive nature, for, as

Crooke came in he hurriedly covered it up, and turned a rather startled face to the door.

Gerald Crooke noted the rather significant action—hence his grinning question.

Racke's face cleared as he recognised Crooke.

"Oh, it's you, Crooke!" he said, with some relief. "Come in and close the door. Better lock it, old man."

Crooke nodded, and closed and locked the door. He eyed his study-mate curiously.

"Not writing home?" he queried.

"No."

"What's the merry old secret?" grinned Crooke. "Whom are you writing—Hullo! What's that you've got hold of?"

Crooke's eyes had fallen upon a torn sheet of folded paper—a letter torn in two—and crumpled, as if it had been read and discarded.

"Oh, that!" grinned Racke. "I found it in the waste-paper basket, old top. It's part of a letter."

"I see it is," said Crooke grimly. "Looks to me jolly well like one of that cad Clegg's, too."

"It is," said Racke, nodding coolly. "It's from one of his dashed old pals—from the Council School he used to attend, you know. I yanked the thing out of the basket just now."

"And have you read it, Racke?" said Crooke, staring.

"Not at all. I've no desire to do so, old top," said Racke, grinning. "In any case, it's torn right down, and it wouldn't be easy to read."

"But what on earth's the game?" demanded Crooke, glancing down at the writing paper on Racke's blotting-pad. "Are you copying the dashed thing, or what?"

"Only the signature and the address it came from," said Racke blandly.

"But what for?" insisted Racke's chum, in some exasperation. "I'm blessed if I see any sense in this game."

"You wouldn't," grinned Racke. "Well, I don't mind telling you, old chap. I'm just doin' Clegg a good turn—"

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I'm writing him another letter from his old Council School pal—see? It ought to please him—I don't think!"

"Oh!" said Crooke. "But—but what's the good, if you aren't copying the handwriting? He'll know it's not from his pal."

"I don't mind if he does," smiled Racke. "The letter isn't intended for dear old Walter to see at all. It's for other fellows—Baggy Trimble and Mellish, for instance."

"Oh!" ejaculated Crooke, light dawning in upon him. "I—I see now. You're going to shove something in that letter—something that'll put Clegg in the soup—what?"

"What a brain!" sneered Racke. "You've actually worked it out yourself."

"Oh, rats!" grunted Crooke uneasily. "Look here, Racke, old man—chuck it! You're going too far, you know, over this business!"

"Am I?"

"Yes," said Crooke, eyeing his chum fixedly. "Aren't you satisfied with what you've already done? You've got the cad in the soup all round. You've turned all the fellows against him. Even Tom Merry and his lot won't speak to him now. And we've done what we vowed to do—we've got him cleared out of this study. Chuck it!"

An ugly look came over Racke's face.

"Chuck it!" he echoed almost in a snarl. "I'll be dashed well hanged if I do! You know what I said last night, Crooke—I said I wouldn't rest until I've hounded the cad out of St. Jim's! And I mean it!"

"Look here—"

"Shut up! This is my affair, Crooke. He's thrashed us both. If you've forgotten it I haven't. And what about last night? He pitched into me again, and got me lined by Ralton. I tell you, Crooke, I'll make his life such a misery here, that he'll be only too glad to clear out. I haven't finished yet, by a long way."

"I'm blessed if I understand you, Racke. He's your dashed cousin, isn't he? You're overdoing it."

"Cousin be hanged! What right had he to come here on the pater's cash—the pushin' cad? Anyway, you shut up, Crooke, and leave this to me. You'll see the letter in a minute."

Racke resumed operations with his pen. Crooke said no more. He watched uneasily as Racke went on writing. He wrote slowly, obviously disguising his handwriting.

He finished at last, and, after blotting the sheet, he handed it to his chum.

"How's that?" he asked.

Crooke looked at the letter. At the top was an address in East London—the same address that was on the torn letter, Crooke saw. The letter itself was not long, and Crooke read it quickly. It ran as follows:

"Dear Walter,—Just a few lines to let you know as things are all O.K. here yet. You've no need to worry about that there theft, old man. Another fellow's got the

blame, and I expect he'll be sacked and sent to a reformatory. There's only me as knows it was you that took the headmaster's quids, and I'm your pal and sha'n't split. Rely on me. You're lucky to be at a school with chaps as has plenty of cash. Take my tip, and lie low for a bit, though. You may not have the same luck again. Well, I've no more news now. I'll be glad to hear how things are going when you've chance to write, old chap. Cheerio!

"Your old pal,

"CHARLIE BRENT."

"My only hat!" breathed Crooke.

He stared aghast at the rascally Racke.

"So—so that's the game?" he went on, handing the precious epistle back to its author. "Well, you are the outside edge, Racke! You mean to say you're going to let the fellows see that thing?"

"Naturally!" said Racke coolly. "You don't suppose I've taken all this trouble for nothing?"

"It—it's a bit thick Racke, you know," muttered Crooke. "And it's thundering well risky, too. Don't do it!"

Racke's eyes glistened. Without answering, he picked up an envelope that lay on the table. It was a used envelope, with an East London postmark on the stamp in the corner, and the envelope was addressed to Walter Clegg at St. Jim's.

Racke shoved the letter half into the envelope.

"How's that?" he said, with an unpleasant grin. "That was the envelope the other letter came in, I fancy. It was also in the basket there. It came last night. Luckily the postmark's smudged—you can't read the date on it. Now for our old friend Trimble. What a useful fellow old Nescy Parker Trimble is, Crooke."

Racke got up, placing the false letter carefully in his pocket.

"You—you mean to do it then?" gasped Crooke.

"I've said so."

"But—but—"

"You rotten funk!" sneered Racke. "You can keep out of it if you want."

"I'm not funkng; but—"

"Come on, then. Lemme see," said Racke reflectively. "Those cads in Study No. 10 should be at the nets now."

"I believe they are."

"Good! Let's hope Clegg's out, too. I'm rather glad he was shoved in that study now, Crooke."

Crooke said nothing; and as Racke led the way from the study he followed, though not very eagerly. Racke walked straight to Study No. 10, and after a sharp look round and a glance into the room he entered quietly.

Dropping the false letters carelessly on the table, he walked out and rejoined his chum.

"All serene!" he murmured. "Now for friend Trimble!"

Racke started for the study Baggy Trimble shared with Wildrake and Mellish. But as they turned on to the Fourth Form passage Racke's eyes gleamed on sighting the fat junior just emerging from his study.

"Take it easy, Crooke!" he breathed. "And play up to me."

Trimble came towards the two Shell fellows, and Racke went on speaking—aloud now.

"It's a fact, Crooke," he said carelessly. "Merry's got a feed on, or something. I saw a whacking great cake on the table when I passed just now."

"You don't say, Racke? Birthday celebration, I suppose. Were any of them there?"

"No; study was empty, old chap. I expect—"

Racke did not say what he expected, for just then his chum gave him a warning nudge. And next instant Racke's face broke into a scowl as he saw why.

It was Ralph Reckness Cardew. That lackadaisical Fourth-Former was lounging lazily against the door of his study a few doors higher up.

As Racke and Crooke—silent now—strolled past him Cardew gave them a bright nod.

"Still takin' exercise, old beans?" he queried genially.

"Go and eat coke!"

With that savage rejoinder Racke walked on. But when they were out of earshot he drew a deep breath.

"Think the cad heard what we were saying?" he muttered furiously.

"Couldn't have done," said Crooke. "Anyway, that fat ass Trimble did, Racke. I saw his giddy eyes gleam like a blessed codfish's. It'll come off all serene, Racke. I don't like it, though."

But Racke scarcely heard him.

"Hang the sneerin', cynical 'cad!" he hissed. "The rotter always seems to butt in at the wrong moment, Crooke. If—he heard! You know what a sharp-witted cad he is!"

"Oh, you mean Cardew!" said Crooke. "Don't talk rot! He couldn't have heard us. And if he did he wouldn't dream what it meant."

"Good!" breathed Racke. "Well, if Trimble heard it that's good enough, Crooke. Let's get out and leave the rest to the fat ass."

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And Racke and Crooke went out of doors, both dismissing Ralph Reckness Cardew from their minds.

But Crooke was wrong—quite wrong. Cardew had heard. Besides owning sharp wits, the slacker of the Fourth also owned a pair of exceedingly sharp ears.

As Racke and Crooke vanished he gazed after them for a moment, and then he gazed in the direction Baggy Trimble had vanished.

"Dear old Racke!" he mused reflectively. "Always got some merry little scheme on! Now, what did that little bit of byplay mean, I wonder? The bit about the jolly old cake was intended either for me or for Baggy. Hum! I rather fancy it was for the fat and fatuous Baggy. Merry old Aubrey fairly froze when he spotted me."

Cardew shook his head reflectively.

"If it wasn't too much fog," he yawned, "I'd wander along to see if Baggy's found that jolly old cake. As it is—What a life!"

He yawned again, and, lounging back into the study, he dropped into the easy-chair. Levison, who was seated at the table, looked up.

"Finished holding the door up?" he inquired sarcastically.

"Yes, old bean."

"Give us a hand with this dashed impot, then."

Cardew heaved himself out of the chair again.

"Sorry, old top!" he murmured. "But I'm just going to detectin'."

"Going whatter?"

"Detectin', old bean."

"Are you starting that rot again, you ass?"

"It isn't rot," said Cardew gravely. "I'm misjudged in this study. I'm no end of a nobby detective, Levison. When I've detected the crime and bowled out the jolly old guilty merchant you'll admit that."

"But what—"

"You'll see presently, my dear Watson—I mean Levison," drawled Cardew.

And he strolled out of the study. He had decided, after all, to go and find out if Baggy Trimble had found the cake.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Grundy Chips In!

**B**AGGY TRIMBLE cautiously pushed open the door of Study No. 10, and after a careful blink inside the room he entered, closing the door softly after him.

The Falstaff of the Fourth was hungry—which was far from being unusual with him at all times of the day. Baggy had an appetite which needed constant attention, and he possessed a frame which—according to him—needed plenty of nourishing food. And Baggy was never very particular where he got it from.

If there was a cake on the table in Study No. 10—a whacking great cake, and quite unattended—as he had distinctly heard Racke claim, then it was his duty to investigate—a duty he owed to his interior economy.

But now, as Baggy scanned the table in Study No. 10, he gave a grunt. If there ever had been a cake on the table it was certainly gone now.

"Must be in the cupboard!" grunted Baggy. "Hope the rotten door isn't lock—Hallo!"

Baggy had just been on the point of moving across to the study cupboard, when his eyes fell on the letter lying half out of the envelope on the table.

In addition to being a very greedy youth, Baggy was also an exceedingly curious youth. The sight of the open letter was as big a temptation as the sight of the cake would have been—had there been a cake.

"H'm!" mused Baggy, turning the envelope over. "That rotter Clegg's—eh? Wonder if there's any truth in the yarns old Racke's been spinning about him? I think I'll have a squint at it."

And Baggy did. He was as unscrupulous where other people's letters were concerned as he was about other people's "grub."

He read the precious letter through, and as he did so his eyes opened wide as saucers almost.

"G-gug-great pip!" he gasped. "Oh, what an awful rotter that chap Clegg is! M-my hat! Some chaps said Racke was only telling yarns out of spite. This proves he wasn't."

Baggy read the letter through again, and then he slipped it back into the envelope, his eyes gleaming with excitement. But he did not replace the letter on the table; he crammed it into his trousers-pocket.

"Phew!" he gasped. "Won't the fellows just stare when I tell 'em this? And—and that beast Clegg kicked me only this morning—kicked me just because I asked him for a loan. A blessed charity bounder like he is ought to be jolly well bucked at being asked for a loan by a fellow like me! M-my hat! Won't the fellows just open their eyes?"

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And Baggy fairly wrenched the door open and rushed out. He had quite forgotten his hunger now, and the cake. He rushed out into the Shell passage and charged full-tilt into three fellows who happened to be passing at the moment.

They were Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins, and they yelled as the fat form of Baggy Trimble sent them spinning to right and left.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Trimble. "Ow-ow!"

He sat down with a tremendous concussion on the passage floor. And the next moment Grundy's heavy hand closed on his collar.

"You—you fat ass!" snorted the Shell fellow wrathfully. "What the thump d'you mean by rushing out like that?"

"Yow-wow! Leggo, Grundy!" roared Baggy Trimble, as the big fellow shook him. "I say, you chaps, listen! I've got some—yow!—news for you!"

"I'll give you news, you fat frog!" snorted Grundy. "What the thump were you doing in there, anyway? I bet you've been up to something! Just see if anyone's inside, Gunny."

Gunny looked into Study No. 10, and grinningly reported that the owners were absent.

"I thought as much!" said Grundy grimly. "The fat thief's been grub-raiding, I suppose! We'll teach him to prow round Shell studies!"

"I haven't been after grub!" howled Trimble. "I say, Cardew, make 'em lemme go! Back up your own—ow!—Form, you know!"

Cardew, who had just strolled up, stopped and smiled.

"What's the rumpus?" he queried.

"I'll soon tell you that," said Grundy. "We caught the fat clam coming out of Merry's study. I'm going to whop him until he explains what he was after there."

"Oh!" said Cardew. "So that's it! Did you find the cake, Baggy?"

"Eh? The cake?" ejaculated Baggy. "There wasn't any cake—I mean, there was—was only the letter—"

"Letter?"

"Yes," said Baggy, with renewed excitement. "I say, you fellows, lemme go, and I'll read it out to you. It's the blessed limit! You'll fairly jump!"

Grundy released his captive, struck by the excitement of the fat junior. Several other fellows had come up by this, attracted by the row. Baggy grinned round at them. He had wanted an audience, and he had got what he wanted.

"Just listen to this, you fellows!" he said.

The fat junior drew out the crumpled letter and began to read aloud. He read it quickly, and had almost reached the signature at the bottom before his astonished hearers grasped the fact that they were listening to a private letter that obviously did not belong to Baggy.

But Tom Merry, who had just strolled up with Lowther and Manners was the first to grasp the fact, and Baggy's voice ended abruptly in a choking yelp, as Tom's grasp closed upon him.

"You—you fat cad!" he snapped. "Stop that!"

"Here, leggo!" hooted Trimble. "Look here, Tom Merry—"

"You prying rotter!" shouted Tom angrily. "Whose letter's that? It isn't yours, you fat villain!"

"Ow! Leggo! It's that cad, Clegg's, you know—I mean, it's mine. I found it, you know."

"Give it to me!"

"Shan't!"

"Won't you?" rapped out Tom.

He made a grab at the letter, and after a moment's brief struggling he managed to get hold of it, also the envelope. He glanced at the address on the letter, and then he glanced at the "Dear Walter" on the letter itself.

"I thought so!" he breathed, giving Trimble a withering glance. "Well, you fat worm! This is a private letter of Clegg's! You've pinched it, and read it—made us hear what's in it, too!"

"I—I say, it's all right, you know—"

"Is it?" snapped Tom. "We'll see about that, you prying cad. It isn't the first time you've pried into other chap's correspondence. How did you get hold of it, Trimble?"

"Leggo! I say, Clegg gave it me—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I found it—in the quad, you know."

"Well, the fat fibber!" snorted Grundy, whose eyes were gleaming. "We just collared the fat rascal coming out of your study, Merry! He's stole the letter from the table!"

"Ow! Not at all! I tell you—Yoooop!"

Baggy Trimble howled as Tom Merry sent him spinning against the passage wall. Then Tom replaced the letter in the envelope.

"I'll take charge of this," he said curtly. "I'll hand it back to Clegg. That fat cad's a disgrace to St Jim's, with his sneaking and prying!"

And Tom was about to turn to enter his study, when

Grundy caught his arm and held him. Grundy's face was set doggedly.

"Half a minute, Merry!" he snorted. "This wants looking into, my pippin. If it's true what that letter says, then there's another fellow who's a disgrace to St. Jim's as well as Trimble."

"Hear, hear!"

"Great Scott! Yes, rather!"

There was an angry murmur on all sides.

"If what it says in that letter's true," snapped Grundy harshly, "that cad Clegg's not fit to be at this school! He ought to be in the reformatory instead of that other poor chap the letter mentions! You've heard what Trimble read out, Merry?"

"I heard it," said Tom, compressing his lips. "If it's true, you're quite right, Grundy. Clegg ought to be kicked out of this school. That letter ought never to have been seen, though."

"That's true enough," growled Grundy, his jaw setting. "But it's out now, and it's a jolly good thing for St. Jim's it has come out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We already know what he is," resumed Grundy, looking round him. "He's played a dirty trick on the school. He's as good, or bad as a blessed traitor! That's not the worst, though. We know now for a fact that that affair of Racke's wallet was what we suspected. He pinched it right enough."

There was a general nodding of heads. All the faces of the juniors—with the single exception of Cardew's, which wore a bland smile—were grave and angry. Grundy's opinion was obviously the general opinion. Racke's campaign of poisonous lies and slanders had done its work only too well. Before the affair of the Grammar School match the new fellow had been looked upon with distrust and suspicion. But the fact that he had let the school down, preferring to play for the village rather than St. Jim's had made his fellow-juniors furious with him. Then had happened the strange affair of Racke's wallet, and that had made him something of an outcast—uncertain and doubtful as the facts of the case were.

And now this letter had turned up. A damning letter that—so the juniors believed—proved Racke's crafty hints and claims up to the hilt.

Tom Merry realised all this. Moreover, he shared the general view now. That significant letter was quite enough for him.

But he meant to see fair play.

"That's right enough, Grundy," he said quietly. "But I'm doing nothing until I've seen Clegg. I shall give him back his letter, and I shall demand to know what it means. We've a right to know. If the facts are as that letter states, he's not only a rotten thief, but he's a howling cad—allowing another poor chap to suffer for his crime!"

"What's the good of that?" said Gore. "He'll only deny it. He'll destroy the letter, and deny it all."

"That's just what I say," growled Grundy. "Don't talk rot, Merry. You take too jolly much on yourself. It's up to you to take that dashed letter to Railton."

"I'm going to do as I said!" snapped Tom, his eyes gleaming. "The chap's a rotter—there's little doubt about that. But he's going to get fair play. You can go and chop chips, Grundy!"

With that Tom Merry entered his study, and his chums followed him. George Alfred Grundy also followed him, his rugged features grim and determined. He caught Tom Merry by the arm.

"Look here, Merry!" he roared. "That won't do for me! If you don't care a toss for the honour of St. Jim's, lemme tell you I do."

Tom's eyes glinted dangerously.

"Take your fist off me, Grundy," he snapped, "and get out of my study!"

"I jolly well won't! Look here—"

"Won't you?" said Tom.

He nodded to Lowther and Manners, and Grundy yelled as three pairs of hands gripped him hard. He yelled still more as Tom Merry planted a hefty kick behind him. Then, before he had time to think of struggling, he was fairly rushed to the door and hurled out. He fell at the feet of the crowd, and Tom Merry left him there.

Closing and locking the door, he rejoined his chums, breathing hard. Much as he sympathised with Grundy's view, the junior skipper had no intention of being overruled by Grundy. But his face was clouded and anxious as well as angry. He was not at all looking forward to tackling Clegg. The fellow was a rotter without a doubt, of course. That letter proved it up to the hilt. And yet—

Tom Merry still had doubts.

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## CHAPTER 6.

### Standing by Clegg.

"O W! Oh crumbs! Rotters!"

Grundy staggered to his feet, his face red with wrath. At any other time the fellows would have enjoyed the spectacle of seeing Grundy handled thus. There always was a plentiful lack of sympathy shown for Grundy's troubles.

But it was different now. They sympathised with Grundy's views, and they sympathised with his troubles this time. Some of the fellows helped him to his feet, and some of them even dusted him down.

Grundy had heard the click of the lock, and though he was seething with wrath, he made no attempt to gain another entrance.

"Rotters!" he snorted. "It's just like Merry to refuse to do the right thing. He's not fit to be skipper. Fancy shielding a rotter like that! By Jingo! We're not standing this, though, you fellows."

"Rather not!"

"That cad Clegg's not fit to be at St. Jim's!" growled Grundy. "And we'll jolly soon show him he's not wanted here!"

"I say, you fellows," piped Baggy Trimble, who was fairly jumping with excited glee, "let's rag the cad when he comes in! Fancy an awful rotter like that coming here! Let's go and tell old Railton! Never mind that silly ass, Merry! You—Yaroooh!"

Baggy Trimble's excited outburst ended in a howl as Grundy's boot took him forcibly in the rear.

"Shut up, you fat toad!" growled George Alfred in disgust. "Reading other fellows' letters, eh? You're as bad as he is. Kick the fat cad along the passage!"

"Hear, hear!"

But Trimble was too quick for them. He gave a yelp, and bolted for his life. Grundy snorted and marched away to his own study to finish his tea. Though one of the best natured fellows in the world, the burly George Alfred felt strongly on the matter of Clegg. It had annoyed him intensely to think that the new fellow had been given a place in the team within a few days of his arrival at St. Jim's. And the subsequent manner in which Clegg had treated his chance gave Grundy cause to feel doubly annoyed.

Grundy's departure was the signal for the rest of the juniors to disperse, which they did, buzzing with the strange affair. Only Cardew was left lingering in the passage, and he stood rubbing his nose thoughtfully.

"It wasn't a cake, then, after all," he murmured. "It was a letter—and such a letter! Dear old Racke! What a chap for ideas he is! I think I'll bestow my charmin' society on Thomas—may even ask me to tea."

And Cardew was about to tap on the door of Study No. 10 when a junior came quickly along the passage. It was Walter Clegg, and at sight of him Cardew smiled and waited.

"Hallo, old bean!" he remarked. "I've been lookin' for you, dear boy."

Clegg did not return Cardew's smile. His face was hard and bitter. He was about to enter his study without answering the greeting, when he suddenly remembered that Cardew was the first fellow to speak civilly that day. And though he knew the cynical junior's queer ways, he felt strangely drawn towards him. Moreover, he could not forget Cardew's interest in him the night before.

He stopped and eyed Cardew steadily.

"You want me?" he asked curtly. "I suppose you know the fellows here seem to consider me not fit to speak to?"

Cardew nodded coolly.

"Yes," he assented cheerfully. "It's surprisin', begad, what a lot of footlin' idiots there are at St. Jim's, isn't it? By the way, have you found that jolly old note yet?"

"No."

"Pity," mused Cardew. "A great pity! And, speakin' of notes, dear man, have you had any letters lately—letters from old pals of yours?"

Clegg looked at him blankly.

"I don't see why you should ask me that," he said. "But if you want to know I happened to get one last night from an old pal—a chap who goes to the school I've just left. But—"

"What did you do with it when you'd read it, old top—if you don't mind my buttin' in on your jolly old business?"

Clegg looked at him curiously. But he was a keen fellow, and he saw that Cardew had some good reason for asking such a strange question.

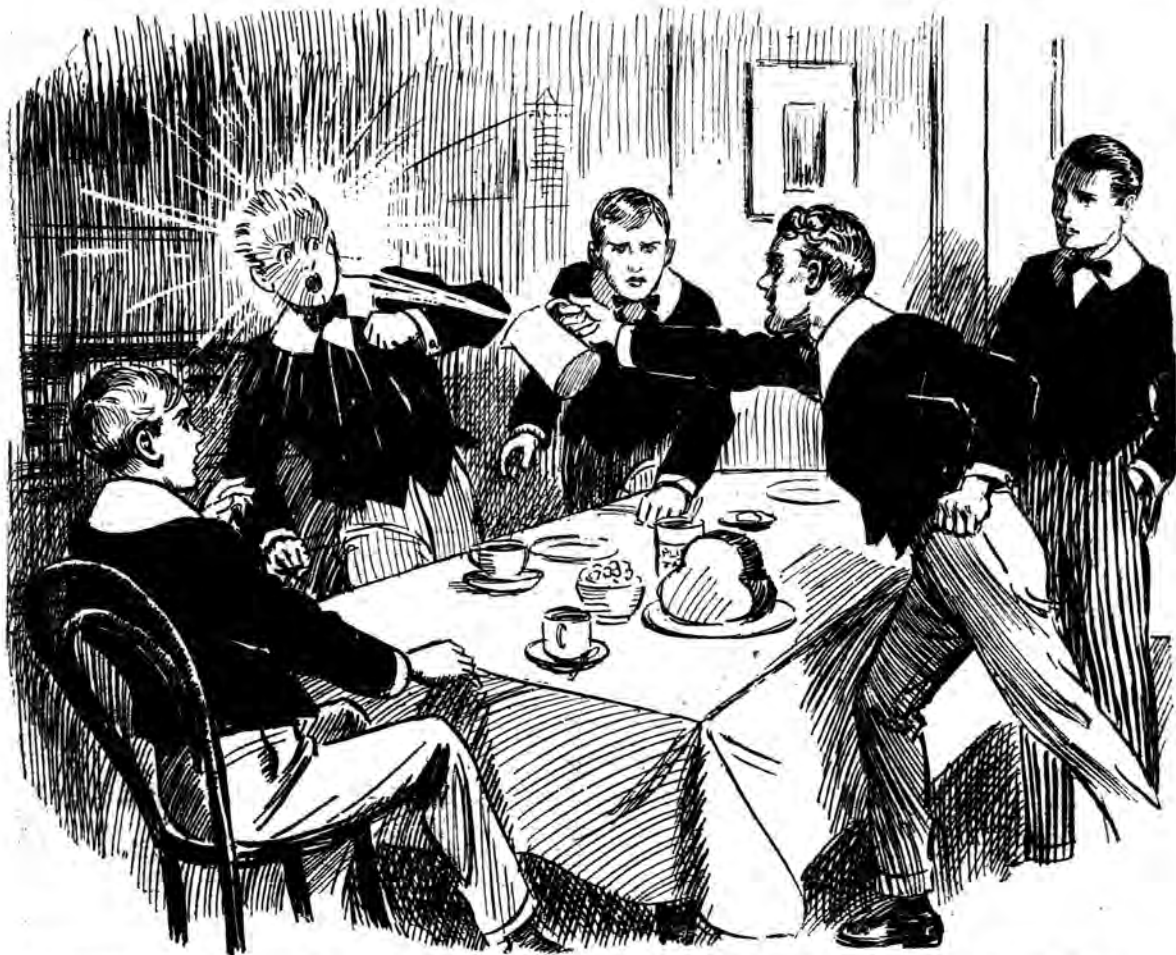
"Do with it!" he echoed. "I scarcely—yes, I remember. I just read it and pitched it into the wastepaper-basket."

"In Study No. 7?"

"Yes."

"Sure you didn't leave it on the table in Study No. 10 here?"

"Of course not."



"So you think I stole Racke's wallet, you cad?" said Clegg fiercely. "I think it looks jolly well like it. I——" But Tom Merry got no further, for, in a sudden burst of passion, Clegg grabbed the nearest thing on the table—a milk jug—and flung its contents full into Tom Merry's face. "That's my answer, then, you cad!" he hissed, his voice hoarse. (See page 16.)

"Anythin' in the letter about a theft you'd committed at your old school, old bean?"

"Wha-a-at?"

Walter Clegg stared at the whimsical Fourth-Former as though he imagined he had suddenly taken leave of his senses. Cardew chuckled softly. The expression of utter bewilderment on Clegg's face was enough for him.

"What on earth do you mean by that, Cardew?" demanded Clegg, scarcely knowing whether to be furiously angry or to laugh.

"Mean?" said Cardew airily. "You'll understand presently, dear old boy. I thought I'd just warn you what to expect. Thomas is inside, fairly yearnin' to ask you about the same jolly old theft, you know——"

"Look here——"

"I think I'll trot in with you," said Cardew coolly. "I'm no end curious to see what happens when Thomas starts in with the questions."

He nodded at the door, and in a state of curiosity and bewilderment, Clegg pushed the door open and entered. Cardew followed him in, smiling quietly.

In the study the hum of conversation ceased abruptly as Clegg entered. Tom Merry half rose from the tea-table. Three pairs of eyes fixed upon Clegg, and then upon Cardew behind him.

Tom Merry, seeing Cardew, frowned.

"You want me, Cardew?" he snapped.

"Not at all, old bean. I've come along with my pal Clegg."

"Your—your what?"

"My pal Clegg, I said," remarked Cardew easily. "He's asked me to tea. Any objection to my presence in this study, Thomas?"

Tom Merry bit his lip and stared at Cardew. He could only guess that Cardew was playing the fool for some reason of his own. He knew the Fourth-Former had been present when the letter was read out. It was just like Cardew to side with the outcast, however. He did such extraordinary

things merely for the sake of notoriety. It amused him to go in direct opposition to popular opinion, as Tom well knew.

"You fool, Cardew!" he snapped. "What's this game you're playing?"

"I'm merely playin' the game!" retorted Cardew blandly, though there was hidden meaning in his words. "My dear man——"

"Rubbish!" snapped Tom. "You know what I want to say to this new chap. You'd better keep off the grass or you'll be sorry for it. I suppose you've told him what we want to see him about?"

"Not at all—at least——"

"Then I jolly well soon will do, Cardew," Tom turned to the silent Clegg, and eyed him steadily. "It's about that letter, Clegg—the letter you left on the table here this afternoon."

"I left no letter on the table here this afternoon."

"What rot!" said Tom disdainfully. "I suppose that fool Cardew's warned you, and you mean to deny any knowledge of it, Clegg?"

"I don't understand what you are talking about," said Clegg quietly.

"Then I'll tell you. You left a letter on the table here this afternoon—a letter from an old pal of yours in London."

"I tell you——"

"Let me finish. That fat spy Trimble saw it lying there. He picked it up and read it. And he's spread the contents among the fellows."

"Oh!"

"I don't dream of trying to shield Trimble!" snapped Tom. "He's a worm that ought to be squashed. But it was your own fault for leaving such a letter lying about. There it is."

Tom flung the letter on the table scornfully.

(Continued on page 16.)



# The St. Jim's News



## EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

IT'S quite a long time since any reference was made to the St. Jim's Parliament, and, in consequence, quite a number of readers have recently written to me inquiring whether our local edition of the national gasworks has been dissolved for good and all.

It so happens that this is far from being the case—indeed, we've been having some very stirring times in Pepper's Barn just lately, and it is merely a question of space—or lack of it, to be more precise—that has precluded the due chronicling of these events in our pages. As so many of you have shown such an interest in the affairs of the St. Jim's Parliament as to write and ask me for information regarding it, I have decided it is quite time that this particular little stunt of ours had its fair share of the limelight, and I don't think I can do better than devote an issue of the "St. Jim's News" to the subject.

Of course, you all know how our Parliament is constituted—at least, I hope you do, because you jolly well ought to; but, in case any very new readers are perusing these lines—and I understand that we're adding a fresh batch of recruits to the great band of enthusiastic Gemites with every issue of the old paper—I ought perhaps to explain that the School House form the Government, and the New House the Opposition. Talbot is the Speaker; I am Prime Minister, with a Cabinet consisting of Blake, Digby, D'Arcy, Levison, Dane, Wildrake, Julian, and Manners. There is no necessity for enumerating the particular Secretaryships and so on they hold, but it might be mentioned that Wildrake is appropriately the Colonial Secretary, and Blake is in charge of the War Office—or, in other words, he is in command of the select little party of members whose particular job it is to chuck out any unruly spirits and restore order when verbal warfare gives place to more effective methods of conducting an argument, as very frequently happens.

Herries is Chief Whip for the Government, and Lawrence for the Opposition. Figgins, of course, is Leader of the Opposition—unless Redfern happens to be claiming the office, on which occasions there is some very entertaining back-chat proceeding between them, which usually ends up in a free fight between their supporters, both sides being encouraged with pleasing impartiality by the members of the Government benches.

New members are proposed and voted in—or out—by the sitting members. As the accommodation in Pepper's Barn is limited, it is necessary to put a limit on the number of members of the House, the actual figure being forty, not counting the Speaker, who brings up the number to forty-one, which is just about as much as the barn will hold when they're all sitting down, and not wallzing about in couples conducting a debate on the subject of whether School House or New House is Cock House.

*Tom Merry*

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## THE UNWANTED!

By George Wilkins



GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY has never been a member of the St. Jim's Parliament.

That isn't his fault, though—or, at least, I should say rather—it isn't through lack of attempts on his part to become one. On the other hand, it's his fault in the sense that, if he didn't behave quite so much like a blithering ass on all occasions, the fellows would jolly soon agree to elect him.

Gunn and I are members, much to Grundy's disgust. He'll talk about it for hours at a time, blithering about nothing but jealousy being the cause of his not being elected, and a lot more guff of that kind that neither Gunn nor I take the trouble to listen to.

Actually I don't see that it matters a button whether a fellow is a member or not. I mean to say, the whole bizney at its best is really only a sort of glorified debating society—and it's precious few times that it is at its best.

But Grundy has got an idea into his giddy mind that really important matters concerning Junior School affairs are discussed and settled during Parliamentary sittings, and no amount of explanation on our part will persuade him otherwise. He really believes that we go there and solemnly discuss the question of the team to be selected for the next inter-house match, and to what degree the authority of the junior skipper shall extend, and all that sort of thing, and he's convinced that, if only he could join the assembly, he could bring about some drastic—and, in his opinion, much needed—reforms by means of his wonderful powers of eloquence.

Only once has Grundy's voice been heard in that select little assembly in Pepper's Barn, and I don't think there is much likelihood that it will ever be heard again.

One evening in the winter, when the nights were long and darkness fell early, Grundy streaked down to the barn directly after tea and waited there for a quarter of an hour or so until the fellows began to arrive for a special session. He'd got an old toffee-tin with him, and he suddenly pitched this to one side of the barn, where it made a clatter, and caused the two fellows at the door, who were responsible for the admittance of nobody but members, to slip round and see what it was.

While they were away Grundy, who'd been standing in the shadow of the door, slipped inside unnoticed, and made his way to the back benches on the Government side. He might have been there for some time without detection, for the lighting is very poor—nothing but a couple of small oil-lamps—but the silly ass must needs come forward and commence to make a speech at the top of his voice. Nobody had the faintest idea what he was talking about, and, in any case, he didn't have much chance to explain himself, for within a minute of his commencing his outburst of hot air he was travelling towards the door, a la frog's-march. The War Office are well on the job when it comes to dealing with interlopers, and they certainly hadn't any particular reasons for going gently with Grundy. In fact, I'm inclined to think they rather welcomed the chance of slinging him out on his ear!

## LITTLE

## PLEASANTRIES!

By Monty Lowther.

THE last session of the St. Jim's Parliament was the shortest on record, but it was quite a lively little affair while it lasted.

The House hadn't been assembled two minutes before things began to hum. The trouble commenced when Clive caught the Speaker's eye. You see, we conduct our proceedings on exactly the same lines as the other gasworks at Westminster, and, as no doubt you are all aware, when a private member wants to blather, he gives the Speaker the glad eye a few times till he has the wink tipped to him, and then he can get up on his hind legs and warble away. That's called "catching the Speaker's eye."

We do just the same thing in Pepper's Barn; but on this particular occasion Clive caught the Speaker's eye with a rotten tomato, and that way of doing it isn't mentioned anywhere in the book of rules.

The Speaker scooped the mess out of his optic, and threw it back in the direction from which he thought it had come; but, unfortunately, his vision was more than a trifle misty, so that his aim wasn't all that it might have been, and the tomato—or what was left of it—landed among the Ministerial benches, providing the Minister of Agriculture with a gorgeous opportunity for studying at first hand the subject for which he held a portfolio.

The Minister swabbed the exhibit from behind his ear, examined it for a moment or so, and, coming to the decision that it wasn't an English-grown vegetable, brought it to the notice of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. That worthy official had no manner of use for it either, and sloshed it over to the Minister of the Interior.

Eventually some sort of order was restored, and then Clive was heard blandly explaining to the Speaker that he was most frightfully sorry to have squiffed him with the tomato; but, as a matter of fact, the whole affair was quite an accident. He'd intended to hit Redfern, in the Opposition benches, but, unfortunately, somebody joggled his elbow at a critical moment and spoilt the shot.

Upon hearing this explanation, the Speaker very graciously consented to overlook the episode—which was a jolly sight more than Redfern was prepared to do. He hadn't had the faintest idea that Clive had been intending to use him as a cock-shy; but, upon becoming acquainted with the fact by hearing Clive's explanation of the accident, he decided that, if Clive really wanted to play with him, it was up to him to do something to provide his share of the fun, and, as Lawrence had thoughtfully brought along a bag of pre-war eggs, Redfern borrowed one and buzzed it over as a little love-token to Clive. At that moment Blake, who was engaged in a heated argument with somebody, happened to be climbing over his chair with the idea of continuing the argument at closer quarters, and as he happened to be exactly in the line of fire, the egg couldn't very well get past him. So it stopped short at his chin, went off like a bomb, and—well, in fifteen seconds there wasn't one of us left in Pepper's Barn.

Woocof! It was an egg, that! Woocof!



# GUY FAWKES - UP-to-DATE!

By Jack Blake.

**Y**OU can take it from me that it isn't all jam and doughnuts being Secretary of State for War in the St. Jim's Parliament.

I'm certain that nobody, except myself and my little gang of assistants, ever realises what I undertake in the course of my duties. I have to tackle jobs that in the real Parliament are divided between about half a dozen chaps.

For instance, I believe it's one man's job to take charge of the cellar-searching operations that always precede an opening of Parliament. I don't know quite who bosses the Beefeaters when they go scrounging about among the cobwebs and best Derby brights in the cellars of the Houses of Parliament, making certain that there are no bad lads with twopenny squibs and roman candles and fiery serpents and barrels of gunpowder, and all that sort of thing, preparing to infringe the local by-laws by blowing people to atoms upon premises not duly licensed for that purpose.

But though it's true I don't know who looks after that business, there's one thing I jolly well do know—it isn't the Secretary of State for War. But in the case of St. Jim's Parliament, the poor old War Secretary has to do it.

You see, there's a cellar underneath Pepper's Barn, and, though we don't exactly anticipate any danger of being blown sky-high, yet—well, you never know. And, as it's admittedly better to be safe rather than sorry, we make a point of having a squint into that cellar before we take our places in the Parliament chamber above.

Of course, it's not much of a job, really. All we do is to buzz inside and have a poke round, and then come out again and go into the barn itself and report "All clear!" to the Speaker. The worst of it is there's no key to the cellar—or if there is we've never seen it—so there's nothing to prevent anybody getting into the place after we've had our look round and gone away again—or, at least, there wasn't until Glyn lent us one of his patent burglar-alarms. This contraption consists of a few pieces of brass, a dry cell, an electric bell, and a few odd lengths of wire, and when the apparatus is rigged up nobody can open the door without letting Bedlam loose on the alarm-bell.

One of the duties of the cellar-searching party is to fix this contrivance in position and take it down again after the session is closed—if we don't forget, which three times out of four we do. Then somebody has to streak back and disentangle it before it causes any trouble, because once we forgot it altogether, and a day or so later old Pepper went to the place to get a sack of potatoes out of the cellar and nearly scared himself into a blue fit when the alarm went off in the barn overhead.

However, that's quite enough about old Pepper, because he's not a very pleasant subject for conversation. But about a fortnight ago we held a session of the Parliament, and after we'd searched the cellar as usual, and had fixed up the alarm, the search-party took their places in the assembly and prepared to take part in the debates, or back me up in the job of keeping order, according to circumstances.

Proceedings bowed merrily along for a few minutes, and we were in the middle of a very lively discussion as to whether New House worms should be permitted to continue to enter St. Jim's by means of the main gate or compelled to use the tradesmen's entrance, when we were all startled by hearing a voice which said "Shut up, you lot of cackling asses!"

It was a voice, too. Practically everybody in the barn was talking away like billy-ho at that particular moment, and there was such a row going on that nobody could really hear himself speaking. Yet everybody heard that voice, and there was a sudden silence as we all turned to see where it had come from.

Mr. Speaker was as puzzled as anybody, but he adopted the proper procedure for such occasions.

"Order, there!" he said sharply. "Order!"

"Jolly good idea!" said the voice again. "Order a charabanc to take a load to Colney Hatch!"

"Somebody's shouting through a megaphone," said Figgins, "and it sounds to me as if the blighter's in the cellar, too!"

Of course, all the silly asses turned their blessed optics towards me.

"I thought you said you'd searched the cellar?" said Talbot.

"So we did," I replied. "There was nobody there then."

"Well, there's somebody there now, I'll bet my aunt's Sunday hat," put in Figgins. "and we'll soon have the blighter out of it! Come on!"

He was the first out of the door, but the rest of the House crowded out behind him and went round to the doors of the cellar.

I went with them, though I was a bit more puzzled than I ever remember being before, because I was certain there'd been nobody in the place when we searched it, and the alarm-bell hadn't rung, so I didn't see how anybody could have got in since. I wondered if the bell had gone wrong, but that doubt was soon dispelled when Figgy flung open the door. The blessed thing went off like a fire-alarm. It was obvious that nobody could have got in or out without our being aware of the fact.

But, in spite of that, the cellar was empty—except, of course, for the half-dozen or so sacks of potatoes that old Pepper always keeps there. We made a dive for them, thinking that somebody might be hiding behind them, but we drew blank. There was absolutely nobody other than ourselves in the cellar. Of course, it was a staggerer, but I don't mind saying that I was as pleased as I was puzzled, because, naturally, I didn't fancy the idea of having to admit that I'd searched a small, practically bare room and failed to see some chap who was hiding there.

The rest of the fellows looked pretty dumb-founded, and Figgy scratched his head till I thought he'd work his way right through to what bit of brain he's got inside. But there was no getting away from the fact that there was nobody hidden there, and, on the other hand, there was no getting away from the fact that the voice had most certainly come from the cellar.

"I say, I've got an idea!" shouted Herries excitedly. "I'll bunk off and fetch old Towser! If there's anybody here, he'll rout 'em out!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" I informed him promptly. "If there's anybody lurking about near here I reckon we can find him without having any mongrels sniffing about round—"

"Mongrel!" snorted Herries. It always gets his giddy rag out when you say that about Towser. "Let me tell you Towser's got a pedigree—"

"A fiddle-de-dee!" I interrupted. "Look here, I don't know what you fellows think, but it seems to me that—"

And at that point I stopped talking, because I suddenly realised that I was off the track. I did know what the other fellows were thinking. They were thinking they'd solved the mystery, and, what's more, they were jolly well right, too.

It was Herries who put them on the track, though it must be admitted that he did it quite accidentally. In spite of my discouragement, he was determined to bring

Towser into the affair, and he started out for St. Jim's to fetch him. His first job was to get out of the cellar of the barn, and, as the place was crowded with members of the St. Jim's Parliament, it was no easy job.

The most direct way is always the best to Herries, and in this case that way happened to be via the sacks of potatoes, which he promptly proceeded to wick over. As most of you know, old Herries takes a No. 10 boot—and fills it up at that—so it's not advisable for him to shove his hoofs down on anything that's liable to injury. Not that you'd think a sack of potatoes would come into that category, and Herries didn't think it necessary to take any care about the manner in which he trod on them—which was very unfortunate for the contents of that sack.

"Yowp!" yelled that sack of potatoes. Herries jumped a foot in the air, and yelped himself with the shock; and as he came down on about the same spot, the potatoes yelped again, also from the shock—a different kind of shock from Herries. In fact, there was quite a lot of yelping, because I think we all did a little. Well, it's rather startling when a sack of potatoes starts to call attention to itself in that way isn't it.

But it didn't take us long to recover from the surprise, and then we began to investigate.

And we discovered that those sacks repaid investigation.

From one of them—that which Herries had favoured with his attentions—we rolled out Gordon Gay, complete with megaphone, and a little more curiosity on our part produced Frank Monk and Carboy from two of the other sacks.

Quite a neat little scheme, wasn't it? Oh, yes, a very nice little scheme. Only it happened to be a trifle too much so for our liking. We don't encourage notions of that kind, as we have on many occasions pointed out to the Grammarians, and the sooner they realise the fact the better it will be for them.

One of these days they'll no doubt get into their heads a realisation of the fundamental fact that japing St. Jim's—or attempting to jape St. Jim's, rather—isn't a paying proposi-



After a desperate struggle the Grammarians managed to negotiate the stile.

tion, and in order to hasten that glad day we waste no opportunity for a practical lesson.

This seemed to be another such opportunity, and we promptly availed ourselves of it.

As the Grammarian trio had shown such a fondness for the sack, speaking literally, we agreed that we could not do better than to afford them a chance of becoming still better acquainted with that useful article, so we simply drew the necks of the sacks up to the necks of the contents thereof, and tied them there.

Then we gave them another sack—from the barn this time—or, in other words, the dirty kick-out—and promised them that if they weren't out of the field and on their way back to their reformatory within five minutes we'd come and boot them over the hedge.

After a desperate struggle they managed to negotiate the stile with a few seconds to spare.

I don't think there's any chance of our finding any more Grammarians in the cellars of Pepper's Barn.

THE END.

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# CARDEW TAKES A HAND!

(Continued from  
page 13.)

Clegg started as he picked the letter up and glanced at the envelope.

"I think that letter needs some explaining, Clegg," said Tom, eyeing the new fellow narrowly. "It was by accident that I learned what was in it. But now I do know it's my duty, I believe, to take the matter up. If what it says is true, you're not fit to be here at all."

"But—but—" began Clegg blankly.

"That letter speaks for itself," went on Tom curtly. "No decent chap can let a thing like that go on. Now the fellows know the truth they'll not allow you to remain here, Clegg. You've got to clear out, or we'll make you clear—if it's true. And you've got to own up to that headmaster, and clear that other poor chap. If you don't I'll write myself and explain. I'm not standing by and seeing an injustice committed like that."

"You—you're mad!" stuttered Clegg, glancing again at the envelope. "This letter came last night—it's from an old pal of mine. There's nothing in it, you cads! I threw it into the wastepaper-basket in Racke's study. Read it—read it, you cads, and see!"

He tossed the letter over to Tom in sudden anger. Tom hesitated, and then he picked it up. Clegg's blank looks amazed him. It had seemed to him impossible that Trimble could have composed the letter himself on the spur of the moment. For all that he felt it would be just as well to read it for himself.

"Right, Clegg!" he snapped. "I will read it, as you give me permission."

He scanned the letter swiftly. It was exactly as he had heard Trimble read it out. He threw it back to Clegg, wondering at the fellow's nerve.

"I wonder you dared to ask me to read it," he said scornfully. "That's plain enough, you rotter!"

Clegg stared again at Tom Merry, and then, with a sudden impulse, he snatched up the letter and read it through. And as he did so his face went white, and he started back with a cry.

"This—this is not the letter," he panted. "This was never written by Charlie—by my chum! It's lies—cruel lies! Oh, you cads!"

"Rubbish! Look at the address—look at the postmark on the envelope, too. There's no getting behind that!"

Clegg looked at Tom Merry, and then he looked at Lowther and Manners. He read only scorn and contempt on their faces.

"It's a trick!" he hissed savagely. "It's more trickery by someone! You're all in it—you're all rotten cads!"

"Rubbish!" said Tom again, his lip curling. "If it's a trick, then it's a trick played by your chum in London, Clegg. But I fancy you'll have a job to prove that. You've already shown yourself to be false over that match business. I was doubtful about that before; I'm not now. As for that wallet of Racke's—"

Tom paused abruptly, struck by the look on Clegg's face. The new fellow's face was aflame, and tears of rage and bitter despair glistened in his eyes.

"You—you say I lied over that match affair—"

"It looks like it now," said Tom steadily.

"And—and you think I stole Racke's wallet, you cad?"

"It looks queer enough, anyway."

"Oh, you cad! And now you think that what's in that lying letter is true?"

"I think it looks jolly well like it. I—"

Tom Merry got as far as that, but no farther. In a sudden burst of passion Clegg grabbed the nearest thing on the table—a milk-jug—and flung the contents full into Tom Merry's face.

"That's my answer, then, you cad!" he hissed, his voice hoarse.

There was an instant's silence. Tom Merry staggered back against his chair with milk streaming down his face and clothes. Then the chair went crashing over as he leaped out from the table.

Snatching out his handkerchief he hurriedly mopped his streaming face, and then he rushed at the new fellow with blazing eyes and whirling fists.

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Walter Clegg just had time to put his hands up, and the next moment the two were fighting hammer and tongs. Monty Lowther and Manners leaped from the table with angry yells.

"Smash the cad!"

"Go for him, Tom!"

"Sling him out, the rotter!"

They both started towards the struggling forms, but Cardew jumped before them, and held up his hand.

"Fair play, old tops!" he remarked coolly. "One at a time, you know."

"Stand aside, Cardew!"

"Sorry, old bean," said Cardew, pushing the furious Lowther back. "But I'm Clegg's jolly old guest, and I'm bound to back him up. If you chuck my pal Clegg out, you'll have to chuck me out, too!"

The answer was a sudden rush on the part of Lowther and Manners that fairly sent Cardew spinning against the struggling figures of Clegg and Merry.

Cardew's eyes gleamed then, and as Lowther made a grab at Clegg, he punched out at him with no little force. Lowther grunted and punched back, and the next moment a furious mill was in progress between the five of them. Lowther and Manners had no thought of fighting—their one idea was to help their chum to "chuck out" the unwanted Clegg.

Now, however, they started in to do their best to throw out both Clegg and Cardew.

"Out with them!" yelled Manners. "Oh, you rotter, Cardew!"

The fight waxed fast and furious. Chairs went crashing over, and more than once the table narrowly missed a like fate. The door suddenly opened, and a crowd of scared faces looked in.

"Great pip! It's that new chap again!"

"And Cardew! Oh, my hat! Cardew's backing him up!"

"Well, the burbling ass!"

"Go it, you chaps—sling them both out!"

It was an unequal contest from the start. Cardew had Manners and Lowther to himself, and he found them more than a match for him. Such a scrap could only have one end.

It came quickly.

The crowd in the doorway suddenly scattered back, as Cardew came flying out to fall in the passage sprawling. Manners and Lowther at once turned to aid Tom Merry, and the next moment Clegg also came flying out, crashing into Cardew who was just scrambling up again.

Both went down sprawling, and by the time they had scrambled to their feet, the door of Study No. 10 had closed, and they heard the click of the key in the lock.

"By gad!"

Cardew grinned faintly as he started to adjust his dishevelled clothes. Cardew was a great dandy, and the havoc done to his elegant "clobber" made him shudder. Moreover, his face was more than a trifle knocked about.

"Well, my hat!" snorted Grundy, glaring at Cardew. "Mean to say you've been backing up that howling rotter, Cardew?"

"Not at all, old top! I've merely been backin' up my pal Clegg. And I'm goin' to go on backin' him up!"

"Well, my hat! You'll get it hot for this, Cardew, you idiot!"

Cardew smiled, and linked his arm in Clegg's. That junior seemed to be on the point of making an assault on the locked door.

"Nunno! Let it wait, old bean," advised Cardew. "Enough is as good as a feast, you know. It looks as if I'll have to ask you to tea, after all. What a life! Come on, old top!"

With flaming face, Clegg allowed himself to be led away by Cardew. Black looks, and numerous hisses followed the pair. At the door of Study No. 9 on the Fourth passage, Clegg hung back.

"Look—look here," he stammered. "I'd rather not, Cardew. No good making yourself unpopular. Clive and Levison won't—"

"My dear man, I've asked you to tea, and you're comin'. I don't often invite fellows to tea, and I'm not accustomed to having my jolly old invites turned down, you know. We're seein' this through together, old bean."

Cardew pushed open the door, and after another moment's hesitation, Clegg's eyes gleamed defiantly, and he followed. He had suspected vaguely before that the airy Cardew was merely mocking him—was pulling his leg for his own entertainment.

He knew differently now—or felt he did. It was scarcely likely that a fellow would amuse himself thus by facing odds—by fighting for him. And Clegg's heart warmed towards the whimsical Fourth Former. He wanted no tea—he had no appetite for a meal—but he did not wish to hurt the feelings of the one fellow at St. Jim's who was standing by him.

He entered the study behind Cardew, and Levison and

Clive, who were just finishing tea, stared at him in a way there was no mistaking.

"Hallo!" said Clive curtly. "What's the game, Cardew? Who asked that chap in here?"

"I did, old top," said Cardew calmly. "He's come to tea with us!"

"Oh, has he?" snapped Levison, his eyes glinting. "That's your mistake, Cardew, you utter ass! If what I've heard is true he's not a person we want in this study."

"My dear man, you mustn't believe all you hear. Anyhow, I've asked Clegg to stay, and he's staying!"

Cardew spoke mockingly, but his eyes glinted, and Levison noted it. He rose from the table.

"You mean that, Cardew?" he asked.

"Exactly!"

"Then you can have him to yourself!" snapped Levison. "Come on, Clive."

Levison walked out, his face set. Clive gave Cardew a puzzled look and followed, and the door closed upon them with a slam. Cardew looked at the closed door and smiled. He knew he was astonishing his chums and the School House in general, and the thought amused him vastly. Cardew was quite enjoying himself.

## CHAPTER 7.

### The Finishing Touch!

"**R**OTTEN!" said Tom Merry.

"It is rotten!" agreed Lowther and Manners together.

The Terrible Three were neither referring to the state of the weather, nor to affairs in general at St. Jim's. They were merely referring to the state of the study exchequer, and to the bare state of the tea-table in particular.

Tom Merry was standing before the study cupboard which sadly resembled that of the immortal Mother Hubbard.

"Rotten!" he repeated. "We've about half a loaf of bread, a bit of butter the size of a walnut, and a couple of sardines between three of us. There's a tin of bloater-paste in the cupboard here, but that belongs to that cad Clegg."

"Can't touch that—"

"Of course not, you ass! Wonder if he'll come in to tea?"

"Hope not, anyway!"

Tom Merry nodded, and his face clouded over. He hoped not, too. A small junior study was scarcely a cheerful place when one of its four inmates was an outcast—scorned and shunned by the other three. Tom Merry was already more than tired of the position.

It was the following day, and matters were much the same as they had been the previous evening. As yet Tom Merry had done nothing further in the matter of the incriminating letter—at least, he had done nothing beyond a few brief words with Clegg concerning it.

All the Lower School seemed to have learned the story before bedtime that evening—Baggy Trimble had seen to that—and, by general consent, Clegg had been sent to Coventry, and the matter had been left in Tom Merry's hands to deal with.

It was not a pleasant task for the junior skipper, but, under strong pressure from the juniors, he had tackled Clegg again that morning, demanding the name and address of the headmaster of the Council School the new boy had attended.

Before taking further steps Tom Merry was determined to give Clegg every chance—to make absolutely sure that the facts were as that letter had stated.

But again Clegg had proved defiant. Though he knew that a letter to his old headmaster would bring the true facts—would prove the letter false, and clear him—he flatly refused to give the required information. He was proud, and in his present bitter mood he showed he was also stubborn and resentful of even the chance to clear himself.

The whole wretched affair had aroused a great deal of interest in the Lower School, and a very great deal of anger. Clegg's dogged determination to play for the village on Wednesday against his own school was enough in itself to arouse anger. It was likely that if he kept his word there would be a rough time in store for the new fellow.

But that fatal letter had aroused far more anger and interest. It was a case of whether Clegg should remain at St. Jim's or be kicked out in disgrace now.

Something had to be done in the matter—the juniors were resolved upon that. And so, having failed to get the information from the stubborn Clegg, Tom had gone to Racke, and obtained a promise from him to get to know the address of his cousin's old school—a promise, needless to say, which Aubrey Racke hadn't the slightest intention of carrying out. The very thought of it terrified the rascally junior.

In Study No. 10 matters were also much the same. That day Clegg had not set foot in his study scarcely, and it was no wonder the Terrible Three were not looking forward to tea in his company.

"We'd better get our tea quickly, in case he does turn up," grunted Tom, leaving the almost empty cupboard. "It's a case of making the best of what we've got, or tea in Hall, anyway."

"No good trying Study No. 6 for an invite to tea?" remarked Lowther, grinning.

Tom shook his head, and smiled.

"I believe they're as stony as we are," he said dismally. "There's nothing else—Come in, ass!"

The "ass" proved to be Toby, the School House page.

"Letter for you, Master Merry," he said.

"Oh, good!" breathed Tom Merry hopefully.

Tom fairly grabbed the letter, hoping against hope that it contained a remittance. His hopes were very quickly proved to be well founded. The letter was from his uncle, General Merry, and as he tore it feverishly open, out dropped three Treasury-notes for one pound each.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Saved—saved, you chaps! Hip, pip!"

The Terrible Three fairly danced with joy. It was corn in Egypt once again.

"Well, what ripping luck!" grinned Tom Merry. "Good old Nunky! You fellows can shove off for some grub from the tuckshop. Here's a quid!"

"What ho!" chortled Lowther.

"What about those Study No. 6 chaps?" asked Manners. "Let's ask 'em to join us?"

"Good wheeze," said Tom. "They've turned up trumps when we've been hard up before. We'll ask 'em. You chaps shove off for grub, and I'll yank them along here. I don't suppose they've started tea yet."

Manners and Lowther took the pound-note and hurried out, en route for the school tuckshop for supplies. Tom Merry picked up his uncle's letter. It was merely a brief note, and Tom scanned it hurriedly. Then he threw it on the table, and hurried out to ask Blake & Co. to tea.

He had scarcely gone when two juniors came along the passage. They were Racke and Crooke, and both juniors had the air of guilty conspirators. Racke was carrying something carefully under his coat.

"Manners and Lowther have just gone out, but we'd better be careful," whispered Racke. "Let's hope—Hallo, the door's open!"

Racke scowled at sight of the open door, but the next moment his glance took in the deserted study, and his scowl vanished.

"Good!" he breathed. "It would have been risky to pin them up with those chaps inside. Here goes!"

Racke slipped from under his coat a sheet of cardboard, on which were printed large letters in ink. They read as follows:

### "THE THIEVES' KITCHEN!"

In a flash Racke had pinned the strange notice on the door. Then Crooke handed him another sheet of cardboard he had carried under his coat.

"Half a mo!" grinned Racke. "Keep cave, Crooke! I'll shove this inside somewhere."

With a cautious glance round Racke ran into the study, and placed another notice on the mantelpiece. It ran:

### "BEWARE OF PICKPOCKETS!"

Racke grinned at it a second, and then he started for the door again. As he did so his eye fell on something lying on the table alongside a letter. It was the other two pound-notes belonging to Tom Merry. The junior captain of St. Jim's was usually a very careful fellow where money was concerned, but for once he had been careless—very careless.

Racke stopped at sight of the two Treasury-notes.

He eyed them a brief instant, and then he stepped to the table. He noted the address on the letter, and his eyes gleamed curiously.

His grasp closed on the notes, and he glanced round swiftly. He took a step towards the fireplace, saw the fire was out, and stopped again. Then an inspiration occurred to him, and running across to the high bookshelves, he jumped on a chair and slipped the notes out of sight over the edge of the beading topping the bookshelves.

This done, he ran to the mantelpiece again, and took down the notice he had put up. Rolling up the cardboard swiftly, he crammed it into his pocket, and hurried out of the room. Crooke had watched his chum's strange actions in blank bewilderment.

"Racke, you ass—"

"Shut up, and let's get away from here!" hissed Racke.

"But—"

"Shut up!"

With that Aubrey Racke tore down the notice he had pinned to the door, and fairly rushed his chum away. Those notices had been Racke's idea—the spiteful, mean-spirited sort of idea Aubrey Racke was noted for. But he felt they

were not needed now—more, he felt they were dangerous things to leave there, in view of what he had just done.

It was just then that Fate once again took a hand in the matter. Even as Racke grasped his chum's arm to rush him away two juniors rounded the corner of the passage, and came towards them. One was Walter Clegg and the other was Ralph Reckness Cardew. Apparently Cardew was still chumming with the outcast.

Racke's face went white at sight of Cardew, and he almost stopped dead in his tracks.

It seemed to him almost uncanny that the mocking, keen-witted Fourth-Former should always turn up at awkward moments like this. Was the fellow gifted with second-sight?

Racke gritted his teeth, and went on, chagrin and bitter rage seething within him. That Cardew should appear just then was the rottenest luck imaginable! He glared at Cardew as he passed him, and Cardew gave him a mocking smile that added to Racke's fear. It seemed to him that Cardew had already guessed something was wrong.

But Racke was quite wrong himself there. Cardew had guessed nothing of the sort. He knew that Racke feared him, and it amused him to play on his fears. But he had seen Racke leave Study No. 10, for all that—and Cardew had a good memory!

Out of earshot Racke turned savagely to his chum.

"Did that cad see me come out of there?" he breathed.

"You mean Cardew?"

"Yes, hang him!"

"I suppose he did," grunted Crooke. "But what's the game, Racke, you fool? What on earth did you do? Those were Treasury-notes you hid, weren't they?"

Racke nodded, his face white and anxious. The sight of Cardew just then had made him wish from the bottom of his heart that he had left the Treasury-notes alone.

"Can't you see the game?" he breathed. "They belonged to Merry. I've hidden them on top of the bookcase. They may not be found for ages there."

"But—but, hang it all—"

"Don't you see?" hissed Racke impatiently. "It's just the dashed wheeze we wanted, you fool! You know how things are now. Merry's determined to prove things up to the hilt. I never dreamed he would suggest writing to that confounded headmaster. He'll get fed-up with asking me if I've heard the address, and he'll find a way of getting it himself."

"Yes, but—"

"That's not all," muttered Racke. "At any moment that cad of a cousin of mine may decide to give in and tell Merry the address of the dashed school. I tell you it's a dangerous position. Besides, there's Cardew! He's after me—I know he is. He's only waiting his chance—he's only waiting to get the proof he wants, the hound!"

"I warned you you were going too far," said Crooke, looking alarmed. "And now—"

"I knew I had to do something quickly," muttered Racke. "I've been trying to think of a way—a way to finish Clegg completely before something comes out. I wanted a clear case against him. Well, when I spotted those notes just now I saw a way—a way that would have been safe enough if that cad Cardew hadn't just appeared then. Oh, hang the luck!"

"I think I see now. You've hidden those notes so that Clegg will be suspected of taking them?"

"Of course!" snarled Racke. "Couldn't you see that? He'll be suspected at once. The fellows won't need any proof after what's happened. He's done—dished and done!"

Crooke drew a deep breath.

"You're a dashed fool, Racke!" he snapped. "Well, it's your own look-out! I've had no hand in this, remember!"

"Oh, shut up, you funk!" snarled Racke.

But as Racke and Crooke entered their study a moment later Racke's face was whiter even than Crooke's. He had called his chum a funk, but he was in a far bigger funk himself. He had acted on the spur of the moment, had acted swiftly, struck by the very simplicity of the idea that had flashed upon him. But Cardew had seen him leave the study. The notes would be missed, and he would be dragged into it. That made all the difference. He might even be suspected of the theft of the notes himself!

Racke shuddered. He could not get the sight of Cardew's mocking smile out of his mind.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Cardew is Lucky!

CARDEW parted from Walter Clegg at the door of Study No. 10 and strolled on along the passage, yawning. Cardew was bored. In one way Cardew enjoyed "palling" on with the new fellow, but in another he did not. Cardew thoroughly enjoyed the looks fellows gave him as they met him with the outcast. He enjoyed the rows he had had with Levison and Clive about it.

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not to mention the rows with other fellows for the same reason. It amused him to think that he was the only fellow who gave the outcast a civil word.

Yet, for all that, Cardew did not pal on with Clegg entirely for his own entertainment. He honestly believed that Clegg was entirely innocent of the charges against him, and deep in his queer make-up the slacker and dandy of the Fourth felt an intense sympathy for him.

Moreover, Cardew felt a strong desire to clear the matter up and to prove the fellows wrong and himself right. He believed Clegg was innocent, and he was determined to prove he was. Racke, in his fear and apprehension, had been quite right. Ralph Reckness Cardew was "after him."

Nevertheless, palling with Clegg bored Cardew considerably. Cardew's tastes were not the tastes of Walter Clegg. They had little in common. And most people did bore Cardew. Even his own chums bored him very often, and he often left them to seek excitement and entertainment elsewhere.

So Cardew strolled along the passage, wondering what to do with himself next. He could go along to his own study for tea, but relations with Clive and Levison were somewhat strained, and he decided to give his own study a miss. Getting his cap he strolled along to the gates, half inclined to walk to the village in search of excitement—and tea.

At the gates a village youth was hanging about, as if waiting for someone. He was a cheery-faced youth with a basket on his arm, and Cardew gave him a genial nod as he recognised him as Grimes, the leader of the village cricket team.

"Hallo, Grimey, old top!" he exclaimed. "Waitin' for someone?"

Grimes nodded respectfully. The elegant and aristocratic Cardew rather overawed Grimes, the grocer's boy.

"I'm hoping to see Master Clegg, sir," he said. "If you know 'ow I can find him, Master Cardew—"

"My dear man, that's easy," said Cardew carelessly. "You'll find him inside, old top. He's in his study. I've just left him. You'd better ask old Taggy, though."

"You mean the porter, Master Cardew?"

"Yes. He'll send for him, or yank you along there!"

"Oh!" gasped Grimes. "It—it doesn't matter. I don't want to give nobody no trouble. I just wanted to give 'im a letter belongin' to 'im. I found it in our dressin'-room. He must have dropped it at the match, when he played for us."

"Oh!" said Cardew.

His interest was aroused at once. He gave the grocer's boy a keen, eager look.

"A letter he dropped at the match, eh?" he breathed. "Here, old bean, I'll take it along if you like. Hand it over."

"That's good of you, Master Cardew. But—but it's an important note, I believe. Leastwise, he was sayin' he'd lost one the other night when he came over. He asked me if I'd seen anythin' of one. I found this here only to-night. It was lyin' in a corner, where it must have fell out of 'is blazer when he took it off. Here it is, Master Cardew!"

Grimes drew from his pocket a crumpled, rather dirty piece of folded paper. He handed it rather doubtfully to Cardew. Cardew took it carelessly.

"Right, Grimes!" he said, nodding. "Want Clegg for anything else?"

"No, Master Cardew."

"Cheerio, then, old top! I'll see he gets this!"

Grimes thanked the dandy and moved away from the gates, still rather uncertain if he had done right in giving the note up to someone other than Clegg. Cardew turned and strolled back across the quad. He appeared to be calm and careless, but inwardly he was seething with excitement, and his eyes were gleaming. A swift glance had shown him Clegg's name on the folded note, and he felt he knew the handwriting.

He held the note in his pocket until he reached the School House, and then he took it out and looked at it. The fact that it was Clegg's and addressed to him did not trouble Cardew. He felt entitled to read it under the circumstances.

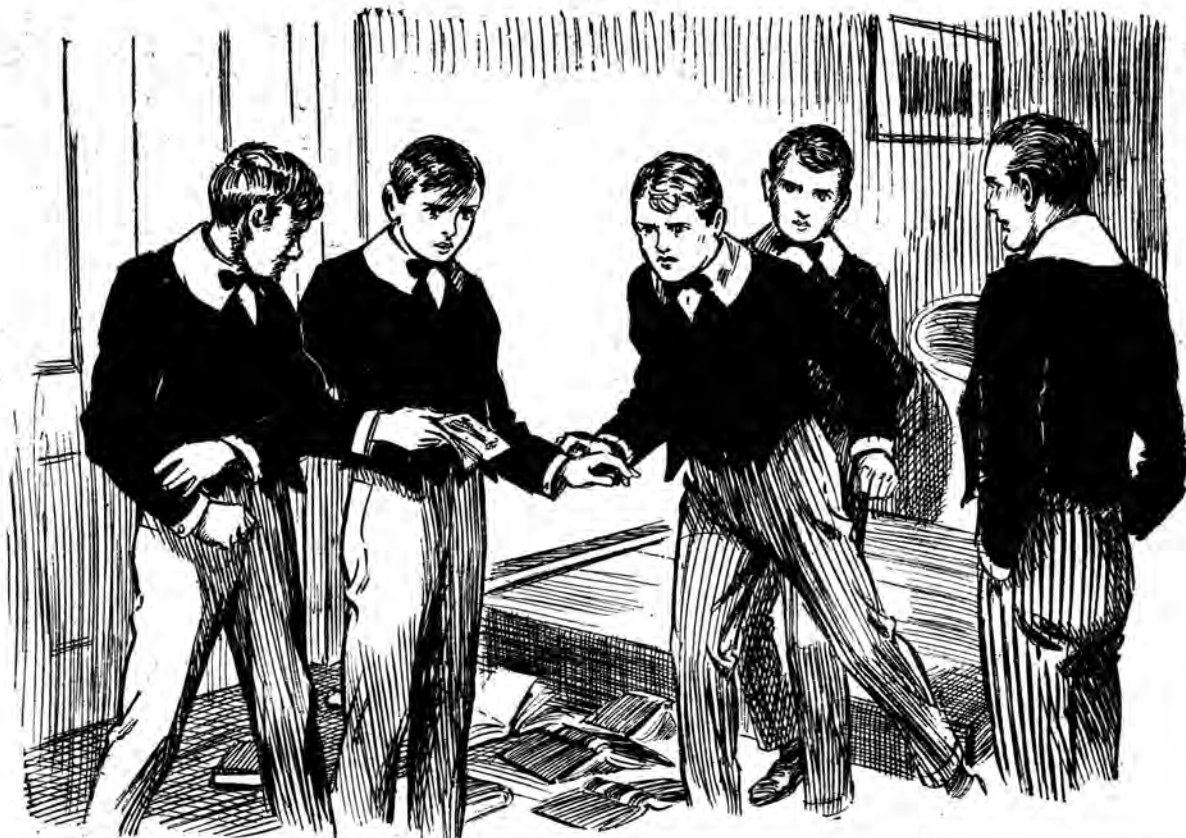
And he read it. The note was on a sheet torn from a notebook, and at the top left-hand corner was a printed number the number six. Cardew read the note through, and then he whistled.

"Phew! What luck!" he breathed.

It was the note—the note that Clegg had received just before the Grammar School match without a doubt. It was remarkably like Tom Merry's "fist," and it was signed by Tom Merry. It told Clegg that he was not wanted for the match after all, and that he could play for the village if he wished.

It was the fatal note—the note Racke had written, and which he had attacked Clegg in the woods to get back again. No wonder Racke had been unable to find it on Clegg when it had been dropped in the village dressing-room.

Cardew had wanted that note—wanted it badly. And now he had got it.



"Great pip!" gasped Tom Merry. "What's that you've got, Manners?" Manners pushed his way between them with two slips of paper with brownish-coloured printing on them in his hand. "Are these the notes, Tommy?" said Manners with surprising calmness. "They must have been on the top of these shelves!" Tom Merry looked spellbound. "So—so Clegg must have been speaking the truth after all!" he gasped.

(See page 21.)

For some moments the Fourth-Former stood thinking, and then he moved away towards his own study. To his satisfaction he found his study-mates out. The room was empty. Cardew went out again. In the passage he saw Baggy Trimble, and he beckoned to him, taking a sixpence from his pocket as he did so.

"Care to earn sixpence, old fat bean?" he asked.

"Try me!" grinned Baggy.

"Here you are, old top. Just trot along and find Racke and Crooke, will you? Tell 'em they're wanted in Levison's study. Needn't mention me! Understand?"

Trimble pocketed the sixpence, and nodded.

"I'll fetch 'em!" he grinned.

Cardew watched the fat junior roll away rather thoughtfully. If Racke and Crooke suspected for one moment that he had sent the message, he knew they would never come. He entered the study and waited.

He did not have to wait long. Racke and Crooke did not suspect. Levison's name was enough. They came grumbling at Levison's cheek, but they came nevertheless. They were curious.

Racke tapped at the door, and the two black sheep walked into the study. As they did so Cardew slipped gracefully from behind the door, and slipped out, closing the door quickly.

"Here!" yelled Racke, recognising Cardew and suddenly alarmed. "What's this game, you cad?"

"Only swoppin' studies, old bean!" called Cardew cheerily.

With that Cardew locked the door, slipped the key in his pocket, and walked serenely away. He strode to the Shell passage, and entered Study No. 7 as if he owned it. Closing the door, he locked it carefully.

"Good!" he murmured. "Now, my dear Watson, you've got to be slippy with the detectin' bizney. Now for that jolly old pocket-book—the pocket-book this giddy sheet was torn from! Here goes!"

Cardew showed in the next few moments that, slacker or not, he was capable of swift and efficient action when it suited him. He went first to the table drawer and turned it out systematically. There was nothing there, and he next turned his attention to Racke's elaborate writing-case.

Here again he drew blank, and he was just closing the case when a sudden idea occurred to him.

Taking out the blotting-pad he walked across to the study looking-glass and held the pad facing the mirror.

He eyed the reflection in the glass steadily, turning the blotter slowly as he did so.

He stopped at last, holding the blotter steady, his gleaming eyes fixed on the lines on the blotting-paper. The sheet was soiled, but little used—only three or four sets of lines showing upon it.

These crossed and re-crossed, and some of them were blurred and indistinct. Cardew's eyes were rooted to one set, however—more distinct, and obviously newer than the others. The amateur detective studied it carefully, and then he drew a letter from his pocket.

It was the letter that had caused all the trouble—the letter addressed to Clegg, and supposed to be from his former school-fellow. Cardew had persuaded Clegg to allow him to take charge of it, and Cardew found it very useful now.

He opened it out and held it alongside the mirror, glancing from the letter to the reflection in the mirror again and again.

There was no doubt about it, however. The address at the top, clear and distinct was the same—the "Dear Walter" was the same. The words on the blotter were smudged and indistinct for the most part, but Cardew traced them to the clear and distinct signature at the end.

Cardew was satisfied at last—satisfied and triumphant.

"Dear old Racke," he murmured. "What a lad he is for ideas!"

He replaced the letter in his pocket, and, putting the pad on the table, he carefully tore off the top sheet of blotting-paper. Folding it neatly, he placed it, with the letter, in his pocket.

"That's that!" he mused, smiling. "Now for the merry old pocket-book. What a giddy slack sleuth I am! I might have thought of taking a squint at that blottin'-pad before this. However—"

Cardew ceased his musings and started the search again in earnest. He searched the bookshelves next, and then he

went to the cupboard drawer and opened it. He rummaged a moment, and then he drew out a large black notebook.

It was the one he was searching for, without a doubt. Each page was numbered, and as he turned them Cardew chuckled on finding that pages No. 3, 4, 5, and 6 were missing.

"Practising his hand at copyin' dear old Thomas' list, I fancy," murmured Cardew. "What a lad! We'll make sure, though."

Cardew took out the note and compared the sheets. They were exactly the same paper, both in size and texture.

"Hallo!" breathed Cardew suddenly.

His keen eyes had caught sight of faint impressions on the page numbered 7. On it were the faint indentations of a pointed instrument—a pencil undoubtedly. A few of the indented words Cardew could make out clearly.

As in the case of the blotting-pad, Cardew compared the writing on the note with the telltale impressions on the page numbered 7.

They agreed in every particular.

Without a doubt that note had been written in the notebook he held in his hand, and the hard pencil had sunk through the soft paper, making clear indentations on the next page.

"That, my dear Watson," murmured Cardew, "finishes our work here, I fancy. It also puts dear old Aubrey into the soup with a sickenin' splash!"

Placing the notebook and the note in his pocket, Cardew closed the drawer and left the study. He walked along to his own study and smiled as he saw Levison and Clive outside the door.

Levison was banging furiously on the door, and both he and Clive appeared to be in a state bordering on frenzy.

"Hallo, old beans!" exclaimed Cardew, strolling up carelessly. "Can't you get in?"

Levison turned furiously on his chum.

"You burbling idiot, Cardew!" he hooted. "What the thump's this mean? Why on earth have you locked those cads in here? Are you jolly well potty?"

"Is that Cardew?" came Racke's raging voice from the other side of the door. "Cardew, you fool! Open this dashed door."

"He's heard his master's voice," remarked Cardew.

He inserted the key and turned it smartly. Then he gave his savage chums a bland smile and walked quickly away, leaving his chums to deal with Racke and Crooke.

And this Levison and Clive did quickly enough. They asked no questions, but brought their boots into play. And Racke and Crooke went flying into the passage and limped away, astonished and furious—and, in Racke's case, fearful and apprehensive.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Cardew—Detective!

WALTER CLEGG entered Study No. 10 quietly, and his face cleared a trifle as he noted that his study-mates were absent. He wanted his tea, but he had no intention of staying in the study if the Terrible Three had not finished theirs yet.

Then he noticed that the cups and saucers were unused, and he frowned again. Apparently his study-mates had not yet had tea.

Clegg hesitated, undecided whether to go and have tea in Hall or stay and brave the unpleasant ordeal of tea at the table with the fellows who shunned and resented his presence.

He was still undecided, when footsteps and cheery voices sounded in the passage, and the next moment five juniors came in. They were Tom Merry and Blake & Co., and the cheery hum of conversation suddenly ceased as the juniors sighted Clegg.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gave an involuntary gasp of dismay, and Tom Merry echoed it. In his joy at the arrival of his uncle's unexpected tip he had completely forgotten Walter Clegg.

He remembered him now, however, and his face clouded over. To sit at the same table with the fellow they scorned was dismaying; to invite other fellows to come and do likewise was hardly the thing, to say the least of it.

It was decidedly awkward. Why could not the fellow have the decency to clear out, under the circumstances?

That was the thought of some of the juniors, at all events. But, as it happened, they had no need to worry. Clegg saw the looks on their faces, and he flushed crimson.

Without a word he walked out of the study.

A sigh of relief followed him. Tom Merry & Co. had no wish to be heartless, or even unkind to the outcast. There was a limit, however. All agreed that Walter Clegg was the limit. The heartless tone of the letter he was supposed

to have received, and approved of, was not likely to make the juniors kindly disposed towards him.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus, shaking his head seriously. "I am vewy sowwy for that fellow, deah boys, despite ewerythin'. But—but I must admit that I am wathah glad he has gone."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's a rotten business altogether," said Tom Merry quietly. "But let's forget the chap for a bit. I only wish I could believe well of him. But I can't. Anyway, Monty and Manners will be along soon. Sit down, chaps."

"What-ho!" said Blake, dragging up a chair to the table. "Mind you don't sit opposite to Gussy's waistcoat, you chaps!"

"Weally, Blake—"

D'Arcy's indignant retort was cut short by an exclamation from Tom Merry.

"My hat! Here's Nunky's letter!" he exclaimed, his eyes falling upon the letter on the table. "I'd forgotten all about it. Now, where the thump did I put that other two quid?"

Tom glanced inside the envelope, and then he scanned the table, moving aside the crockery to do so. His hands then went to his pockets, and his face went blank as he withdrew them at last empty.

At that moment Lowther and Manners tramped in and planked armfuls of paper bags on the table.

"Half a minute, you chaps!" said Tom in rather an uneasy tone. "Did you notice what I did with that other two quid?"

Lowther and Manners stared at him.

"The notes were on the table when we went out," said Lowther.

"I saw them, too; you handed us a quid, and dropped the other two on the table," Manners agreed.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows. He ran through his pockets again, and then he looked around the carpet and under the table.

"I say, you chaps," he said, "this is rather queer! I remember dropping them on the table, too. Hunt round a bit, some of you."

"Mean to say you left 'em on the table and went out?" asked Lowther, staring. "Well, you burbling ass, Tommy."

"I know," said Tom, frowning uneasily. "It was jolly careless of me, I'll admit. I was thinking of the feed, though, and I forgot the blessed things. Oh, blow!"

He started to search again, and this time the rest of the juniors helped him. But the search came to nothing, though every inch of the floor was gone over, and even the carpet lifted and peered under.

"Well, this takes the bun," breathed Tom. "I distinctly remember dropping the blessed things on the table now. Dash it all, they couldn't have walked. I wasn't out of the room five minutes, either. Look here, this is rather rotten, chaps. It isn't a matter of the two quid, but— Oh, blow! Let's look again, for goodness' sake!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

They searched again—more thoroughly this time, looking in the empty coal-scuttle, the fireplace, and even in drawers and cupboards—though Tom knew the missing notes could scarcely be there.

The searchers stopped searching at last by mutual consent. They looked at each other in a scared way—each guessing what the others were thinking of.

"This is too rotten for words," said Tom Merry in utter dismay. "I hate to think such a thing, you chaps. But—but there isn't a doubt about it. Somebody's lifted those notes. There's nothing else for it."

"Clegg!" breathed Herries, his jaw setting.

Tom nodded gravely. He saw from his chums' faces that the same conclusion had dawned upon them. What else could they think?

"You're absolutely sure the things were on the table?" demanded Blake.

"Absolutely!"

"Then it's no good blinking at facts," snapped Blake. "Coming on top of the other things there's nothing else for it but that. Who else is likely to do such a thing? And—and we found him here when we came in."

"Bai Jove! How feahfully wotten!"

Tom Merry's face set hard.

"We'll have him in here again," he said grimly. "What an outsider the fellow must be! Some of you chaps go after him. We must get him before he has a chance to get rid of them—if he has taken them."

"Little doubt about that!" growled Herries. "Come on! We'll soon yank the beggar back."

He hurried out with Digby, Lowther, and Manners. They were scarcely absent a minute, when a sound of scuffling came from the passage, and as Tom opened the door wide, the three juniors surged in, dragging the struggling Clegg between them.

"He didn't want to come," said Lowther grimly. "We persuaded him, though. Go ahead, Tommy!"

Tom Merry quietly closed the door and faced Clegg.

"We want a word with you, Clegg," he said steadily. "And I'm not going to beat about the bush. Ten minutes ago I went out of this study, leaving two pound-notes on the table there. When I came back five minutes later I found the notes gone. I also found you in the study."

Clegg stared at Tom as if scarcely apprehending what he said. Then his face flamed—just as suddenly becoming white the next moment, however. His lips quivered.

Were the false charges against him never to end—was this persecution never to cease?

A sudden feeling of rage took possession of the hapless outcast. It was only a mighty effort of will that kept him from throwing himself at Tom Merry.

"What do you mean, Merry?" he asked thickly. "Are you asking me if I've taken the notes?"

"I'm asking you if you've seen them!"

Clegg trembled from head to foot.

"I haven't seen them," he said, in a low voice. "I know nothing whatever about any notes. Oh, what cads you are!"

"It's your own doing, Clegg," said Tom quietly. "Knowing what we do know about you, you can expect nothing else but this from us. You say you know nothing of them?"

Clegg shook his head—he could not trust himself to speak. "Then you won't object to being searched?" asked Tom Merry.

The question struck the junior like a blow. His face flamed again, and he took a step towards Tom, his fists clenched convulsively.

"Yes," he shouted passionately. "I do object, you cads! I swear I know nothing of any notes. I don't believe there ever were any notes. I won't be searched by you!"

Tom Merry looked meaningfully at his chums, but before he could speak again a tap sounded on the door, and Cardew entered. Tom Merry frowned angrily.

Cardew looked at the scene, and sighed.

"More trouble!" he said sadly. "What a life! What's my pal Clegg been up to now?"

Tom Merry gave him a savage look.

"Your pal!" he said scornfully. "I fancy you'll not be so keen to own him as a pal presently, Cardew."

"What's the jolly old villain done now?" insisted Cardew cheerfully.

"It's no rotten joking matter, Cardew," rapped out Tom Merry angrily. "I'll jolly soon tell you if you want to know, though."

And he did. He explained the position clearly, but Cardew merely whistled.

"So—so that's it?" he remarked.

"That's it!" snapped Tom. "Aren't we justified in asking Clegg to allow us to search him? I jolly well think so! Look here, Clegg," went on Tom curtly. "I'll ask you again. Will you be searched to settle the matter?"

"Never!"

"Then we'll thundering well search you by force!" said Tom angrily. "Now, you fellows!"

"By gad! Half a sec, old beans!"

But Tom Merry did not heed Cardew. They were determined to settle the matter once and for all, and they brushed Cardew aside and made a rush at the new fellow. If he had been innocent he would have allowed them to search—they felt certain of that.

A fist like iron took Tom Merry full on the point of his chin, and he staggered back, gasping. But his chums closed in, and as they did so, Clegg sprang with his back to the wall, hitting out desperately.

For once Cardew lost his languid nonchalance then. He sprang forward in alarm.

"You burbling asses! Let the chap alone! Oh, gad!"

Cardew gasped as Blake and Herries turned to deal with him, and the next moment Cardew had his own hands full.

"Give in, Clegg!" gasped Tom Merry. "You idiot! We don't want to hurt you, but you're asking for it. Collar him!"

Clegg's fists were swept aside, and several pairs of hands grasped him, striving to pull him into the centre of the room. Then it happened—how, none of the juniors knew, excepting Clegg, at the moment. But Tom Merry gave a sudden yell.

"Look out!"

Crash! Crash!

It was the tall bookshelves—the bookshelves Clegg had been desperately clinging to. It lurched forward suddenly and came over on top of the juniors.

Crash!

"Yarcooh! Yoop!"

One corner of the framework caught Tom Merry a fearful crack on the head, and another sent Manners staggering forward on his face. A shower of books rattled about the heads of them all.

"Oh, my hat!"

The juniors gasped and groaned and picked themselves up in alarm, rubbing their bruises. Clegg had escaped injury, but he did not attempt to fly, though the juniors had released him now.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "What a mess! Lock the thumping door, somebody!"

But Cardew had already done that. Luckily, the books had deadened the sound of the crash, and after waiting and listening a moment, the juniors realised that the noise had not been heard outside.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Tom Merry. "I thought—Great pip! What's that you've got, Manners?"

For Manners had given a sudden startled exclamation, and was holding something up in his hand. They were two slips of paper with brownish-coloured printing on them.

"Are these the notes, Tommy?" said Manners, with surprising calmness. "They must have been on top of these shelves. Look at them!"

"Well, my hat!"

## CHAPTER 10.

### Cardew Shines!

THERE was a sudden silence. All eyes turned to the notes in Manners' hand. Tom Merry almost snatched them from his chum.

"On top of the shelves?" echoed Tom Merry.

"What rot, Manners!"

"I saw them flutter down out of the corner of my eye," said Manners emphatically. "They were up there, I tell you!"

"Phew!"

All eyes turned to Walter Clegg, who had not moved as yet. Tom Merry, struck by a sudden thought, took out his uncle's letter. General Merry was a careful man where money was concerned. He had scribbled down the numbers of the notes he had sent on the top of the letter.

Tom Merry hurriedly compared the numbers. The two were identical with two of the numbers on the letter.

"Well, this beats the band!" gasped Tom. "So—so Clegg was speaking the truth."

"Unless he hid them there out of spite—or for some other purpose!" grunted Blake.

"Oh!" said Tom, his face clouding again. "Clegg, do you know anything about these being up there?"

Clegg gave him a bitter look, but was silent.

"I fancy I had better chip in here, old beans!"

The interruption came from Cardew. That elegant youth was smiling, as if highly amused.

"Now, Thomas," he said calmly, "as my pal Clegg isn't keen to defend himself, I'll take up the giddy cudgels on his behalf."

"What the thump do you know about it, Cardew?"

"Quite a lot, old nut! I take it you justly indignant lads are basing your charge on the giddy fact that Clegg is a dog with a bad name, and on the supposition that he was the only fellow who entered the study at the time."

Tom hesitated, and then he nodded, eyeing Cardew keenly.

"I suppose that's so," he assented.

"An' if I can prove that Clegg isn't at all a dog with a bad name, and that he wasn't the only fellow who entered the study, the charge falls through—what?"

"Naturally. But I fancy you'll find it difficult to prove that, Cardew."

"We'll see. Any of you fellows wear tennis shoes at all to-day, by the way?"

"Tennis shoes! Why, no, you ass!"

"And Clegg is wearing brogues," smiled Cardew. "He could scarcely have changed in the time, could he?"

"No. But—"

"Wait a minute, old bean. Look at that chair. The fellow who shoved those notes up there was wearing tennis shoes. You can see the ribbed design of the rubber soles on the seat of the chair clearly. He stood on that chair to shove them there—he could not reach otherwise. Any objection to that theory?"

"Oh!" said Tom. "I—I believe you're right, Cardew."

"I know I am."

"But did any other fellow enter the study but Clegg?"

Cardew nodded.

"I saw him myself coming out—so did Clegg," he said coolly. "He's the real jolly old dog with a bad name in this reel, Merry. His name's Aubrey Racke, and I'm going to ask you to have him brought along here, old beans."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry started, as did more than one of the juniors. "Racke!" he stammered. "You—you saw Racke leaving this study, Cardew?"

"Just that. What about sending for the merry old blade?"

Tom Merry's face was a picture. At that moment all

his doubts came back to him with a rush. He gave Clegg a glance, and then he nodded to his chums. Lowther, Blake, Manners, and Digby went off without a word. They unlocked the door, and hurried out in search of Aubrey Racke, their faces grim.

Cardew said nothing more while they were away. Cardew loved a dramatic situation as much as he loved the lime-light, and he had no intention of spoiling the entertainment.

Three minutes passed, and then the door opened. Into the room filed Lowther, Manners, Blake, and Digby. Between them was Aubrey Racke. He had not dared to refuse to comply with the summons.

He saw Cardew at once, and he paled visibly. He glanced from face to face as if to read there what it meant. His heart was thumping against his ribs with fear and apprehension.

Tom Merry & Co. scarcely glanced at his face; they one and all looked at his feet. Racke was wearing rubber-soled tennis shoes.

Tom Merry's eyes glittered as he noted them.

"Leave this to me, Thomas," smiled Cardew, as Tom was about to speak. "Now, Racke, old top! I'm goin' to ask you to step up on that chair."

Racke licked his lips which were dry. The overturned bookshelves was enough for him.

"I—I won't!" he stammered. "You fool, Cardew—Here—"

Racke's words ended in a yell of fear as Cardew leaped upon him. He fairly wrenched the right shoe from Racke's foot, and stamped the sole on the chair seat, pressing down hard with his hand.

When he withdrew it there was a second impression on the chair—identical with the first one.

"Bai Jove!"

There was a deep murmur, and Racke looked round him savagely. Cardew tossed him his tennis shoe back.

"And that's that," he said coolly. "It was jolly old Aubrey who hid those notes on the bookshelves. I've no need to insult the intelligence of the gentlemen present by explainin' why he did it—what?"

"By jingo!" breathed Tom Merry. "You haven't, Cardew!"

"And now for provin' that my pal Clegg isn't really a giddy dog with a bad name," smiled Cardew. "I'll go back to the beginning to do that, though. You fellows know what a glad youth Racke is—how overjoyed he was at hearing his cousin was coming to St. Jim's. He was so delighted, in fact, that he vowed to get his dear cousin kicked out at the earliest possible moment. You fellows appear to have forgotten that."

Tom Merry flushed. He certainly had forgotten that lately.

"Go on, Cardew," he said quietly.

"I'm going on, old top. You started to forget dear old Aubrey's existence when Clegg failed to turn up at the match. An' when he came home and told the yarn about the note, and after about being attacked in the woods, you refused to believe him. I didn't, though."

"You didn't?"

"Not at all. You see, I happened to be in the woods that afternoon, and I happened to see friend Aubrey with friends Crooke and Scrope enter the woods. They looked like giddy conspirators. Racke carried a parcel, too, and that alone made me wonder what was up. Not only that, I noticed what you chaps missed; I noticed that Clegg's flannels were covered with moss and bits of broken fern."

"Oh!"

"That set me thinking," resumed Cardew, smiling at Racke, who was white and shaking. "I knew he couldn't get in that state playin' cricket. So I questioned my pal Clegg, and then I visited the spot he said was the spot where he was attacked. I found clear traces of a struggle having taken place there, and I also found an old sack."

"My hat!"

"I was just looking at the sack," went on Cardew, with a chuckle at the expression on Racke's face, "when our old friends Aubrey and Crooke appeared. They didn't spot me at first. They'd got the wind up, and had come to search for the sack—to hide the dashed evidence, you know."

"It—it's a lie!" breathed Racke.

"That settled the matter for me," resumed Cardew, ignoring Racke's outburst. "I rammed the sack over dear old Aubrey's scented hair, and then I left 'em to it."

"You—you ass, Cardew!" snapped Tom Merry. "Why didn't you mention this?"

"My dear man, I wanted clearer proof of that first. But this is how I figured it out. I figured it out that dear old Aubrey wrote the merry old note to Clegg—forged old Thomas' name, you know. Afterwards he got the wind-up, and he thought of the brilliant stunt of attacking Clegg in the woods, and getting it back again to destroy. During the struggle Racke either dropped his wallet by accident, or

else he deliberately planted it on his cousin. Anyway, he jolly soon charged his loving cousin with stealing it when Clegg yanked it out of his pocket.

"I ask you! Was it likely that Clegg would be carryin' such a thing in the pocket of his dashed blazer if he'd stolen it?"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!"

"I—I think I see now," said Tom Merry quietly. "But—but the note? Did Racke get it?"

"No," said Cardew, grinning. "As it happened, Clegg had lost it as he said he had. He dropped it in the dressing-room of the village cricket-club. Grimes found it, and brought it to-day. He handed it to little me, and here it is."

Cardew took from his pocket the note and handed it to Tom Merry. Tom read it, and then he looked at Racke. That junior fairly shrank before his look.

"It's all lies!" he said thickly. "Can Cardew prove I wrote it? I defy him to prove it!"

"I'll take you on, then," smiled Cardew. "I suppose you wondered why I took the trouble to look you in my study, Racke? Well, I'll tell you why. I went along to your study and did a bit of detectin'—I'm no end of a dab at it. And I found this there. It's got your name inside, Racke."

Cardew drew from his pocket the note-book. He opened it at the missing pages, and handed it to Tom Merry. Racke gave a cry, and snatched at the book frantically, but Cardew slung him aside like a sack of coal.

"Compare page six with page seven, old top," said Cardew.

Tom Merry compared them. The number had been quite enough for him though. He drew a deep, deep breath.

"You howling rotter, Racke!" he snapped. "Good for you, Cardew!"

Cardew was in his element.

"That's not all, though," he said cheerfully. "I'll now deal with that jolly old letter that's caused such a rumpus. While detectin' in Racke's study, I took a fancy to the top sheet of Racke's blottin'-pad, and I brought it away with me. Here it is, and here's the letter."

Cardew handed the sheet of blotting-paper to Tom Merry, with the fatal letter.

"If you'll hold that blottin'-paper to the merry old lookin'-glass, old bean," he said, "you'll see somethin' no end interestin'. Compare what you see with the letter, Thomas."

Tom Merry walked across to the mirror. Racke started after him, but Blake yanked him back by the scruff of the neck.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed Tom Merry, satisfied at last. "But what about the envelope, Cardew?"

"My dear man, can't you guess that? Dear old Racke rooted it out of the wastepaper-basket, I'll bet. It was from another letter Clegg had, of course. That's where Racke got it from, and where he also got the address and name of Clegg's old school pal from."

"Oh! I—I see!"

Tom Merry did see now. And when the evidence was passed from hand to hand, Blake and the rest of them saw it also—they could scarcely fail to see. There was a deep, angry murmur. All eyes turned upon Racke. That rascally schemer fairly shrivelled under the glances of scorn and deep contempt.

"You—you worm, Racke!" breathed Tom Merry. "Oh, you worm! What blind owls we've been. We might have known—we ought to have guessed."

Racke glared round him like a hunted animal.

"I deny it all—every word!" he hissed. "Oh, you rotter, Cardew!"

"What? You deny it after this?" snapped Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "Right! We'll see if you deny it before Ralton, you bound! You deserve all that's coming to you for this, Racke! You—you plotting, scheming cad! Come on, Cardew! We'll take this matter to Ralton."

And Tom started for the door. Racke gave a cry, and ran after him. His hand closed appealingly on Tom's arm. "Don't!" he panted. "For Heaven's sake don't. I'll be sacked, and—and my pater will never forgive me."

"You admit it—you'll confess?"

"Yes," stammered the wretched junior. "I—I own up. If only you keep it from Ralton, I'll tell everything."

And Racke told everything. He finished at last, and as he did so, Tom pointed to the door.

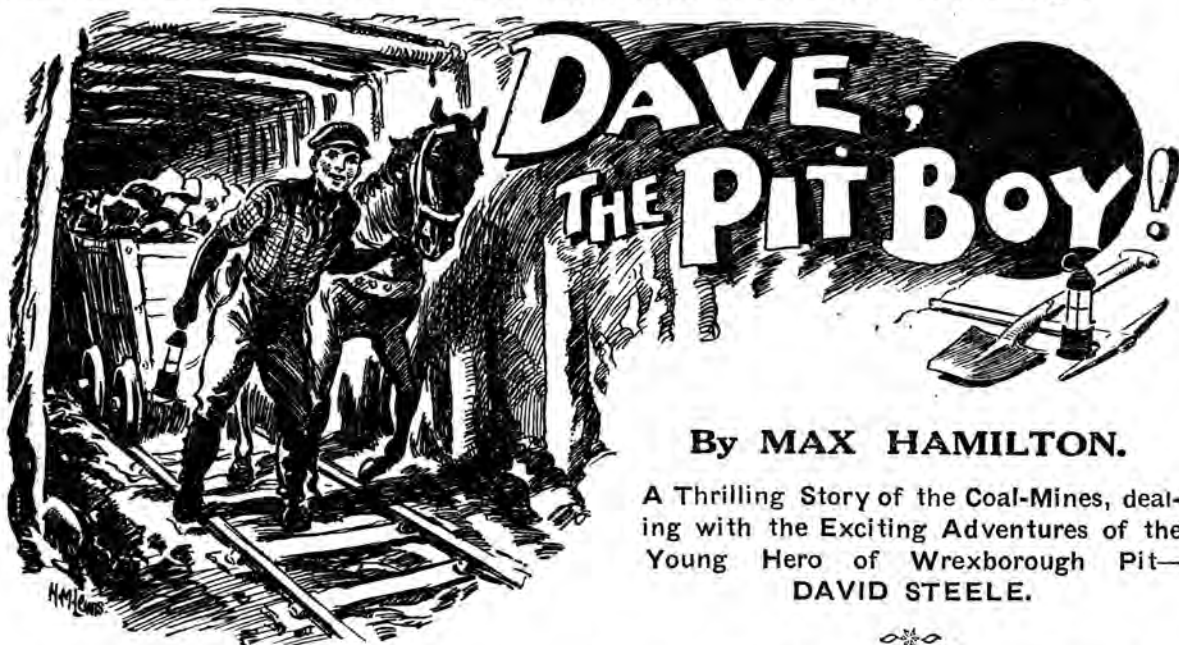
"Get out!" he snapped, in utter disgust. "Get out, you snivelling worm! The fellows will know how to deal with you. Get out!"

Racke almost crawled to the door, and slunk out. Tom turned to Walter Clegg. That junior was white as a sheet. He had stood through it all with scarcely a movement.

"Clegg," said the junior captain quietly. "We've treated you in a beastly manner, and I for one am thundering sorry. I can scarcely expect you to shake hands and forget, but the fellows shall hear all about this, and I can promise

(Continued on page 28.)

Alone in the darkness with a madman—is the terrible experience David Steele has to undergo!



By MAX HAMILTON.

A Thrilling Story of the Coal-Mines, dealing with the Exciting Adventures of the Young Hero of Wrexborough Pit—  
**DAVID STEELE.**

#### WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

**L**EAVING the little North-country village of Thorpe Western, **DAVID STEELE**, an ambitious young lad of fifteen, decided to try his fortune in Wrexborough.

With a few shillings in his pocket, and with a tramp of thirty to forty miles to his destination, the sturdy country lad sets off.

Utterly tired out at night, the lad sought a sheltered place, into which he crept. But hardly had he dropped off to slumber when he was aroused by hurried movements near at hand. He was alert almost on the instant, and, on making investigations, found, to his horror, the bound figure of a man lying on the permanent-way at the mercy of an express train which was at that moment due. With great presence of mind, the lad dragged the inert form to safety just a fraction of a second before the great train rushed by.

But the perpetrators of the crime were returning; so, carrying the unconscious form, Dave took refuge beneath the arched stone bridge which carried the railway over a canal.

His presence was detected, however, and in an effort to escape the clutches of the unconscious man's assailants, Dave and his burden found themselves in the canal, sweeping helplessly through the arch and out into the open waters beyond.

Fortune was at hand, however, for the two were just able to

scramble on board a barge which lay right across the canal. David then learned that he had rescued Mr. Scott, the owner of the Wrexborough coal-mines. David was offered a job in the mine, and gratefully accepted.

Mr. Scott's manner was very strange after that; for not only did he ask Steele to keep the whole affair a secret, but he also found the lad accommodation with a man named Markham, his own assailant!

Markham had recognised Steele, too, and had made many unsuccessful attempts to get the lad out of the way.

Later, by a strange coincidence, Steele gets wise to another plot to capture Scott. But he is unable to warn the mine-owner, for he is caught spying and made prisoner.

He effects an escape, however, and finds that Scott has been chained to a wall in one of the disused pits by his brother George, who has made an unavailing attempt to extort money from the wealthy mine-owner.

Dave is attempting to get away again when he overhears George Scott tell Markham that he has yet to play his trump-card.

No sooner had the two conspirators departed before David was speeding his way towards Wrexborough, determined to learn the meaning of George Scott's phrase, "the trump-card."

(Now read on.)

#### A Bolt from the Blue!

**I**T was not long before David as well as Markham was enlightened as to the meaning of George Scott's phrase—"his trump card."

For, two days after David's adventure in the old mine, all Wrexborough Town was agog with excitement and amazement—amazement which gradually deepened into the honest wrath and indignation of men whose rights are wrongfully assailed.

The owner of the Wrexborough Pit had announced to the men in his employ that, after the customary period of notice, they would be required to submit to a twenty per cent reduction on their present rate of wages.

At first the Wrexborough men could not believe their eyes and ears. The whole thing was so impossible, so utterly unlike Mr. Scott, that they imagined it to be some extravagant joke. But that idea passed as soon as it was known that Grafton and the mineowner had had "words"—pretty strong ones, it was rumoured—over the matter, and that Scott had finished, not only by refusing to reconsider his decision, but by ordering the manager out of his presence.

"He's no reason to give for doing it," was the verdict of the pitmen, "unless pure and simple greed's a reason. Trade's never been better; his profits have never been higher!"

And the miners looked at each other in stupefaction, and asked if Billy Scott had gone mad.

There were only two people in Wrexborough who could have enlightened the pitmen as to the nature of the thunder-

bolt so unexpectedly launched at their heads; and those two were Markham and David, each of whom, for very different reasons, held his peace.

As soon as they had realised that the notice meant what it said—that, from the skilled "holer" to the youngest "trammer," everybody employed in the mine was required to yield up one-fifth of his income—the pitmen took the obvious steps that were demanded by the situation. A meeting was held, and a dozen representative miners chosen as a deputation to wait upon Scott and place the men's point of view before him.

So thoroughly friendly had been the relations which had always existed between Scott and his men, and so perfect had been their confidence in his honesty and justice, that the miners could not yet bring themselves to believe that their employer could persist in an act of tyranny.

"Let's see 'un and talk to 'un, and things'll be straight in no time," declared Nathan Benn, who headed the deputation.

And his optimism was shared by most of his comrades. But their hopes were destined to be bitterly dashed.

George Scott received the deputation with a mocking politeness, and, with a sneer on his lips, listened while Benn, the spokesman, stumbled through his speech—a speech that, if not eloquent, was straightforward, and, considering the provocation the men had received, exceedingly temperate.

"And is that all you have to say?" Scott asked sardonically, when Nathan came to a stop. "You can give me no better reasons to induce me to change my mind?"

Benn looked at his employer in astonishment. Then, finding his tongue, he said, with a certain rough dignity:

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"If you want better reasons, sir," to keep you from doing an injustice, I can but remind you of the wives and children we've got at home."

There was a murmur of applause. Scott waited until it had died away, and then, leaning across the table at which he was seated, looked the leader of the deputation full in the eyes.

"Your wives and children, Mr. Benn," he said coolly, "are your affairs, not mine. I am a business man, and it is as a business man that I am acting when I desire to run my property at the greatest possible profit. The wage-list in the Wrexborough Mine is too high; it must come down. You say that the pit is paying. Quite so. But I wish it to pay more!"

One of the deputation—a stalwart young fellow of the name of Stevens—sprang forward, clenching his fist.

"Then you admit it! It's greed—nothing but greed—that's making ye put the screw on!"

"Call it greed if you like. I call it a legitimate desire for gain," was the supercilious reply.

"What!" returned the young man passionately. "And we're to be cut down that you may pocket a few extra thousands a year—you who have everything you want already?"

Almost unconsciously he raised his hand menacingly as he spoke.

Scott shrank back, his face livid; but the threatened breach of the peace was arrested by Benn, who seized the young man's uplifted arm and pushed him back from Scott.

"None o' that, Jim!" he said sternly. "We're here to argue, not to have a rough and tumble. Now, Mr. Scott," he went on, "will you listen to me? You say you want to run the Wrexborough pit at a higher profit; but what profit will it be bringin' you in when the men are hangin' idle about the streets, and the seams are empty of workers? Strikes don't bring much profit to anyone concerned in 'em, Mr. Scott—that's my experience, leastways."

The man he addressed had recovered the composure which had momentarily deserted him at Stevens' violence, and he replied calmly:

"That, Mr. Benn, is for me to consider. I may prefer to suffer a small present loss for the sake of a greater gain later on; or I may not believe that, even after all your big talk, you miners will be such fools as to quarrel with your bread-and-butter because it hasn't enough jam on it. To save further argument, I may as well tell you that you cannot frighten me with the strike bogey. In fact, I have already made up my mind that, unless you submit wholly and unconditionally to my demands, I shall lock you all out!"

The men stood looking at him in stupefied silence. Never had they thought to hear such a speech from their employer's lips.

"That is my last word," Scott continued, rising and pointing to the door. "Understand that it is useless to make any further representation to me on the subject. My mind is made up. Unless you agree to my conditions, you will in a few days, as your friend Mr. Benn expressed it, be hanging idle about the streets."

Remonstrance was useless. The pitmen filed out to carry back to those who had sent them the story of their ill-success, and that night, for the first time since it had been known there, the name of Scott was hooted in Wrexborough Town.

### Trapped!

ONLY a man who was destitute of every feeling of honour and duty could have devised such a revenge as that which George Scott now proposed to take upon his imprisoned brother.

He knew that it was the welfare of the men in his employment that lay nearer than anything else to his brother's heart; and that if William was proud of anything, it was not so much the prosperity of the pit as of the prosperity of the men who worked on it.

What a revenge, then, for his brother's obstinacy, so he said to himself, to bring misery upon the whole town! Perhaps even to stir the men up to desperate acts of violence, which might ruin the industry that brought them in their daily bread!

And the whole thing could be done so safely, too! For William would never willingly bring him to justice—at least, not while his mother lived.

Such was George Scott's plan of revenge—a plan which David Steele had little difficulty in penetrating. The cold cruelty of it made his blood boil; it was only his solemn promise that kept back the natural denunciation of such villainy that sprang to his lips.

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The impostor's idea had been to keep his prisoner for the present in ignorance of what he was doing; and only when his evil scheme had been successful to inform his brother that his workmen and himself were involved in a common ruin.

But he had not reckoned on David Steele.

The boy's first thought was to let his master know the state of affairs, and the evening following George Scott's insolent reception of the deputation of miners found him once more on the way to the disused pit.

He did not go empty handed. All his available cash had been expended in the purchase of food more likely to tempt an invalid than the scanty fare which had hitherto fallen to Scott's portion.

He was not disappointed in the effect of his words upon the prisoner. Scott turned deathly pale when he heard of his brother's latest piece of villainy.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered. "I could have forgiven him anything but the meanness of revenging himself upon those who have never injured him, of bringing misery upon hundreds of helpless women and children."

He buried his face in his hands, and remained silent for a little while, but when he looked up it was with a glance of stern determination.

"I have made up my mind, David," he said quietly. "I have no right to consider my own feelings or even my mother's feelings before the welfare of the whole town of Wrexborough. At all cost, this horrible plan must be defeated—yes, even if I myself have to give my own brother up to the police!"

"Surely that won't be necessary, sir?" said David. "If your brother once hears that you have escaped, he won't stay to be arrested. Directly you are safe out of this, you can send him a message—I will take it myself—and he will clear out in next to no time."

Scott's face brightened.

"You're right, Dave. You've got a proper head for expedients. And now let's talk the matter over. I feel so much better that I believe in another twenty-four hours I shall be able to crawl up the ladder."

Before David left, the plan of escape had been thoroughly arranged. It was very simple. On the following night, after making certain that he was not watched, David was to descend to the mine, bringing with him a file, with which to cut through Scott's fetters.

Together they were to ascend to the surface and make their way to Wrexborough under cover of darkness. Scott thus hoped to reach his own dwelling and to have the necessary interview with his brother unnoticed by any of the townspeople, or even by his own servants; and when George Scott saw that the game was up, there was little doubt but that he would clear out with all speed.

Such was the arrangement at which they arrived, and, having arrived at it, David began his return journey, chuckling to himself at the thought of the different complexion that Wrexborough politics would assume in the next twenty-four hours.

But he would hardly have whistled so exultantly as he extinguished his lamp and strode away from the pit's mouth over the moor had he known that a few paces from him, half hidden behind a dwarf furze-bush and half shrouded in the darkness, was a man watching his every movement; a man who, when a few minutes before he had been about to descend into the old shaft, had stopped short at the sight of a light shining far below him in the blackness—the gleam of David's lamp.

Micky Jones commented on David's spirits at tea next day, and Micky Jones was not the only person to remark that the lad was in a state of suppressed excitement. It was not only on Scott's account that he looked forward to the night's work; the idea of being instrumental in bringing to naught the plans of the man who had twice all but taken his life caused him to rub his hands with a not unnatural glee.

"Micky," he said cheerfully, as he emptied his second cup of tea, "do you know why I'm so jolly? It's because I'm getting a bit of my own back to-night."

"How?" inquired Micky stolidly.

"Ah, that's telling!" returned David, with a wink. "And now I'm going out. And don't you be frightened if I'm a bit late, Mrs. Nichols."

Ten minutes later, David Steele was striding through the crisp, cold air towards the old shaft, the file in his pocket, his lantern under his coat.

"The last time I shall make this delightful excursion," he told himself, as, having kindled his lamp, he began the descent.

He gave a cheery hail as he reached the bottom. But, somewhat to his surprise, there was no answer, and as he neared the place where Scott had been confined, he noticed,

with a little start of alarm, that the chink of light was no longer visible under the door.

"The lamp's gone out, I suppose," he muttered.

Instantly he quickened his steps.

He laid his hand on the door, and it yielded to his touch. He opened it, and entered, holding his lamp above his head as he did so.

Then a cry burst from his lips. The place was empty—absolutely empty. Scott's presence there might have been nothing but a dream, so bare was it of any sign of human life.

The boy stood open-mouthed. What was the meaning of this sudden disappearance? Had Scott gone of his own free will, or had he simply changed his prison? Was he above ground, or only concealed in another of the recesses of the mine?

It was useless seeking for a clue to the mystery from the bare walls of the cell.

Bitterly disappointed, the boy turned and left it. He tried to hope against hope that Scott had succeeded in escaping without his help; but his cooler sense told him that that was practically impossible.

The alternative explanation was that his captors had removed him, either to some other place of confinement, or by death.

The boy shuddered at the idea, which he had good reason to know was not an extravagant one. His reflections had brought him to the foot of the shaft. Mechanically he stretched out his hands for the ladder.

Then, for the second time, a shock of surprise thrilled him through.

The rope ladder was gone. During the few minutes he had been absent from the foot of the shaft someone had hauled it up!

### An Unexpected Meeting!

FOR a moment David stood, stunned by the discovery. Then he began to put two and two together.

Taken in conjunction with Scott's disappearance, this latest development could only mean one thing—that George Scott had obtained a knowledge of his prisoner's intended escape. He—David—had been watched and dogged. And no sooner had he reached the bottom of the ladder than it had been drawn up, his enemies thus hoping, no doubt, that they had trapped him finally and for ever.

Had they done so? That was the question that the lad asked himself, while his heart beat loudly in his ears. The answer to that question must depend on whether or no he could find the other exit to the old mine—the way by which he had first tracked Markham to Scott's prison.

Could he do so?

He had but a vague idea of the direction in which it lay. Still, he had a light now; and as his safety depended on finding a way of escape before that light was extinguished, there was no time to lose in commencing his search for it. The mystery of Scott's whereabouts must be left until that first and most pressing question had been solved.

He paused only to consider his bearings. Roughly speaking, he knew that the spot at which the new and old workings touched must be somewhere on his right. To his right, therefore, he turned, and, plunging into the dark and solitary passage, began his hunt for the outlet, on whose discovery his life depended.

For some twenty minutes or so he hurried on, and then he stopped short suddenly; for a dull roar—a roar that swelled, and then died slowly away in thunderous echoes—had fallen upon his ear. He could feel the reverberation of the ground even where he stood, and a shower of small stones and dust pattered down around him from the roof.

What was the meaning of the sound—an explosion? But of what kind? Could firedamp explode in an unused pit? He did not as yet know enough about subterranean gases to guess whether or not that was likely or possible.

He advanced cautiously, feeling that he might be about to incur a new danger. Judging by the loudness of the report, the explosion could have taken place at no great distance from him. And before he had gone many paces he saw that the ground was strewn with fragments of rock, which the concussion had dislodged from the crumbling roof.

He half hesitated whether or no to turn back and try another way; but curiosity, as well as conviction that he was somewhere in the neighbourhood of the outlet, determined him to push on. And he picked his way over the rough ground until, just as he reached a sharp turn in the gallery, he stopped again, this time even more suddenly than before. For out of the darkness, the thick darkness before him, there sounded a deep groan.

"Who's there?" he cried, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment, flashing his lamp ahead and hurrying on. "Mr. Scott, is that you?"

There was no intelligible answer; but the groan was repeated, long-drawn-out and faint.

A couple of paces more, and the light of his lamp disclosed the body of a man outstretched upon the ground, face downwards and arms flung wide. David fell upon his knees and turned the unconscious figure upon his back, and as he did so he involuntarily cried out; for it was not, as he had expected, Scott, but Markham who lay there, stunned, and bleeding from a long red gash in the forehead.

It was easy enough to see how he had come by his injury. A sharp fragment of rock, falling from the roof, had struck him just above the temple, inflicting a jagged scar that was bleeding profusely. The blow had evidently been a severe one. Markham's breath came stertorously from between his lips, and his face was of a grey and death-like pallor.



"It's greed—nothing but greed—that's making ye put the screw on, Scott!" Almost unconsciously Stevens raised his hand menacingly as he spoke. But at that moment the leader of the deputation seized the uplifted arm. "None o' that, Jim!" he said sternly. "We're here to argufy, not to have a rough and tumble!"

David would have been hardly human if the idea had not flashed through his mind that it would be safer to leave his enemy to struggle back to life if and when he could. But after a moment's hesitation he knelt down beside the injured man, wiped away the blood that was trickling from the cut down the side of his face, loosened his neckcloth, and felt for the little flask of brandy which he had slipped into his pocket earlier in the evening, intending it for Scott's use. After a good deal of trouble he succeeded in forcing some of the spirit between Markham's teeth, with the result that, after two or three deep-drawn sighs, the man opened his eyes and looked up into David's face with a puzzled stare.

"Are you better?" asked David, with as much cordiality as he could throw into the question—not very much, perhaps. Markham did not seem to hear, or, at least, to understand, the question, though he apparently recognised the questioner.

"David Steele!" he muttered thickly. "Yes; he can't get out. I've blocked it up—the passage—I've blown up the gallery, and he doesn't know the other way—and no one will ever know."

His voice died away weakly and his eyelids closed once more.

David laid his head down—not so gently as he might have done, for a fresh groan burst from Markham's lips—and he sprang to his feet.

The miner's semi-delirious words had given him an insight into the truth. Markham had deliberately destroyed the way of escape for which he had been searching.

There was a savage joy in thinking that by so doing the scoundrel had over-reached himself, that he had literally been "hoist with his own petard." In firing the train of explosive which was destined to shut the door of David's escape, he had forgotten to make allowance for the crumbling state of the old "gateways," and he himself was the first to suffer from his own misdeed.

"You villain!" David muttered, looking down upon the senseless face. "So you were going to bottle me up here, were you—to leave me to die after you had stopped all the earths? You're a pretty pair of cold-blooded skunks, you and your pal! And if I could manage to get out of this place without your help, I'm hanged if I wouldn't like to leave you to the fate you intended for me. But, my dear friend, whatever arrangements you have made for your own safety will have to be shared with me."

What these arrangements were he could only guess as yet; but it was very obvious that Markham must have decided on some means of leaving the pit after the accomplishment of his nefarious task.

In the meantime, David extracted from the miner's pocket his only weapon—a large clasp-knife—and, holding this open and ready in his hand, he sat down to await the injured man's return to consciousness.

"I think," he reflected grimly, "that when he does come to he will be feeling too much out of sorts to refuse me the information I intend asking him for."

But that information was longer in coming than David had expected. In spite of all the boy's efforts to rouse him, Markham lay in a sort of stupor, his heavy breathing being his only sign of life. Again and again David tried, by chafing his hands, by fanning him, by pouring brandy between his teeth, to bring him back to consciousness.

Hour after hour went by, and still David sat gazing on the pallid, motionless face. In spite of his anxiety a drowsiness began to creep over him, and, strive against it as he might, it overpowered him at last; with his back against the rock, and his head leaning upon his knees, he fell into a heavy slumber.

When he awoke it was with a start, for peal after peal of eerie laughter was ringing in his ears.

It was Markham who was laughing. Propping himself upon his elbow, he was rolling his head from side to side, and shaking in the contortions of his fantastic mirth. David gazed at him, open-mouthed, with horror—at his flushed face, his glazed, unseeing eyes, his scarred forehead, on which the blood was scarcely dry, his ridiculous and ungainly features. It did not take long to convince him that the wild yell of laughter was the laugh of a maniac—that here, far beneath the earth, in the depths of the deserted mine, Markham had gone raving mad!

### A Madman's Secret!

THERE was not the least doubt about it—Markham was a madman! The blow he had received had, for the time at least, affected his reason.

David's own brain reeled with the horror of the situation. To be shut up in a living tomb with a maniac—a maniac whose next move might be to fly at him in an excess of unreasoning fury! He dared not stir; utterly unnerved, he sat and stared at the miner as he rolled and writhed in his hideous mirth.

At last—seemingly from sheer exhaustion produced by its violence—the paroxysm ceased, and Markham leaned back against a rock and closed his eyes.

Trembling in every limb, David rose to his feet, and, clutching the knife which he had obtained from Markham himself, advanced towards the miner. As he heard his footsteps, the latter opened his eyes once more and fixed them in a questioning gaze upon the boy's face; but, to David's relief, he appeared quiet and reasonable.

"David Steele," he murmured. "You're David Steele, ain't you? What makes my head throbb so, lad? Seems as though someone was a hittin' it with a pick. Is it time to knock off work yet? I'm that tired!" he concluded drowsily.

Fighting back a shuddering fear of the madman that he could not altogether overcome, David laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Markham," he said earnestly, "don't you know where you are?"

"Ay, ay—Wrexborough Pit, Wrexborough Pit!" the miner answered, in the same drowsy tone.

The boy was afraid that he was about to lapse into his former condition of stupor; and, fearful though he was of

the consequences of rousing the madman's anger, he shook his arm violently.

"You're not in Wrexborough Pit, Markham," he said slowly and distinctly. "You're in the old pit—down the old shaft—and unless you know the way out of it you'll die here!"

Some of the words, at least, seemed to have reached the miner's bewildered brain.

"Th' old shaft," he murmured in reply. "What's that you're sayin' about th' old shaft? There's summat about it that I can't remember. Oh, ay, he's down there, and nobody knows. Only Dave Steele knows. He's a cunning lad!"

Markham's eyes were open now; but they wandered aimlessly by David to stare into the darkness, and his tones were those of a man talking in his sleep.

"He's a cunning lad! But he doesn't know everything. He doesn't know how to get out—no, not the other way! There's the ladder—and we take it away—and the hole into the new workings—and we fill it up—and there's—"

David held his breath. His very life depended on the madman's wandering speech.

"And there's th' third way—the third way," Markham went on muttering, twisting his fingers together as he talked.

Then his voice ceased. David's heart sank.

He tried a direct question.

"Markham," he said quietly, "what is the third way out of the pit?"

Markham replied by a stupid stare.

"What is the third way?" David repeated.

"The way—I go," returned Markham, as if trying to collect his thoughts.

"Then you shall go now," David said. "Come!"

Markham rose to his feet obediently. But once on his feet, he stood staring vacantly around him.

"Which way?" asked David.

Still the same vague stare; and then, his lips parting in a foolish smile, Markham answered slowly:

"I—don't—know."

Again the horror clutched at David's heart.

"Man," he cried, "think! You must know! Your life depends on it—think—think—think!"

But the only answer his agonised appeal received was another burst of maniacal laughter peeling weirdly through the long-deserted galleries.

### A Terrible Experience!

DAVID stood stunned with horror, while the miner rocked himself to and fro, snapping his fingers and making the roof ring with his mad laughter. It was impossible to arrest his attention—in fact, even when the boy spoke to him, he did not seem to be aware of his presence.

"What am I to do?" thought David, as, sick with apprehension, he leaned back against the wall of the gallery and pressed his hand to his throbbing temples.

Then a new terror assailed him. He had already been several hours in the mine; it could not, therefore, be long before the oil-lamp was exhausted, and when that happened, he would be alone in the darkness with a madman. A shudder ran through him at the thought.

Yet he dared not, could not, place a safe distance between him and the maniac, for upon that maniac depended his only hope of escape from a living tomb—from a slow death by starvation in the bowels of the earth.

Gradually the peals of laughter grew fainter and died away. But no glimmering of his actual situation had as yet dawned upon the miner's brain. Crouching down upon the ground, he sat staring before him, muttering incoherently to himself now and again, and continually and restlessly twisting his fingers together. Nothing that David could say or do could break in upon his lethargy; even when the lad shook him violently by the shoulder, he seemed as if he were quite unconscious of his touch.

Minutes that seemed hours went by, and David began to despair. The memory of his mother rose to his mind; and at the thought of her—at the thought, too, that in all probability she would never know what had become of him—a dry sob burst from his lips, and he buried his face in his hands. For a little time he sat thus, oblivious of everything but his grief, and too absorbed in it to notice that Markham's madness had taken another turn—that he had ceased to mutter to himself, and that his eyes had fixed themselves upon his companion.

A sound made the boy look up; and as he did so, his blood seemed to turn to ice. For, crawling stealthily on

his hands and knees, his eyes gleaming murder as plainly as eyes ever had done, the miner was approaching him, and had he not looked up at that moment, would have been on him before he was aware of it. As it was, he stopped short a few paces from David, as though the lad's glance had checked him; and for a short space of time—to David it seemed hours—the two glared into each other's eyes.

It was fortunate for the boy that he had deprived Markham of his knife, which was now in his own pocket; but something told him that the first movement he made to draw it out would be the signal for the madman to spring on him.

How long the two faced each other there, David could never have told; but at last, with the horrible strain of keeping his eyes fixed upon the maniac's, his brain began to reel—he felt that he could stand it no longer—that in another instant his senses must give way. Better to end this hideous uncertainty at any cost, and at the thought he moved his right hand to grip the clasp-knife.

The spell which had held Markham was broken. In an instant, with a growl like that of a wild beast, he had flung himself upon the boy and borne him backwards to the ground. The knife, unopened, was in David's hand as he did so, and with a flash of inspiration, the lad, knowing that were Markham to get hold of it, it would mean instant death, flung it far over his head into the darkness; and luckily for him the manœuvre escaped the madman's notice.

David was like a reed in the grasp of his antagonist. He had often heard of the superhuman strength which madness gives, and he experienced it now. Markham had never struck him before as a particularly powerful or muscular man, but now his wrists seemed made of steel, his clenched hands like sledgehammers.

The passivity of despair came over the boy. He ceased to struggle, and lay motionless in that iron grip, expecting each moment to have the life crushed out of him.

He believed it to be only a prolongation of his agony when Markham, rising to his feet, with an insane chuckle, seized him as if he had been a feather-weight, and flung him across his shoulders, in which position he held him fast. Then, snatching up the lamp in his other hand, he set out at a run along the gallery, heedless of the uneven nature of the ground and of the stones which bestrewed his path, and seeming to be not in the slightest degree inconvenienced by the weight of his heavy burden.

On and on he went, stumbling now and again, and once actually falling his length. David was nearly stunned by the fall, but Markham seemed scarcely to heed it, for, gripping the boy again, and swinging him once more over his shoulder, he continued his wild rush onward as quickly as before, never speaking, but now and again chuckling foolishly.

Once or twice David essayed to struggle free from him; but the miner's grip tightened on him instantly, and he was held as in a vice.

Did the man know where he was going, he wondered, as Markham went on, never pausing, never hesitating at the various turnings?

Was he—and the boy's heart leapt in a sudden throb of hope—was he by any possibility making for that third opening of which he had spoken?

If so, there was a chance, a faint one perhaps, but still a chance, that he, David, might yet escape alive from the peril in which he stood.

And the hope grew stronger when he perceived that the ground was rising—that every "gateway" into which the madman turned had an upward trend. And then suddenly he felt a rush of air upon his face.

A moment later bushes and twigs brushed and scratched him as Markham plunged through them. Then the miner stopped, and, looking up, David saw the stars above him.

They were in the open air!

### The Madman's Crime!

THE old seam at Wrexborough had been much nearer to the surface of the earth than the more modern pit; in fact, the presence of coal in the neighbourhood had originally been discovered at what was locally termed "the Slide"—a bare cliff or scar, the result, as its name indicated, of a landslip. Actually the first attempt at working, the mineral had been made by tunnelling into the Slide—a method that had soon been superseded by the sinking of a shaft nearer to the centre of the seam.

It had been through this old tunnel—now overhung with creepers, and almost choked up with earth and bushes, its very existence nearly forgotten by a later generation of pitmen—that Markham and his helpless burden once more emerged into free air. The Slide itself was an almost sheer cliff from eighty to a hundred feet in height, and the open-



David Steele's brain reeled with the horror of the situation. To be shut up in a living tomb with a maniac—a maniac whose next move might be to fly at him!

ing into the tunnel was about half-way up it—that is to say, some forty or fifty feet from the ground.

Twisting his head round over Markham's shoulder, David peered through the darkness at the scene below him, and had no difficulty in guessing at his whereabouts. The night was a clear one. He could easily make out the valley below him and the glint of the stream that wound its way along it.

For a minute or two after emerging from the tunnel Markham stood motionless on the very edge of the sheer descent—so close to it, in fact, that David held his breath, fearing lest the slightest movement should precipitate them downwards. From the miner's attitude and fixed, absorbed gaze the boy could not gather whether he was even aware of the existence of the gulf on whose verge he stood.

He need not have been afraid. Markham soon showed that he knew well enough where he was. Still holding David tightly in his arms, he began to make his way down the side of the cliff. Precipitous as it looked, there was evidently some kind of rough track with which Markham at least was well acquainted, for he neither stopped nor hesitated in the darkness, though a false step might have cost him a broken limb, if not his life.

A very few minutes and he stood in the valley. But his destination—if, indeed, he had one—was not yet reached. Without a second's pause, he set off over the uneven ground at a walk so rapid as to be almost a run.

On they went. Would Markham never tire? The sweat was pouring off him, but his pace never slackened. Now and again he broke into something between a laugh and a growl, but otherwise the strange journey was performed in silence.

At the end of about a mile the ground began to rise, and Markham had perforce to slacken his pace. As he did so he began to mutter aloud, and here and there David could catch and understand a phrase.

"The last time," he kept on saying—"this'll be the last time! He's been after us; he's a cunning lad, but I've got him this time—got him—and I'll treat him as we treated the other!"

And again he burst into a loud jeering laugh.

David's blood ran cold.

"Markham," he began, and this time his voice reached the miner's brain, and he looked down on the boy's face. "Markham, what are you going to do?"

The miner chuckled.

"You'll see—you'll see," he repeated, in a sing-song voice. "We're just there now."

"There—where?"

"The place where I'm going to kill you—just on there—only a little way."

And he bent his face over David's with a horrible grin!

(It is a terrible moment for David! Be sure you read what he does in next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful serial, chums.)

**"CARDEW TAKES A HAND!"**

(Continued from page 22.)

you they'll make it up to you. We've been fools—blind fools!"

Clegg did not answer. His lips were quivering. He turned abruptly, and walked out of the study. And neither Tom Merry nor his chums attempted to follow him. They saw he had reached his limit—had passed it—and they understood.

Tea was unusually late in Study No. 10 that evening. But it was also an unusually good tea, and there was an unusually large family round the table. Cardew had very kindly consented to join the party, and he had, after a great deal of trouble—unusual trouble for him—managed to persuade Clegg also to join the party. How he actually managed it, Tom Merry & Co. never knew. But he did manage it, and under the benign influence of ginger-pop and Cardew's eloquence, the new fellow gradually lost his bitterness, and his face became cheerier and cheerier. It was a triumphant meal for Cardew.

In the Common-room that evening, Tom Merry laid the full story before the juniors, and Aubrey Racke and Crooke were tried and found guilty. Crooke was sentenced to run the gauntlet, while Racke was sentenced to a likewise punishment, with a fortnight in Coventry thrown in.

Walter Clegg did not play for the village that Wednesday, after all. He played for St. Jim's against the village, and it pained him almost as much as it pained his gallant village chums to have to send their wickets down like skittles. But he sent them down, and at the close of the match, nobody cheered the fellow who had won the match for St. Jim's louder than did Grimes and his men, sportsmen to the core, all of them.

But, alas for Tom Merry's hopes for a series of conquests on the cricket-field! After a few brief weeks at St. Jim's, Walter Clegg said good-bye to the old school. His father had decided to join a brother in New Zealand, and Walter went with him. And nobody regretted his going more than Tom Merry & Co., who had found in Racke's poor relation a rattling good sportsman and a jolly good fellow.

THE END.

(There will be another grand story of St. Jim's next week, chums, entitled: "LEYISON MINOR'S FLIGHT!" by Martin Clifford. Don't miss it, whatever you do!)

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