

"A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!"

GRAND FOOTER  
STORY INSIDE!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

# The GEM 2<sup>D</sup>

LIBRARY  
of  
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

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A PLUNGE FOR THE SPY OF ST. JIM'S!

(A "moving" scene from the long complete school story—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.

#### BORROWING!

**A** GEMITE from St. Albans writes to me for advice on the subject of borrowing. He is very friendly with a fellow who has been down on his luck for some time. And this friend of his has "touched" him once or twice for a small loan. Up till now, however, my correspondent has refused because his parents have instilled into him the folly of either lending or borrowing. Well, now, my St. Albans chum, you need hardly come to me for advice. Far from it that I should run counter to the wishes of your parents. If they say that it is a bad thing to lend or borrow money, you must respect their judgment. It might seem hard to say no to a fellow who really is in need of help, but if you find it too hard, as it were, your best plan would be to consult your parents. Lay all the facts before them and then abide by their decision.

#### TELLING THE TRUTH!

Another interesting letter reaches me from a reader in Scotland. He finds it hard to speak the truth on all occasions. I wonder what he means exactly by that? From his letter I should imagine that he is most truthful, although he undoubtedly possesses the gift of the gab—it comes out in his writing—sufficiently to be able to "extend" an ordinary sentence of five words into thirty-five! I should say that he exaggerates a trifle, but then who doesn't at some time or another? Perhaps it is upon this "weakness" that he condemns himself for not speaking the truth on all occasions. But it's truthfulness in the big things that count, not the "white exaggeration" whoppers of everyday life that are invariably told to give more colour to a conversation. If my correspondent really is untruthful, I can only advise him to change his ways as quickly as possible, and he can do that without any advice from me—his conscience will tell him in advance.

#### THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY!

Gemites must be reminded of the fact that two new numbers of this wonder library are on sale Friday, November 6th, of this week. No. 15 deals with Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, and is entitled "Football Heroes!" Mr. Frank Richards is here shown at his best. No. 16 is entitled "The Rebellion at St. Biddy's!"—a stirring school yarn by Michael Poole, who introduces an amazing character in Giglamps, the schoolboy scientist. Both these issues of the "Schoolboys' Own" are really worth reading. That they will sell out quickly is dead certain. Interested readers should therefore order these volumes to-day!

#### NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME!

##### "TRIMBLE TELLS THE TRUTH!"

By Martin Clifford.

Rather peculiar, is it not, in view of the par above, but this is the title of the next St. Jim's yarn. Even Trimble can tell the truth, you see. Mind you read this story, chums.

##### "A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!"

By Sydney Harler.

Another grand instalment of this fine football story. Look out for it.

##### "JAPING."

A special issue of the "St. Jim's News" deals with the fascinating subject of japing. Well worth reading, boys.

##### "JINGLES!"

Dr. Holmes, the Venerable Head of St. Jim's, figures in next week's "Jingle." Don't miss it.

**Your Editor.**

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You Know A Good Joke? Let's Hear it, Chum.

Delicious Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes  
Awarded for Interesting Pars.

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

#### ANOTHER TUCK HAMPER WON!

##### THE FINISHING TOUCH!

Grocer (to his apprentice): "Well, Augustus, you have been apprenticed now three months, and have seen the various departments of our trade. I wish to give you a choice of occupation." Augustus: "Thank'ee, sir." Grocer: "Well, now, what part of the business do you like best, Augustus?" Augustus: "Shuttin' up, sir!"—A delicious Tuck Hamper has been awarded to D. Abrahams, 20, Old Castle Street, Aldgate, E. 1.

#### A USEFUL SUGGESTION!

It was a local train. The ancient engine wheezed laboriously over equally ancient rails, and jolted to a resolute stop at no place in particular. Time passed tediously, and some of the passengers looked anxiously out of the windows, while others drew their hats over their eyes and tried to forget it. When half an hour had elapsed the guard came along. "Hi, guard," shouted an old man, poking his head out of the window, "what's the trouble?" "We're taking it water," was the explanation. "Well, why on earth don't you get another teaspoon?" asked the old man.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Duncan Marshall, 104, Alexander Street, Victoria Terrace, Airdrie, Scotland.

#### BORROWED PLUMES!

"Hallo, old chap! Thought I'd just drop in and see about that macintosh you borrowed last week." "Very sorry, Fred, I've lent it to a friend. Were you wanting it?" "Well, no, I wasn't, but the chap I borrowed it from says the owner wants it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Richard Saunders, 143, Landseer Avenue, Manor Park, E. 12.

#### THOUGHTFUL PAT!

Pat was struggling along with a heavy load. A friend, passing in a cart, offered him a lift. Pat was delighted, and jumped in. "Put your bundle on the seat, man," said his friend, noticing that Pat was still nursing it. "Oh, no?" replied Pat. "Seeing as you're so kind as to carry me, I'll not be asking ye to carry the bundle as well!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. B. Pedley, Yew Tree Farm, Dukinfield, Cheshire.

#### A CLEVER POSTMAN!

Once a letter was dropped into a pillar-box addressed like this:

"Hill,  
John,  
Hants."

But the postman, being a clever man, the letter arrived safely at its destination, which was: "John Tinkerhill, Amlover, Hants."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Alan Cocks, 121, Webster Street, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia.

#### TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

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

A QUEER CARD! Ralph Reckness Cardew will go to extraordinary lengths to accomplish something he has set his heart on, but as often as not the result does not justify the means!



# CARDEW'S BIG BLUFF!

A GRAND, LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY  
OF TOM MERRY & Co. AT ST. JIM'S, FEATUR-  
ING RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Cardew's Cheque!

"MY word!" exclaimed Sidney Clive.  
"My only aunt!" said Levison. "A hundred and fifty-seven giddy quidlets!"

The eyes of both were fixed upon an oblong slip of coloured paper which Cardew had laid upon the table in Study No. 9 in the Fourth Form passage.

It was not every day that a St. Jim's fellow got a cheque. That one of them should get a cheque to the amount of over a hundred and fifty pounds was something very much out of the ordinary.

Yet Cardew seemed perfectly cool about it.

Ralph Reckness Cardew was a cool customer, as no one knew better than Levison and Clive. But a display of coolness in the face of such a cheque as that really was not natural.

"This wasn't a surprise to you, Ralph," said Levison quietly.

"You boulder! You knew it was coming, and never told us!" cried Clive.

"Guilty, m'lud! I knew, an' I told not. But that was the kindness of my heart. I wanted you two to have a surprise."

"Well, we've jolly well got it!" said Clive.

His eyes gleamed as he looked at the cheque, and thought of all the things a fellow could buy with one hundred and fifty-seven pounds. Why, the odd money was a small fortune for a fellow in the St. Jim's Fourth!

Clive was as far from being greedy or covetous as any junior at St. Jim's. He did not grudge Cardew that money, but for a minute or two he did envy him it, feeling that he could have put it to far better use than would Cardew, who was a notorious spendthrift.

"How did it happen?" Levison asked.

"Let me begin at the beginnin'. In the days when I was young—how very, very long ago they seem—"

"Oh, cut out that rot, and get on with the washing!"

"Don't be rude, Ernest! In point of fact, she was not a washerwoman at all, but a nurse—one of those faithful old retainers you meet in back number stories, y'know. She thought no end of me—"

"Was she potty?" inquired Levison.

"She was considered a most sensible woman," Cardew answered solemnly.

"You have no idea, Ernest, what a charmin' little creature I was as a mere kid! Well, to cut a long story—"

"We wish you would, don't we, Clive?" groaned Levison.

"The good old nurse died a few months ago. I was sorry, of course, but I hadn't seen her more than twice since I turned eight, so it wasn't a real bereavement to me. When her will came to be read it was found that she had paid me the distinguished compliment of includin' me among her grandchildren for sharin' what she left. There are nine of them—all doin' very well, thank you, in various walks of life—an' it's curious that none of them complained of my bein' included."

"Very," assented Levison. "They don't know you as well as we do, evidently!"

"My nurse's estate was somethin' well over sixteen hundred pounds, I gather," continued Cardew unperturbed. "The lawyers have had their little cut into it, of course, an' a tenth share apparently works out at one five seven. To me it seems a trifle suspicious that there should be no odd shillin's or pence. But I do not grudge the men of law their little perquisites."

"Ass!" snorted Levison.

"But I shouldn't have thought you'd be allowed to take this, Cardew," said Clive. "I should think they'd have invested it for you until you were twenty-one."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 926.

"Some such absurd notion occurred to their minds, I infer," Cardew answered. "But I caught my granddad—if I may be allowed to use such an expression in connection with a peer of the realm—on the hop. On the giddy hop I caught him, sweet Sidney and egotistical Ernest! I asked him at a moment when he was thinkin' very hard indeed about somethin' else altogether whether I might have that money to spend; an' he said 'Yes' before he realised what money I meant. Indeed, he did not realise what I was talkin' about at the time. I prudently refrained from recallin' his wanderin' wits. Afterwards, havin' given his word, the dear old boy would not take it back, though he called me one or two names which I did not feel I deserved."

"What shall you do with the cheque, Ralph?" asked Clive.

"Would you recommend gettin' a nice gilt frame for it an' puttin' it up on the study wall?"

"Fatehead!"

"Idiot!"

"There are banks even in this rustic neighbourhood, Sidney."

"Yes, but I don't suppose any of them would cash that cheque for you. And you couldn't ask the Head or Ration. There would be a fuss if they knew you'd got all that cash."

"It's all right, Clive," explained Levison. "Ralph can open an account with any of the Wayland banks by paying in this cheque. Then he'll be given a cheque-book of his own, and can draw on the splash as he likes. I give him to the end of the term to get rid of the last giddy quid. 'A fool and his money—'"

"You are rude again, Ernest!" said Cardew reprovingly. "Mend your manners, or you will have no share in the little jamboree I propose. At the outset I shall draw only the odd seven pounds. Later I may be tempted to have the fifty. A hundred is a nice round sum. There is somethin' about a hundred an' fifty which is less round, so to speak. An' I do like roundness—except when it's Baggy."

"What's the jamboree to be?" demanded Levison, refusing to be led astray from the really important point.

"A first-class, sumptuous, bang-up feed," answered Cardew.

"Oh, good!" said Levison warmly.

"Now, that's something like, Ralph!" exclaimed Clive.

"An' as we three are physically incapable of puttin' away seven quids' worth of even the most expensive grub, I propose to invite the truly worthy members of our Form, an' of that Form—I refer to the Shell, Sidney—which is nominally, but only nominally, above us."

As he spoke he slit open the envelope of another letter which had lain neglected on the table.

He frowned slightly as he read it, as though he thought the request it contained rather a nuisance—which he did. Without mentioning it to his chums he thrust the letter into his breast pocket.

It came from an old valet, now superannuated, of Cardew's grandfather, Lord Reckness. It asked whether "Master Ralph" knew of any house suitable for the writer in the Rylecombe neighbourhood, and it was signed "Yours respectfully, R. G. Ropster."

Old Ropster had always been fond of the wayward Cardew, and Cardew, in his careless way, had been fond of old Ropster. But Cardew could not quite see why he should be bothered to hunt for houses on the old chap's behalf.

"Blake & Co., of course," said Clive. "That's four."

"How well you count, Sidney!" murmured Cardew.

"An' without usin' your fingers, too!"

"The Terrible Three and Talbot. That makes eight."

"Still right, so far," Cardew murmured again.

But neither Clive nor Levison paid any heed to him at present.

"Julian, Hammond, Reilly, and Kerruish," suggested Levison.

"Twelve," breathed Cardew. "Sidney will lose count, soon."

"Figgy and Kerr and Fatty Wynn," said Clive thoughtfully. "We couldn't leave them out."

"Dane and Glyn and Kangaroo—"

"Wildrake and Roylance—"

"Is this a roll-call?" asked Cardew mildly.

"We were only running over the names of the fellows to be asked to the spread, that's all," Clive explained—quite needlessly, of course.

"Very kind of you both, I'm sure, Sidney."

Clive flushed. He was very sensitive to any suggestion that he had butted in.

"That's all right, old sport!" Cardew hastened to say.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 926.

"Anyone you an' Ernest think should be asked shall be asked—to the number of twenty-eight, our noble selves included. For let it never be said that a member of the Fourth or Shell of St. Jim's could not put away five bobs' worth of the very best grub! An' the best—the very best—is what I propose to offer them."

A curious sound was heard—a sound as of the smacking of lips. The three looked at one another, and Levison moved silently towards the door.

"There won't be room for Racke and Crooke—or Baggy," said Levison.

"You have omitted Skinny," Cardew said gravely. "I shall not leave him out. It amuses me to see a philosopher eat. That is a rare an' refreshin' sight. But in any farmyard Baggy's kin may be seen eatin', an' gruntin' as they eat. Ernest, I think I hear a grunt!"

At that Levison threw open the door.

The fat figure of Baggy Trimble tumbled into the room.

"Oh! I—I wasn't listenin', you fellows!" he stammered. "I—I came over faint. I do sometimes when it's hot and I haven't had enough dinner—and I just leaned up against your door for a moment."

"He's heard nothing, Cardew," said Levison, with a wink that Baggy failed to observe, "so he won't be disappointed about not being in it."

"Oh, I say! You are going to ask me, aron't you, Cardew?" said Trimble. "I don't mind a bit about your jokes. I can stand a joke as well as anyone. He, he—"

"I certainly am—"

Cardew spoke very slowly, and Baggy broke in upon him with a gurgle of joy.

"Oh, thanks, Cardew! I don't care what the fellows say about you. What I've always said is that you're a jolly good fellow!"

"NOT!" finished Cardew emphatically.

"Eh?" Baggy blinked. "Why, you beast!"

"I think he's got it now, Ralph," said Levison, grinning.

"He'll get more if he doesn't cut!"

"Oh, don't be a selfish boulder, Cardew!" exclaimed Baggy. "It's all very well to joke, but—"

"I'm not jokin', I assure you, Baggybus. Upon my honour I'm not jokin'. You won't come to our spread, an' if you don't get out of that door inside three seconds—"

"Shan't, then! I never came in of my own accord—Levison dragged me in, the bully! And I'm not going till—"

"Till you've been bumped—eh? Well, have it your own way, misguided porpoise! Lend me a hand with the bumpin', you fellows!"

"I'll go! I—I don't want to stay! I— Yaroooooh! Yooooop! Yooooop! Yaroooooh!"

Baggy howled as he was well and truly bumped. The noise he made was heard in every study along the passage, but it was easily recognised as proceeding from Baggy. And no one minded Baggy's being bumped.

Racke and Crooke of the Shell, passing on their way to their own study, stopped to watch, however.

"Bullyin' again—what?" said Racke, with a sneer.

"That's it, Aubrey. They're always at it," agreed Crooke. Cardew whispered something to Clive and Levison.

Next moment the fat form of Bagley Trimble hurtled through the doorway, and came into sudden and violent contact with the black sheep.

Crash!

Racke and Crooke went spinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Levison.

"All right! You'll wish you hadn't done that before you're much older!" muttered Crooke, picking himself up and dusting his clothes.

Racke said nothing, but his look was full of concentrated malevolence, and he showed what his temper was like by kicking Baggy hard while that stout junior was on his hands and knees.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Baggy.

"Pleased to see you both whenever you feel your zeal to put down bullyin' gettin' beyond your control!" gibed Cardew.

Racke and Crooke departed. The chums of Study No. 9 were much too big a handful for them to tackle.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Cardew's Spread!

IT really was surprising how many fellows there were in the Fourth and the Shell who claimed friendship with Ralph Reckness Cardew when the news of the forthcoming spread leaked out.

But Cardew, with all his air of languor, was not the type of fellow to be taken in by these sudden overtures of friendship. He listened to all the nice things that were said about



"Look out, Baggy!" yelled Kerruish. But the warning came too late. The ladder was pulled from under the fat junior's feet. "Ow!" he roared, clutching frantically at the window. Then his feet went through the pane, smashing it. (See page 6.)

him with an irritating smile on his face, and then strolled away whistling.

To Clive and Levison he left the task of inviting the requisite number of juniors to the feed. That number, needless to say, had already run above the twenty-five—not counting Levison & Co.—that Cardew had fixed as the maximum. But Cardew seemed satisfied.

Certainly no study could have housed that terrific party, no three or four studies could have done it comfortably for that matter. Besides which, to split up the merry feasters would have been a great pity.

So Dame Taggles was persuaded to join forces with her rival at the Rylecombe tuckshop, who also needed some little persuasion. She it was who provided the place of the feast, as well as a half of the provender.

The place was the entertainment hall of the village club—a recently started institution next door to the tuckshop. This was big enough for the gathering, and all preferred it to having the banquet on the school premises.

Dame Taggles and her colleague and rival had done their best, and the result was, as Monty Lowther remarked, "simply top-hole!"

Cardew looked quite happy as he took his place at the head of the table, with Tom Merry at the other end, and all the host of the Fourth and Shell ranged down the sides—the fellows whom Clive and Levison had enumerated, and others—Rodfern, Owen, Lawrence, Clarke, of the New

House, Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn, Gore, as well as his study-mates, Talbot and Skimpole, with more yet.

Through his glasses Skimpole beamed upon the array of good things, and commended them in words of many syllables.

Through his celebrated monocle Arthur Augustus surveyed them, and pronounced them good.

Through a window Baggy Trimble saw them, with both eyes blinking, and felt within him a mighty yearning.

Like a fat peri outside the gate of Paradise was the unhappy Baggy.

Clive, always soft-hearted, had suggested that he might be asked. But Cardew, who could be soft-hearted at times, had hard streaks in him, and Baggy could find only the hard streaks.

The juniors felt so. Perched on a ladder, Baggy watched, with watering mouth and acute depression.

The windows of the hall were six or seven feet above the floor. Baggy had counted himself lucky to find that ladder—a short one, but long enough for the purpose.

It was not pleasure for Baggy to watch. It was painful—grievous pain. Yet it was a pain that he would not have forgone.

No one saw the pug nose pressed against the glass. All were too busy to be looking at the windows.

Cardew and Tom Merry, Figgins and Talbot, Redfern and Noble, Lowther and Blake, cut generous helpings of the various pies. Kerr and Digby and Julian played the part of butlers. Soon all were served with food and drink.

Baggy gazed into the room, and fancied himself the unhappiest fellow on earth.

So intent was he upon what he saw that he did not perceive the small crowd of juvenile villagers that was gathering.

They whispered to one another; they pointed to Baggy. A plot against Baggy was being concerted.

The youth of Rylecombe knew what was going on inside, and then held Baggy in contempt because he had not been invited. He seemed to them a most proper object for a practical joke.

So intent was Baggy upon the feast in which he had no share that he did not see Racke and Crooke come up.

Racke and Crooke, though they resented the fact that Cardew had not invited them, did not feel as Baggy did about it. They could afford to have as good a tea as they wanted, in the village or in their study. They were just as contemptuous of the mouth-watering Baggy as were any of the Rylecombe small fry.

For a few minutes their presence acted as some restraint upon these urchins, however. Then one of the band, more daring than the rest, stole forward, and made motions as though to pull the ladder from under Baggy's feet. He was ready to bolt on the instant if either of the two who watched should make any sign of reprobation.

But they only grinned. They did not speak; but their attitude said as plainly as any words could have done that they had no notion of interfering with the joke planned.

At that moment, unseen by any of the conspirators, or by Racke and Crooke, there arrived upon the scene Kerruish of the Fourth, an invited guest who had been delayed by a slight misunderstanding with Mr. Lathom; his Form master. Such misunderstandings sometimes resulted in detention. This one had so resulted for Kerruish.

Kerruish saw Racke and Crooke, but they did not see him.

He hesitated. He wanted to be inside, where a seat awaited him. He drew a little nearer, and was just in time to see what happened.

Two of the boldest of the village urchins ran forward. Kerruish wondered what they could be after. Racke and Crooke did not wonder. They knew.

The two young rascals seized the ladder. And then Kerruish understood.

"Look out, Baggy!" he cried.

But the warning came too late.

The ladder was pulled from under Baggy's feet.

"Ow!" he yelled, clutching frantically at the window.

His first went through a pane, smashing it. The thirty or forty sharers of that spread saw for a moment his fat face, contorted by terror. Then it disappeared.

Baggy crashed down to earth. It was not a tremendous fall, but it shook Baggy up badly.

"Yarooogh! My back's busted!" he yelled, in wild dismay. "My spinal column's broken! I'm killed!"

The banqueters rushed out, Tom Merry at their head. His seat was nearest the door.

He did not see Kerruish. He did not see the village youngsters, for they had made themselves scarce at once. But he saw Racke and Crooke; he saw the fallen ladder and the prostrate Baggy; and he jumped to a conclusion that was really not unnatural.

"You cads!" he cried. "You might have killed him!"

"They have killed me!" burred Baggy. "My back's busted! I shall never walk again! And they did it!"

A howl of execration followed his words. No one believed that Baggy's back was broken; but the trick was one that might have resulted in very serious damage.

Kerruish tried in vain to make himself heard.

Kerruish was not fond of Racke and Crooke, but he believed in fair play. Racke and Crooke had chortled at the dangerous joke; but they had played no part in it, and Kerruish did not guess that they had known beforehand that it was coming off.

"You howling cads!" Tom Merry cried. "This is too thick for anything!"

"Here, hold on! We'd nothin' to do with it!" shouted Racke, with virtuous indignation.

"Nothin' in the wide world!" exclaimed Crooke, with equal warmth.

"Oh, don't tell me that! Who else could have done it?" retorted Tom.

Kangaroo and Redfern picked Baggy up and stood him on his feet. He seemed surprised to find that his feet would support him. He felt his back, moaning gently. He really was a bit hurt; but he was finding consolation.

"Yow! Oh dear! My back's broken—my spine's fractured in at least three places! Wow!"

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 625.

After what had happened Baggy reckoned that of a surety he would be invited to come inside. And if a fellow was to perish of a broken spine it would be better to perish on a full stomach than an empty one.

Kerruish caught Tom Merry by the arm.

"They didn't do it!" he said. "It was two of the village kids. I came up just in time to see them."

"Eh? They didn't do it?" returned Tom, rather blankly. A hush fell upon the shouting crowd.

"No. You owe them an apology, Tommy," said Kerruish. "They'd nothing whatever to do with it."

"Yas, wathah, deah boy," agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Do the wight thing, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry looked at Racke and Crooke, and seemed to gulp back something in his throat.

"I'm hanged if I'll apologise!" he snapped. "If they didn't do it, they must have seen the two village chaps do it, without warning Baggy."

"Hear, hear, Thomas!" said Cardew gravely.

"Let's get back to the festive board; there's no reason why the harmony of the occasion should be upset because Baggy's back's busted," went on Cardew, "or even because Racke and Crooke have been told the truth about themselves, though some of you do seem to think that Thomas has committed a crime in tellin' it!"

"Yes; let's get back," Tom said. "It's no use to stand here arguin', because my mind's made up."

"I say, Ralph," whispered Clive in the ear of Cardew. "I think you might let poor old Baggy in now. He's a fat sweep, of course, and all that; but he's been hurt, and it's jolly rough on him."

"You were ever merciful, Sidney," Cardew answered half mockingly. "Trimble!"

"Yes, Cardew!" cried Baggy eagerly.

"I regret that my secretary—Clive here—inadvertently omitted to send you a card of invitation. Will you pardon the omission, an' accept an informal invite?"

"Oh, rather!" chorried Baggy.

And the juniors trooped in again.

Baggy Trimble got going, and soon made up for lost time. He had not come too late for the pies. He sampled each kind, and went back to pork, after all.

But the catering had been on so generous a scale that it looked as though the late-comer to the feast would get all the tarts he could eat—which meant that it had been generous indeed.

All that Baggy had suffered was of little consequence to him now. If his backbone was "busted," he still had the use of his teeth and immense storage capacity. Baggy ate on, while those around him replenished his plate at frequent intervals.

When it was time to get back before lock-up some of the juniors wondered how Baggy would contrive to reach the school at all. As Digby said, not only was his back busted, according to his own testimony, but there was danger any minute that his front might be in the same condition.

But Baggy waddled in, behind the rest, yet in time. He had forgotten all about his busted back in the joy of that gigantic spread.

Arthur Augustus had not finished with the question of Tom Merry's behaviour. He started to argue the point again in the junior Common-room that night after prep.

The Terrible Three and Talbot did not chance to be present. But Racke and Crooke were there, somewhat surprised to find D'Arcy sticking up for them, as they held it.

But Arthur Augustus was not in the very least sticking up for the black sheep. He was merely supporting his view of the right thing.

"Oh, dash it all, Gussy, give the subject a rest!" yawned Cardew. "I say now, as I said at the time, that Thomas was quite right. A gentleman apologises to a gentleman, but not to a howlin' cad."

"That is not true, an' you know that it is not true, Cardew!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

Racke and Crooke glowered. The insult was open. Cardew grinned at their furious faces.

"Dash you, Cardew!" Racke said angrily. "I don't know what you've got against us specially just now, or why you should back up Merry. You haven't always been on his side, not by long chalks!"

"If a gentleman always apologises to anyone who isn't a howlin' cad Merry's no gentleman, for you'll never catch him apologise!" put in Crooke.

"Not he! He's so dashed self-righteous that he would never believe he was wrong," exclaimed Racke warmly.

"Rot! I've known him to, an' so have all these fellows."

"He might apologise to Talbot or Blake or Gussy—to any of his own special pals," Racke said. "He wouldn't to Goro, or to you, Cardew!"

"You leave my name out of it!" growled Goro of the Shell.

"But you can't leave mine, not after what you've said,"



As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered the house, Mr. Ropster raised his right foot and dealt the swell of St. Jim's a hearty kick. With a flaming face Arthur Augustus wheeled round. "Weally, Mistah Wopstah, I am surprisid an' shooked!" he exclaimed. (See page 9.)

spoke Cardew. "I tell you that Merry would apologise to me if he knew himself in the wrong."

"I bet you he wouldn't!" hooted Racke.

"I'll bet you what you like he would!" rapped out Cardew.

"Then I'll dashed well take you on—for fifty quid!"

The fellows in the Common-room almost held their breath as they listened for Cardew's answer.

Only two there knew that Cardew had cash enough to pay if he lost without really feeling it. He always had plenty of pocket-money, but fifty pounds was a big sum.

"Done with you, Racke!" said Cardew.

Everybody stared—even Clive and Levison, who knew of what wild folly their chum was capable. All St. Jim's knew something about that; but the knowledge of Clive and Levison was more extensive and peculiar than that of St. Jim's generally.

"I say, you fellows, you can't, you know!" protested Jack Blake. "No one ever heard of a bet of fifty quid between two juniors! Why, you'd get sacked if Railton or the Head came to know of it!"

"Well, you're not goin' to sneak, Blake, an' I don't suppose anyone else present will," Cardew said, quite unruffled. "There must be conditions, of course, Racke. What do you propose?"

His cool readiness flurried Racke. The black sheep wished that the bet had never been made. Having made it, however, he could not back out.

And, after all, he might win. There had been trouble between Tom Merry and Ralph Reckness Cardew more than once in the past, and Tom Merry could be as obstinate as Cardew could be annoying.

"There must be a time limit," said Racke. "Say a fortnight?"

"Suits me!"

"An' it must be somethin' serious. You don't win just because Merry barges you over at footer an' then says he's sorry, or anythin' like that."

"Nothin' like that, certainly. It shall be serious enough.

We'd better appoint a referee, in case we don't agree at the finish as to its seriousness."

"Right-ho!" said Racke.

"Will you stand, Blake?" Cardew asked.

"No, I won't. And I advise everybody here to have nothing to do with it!" answered Blake. "The whole thing's rot!"

"Your mistake, dear boy. I'm quite in earnest, and if Racke's bein' funny he'll find he's woke up the wrong passenger. You, Grundy?"

"Me, indeed!" hooted the great Grundy. "Likely, isn't it? Jolly good cheek of you, Cardew, asking a fellow in my position—"

"I forgot your position. Must be because I never knew just what it is, old top! You, Kangaroo?"

"I don't mind," said Harry Noble, the Australian junior. "It's a silly-ass bizney, as Blake says, but that will make it all the more satisfactory when I declare it a drawn game at the finish, as I expect to be able to do."

"I don't see how," muttered Racke.

He would have hailed with relief that solution of the affair.

"Not on your life you won't!" said Cardew. "Want to hand the dubs over to Noble as stake-holder, Racke?"

Racke thought that mere bluff. He did not believe Cardew had fifty pounds. There was that talk of a legacy, though. It might be that he had.

Anyway, Racke could not call the bluff, for at the moment he had nothing like that sum.

Kangaroo came, unconsciously, to his relief.

"No jolly fear!" he said. "I'm not going to play banker to the tune of a hundred quidlets. I shouldn't have a single moment's peace. Why, I'd be mistrusting even Glyn here an' Dane, anybody an' everybody!"

"That's all right," said Racke. "I can pay up if I lose, an', of course, Cardew can."

"Oh, of course!" said Cardew lightly.

He could pay, and if he lost he would pay without worrying about the money after it had once taken flight.

But he did not mean to pay. He meant to win Racke's fifty. The black sheep had put his back up by classing him with Gore and by his allusions to the time when he and Tom Merry had been at grips.

And already a plan for winning was shaping itself in his mind.

It would be a little bit rough on Tom Merry, perhaps. The other fellows might laugh at him for being taken in.

But if the plan worked out as Cardew hoped, there would not be much for some of them to laugh at, for it entailed taking in a good many of them also.

It would be a big spoof—a mighty spoof!

Cardew was chuckling over the thought of it when he and Clive and Levison returned to Study No. 9 for biscuits and cocoa before bed.

"You've got a fat lot to chuckle at, you idiot!" snapped Levison.

"Of all the wild asses, Cardew——"

"What's the matter, dear boys? Don't you think I can win Racke's fifty?"

"I think you're a prize lunatic!"

"An absolute maniac!"

"A complete chucklehead!"

"Dear, dear!" said Cardew commiseratingly. "You'll both go an' hurt the works with all this thinkin'. They were never built to stand it, my children."

"You'll be having trouble with Tom Merry again," said Levison gloomily.

"And you'll probably be reported, and the Head will sack you," Clive added.

"Cheerful fellows, you are. I was goin' to ask you to help me. But I won't now. I'll put the thing through alone, an' leave you two Jeremiahs to worry all the time about what's goin' to happen—by gad, I will!"

"You don't mean to say you've got a scheme already, Ralph?" asked Clive, almost awed.

"Of course he hasn't!" gibed Levison. "The boulder's only bluffin'!"

"Yes, dear boy—I'm bluffin', that's all. But don't be surprised if Study No. 9 sees very little of me for the next ten days or so, an' don't be surprised when you learn what the wheeze is. You'll be sorry you were out of it, that's all."

And Cardew refused to say any more.

Indeed, his plan was not quite clear in his own mind yet. But as he lay awake that night it pieced itself together quite nicely. He fell asleep, sure that he could work it out—and sure that Kerr was the only other fellow at St. Jim's who would have had any chance with it.

Not Lowther, though Lowther had presumed to rival Kerr in the art of impersonation more than once—certainly not Lowther! Perhaps not even Kerr.

Ralph Reckness Cardew had no small conceit of himself!

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Queer Old Bird at the Firs!

"YOU find everything all right, sir, I trust?" said Mr. Pepper.

He addressed a rather small, oldish man who was standing at the gate of the Firs, one of the three or four houses in Rylcombe which were from time to time to be let. The builders had not touched Rylcombe yet; and most of the houses above the cottage grade were in the hands of permanent tenants.

Mr. Pepper had managed to acquire all that were not so. Some people spoke of Mr. Pepper as the Rylcombe miser. He was not quite that, though he was very careful indeed with his money. But the miser gathers money only to hoard it. Mr. Pepper laid his out to breed more.

"Quite all right, thank you, Mr. Pepper," replied the new tenant of the Firs. "By the way, perhaps you won't object if I call you Erasmus?"

Mr. Pepper stiffened slightly. It was a long time since he had been called Erasmus by anyone, and he was not at all sure that he wanted anyone to be so familiar with him.

But the tenant of the Firs seemed to have money, and Mr. Pepper had other activities besides letting houses.

"I don't mind," he said grudgingly.

"Thank you, Erasmus, thank you!" said Mr. Ropster, in a high and squeaky voice. "The moment I saw you I knew you for a person who could look the whole world in the face and call himself a man! There are not many such, Erasmus!"

Mr. Ropster might be correct as to there being few such people; but if he really meant that Erasmus Pepper was one of them his judgment was badly at fault. For Mr. Pepper was not at all good at looking anyone straight in the eyes.

He did not look Mr. Ropster in the eyes; but he took

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stock of him furtively, and decided that he was a queer little man. He wore a black bowler hat and grey gloves. Naturally, he also wore other things; but it was the black bowler hat and the grey gloves that seemed to strike the keynote of his attire.

"You're right there, Mr. Ropster," said Erasmus.

"I am interested in St. James' School, Erasmus. As you are aware, young Mr. Cardew, the grandson of Lord Reckness, is a friend of mine. Of course—of course—it was he who negotiated the business of becoming your tenant on my behalf. But, apart from Cardew, I like boys."

"Everybody to his taste," Mr. Pepper said somewhat sourly. "That ain't mine. Nasty young reptiles, most of them."

"Really, Erasmus! You would not apply that opprobrious epithet to the grandson of a peer of the realm, surely?"

With all his faults, old Pepper was no snob. The fact that Cardew was Lord Reckness' grandson did not weigh with him a bit. But the desire to keep on good terms with Mr. Ropster did.

"Well, he's an exception. Nice young gentleman, Master Cardew, I'm sure."

"It rejoices me to hear you say that, Erasmus. Now, there is Master D'Arcy, who is related to the family, and whom I also know—you surely do not object to him?"

Pepper did. He objected strongly to Arthur Augustus. He considered him an interfering young fop, and had told him so.

While he hesitated to reply a bicycle bell rang, and Arthur Augustus shot into sight round the corner.

"There he is," said Mr. Pepper. "If you like boys in the lump, you'll like him, I dare say. But the less I see of them the better I'm suited."

And with that Mr. Pepper hurried away—which was perhaps as well; for though Mr. Ropster had claimed to know Arthur Augustus the swell of St. Jim's shot past without recognising him.

He did not pass without a curious glance. Gussy had the bump of inquisitiveness fully developed.

But he passed. Mr. Ropster ambled out of the gate.

He waited near the next corner. One might almost have said that he lurked there.

He must have been deaf if he did not hear D'Arcy's bell, but, in spite of its warning, he had a very narrow squeak of being knocked over. He did, in fact, fall, but could not be said to have been knocked down, since the machine did not touch him.

"Goodness gracious me! My dear sir, I trust that you are not seriously damaged? I assure you that I wanged my bell, an' I am surprised that you did not hear it. Let me help you up."

Arthur Augustus had jumped from his bike on the instant. He stood it against the hedge now while he gave Mr. Ropster aid.

Mr. Ropster groaned as he was put upon his feet again. His hat had not fallen off, and in it and the grey gloves he seemed to Arthur Augustus, always critical in the matter of garb, a weird creature.

"No blame attaches to you, my dear boy," said Mr. Ropster in his squeaky voice. "I heard your bell distinctly, and one might think that it would have been the easiest thing in the world for me to stand clear. But I am an unfortunate sufferer from an obscure nervous complaint, which often prevents my doing what I should at such times."

"Bai Jove, sir, that's wough luck!" said Arthur Augustus.

He wondered whether this queer-looking person ought to be out alone. Mr. Ropster limped.

"I fear I have strained my right ankle," he remarked. "It is nothing much; if you will only give me your arm as far as my cottage I shall be all right. Thank you! You are very good indeed!"

"Pway don't moneh!"

Arthur Augustus really had no choice. He hoped that no one would see him giving his arm to this weird creature. But even the certainty that all St. Jim's would see would not have prevented his giving it. He had hurt the man, it seemed, though quite blamelessly and without intention.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not merely talk about "noblesse oblige." He did his best to live up to the motto.

Mr. Ropster gave a queer little giggle.

"It's very funny," he said, "that you should not know in the least who I am, while I know perfectly well who you are."

"Weally?"

"Yes, that is so. I have heard of you from my young friend Cardew. He described you so graphically that I could not be mistaken in your identity when I saw you."

The bike which D'Arcy was pushing with his right hand, while he gave his left arm to Mr. Ropster, wriggled a

little. Somehow, Arthur Augustus did not greatly like the notion of a graphic description of himself having been given by Cardew to this seeming outsider.

"Indeed?" he said, just a trifle haughtily. "It was vewy good of Cardew, I am suah."

"My name is Ropster. I have known Ralph Cardew ever since he was an infant. You, I know, are Master D'Arcy, and a relative of my young friend."

"A distant connection, Mistah Wopstah, that is all. Heah we are at the gate of your house. I will help you to the door, an' then leave you, twustin' that your ankle will be all wright to-morrow."

"Oh, but you must come inside—you really must! I have already booked you as my second friend at St. Jim's—Ralph, of course, is my first. There will be many more, I hope, for I love to see the rising generation around me, gambolling like young lambs in their innocent enjoyment of life."

"That is true. That is very true indeed. But it seldom takes this particular form. I have known it to cause me to bash in a silk hat—a terrible thing to do!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"It has caused me to walk up to a lady whom I did not know in the least and address her as 'Aunt Maria.' Very embarrassing for both of us. You see that, do you not?"

Gussy saw it quite clearly. He thought he saw that what Mr. Ropster called an obscure nervous complaint other people might call something else. And he wondered how Mr. Pepper would like it when he found that his new tenant was mad!

But Mr. Pepper was not his affair. Gussy's charity, wide as it was, stopped short of Mr. Pepper.

He made up his mind not to come near Mr. Ropster with a topper on. But he would not come near him again at all if he could help it.

The poor lunatic seemed very kindly disposed, however.



# St Jim's Jingles!



No. 10 RICHARD REDFERN

(of the New House.)

A SPLENDID lad, with sturdy limbs,  
Courageous, strong, and clever;  
Who won his entry to St. Jim's  
By honest, hard endeavour,  
His sire is not a millionaire,  
Like Aubrey Racke's proud pater,  
And Reddy's therefore had to bear  
The sneers of that "third-rater."

The hero of a hundred fights  
On Little Side's arena,  
His prowess pleases and delights—  
No sportsman could be keener.  
He plays the game in every sense,  
And plays it to a finish;  
His popularity's immense,  
And may it ne'er diminish!

Cads such as Mellish, Racke, and Gore,  
He views with keen abhorrence;  
But always has a handshake for  
Owon, and Edgar Lawrence.  
These are his chums, the first and best,  
Who rally to his banner.

And hold their own against the rest  
In a courageous manner.  
Once Reddy ran away from school,  
And joined a Wayland paper;



DICK REDFERN.

His nerve was voted "pretty cool"—  
It was a reckless caper!  
He set to work, and soon displayed  
A genius for reporting;  
And thrilling articles he made  
Concerning topics sporting.

But this adventure fizzled out,  
And he was reinstated;  
To be a writing-man, no doubt,  
He's fitted and he's fated.  
But he will have to wait awhile,  
And rein his keen ambition  
Ere he surrenders, with a smile,  
His present-day position.

"Good luck to Reddy of the Fourth!"  
Whose exploits keep us wondering:  
From east and west from south and north,  
Shouts of "Hoar, hear!" come thundering.  
For he's a champion, I declare,  
In whom all virtues mingle;  
(But, being modest, he'll despair  
When he perceives this jingle!)

NEXT WEEK :—DR. HOLMES, The respected Head of St. Jim's.

"Weally, sir, you are vewy kind—"

Arthur Augustus wished he could have seen a way to refuse. He had no desire to make friends with Mr. Ropster, and he was quite sure that nothing would induce him to gambol like a young lamb. Why, even the fags in the Second Form would have shied at the notion of doing that!

But he went in. Mr. Ropster used his latchkey, and then stood back to let the swell of St. Jim's enter ahead of him. Gussy had left his bike just inside the gate.

As Arthur Augustus entered Mr. Ropster raised his right foot and dealt him a hearty kick! No one would have imagined for a moment that the elderly gentleman's ankle was strained.

With a flaming face, Arthur Augustus wheeled round.

"Weally, Mistah Wopstah, I am surprised an' shocked!" he exclaimed. "You ask me—"

"A thousand pardons, my dear Master D'Arcy—a thousand pardons! Will you believe me if I tell you that my foot acted then without my volition? This nervous complaint of mine is really very awkward for me!"

"It is not pweecisely agreeable for othah people, Mistah Wopstah, if you will excuse my sayin' so!" rapped out D'Arcy indignantly.

"You will take some little refreshment before you go, Master D'Arcy?" he said, rubbing his hands together.

"I thank you—no Mistah Wopstah. I will go at once."

"Oh, but you must have something! Don't fear that my nerves will cause me to transgress again; I find that this seldom happens twice in a day. Now, do have something, or I shall think you are annoyed with me."

Arthur Augustus was, in point of fact, seriously annoyed. The kick had not hurt him greatly in body, but it had hurt his dignity. But he began to relent now.

"I have some excellent preserved ginger," said his strange host. Will you do me the honour of sampling that?"

Arthur Augustus was fond of preserved ginger, and possibly that fact helped to persuade him that it would be churlish to refuse. One night humour the poor fellow this time, and steer clear of him in future.

So Arthur Augustus sampled the preserved ginger and found it very good indeed. He was taking a second helping, at the cordial invitation of the eccentric Mr. Ropster, when he chanced to look towards the window and saw a podgy nose pressed against one pane in a fashion which made the

lice appertaining to that nose—never beautiful at its best—look very ugly and grotesque indeed.

Mr. Ropster nodded towards the nose, smiling cheerily. Somehow that smile seemed very familiar to Gussy. Mr. Ropster did not appear to regard the behaviour of the nose with the face behind it as in any way strange. But, of course, a person so very queer as he was would not see anything in an ordinary light.

"Friend of yours, Master D'Arcy?" he asked.

"Nothin' of the sort, Mistah Wopstah, I assuah you! That is Baggy Twimble, who is vewy far from bein' a friend of mine."

"Ah, well—ah, well! 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite,' as that great poet Dr. Watts wrote. But among schoolboys all should be harmony. I am going to ask Master—Baggy, did you say, or Thimble?—in, and I hope to see you sit down with him in amity to my preserved ginger."

Before Arthur Augustus could answer he had made for the door.

Baggy was ready to bolt. Baggy's notions as to the correct thing were somewhat vague, but he did at least know that peering through a window in this manner was generally considered "off."

But Mr. Ropster smiled upon Baggy so amiably that the fat junior took heart of grace and came forward boldly.

"I was waiting for my pal D'Arcy, sir," he said. "I saw his bike near the gate, so I just popped in."

"Quite right, my dear lad—quite right!" said Mr. Ropster. "I am very pleased to see you, or any of your chums from St. James' School."

"Better call it St. Jim's," said Baggy in a friendly and rather patronising tone. "That's what we call it, sir."

"I see, I will call it St. Jim's in future. Surely you are not going, D'Arcy?"

"I am goin', Mr. Wopstah," replied Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

The man might be mad; but he seemed to be having a lucid interval just now, and Arthur Augustus considered that he should have known better than to make friends with Baggy Twimble after that gross youth had been guilty of such a gross breach of manners.

"Sorry you won't stay longer. But must you go with your—er—pal, Thimble? Is it Thimble?" Mr. Ropster said.

"Thimble—Bagley Twimble. I belong to a well-known and highly respected family," Baggy answered. "One of my ancestors came over with the 'Doomsday Book'—I mean the Battle of Hastings."

"Twimble," said D'Arcy severely, "is no pal of mine, an' if he told you that he was, Mistah Wopstah, he was lyin'!"

"Oh, no, my dear lad! Don't be harsh with him. Reflect that, though you may not like him greatly, he may have a sincere affection for you."

"If he has anythin' of the kind, Mistah Wopstah, I twust that he will take it away an' buy it! I do not care to give away any membah of my own school an' Form to an outside; but Twimble is a measly wottah, an' you would be well advised to have as little to do with him as poss."

Arthur Augustus was indignant at Baggy for letting St. Jim's down by his behaviour. He grew still more indignant when Baggy put out a big tongue at him.

Mr. Ropster saw the rude gesture, but uttered no word of reproach. Instead, he turned to Twimble and said:

"Well, you need not go because your chum does, Twimble."

"After what he's said I wouldn't go with him now if he asked me on his bended knees!" said Baggy indignantly.

Arthur Augustus did not even trouble to point out that his doing anything in the least like that was not even a remote possibility.

He marched to the gate, his head held high. He wheeled his bicycle into the road, mounted, and rode away without another glance.

"Swankin'! Silly, swanking ass!" muttered Baggy.

"Come inside, Twimble," said Mr. Ropster. "I have to go to the post-office, but you can make yourself at home for the little time I am away. Help yourself to the preserved ginger if your young friend has not finished it."

"Thank you, sir! You're one of the right sort, I can see that, and I hope we're going to be ever so pally," said Baggy satuously.

It would take Mr. Ropster, he calculated, at least a quarter of an hour to get to the post-office and back again, for the Firs was outside the village. The preserved ginger could surely be cleared up inside five minutes. Anyway, if it couldn't, Baggy had pockets. The balance of time would give him a chance to examine the larder.

Only to examine it, of course. Just to make sure that this funny old fellow lived well and was worth cultivating—that was all. As for touching anything, Baggy was virtuously determined not to do that.

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Mr. Ropster went, apparently with full faith in Baggy. If D'Arcy had been there he might have noticed that Mr. Ropster did not limp in the least.

But perhaps if D'Arcy had been there Mr. Ropster would have limped.

He did not go far. Fifty yards from the gate he turned back, and in less than half a minute was at the window through which Baggy had peered.

Baggy was no longer in the room!

It had occurred to him that the examination of the larder would be better done at once. The preserved ginger could wait. To be busy with that when his host came back would look better.

There was a curious grin on the face of Mr. Ropster as he looked in. It was almost, if not quite, a boyish grin.

In the larder Baggy's eyes goggled and his mouth watered.

He made up his mind at once that he and the queer little old man were going to be the best of pals.

"My aunt! He doesn't half live!" muttered Baggy.

The larder was admirably stocked. Baggy, given carte blanche in ordering, could hardly have done better himself. Of course, for immediate consumption there might have been more fare of the perishable sort. But there was a dish of tarts, besides tin after tin of sardines and salmon, a big uncured ham, tins of pineapple chunks and pears and peaches, and various other delicacies.

That the ham had not been cut into seemed to Baggy a great pity. He had a knife in his pocket, and would not have scrupled to hack away a pound or so. But as things were he could not well do that.

He slipped a tin of sardines into one pocket, and a tin of salmon into another. He crammed a tart into his mouth, and his podgy and unclean hand was outstretched for another, when a voice behind him made him turn suddenly, his face a picture of conscious guilt.

"So you are a thief, Twimble!" said Mr. Ropster.

"I— Oh, you know, you said you were going to the post-office!" spluttered Baggy, trembling at the knees.

"You are a thief, Twimble! I am fond of boys, but I cannot tolerate thieves! You may consider my overtures of friendship as definitely withdrawn."

Twimble's courage revived. After all, he had nothing to fear.

"All right! I don't want to be friendly with you," he said haughtily. "I hate deceitful people, and you can't say you weren't deceitful when you told me you were going to the post-office and then slunk back to spy on me!"

He moved towards the front door.

"Stop!"

Mr. Ropster's tone was so authoritative that Baggy stopped at once.

"You are not going yet. Before you go you will have to be punished!" said Mr. Ropster warmly.

Baggy was no hero. But he could bluff on occasion, and he bluffed then.

Mr. Ropster was a little man, not much taller than Baggy, and much lighter.

Baggy put on his most truculent look.

"Likely I'll let you punish me! I don't think!" he sneered. "Just you stand out of the way, you old fraud, or I'll walk over you!"

"Do you prefer to be punished by me or by your head-master?"

If Arthur Augustus had heard Mr. Ropster ask that he would have begun to wonder whether the little old gentleman was really a lunatic, after all, for his tone was firm and grim. So firm and grim was it that it quite overawed Baggy.

"I— Oh, look here. You don't want to make a silly fuss about nothing at all," said Baggy. "It would be sneaking if you reported me to the Head, you know."

"Then you must take your punishment. Bend over that chair!"

Baggy's courage oozed out of his boots. He bent over the chair meekly, finding some slight hope in the reflection that it was unlikely the little old gentleman had anything but a walking-stick to use upon him.

But a most workmanlike cane descended upon the tightened trousers of Baggy—a cane wielded by a hand that knew how to make the most of its swish and draw.

"Ow! Yow! Yarocoooh! Stoppit!" roared Baggy.

"If you dare to stir yet it will be the worse for you!" said the man who wielded the cane.

Baggy remembered afterwards that he had not spoken in the same squeaky voice as had characterised him at first. But he gave no thought to it at the time.

Six strokes Baggy took, and yelled at each stroke. Then he was told that he might go.

He made no delay. He shook the dust of the Firs off his feet, so to speak. He had been grievously mistaken in the seemingly pally little old gentleman, and he felt quite



Now was Levison's chance. He shot forward. He was more than ten yards away before the Grammarians realised what he was doing. And that start meant everything to him. "After him!" roared Gordon Gay. "Stop the cheeky rotter!" (See page 12.)

said. The thought of that beautiful mount made him feel even sadder.

Before classes that afternoon Arthur Augustus looked in at Study No. 9.

"Cardew," he said, "there's a queer old bird at the Pirs who pretends to be a friend of yours."

"Old Ropster, you mean, Gussy. Yes, I knew him very well. He might consider me a friend, I dare say. I don't repudiate the claim."

"I considah him, Cardew, a lunatic, or something vewy little bettah."

"Do you, Gussy? Sorry to hear that. What's he done to you?"

But that Arthur Augustus would not tell. He went off in high dudgeon.

Cardew chuckled.

"Who's Ropster?" asked Levison. "I've never heard you speak of him, Cardew."

"Never mind, Ernest. You'll be sure to hear more about him before long. He's no end interesting; is Ropster. Not a lunatic, of course. I don't number lunatics among my pals—present company always excepted. But eccentric—yes, I think you might say old Ropster is eccentric. Better go and look him up. He's keen on boys. He can even stand me."

"Thank you for nothing. I'm not jolly well going to look him up," replied Levison. "Are you, Clive?"

"I think not, Ernest."

"On the whole," murmured Cardew to himself, "perhaps it's just as well the dear boys should stay away."

#### CHAPTER 4.

#### Gordon Gay & Co. Find Out!

"YOU'RE a silly ass, Cardew!"

"Think so, Ernest?"

"I don't think, I know it."

"But why am I a silly ass, old top?"

"Because you were born so, I suppose," said Clive.

"Well, this surprises me, Sidney. I expected some support from you."

"Well, you jolly well won't get it!"

Clive and Levison could not make Cardew out a bit. For the last few days he had hardly been seen in No. 9 until tea-time, and sometimes he was late for tea.

He seemed to be spending all his spare time out of gates. Little Side knew him not, nor did the luxurious couch on which he was wont to lie when a slacking mood overcame him.

That he was very busy about something his chums were sure, and his silence made them uneasy.

It must surely be something even wilder than usual. Cardew could be secretive when he chose. But he seldom chose. His usual habit was to confess his worst misdeeds with something like cynicism.

"Why do you consider me a silly ass, Levison?" he asked, quietly now.

"What about that mad bet with Racke? I told you that a fool and his money were soon parted. I didn't like your chances, either. It's a bit rough on Tom Merry, who is a dashed good sort, that you should try to swizzle him into apologising to you. But—"

"If you don't like the notion of that you ought to be resigned to my losing the fifty," broke in Cardew.

"Losing fifty pounds to a cad like Racke? And won't he and Crooke just chortle! I call that letting the study down."

Cardew yawned.

"What's a mere fifty pounds, compared with the tender feeling of the dear Thomas?" he said. "You ought to be pleased to think that Thomas is to be spared, Levison."

Levison looked at him very keenly. There was a glint in the eyes of Ralph Reckness Cardew that he knew of old.

"You spoofer!" he said. "You're preparing something. I'm sure of that now. But what do you want to keep us out of it for?"

"You wouldn't want to aid in a scheme to take Thomas down, would you, Ernest?"

"Well, it won't really hurt him. He'll get over it, anyway. And I don't want to see you part with that fifty to Racke. What is it, Cardew?"

"As a certain peer of the realm—to wit, Lord Oxford, alias Mr. Asquith—has remarked, 'wait an' see.'"

"You mean you don't want us in it?" said Clive.

"I commend your perspicacity. I do not require either of you. I am not sure that you could be trusted to play up. You have too many conscientious scruples. I would not see you lose them. Therefore an' accordingly—"

"Right-ho! Go your own way, then," said Clive shortly.

"I always do, dear man," replied Cardew softly.

And that was near enough to being wholly true. Very seldom indeed did it happen that Ralph Reckness Cardew did not go his own way, for good or for evil.

He went, and from the study window Levison and Clive saw him run his bike out of the shed.

"Come along, Clive!" said Levison.

"Where to?"

The day was a half-holiday, and consequently there was no footer between classes and dinner.

"After Cardew."

"No jolly fear!" replied Clive. "He says he doesn't want us, and I'm hanged if I'll go after him."

"Oh, come along, old sport! We ought to know what silly ass game he's up to, and it will be rather a score if we find out without being told."

"Do as you like. I'm not going, old fellow," said Clive. Levison knew that tone of decision. Further attempts at persuasion would be useless. He went out alone.

He was just in time to see Cardew disappear down Rylcombe Lane.

"Now, I wonder whether that queer old bird at the Firs has anything to do with Ralph's scheme to take down Tom Merry's number?" Levison said to himself.

Cardew had not told either of his chums about the letter from Mr. Ropster, or his negotiations with Mr. Pepper for the house that Mr. Ropster wanted.

By the time Levison reached the village he had lost sight of his chum. As is the fashion with all the Sussex roads, the turns in Rylcombe Lane were many. He passed the Firs, and saw at an upper window a face that must surely have been Mr. Ropster's.

But he saw nothing of his chum.

He went on slowly.

He rounded a bend, and rode right into trouble.

"Hands up!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, leader of the Grammar School juniors.

The command was hardly meant literally, of course. A cyclist may ride with his hands off the bar, but he can hardly elevate them above his head without risking a nasty cropper.

What Gay meant was that Levison must surrender.

Gordon Gay had the usual crowd with him—Frank Monk, the Wootton brothers, Carboy, Gustave le Blanc, and two or three more.

They were on foot. But for the moment that fact gave Levison no advantage, for he had ridden right into their midst.

He knew what to expect—or, at least, knew that it was bound to be something unpleasant.

War between Rylcombe Grammar School and the juniors of the bigger neighbouring school went on ceaselessly. There were intervals of truce, but never peace.

In this war there was no malice. At heart Gordon Gay and his crowd and all the decent fellows of St. Jim's were the best of friends. But they were enemies nevertheless.

Now, Levison, Cardew, and Clive had lately incurred the special wrath of the Grammarians by a big spoof. It was real jam for Gordon Gay & Co. to catch one of the redoubtable trio alone.

Carboy snatched at the handlebar of the bike, and Levison came off in a hurry, grazing a shin on one of the pedals.

"You ass!" he snapped. "What did you do that for?"

"That's nothing," said Carboy. "We haven't begun yet, have we, you fellows?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 226.

The Woottons had seized Levison's arms. He glanced round; but there was no one in sight except his captors and himself. They were beyond the village, and the chance of rescue by any St. Jim's fellows was slight.

"Take his jacket off, you two!" commanded Monk.

The Woottons had to release Levison's arms to get off his jacket. He had no chance to bolt. They were all round him. But he got a chance to use his fists, and Carboy staggered back with his hand to his nose, and Jack Wootton took a blow under the chin that made him bite his tongue.

"Wow!"

"Yarrah!"

"Oh, the rotter!" howled Carboy, dabbing his nose with his handkerchief.

"Make me bite my tongue, would you?" hooted Wootton minor. "I'll teach you to do that, you St. Jim's sweep!"

"He hardly seems to need teaching!" remarked Frank Monk dryly.

"What do you expect?" said Levison. "Think I'm going to take all you give me, and say, 'Thank you, kind gentlemen, I suppose? But that's where you're off it!'"

"We don't want to be hard on you," Gordon Gay told him.

"We are seven—no, nine. You are but one. Go down on your knees and ask pardon for the trick you played on us the other day, and we'll let you off scot-free!"

"In ze mud—not on ze clean grass," said Le Blanc.

"And three times—once for yourself, once for that rotter, Cardew, and once for Clive!" added Harry Wootton.

"Likely, isn't it?" snorted Levison. "I think I can see myself doing it! When a Grammarian sweep is caught all alone he'll do any blessed thing to wriggle out of punishment—we know that. But that's not the St. Jim's way. Do your worst, you measly bouncers!"

The charge Levison had levelled was untrue, and he knew it. The insult was flagrant. They were sure to do their worst after it.

But he had the consolation of knowing that they would have done their worst, in any case.

They started in at once. His jacket was turned inside out, and put upon him again with the back to the front.

Le Blanc brought a juicy handful of mud from the ditch, and they rubbed it over Levison's face.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the Grammarians.

"Is that the way you like it done, Levison?"

"Gug-gug!" spluttered Levison, as some of the mud found its way between his lips.

"Looks really pretty now, doesn't he?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They forced Levison to remount his bike. While two of them held him up, and two more kept his hands behind him, others tied his legs in such a fashion, by their reckoning, as would just allow him to pedal gently. There was no fear of his falling over, for he would be in their midst. Besides, they really did not mind very much if he did fall.

"Let his hands go!" commanded Gordon Gay. "Now then, you St. Jim's insect, proceed!"

There was nothing for Levison to do but to obey.

But he had not proceeded more than twenty yards before a wild hope came to him.

The stout string which bound his legs was giving. Another few yards, and he would be able to make a dash for liberty!

Carboy marched ahead of him. Levison did not want anyone ahead.

He suddenly quickened up a little, and his front wheel caught Carboy hard in the rear.

"You fatheaded idiot!" yelled Carboy, as he sprawled in the muddy road.

Carboy had been the principal victim of the trick played by the three. He was very anxious indeed to get his own back. Thus far, however, he had not got very far on the way to doing that.

Levison did not fall. Monk on one side, Gay on the other, upheld him—less for his sake than for their own. Had he fallen, they might have done likewise.

Carboy scrambled up, and the other two left their hold of Levison.

Now was his chance!

He shot forward. He was ten yards away before they realised what he was doing. And that start meant everything to him.

No, not quite everything! He was hampered by the string around his legs. He could not dismount, and in a minute or two he would be in Rylcombe High Street, his jacket inside out, his face plastered with mud, an object of derision for the small fry of the village.

Then he saw a blessed sight. The gate of the Firs was open, the front door of the Firs was open also, and at the front door stood a little old gentleman in a black bowler-hat and grey gloves—with other garments, of course—who could surely be none other than Mr. Ropster!

Mr. Ropster was a friend of Cardew's, and Cardew was



Bundling his fat and unwieldy carcass through the window, Baggie Trimble fell right on top of a man. "Wow!" howled the fat junior. In an instant a big rough hand grasped his throat, and a big rough voice exclaimed: "Oo're you?" (See page 20.)

Levison's pal. Cardew might be within the Firs at that moment. Surely here was a harbour of refuge!

"Look out!" yelled Levison. "I'm coming in!"

The Grammarians were chasing him, like a pack of hounds behind a fox. But he gained on them with every yard. And little Mr. Ropster understood at once, which was surprising, and scuttled out of the way with alacrity that was even more surprising.

Deftly Levison swerved in at the narrow gateway, pedalled up the path, and bumped over the threshold of the Firs.

After him through the gateway darted the Grammarians. But the door was slammed in their faces.

Levison was safe!

He blundered against a hat-stand, and his machine slipped on the linoleum, bringing him down. There he lay, untying the knot in the cord around his legs, while his preserver ran upstairs in the most agile way.

Levison looked round for Cardew. But Cardew did not seem to be there.

Outside the Grammarians clamoured.

"Silly old ass! What bizney is it of his?" hooted Carboy.

The door was a stout one, and Mr. Ropster had locked it. To make it additionally secure, Levison shot the bolts.

The blood of the Grammarians was up, and if they could get inside to fetch him out they would do so. They would not lay a hand on Mr. Ropster, of course; but they were not likely to shy at trespass on that gentleman's premises.

Levison ran to the nearest window.

They were trying to get in there.

He snatched up a chair, with the notion of beating at their knuckles if they raised the rash.

But even as he did so a deluge of water descended upon Gordon Gay & Co., and a shrill, squeaky voice cried:

"Plenty more where that came from, my lads!"

Levison remembered that Arthur Augustus had thought Mr. Ropster a lunatic, and that Cardew had admitted that he was a trifle eccentric.

And Levison wondered whether possibly Arthur Augustus was not nearer the truth than Cardew.

It is not quite usual for an elderly gentleman to take part

with gusto in such a game as this. Levison was grateful, but at the same time a trifle uneasy.

Where could Cardew be?

Suddenly the Grammarians disappeared.

But they had not beaten a retreat. They were merely trying the back way.

Too late Levison thought of that. Too late he rushed to bar them out.

They poured in, Gordon Gay at their head.

"Stop it!" cried Levison. "You'll get into frightful trouble, you silly asses."

"Where's that old bounder who emptied the jug on us?" hooted Frank Monk. "Where is he?"

"You idiots! Can't you see—"

"Can't see him, and it's him we want!" yelled Gordon Gay. "He took a hand in the game, and he can't make much of a fuss if we don't drop it the moment it suits him."

And Gordon Gay and Frank Monk rushed up the staircase, while the rest surrounded Levison.

"Oh, you are a crowd of fatheads!" stormed Levison. "A joke's a joke; but this is going beyond everything!"

Mr. Ropster stood at the head of the staircase. He had another ewer of water in his right hand, and a bolster lay handy.

Swish!

Gordon Gay and Frank Monk received the contents of the ewer.

But they were already so wet that it mattered little to them.

They pressed on up the stairs. Mr. Ropster caught up the bolster and smote mightily with it—smote as though bolster-fighting were an amusement practised daily by him.

So mighty a swipe he gave that the heads of Gordon Gay and Frank Monk came together with a resounding thwack.

Those heroes staggered; but they held on.

Next moment little Mr. Ropster went down under their charge. His wig came off; his face was queerly streaked.

And Gordon Gay and Frank Monk saw that little Mr. Ropster was—Ralph Reckness Cardew!

(Continued on page 16.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 926.

# THE St. Jim's News

**ROUND the BONFIRE!**  
A Column of Cheery Guy Fawkes' Gossip.  
BY JACK BLAKE.

## EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

**TRAGEDIES of "THE FIFTH!"**  
By Monty Lowther.

**B**ANG! Boom! Crackety-crack!  
Another Guy Fawkes Day has come round, and the St. Jim's celebrations look like putting all previous efforts in the shade.  
This is our programme for the evening of the Fifth:

6 p.m.—General muster in the quad. Torch-bearers will line up at the foot of the School House steps, under the direction of Tom Merry.

6.15 p.m.—Parade of guys in the quad. Mr. Ratliff is awarding special prizes for the three guys which he considers most ingenious. (Needless to state, Ratty's effigy of Mr. Ratliff will NOT be in the first three!)

6.30 p.m.—March in force to the football ground, the torchbearers leading the way. The whole school will chant in chorus:

"Remember, remember,  
The Fifth of November," etc.

6.45 p.m.—The Head has generously consented to fire the first rocket. He will also apply a lighted torch to the bonfire.

6.55 p.m. to 8 p.m.—Those who possess fireworks will be busy getting rid of their stocks! Bangs, booms, explosions, and detonations will re-echo for miles around.

8 p.m. to "any old time."—Dancing round the bonfire.

The undermentioned persons are hereby advised not to take part in the Guy Fawkes' festivities:

**GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY**—because he might be mistaken for a guy and thrown to the flames.

**ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY**—because his "clobber" will be "utterly ruined, bai Jove!"

**GERALD KNOX**—because a number of heavily masked juniors might seize the opportunity to pay off some old scores against the bully of the Sixth!

**WILLIAM GUNN**—because if you put a "Gunn" near a bonfire it's quite likely to explode!

**GERALD CUTTS**—because there will be quite enough "gay sparks" present without Cutts!

THE rumour that Mr. Ratliff intends to dress up as a clown and dance round the bonfire with the fags of the Third has been denied in official quarters. It is far more probable that Mr. Ratliff will spend Bonfire Night in his study, sulking like Achilles in his tent.

Supplement 1.  
THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 926.

**L**ITTLE did Guy Fawkes dream, when he smuggled his barrels of gunpowder into the vaults under the House of Lords with the intention of blowing that dignified establishment sky-high, that his name would go down to posterity.

Fortunately for King James and his Ministers, the plot failed—or, as we should say in modern parlance, the wheeze didn't work. There was a traitor amongst the plotters, and he put the Government wise as to Guy's sinister intentions. Guy was caught red-handed in the cellars, and a couple of months later he was sent to the scaffold.

If you were to ask D'Arcy minor to name his favourite hero in history, he would promptly say, "Guy Fawkes!" But, of course, Guy wasn't a hero. He was plucky, no doubt; for if he had succeeded in blowing up the Parliament, he would probably have been blown up himself. But there was no heroism about his action. It was treason, pure and simple. We are grateful to Guy for giving us "Guy Fawkes Day," but we cannot honestly take off our hats to him and hail him as a hero. He is not fit to be mentioned in the same breath as Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, and other genuine heroes of history.

November the Fifth is a day of fire, flame, and fury. Beacon-fires are still lighted on some of the lofty Sussex Downs, and the skies are ablaze with every sort of illumination. The guy-makers are busy for days beforehand, and there is scarcely a fellow in the land who doesn't invest in a bundle of fireworks to loose off at his pleasure.

Bonfire Night is essentially a boys' festival. You can't imagine the staid and dignified Head of St. Jim's dancing around the bonfire, and even the most fanciful fellow would find it difficult to picture Mr. Ratliff letting off jumping-crackers in the quad. I dare say the Head played an active part in the Guy Fawkes' celebrations when he was young; but Mr. Ratliff couldn't have done, for Higgins declares that Ratty had never been a boy himself. If he had his own way, the unpopular Housemaster would abolish Bonfire Night at St. Jim's; but, fortunately for us, Ratty's powers are limited.

I am writing this Editorial in advance of Guy Fawkes Day, and all around me the fellows are busy making their guys. Bernard Glyn is a positive genius at this game, and those who need advice and assistance find him a ready helper. Glyn is making an extra-special guy of his own, of course, but we have no idea whom it is going to represent. Glyn is keeping it a deep, dark secret, and he works on it in the woodshed of an evening by the light of a couple of bike-lanterns. There will be a shock for some majestic personage on the night of "The Fifth," when he sees a lifelike effigy of himself being fed to the flames!

Tom Merry

**I** FIRED a rocket in the air,  
It fell to earth, I knew not where,  
Till Ratty yelled with pain and dread—  
The stick had landed on his head!

I hurled a lighted jumping-cracker  
At Blake, to wake him up, the snacker!  
Alas! the merry cracker missed;  
It danced, red-hot, on Knox's wrist!

I went to light a Roman Candle,  
The sequel was a perfect scandal.  
The "Roman Candle" was a rocket—  
It flew! I grasped the empty socket!

Another rocket I ignited,  
And watched it splutter, quite excited.  
The sequel, though, was hardly proper—  
The thing went clean through Gussy's topper!

I went to light a "Golden Rain"  
(I'll never touch the things again!)  
A flash! A roar! I sprang six paces—  
My hand was burnt in umpteen places!

I'd bought some squibs, at Glyn's suggestion,  
Where had I put them? was the question.  
I very quickly found the packet—  
They'd taken fire inside my jacket!

Around the bonfire's flaming pyre  
To dance and prance was my desire.  
A flying ember struck my brow—  
I've lost a pair of eyebrows now!

I made an effigy of Knox,  
And then received the worst of shocks.  
Kildare chastised me for my trouble—  
He took the guy to be his double!

When the festivities were ended,  
My weary way to bed I wended.  
I must have looked a fearful fright  
On that eventful Bonfire Night!

With blackened face, and hair all scattered,  
And jacket torn, and trousers tattered,  
And eyebrows gone beyond recall,  
I looked the biggest "guy" of all!



# BAGGY'S BLUNDER!

A Guy Fawkes' Day Tragedy  
BY RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW.

"FIREWORKS!" granted Baggy Trimble. And he turned up his snub little nose contemptuously.

Baggy had no use for fireworks. Boastful, noisy things that left an awful reek of powder behind them after they exploded. But Baggy's chief objection to fireworks was that they were not edible.

It was the morning of "The Fifth"—a damp, drizzly morning, at St. Jim's—and a large cardboard box had arrived by rail for Baggy Trimble. It was labelled "FIREWORKS—WITH CARE," and when it was delivered by the railway company's carriers it was in a soaking condition.

Baggy was always keen on receiving presents; but a box of soaking fireworks is a pretty poor sort of present. The fat junior stared at the cardboard box in deep disgust.

"Fireworks!" he growled. "Ruined by the rain, too! They're not a scrap of use to me. Aunt Jemima ought to have known better."

It was Aunt Jemima's handwriting which appeared on the box. The writing was only just legible, the rain having done its best to erase it.

"What are you looking so sick about, Baggy?" inquired Piggott of the Third, joining Baggy in the hall.

Baggy gave a snort.

"Look what my Aunt Jemima has just sent me! A box of beastly fireworks. They're soaking wet, too—no use to anybody."

"Don't you want them?" asked Piggott eagerly.

"No!"

"Hand 'em over, then. I'll take 'em out and dry them. I don't suppose they're all duds. Those in the middle ought to have dodged the rain."

Baggy gave a further snort, and handed over the box to Piggott. It was not often that Trimble gave anything away. He never did so, in fact, unless the gift was quite valueless. And Baggy considered that a box of damp fireworks was of no use to anybody.

"You're welcome to the beastly things!" he told Piggott.

"Thanks awfully!"

Piggott trotted away with his capture. He had high hopes of getting the fireworks dried by the evening, when he would explode them on the football ground, where the Guy Fawkes celebrations were to be held.

Baggy Trimble rolled disconsolately away.

Piggott came into Baggy's study an hour later, looking very merry and bright. There were smears of jam on his cheeks, and also a number of cake-crumbs. You could always tell when

Piggott had been feeding. His face was a sort of advertising agent.

"What do you want?" growled Baggy.

Piggott produced a letter, which he handed to the fat junior.

"You know that box you kindly gave me an hour ago?" said the sag. "I found this note inside it."

Piggott moved to the door.

"Tell your Aunt Jemima when you write that she's got a jolly good taste in tuck!" he added. And then he promptly bolted.

Baggy Trimble stood blinking at the note in utter dismay. It ran as follows:

"My Dear Bagley,—I am enclosing some wholesome and delicious foodstuffs for your consumption. You have worried me so often to send you some 'tuck,' as you call it, that I am at last doing so. Please excuse the box. It formerly contained fireworks, and was the only box I could find to pack the delicacies in."

"Your affectionate  
AUNT JEMIMA."

Baggy Trimble's face when he perceived that letter was a study. The mischievous fluttered from his hand, and he uttered a yell which rang down the Fourth Form passage.

"My hat! That box contained grub all the time—not fireworks! Grub! And that young villain Piggott—"

Baggy fairly bounded out of the study and rushed off to the Third Form quarters, in the hope of recovering some of the spoils. But it was a forlorn hope. Reuben Piggott, aided by his pals, had "polished off" the wholesome and delicious foodstuffs which Aunt Jemima had so thoughtfully sent. And Baggy Trimble shared the sad fate of Mother Hubbard's dog in the nursery rhyme!



# SHOULD GUY FAWKES DAY be ABOLISHED?

Some of our contributors, "flare up" at the "burning" question.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY (in an interview):

"Yaas, deah boy, I considah, on the whole, that Guy Fawkes Day ought to be abolished. Please don't wogard me as a cwank or a killjoy. I'm as fond of pleasuah as the next fellow."

"What is my objection to Guy Fawkes Day? Well, it simply wuins a fellow's togs, bai Jovel! Last yeah a bundle of fireworks exploded in my pocket, an' my jacket—which I haw-wiedly peeted off, of course—was weduced to a smoulewin' wag. My twousahs were also wuined, one of those beastly jumpin'-cwackahs havin' scorched a hole wight through them!"

"It has been suggested that I ought to weah old an' shabby clothes for the occasion, an' not dance wound the bou-fah in my Sunday best. But I wefuse to wear shabby clothes, no matrah what the occasion may be. Why should I go about lookin' like a twamp?"

"The soonah they abolish Guy Fawkes Day the bettah it will be for my peace of mind—an' my wardrobe!"

BAGGY TRIMBLE:

Guy Fox Day duzent want abolish-

ing, eggssactly. It wants altering. It is kept up in the wrong way. It should be sallybrated with feeds instead of fireworks—with bankwotts instead of bonfires. On the night of the Fifth there ought to be a School Supper, consisting of about fifteen courses. And the memory of Guy Fox could be kept greer by serving special dishes with appropriate names, such as "Parliament Pudding," "Treason Tart," and "Plotters' Pie." I hope the Head will seriously consider this suggestion of mine. I always feel ravenously hungry on the night of the Fifth!

MR. HORACE RATCLIFF:

Most certainly Guy Fawkes Day should be abolished! Scenes of the wildest horseplay and hooliganism are enacted on Bonfire Night, and the school is turned into a bear-garden. Moreover, a number of impertinent juniors are in the habit of disguising themselves with masks, and shouting insulting epithets at me, knowing that I shall not discover their identities! I have appealed to Dr. Holmes on numerous occasions to abolish the rowdy Guy Fawkes celebrations, but he refuses to

do so. Later on, when I become headmaster, one of my first actions will be to forbid fireworks, bonfires, torchlight processions, and the many other undesirable things associated with Guy Fawkes Day.

D'ARCY MINOR:

Abolish Guy Forks Day, indeed! I'd like to see any tirant try it on! We'd duck him in the school fountain, or put him in the pillory, or shove him in a pair of stox, like they used to do to our four-fathers. No Guy Forks sally-brations? No fireworks? No ripping bonfires? Why, the fags of St. Jim's wouldn't stand for it! Anybody who tried to tamper with our priviledges would get it in the neck, good and proper!

EPHRAIM TAGGLES:

"Wot I says is this 'ere—that there Guy Fox was a rascal an' a rapscallion, as ever was! 'E ought to 'ave been drowned at birth, an' then there wouldn't 'ave been none of these hawful goings hon! Last Bonfire Night at St. Jim's was a puffick nightmare to me. The young rips started lettin' off their fireworks under me vory nose, an' it's a mery I didn't catch alight, an' 'ave to 'ave the 'osepipe turned on me! This year, when the Guy Fox celebrations begins, I shall lock myself in the parlour, while all the bungin' an' flashin' is goin' hon houtside. You won't catch Ephraim Taggles 'opping round the bonfire on 'is gouty leg! I shall stay hindoors, where I'm safe!"

Supplement II.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 926.



"My hat!" gasped Gay. "You, Car—" "Shush! Be a sport, Gay, do! I don't want Levison to know. This is a big spoof I'm puttin' across St. Jim's." Gordon Gay and Frank Monk looked at one another across his prostrate form.

"He deserves to be scragged. But I think we might let him off and keep his secret, Frank, eh?" said Gordon Gay. "Oh, rather! You'll tell us afterwards, won't you, Cardew?"

"I promise. I may even ask you to take a hand. Now let me get up and put myself straight before Levison sees me."

Levison had heard nothing of this colloquy. Levison was being kept busy. It had occurred to some of the Grammarians that perhaps the mud ought to be washed off his face, and they had taken him to the kitchen sink.

There they were dealing with him—not too gently. But Levison was glad to get the mud off, though he would have preferred it done otherwise than with Sunlight soap, and otherwise than by the ministrations of Carboy, Jack Wootton, and Gustave le Blanc.

Frank Monk came downstairs. "The old gentleman will make it pax, on condition that we let Levison go," he said. "I think we'd better. No use getting ourselves reported, is it?"

All agreed to that. Levison was suffered to put his jacket on right side foremost. He looked at himself in the glass over the sink—a small and poor mirror, but capable of showing him a very rasped face still slightly streaked with mud. But he did not ask his cleansers to finish their job.

As he picked up his bike in the hall Mr. Ropster came downstairs. He still wore his grey gloves. When a very young person makes up as an old one nothing else is quite so likely to give him away as his hands. Cardew knew that.

"I say, sir, I'm awfully obliged to you!" said Levison. "You're a real sport!"

"Don't mention it," replied the high, squeaky voice. "Come again, when these ruda little boys are not here. For the present, 'fare thee well, and if for ever—'"

Levison had turned to go. He thought it better not to answer the invitation, which he had no mind to accept. Mr. Ropster might not be actually mad, but he seemed very near being so.

The moment Levison's back was turned little Mr. Ropster broke off his quotation, and kicked hard and accurately. Levison turned with a flaming face.

"Yaroooh!" he howled. Then he saw that it was no Grammarian who had administered that parting kick, but Mr. Ropster. The Grammarians were grinning, but there was astonishment on all their faces—even on the faces of Gordon Gay and Frank Monk.

Cardew seemed to be carrying his spoof pretty far! Levison went without another word. What was the use of arguing with a lunatic?

He rode slowly, thinking hard; and just before he reached the gates of St. Jim's Cardew, now in school attire and riding fast, caught him up.

"Hallo, Ernest! Been for a ride?" inquired Cardew genially. "Where's Sydney?"

"I've seen your friend Ropster, and he's a worse lunatic than Gussy makes him out! Have you seen him to-day?"

"No," answered Cardew, quite truthfully. "I haven't seen Mr. Ropster to-day, Ernest. But I really don't think he's mad. A trifle decentric, maybe, but not mad—certainly not mad!"

## CHAPTER 5.

### Baggy on the Track!

"YOU think I'm a fool," said Baggy Trimble. "I don't think, I know you are—a fathended fool!" replied Baggy's study-mate, Percy Mellish. "Why, you beast— But you'll be sorry when you know what you've missed—that's all."

"What am I going to miss, anyway?"

"That's telling," said Baggy, with a crafty smile.

Clive stuck his head in at the door.

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"Seen anything of Cardew?" he asked.

"No. Haven't been out," said Mellish sourly.

"He said he might be looking in here."

"What should he look in here for?" returned Mellish.

Mellish heartily disliked Clive, and Clive had no use whatever for Mellish.

"That's what I wondered," said Clive simply. "Oh, well, as he isn't here, it's no odds."

And Clive's head disappeared.

"There you are!" said Baggy triumphantly.

"Where?"

"Don't you see? Cardew's own chums don't know where to find him! He clears out after classes, morning and afternoon, and he pops in just in time for dinner, and sometimes only just before lock-up. And—I know—where—he—goes! He, he, he!"

"What about it?"

Mellish might pretend indifference. But Baggy knew him too well to be taken in.

A secret always appealed to the sneak of the Fourth. It appealed to him even apart from any possible profit that might be made of it, though he was not above blackmail.

"He goes to see that old boulder at the Firs—the nasty old beast that camed me just because I took a squirt into his larder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle about in that, Mellish," said Trimble peevishly.

"But I do," chuckled Mellish. "I can picture you bending over the chair and that little old chap laying into you."

"Never mind—I'll pay him out! There'll be a row if it gets known that he's having Cardew there to gamble and drink!"

"Is he?"

"What else do you suppose Cardew goes for?" demanded the fat junior.

"Dunno, I'm sure. But if it does come out, Baggy, it will be a heap bigger row for Cardew than for old Ropster, if that's his name."

"I don't mind that. Do you?"

"Can't say I do. Cardew's no pal of mine."

"Come along with me this afternoon, and let's see if we can't catch them at it!" said Baggy eagerly.

"And if we do? Are you going to the Head or Railton about it? Or to Kildare, or Tom Merry? You aren't very popular now, Baggy; but you'll be a jolly sight less popular if you get sneaking!"

"I might tell Tom Merry, if I thought I would. It's his duty to stop it. He's junior captain. I shouldn't go to Kildare or Railton or the Head—I should let Tom Merry do that. But I wasn't so much thinking about splitting on him."

"What, then?"

"Oh, you know, Mellish! If Cardew's got money to gamble with that old hunk, he's got money to pay me—and you, if you come into it—to keep it dark, I suppose?"

"That's an idea, Baggy," said Mellish, much more genially. "I will say for you that you aren't half the fool you look."

"Well, come along with me this afternoon."

"Sorry—I can't. I'm booked for detention. Bother old Lathom! Tell you what, though, Baggy, you go, and come back and tell me anything you find out. Then we'll put our heads together over it."

"If I'm to do all the work—"

"Not all of it. If there really is anything going on, what chance do you think you'd have of screwing a quid or two out of Cardew? But I might—I know the way to get at him better than you do."

"Right-ho, Mellish! I—I don't mind owning that I shouldn't be keen on putting it to Cardew. He's such a canny sort of boulder. You never know what he will do."

"Oh, I think I've got him sized up," said Mellish, with a self-satisfied sniff.

Other people had thought at times that they had Ralph Rockness Cardew sized up, but it had generally turned out that they were mistaken.

Baggy Trimble started out directly after dinner, with the blessing of Mellish on his enterprise, so to speak. Mellish went a little later to keep his appointment in the detention-room.

Baggy lurked in the vicinity of the Firs, fondly imagining that he was behaving like a real live detective.

When Cardew rode up and passed in at the gate Baggy did not dream that Cardew had spotted him.

Still less did he dream that he was doing exactly what Cardew wanted him to do.

Least of all did the fat Fourth-Former guess that Cardew actually wanted him to find out something and play the blackmailer!

Cardew's scheme was drawing to a head now, and he needed someone to play the informer's part. He was not quite ready to be given away, but he knew that he could stop Baggy's mouth till it suited his purpose to do otherwise.

The fat sleuth-hound was vastly surprised when he saw Cardew take out a latchkey and let himself into the house, instead of knocking or ringing.

But no suspicion of the truth had dawned upon Baggy as yet.

That was soon to come, however.

Cardew took his bike in with him.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered the fat junior.

He stole up to the lonely house and peeped in at all the windows on the ground floor, taking no end of care to avoid being spotted. As a matter of fact, however, Cardew, moving from one room to another, watched his peregrinations with a grim smile on his face.

Then there reached Baggy's ears the sound of whistling. Baggy had not a musical ear, but he recognised an air from "The Gondoliers," of which Cardew was fond.

The whistling came from a back room on the first floor. Its window was immediately above the kitchen window, and close by the kitchen window stood a huge water-butt, taller than Baggy.

Baggy looked at the window-ledge. He could scramble up on that, and from that he might be able to get to the top of the butt. It was worth trying, anyway.

He tried it. Cardew had ceased to whistle. He was now singing.

"I stole the prince, and I brought him here,

And left him gaily prattling

With a highly respectable gondolier,

Who promised the royal babe to rear,

And teach him the trade of a timoneer,

With his own beloved bratling.

Both of the babes were strong and stout;

Both of the babes were clever.

Of that there is no manner of doubt,

No possible, probable shadow of doubt,

No possible doubt whatever!"

The words rang in Baggy's ears as he scrambled up. Baggy was no gymnast. To almost any other fellow in the Fourth, what he was labouring to do would have been mere child's play. To Baggy it was a hard task.

But he thought of what it might mean, and he accomplished the task.

The water-butt had a lid. Very gingerly Baggy felt it, to make sure that it rested securely upon the top before he trusted his full weight upon it.

He decided that it was firm enough. Crouching upon it, he looked through the bed-room window and had a great shock.

Was it Mr. Ropster he saw, or was it Cardew?

Whoever it was wore the clothes of Mr. Ropster. But on the bed lay Cardew's Eton jacket and grey trousers.

The face seemed to Baggy the face of Mr. Ropster, for Cardew had just finished his make-up. He had practised that till he was able to make a really artistic job of it.

But the hair was unmistakably Cardew's.

Cardew lifted his hands.

The glass was not in front of the window, but a little to the side farthest from the water-butt. If Baggy had looked into it he would have seen the reflection of his own podgy, astonished face, appearing at Cardew's elbow, as it were.

But Baggy was watching Cardew put on the grey wig which transformed him into Mr. Ropster.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Baggy.

He knew now, or thought he knew, that there was no Mr. Ropster. It was Cardew, the beast, who had lured him into the house and then cased him for just peeping into the larder!

But the mystery was deeper than ever. What was Cardew after? He could not have come there to play cards and drink with a Mr. Ropster who did not exist.

What would Gussy say when he knew that it was Cardew who had booted him out of the house? Not that Baggy meant to tell D'Arcy—not yet, anyway.

This did not make any difference to his plan of blackmail, he decided. Cardew had a secret, and he would have to pay Baggy for keeping it.

Best to get back to Mellish now, and see if he could solve the puzzle.

But when Baggy tried to get off the lid of the butt he found it wobbling under him.

Then the sash of the window was thrown up, and the face that was and yet was not Cardew's appeared within a foot of his agonised visage.

"A tactical error, Baggybus!" said Cardew cheerily. "It's a mistake to try sneaking in at a window when there's someone in the room, y'know."

The lid of the butt wobbled more and more. Baggy clung desperately to the ledge.

He tried to pluck up spirit for a reply which should make it clear to Cardew that he was not in a position to chortle.

But the wobbling of the lid took all the spirit out of him. "I wasn't trying to get in," he said feebly. "I was only watching you."

"That lid's goin' to do things in a moment," said Cardew coolly. "If you don't want a bath, Baggy—an' I'm afraid it wouldn't be a very nice bath—you'd better climb down."

"Wow—wow—wow!" The lid was tipping. "Help me, Cardew! Yarooogh!"

Cardew could have helped. He had but to stretch out a hand.

He did not help. He smiled mockingly as Baggy began to howl, and laughed till he rocked when Baggy plunged down and dirty water splashed up from the butt.

It must have been quite a long time since that butt had been cleaned out. The water smelt abominably. Luckily the vessel was not full, for Baggy was immersed only up to the shoulders.

"Wow! Help me out, Cardew!" he roared. "Groooh! I'm stifling! I'm being poisoned! Help me out, and—and I promise I won't tell anyone that you are Mr. Ropster—I mean, that Mr. Ropster's you—I mean, that you're both the same person! Honest Injun, I won't!"

But Cardew shook his head gravely.

"I couldn't think of it, Baggy," he said. "I should get into a most confounded mess if I started in to help you. Have a shot at self-help, Baggy!"

"You rotter! Groooh!"

Baggy groaned. For the moment vengeance seemed sweeter even than cash to Baggy, and he made up his mind to give Cardew away directly he got back to St. Jim's.

He tried to scramble up the side of the butt, while Cardew watched him with critical eyes.

"You'll never do it that way, Baggy!" said Cardew. "Ah, that's better—much better!"

All Baggy's weight had come upon one side of the butt, causing it to lurch over somewhat.

Another frantic struggle, and it fell, discharging a deluge of foul water and Baggy.

"Yooop!" howled Trimble. "Rescue! Help! Fire! Wow!"

"I'll come down to you, Baggy," said Cardew. "But, how ever affectionate you may feel, don't try to embrace me, an' please keep to leeward!"

"Yooop! Yah! Oh, you rotter! I'll pay you out for this, Cardew!"

Cardew appeared round the corner of the house a moment later in black bowler and grey gloves. He did not seem at all alarmed by Baggy's threat.

But he would not come near the miserable fat junior.

"Stand away, Baggybus!" he commanded, waving his hand.

"Pouf! You are an offence to the nostrils. An' I really don't know what Mr. Pepper will say. Probably he'll expect my friend Ropster to pay for that butt, which you've damaged badly."

"There isn't any Ropster!" yelled Trimble. "You're him, and I'm going to tell everybody that you are!"

"Oh, no, you're not, Baggybus!"

"I am!" Then Baggy weakened. After all, a really first-class gorge was better than revenge. "That is, I shall unless you let me come indoors and get dry, and find some clothes for me while I'm cleaning myself, and make it worth my while to keep it dark!"

"Why this sudden urge to cleanliness, Baggybus? You have never thus far been suspected of carin' for it. No, my odoriferous porker, you can't come indoors, an' if you did you would find no clothes here to fit you. But if a quid—"

"Make it two!" broke in Baggy, almost forgetting his deplorable state in the thought of what all that money meant.

"Very well. I will make it two—one down, the other in three days' time, if you have kept your promise. An' now you'd better clear out. Mr. Ropster, though he is fond of boys, wouldn't like you about the place in that condition, I'm sure."

Cardew extracted a wallet, took a pound-note from it, and laid it on the ground, with a stone to prevent its blowing away. Then he backed some yards.

"Pick it up, Baggybus," he said.

Baggy snatched it up. Then he waddled off round the house to the gate, intent on getting back to St. Jim's as soon and as secretly as possible.

Cardew followed him.

Baggy came to a sudden pause, and then turned, as if to flee.

Cardew also checked. For there, looking over the gate at the dripping Baggy, stood Mr. Latham, their Form master!

Cardew might have retreated. Mr. Latham had no eye at the moment for anything but Baggy.

"Trimble!" he exclaimed, in a tone that made Baggy quail.

Cardew saw that it would not do for him to retreat. Baggy might give the whole game away if he did.

"Ye-es, sir," replied the unfortunate fat junior faintly.

"How came you in that disgraceful state?"

Mr. Lathom was a little man and not at all fierce. His form, on the whole, liked him very well, and considered themselves far better off than the Shell, under Mr. Linton, who could be very severe. But just now little Mr. Lathom seemed a very dreadful personage to the cowering Baggy.

Cardew came forward. Baggy caught his breath.

Would Cardew dare?

Cardew dared! He walked right up to Mr. Lathom, and spoke in the high, squeaky voice of Ropster.

"Excuse me, sir. It seems needful that I should introduce myself. My name is Ropster, and I have lately come to reside here."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lathom stiffly. "As perhaps you have gathered, I am a master at St. James', and this wretched boy is one of my pupils."

"Then I am happy to make your acquaintance. I take much interest in the school. My young friend here, visiting me for a second time, has met with a slight mishap."

For just a moment Mr. Lathom looked very keenly at Cardew.

Baggy did not know whether he feared or hoped that the Form master would see through the imposture. If he did Cardew was fairly in the cart, while Baggy, a ducking to the bad, was a "quid" to the good!

Then the master's gaze was turned upon Baggy, and it was plain that Cardew had not been detected. Mr. Lathom waited for further explanation.

And Cardew gave it glibly.

"In his desire to display to me his acrobatic prowess, Trimble got upon the top of a water-butt," he said. "The lid slipped, and he was immersed. I trust you will overlook a childish indiscretion, Mr. Lathom. For my part, I am never surprised at anything a boy does."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom in surprise.

Trimble and acrobatic prowess seemed to him as poles asunder. But the boy was yet, and Mr. Lathom's nose assured him that the water wherein he had been immersed might well have been that of a butt in a very neglected condition.

"I trust that you will not allow our boys to become a nuisance to you, sir," said the little master stiffly. "Come with me—or, rather, walk behind me, Trimble. Bless my soul!"

Mr. Lathom accorded no leave-taking to the supposed Mr. Ropster. He was not pleased with Mr. Ropster.

Cardew did not mind that. On the whole, he thought that he had come very well out of a sudden danger. There was, indeed, an increase of possible future danger, for if the story of his imposture became public he would have Mr. Lathom to reckon with. But he did not allow that to worry him.

Meantime, having changed into dry clothes, Baggy Trimble sought out Mellish. More acute than Trimble, Mellish saw the perilous possibility for Cardew, and gloated over what he deemed that wily junior's misfortune.

"I say, Baggy," he said at length, "we've fairly got Cardew on toast now! He'll have to shell out whenever we ask him, for if we let on there's old Lathom for him to face, and he won't half get it in the neck for his cheek!"

And Baggy Trimble, between mouthfuls of an iced cake, purchased on the strength of the quid he had "squeezed" from Cardew, chuckled.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Baggy Missing!

**D**URING the next few days Tom Merry heard from time to time queer rumours about a man in the village—or, rather just outside the village—named Ropster.

The man, it was said, was a friend of Cardew's, and Cardew, on being questioned, did not deny that he knew him.

"That's nothin', Thomas," he said. "Lots more of our fellows know him. I happen to have known him before the rest of them, that's all."

"I rather think too many of them know him," said Tom, with knitted brows. "Look here, Cardew, tell me straight—is he a wrong 'un?"

"My dear Thomas, I've known old Ropster practically all my life, an' I tell you on my honour that I've never heard a single word against his character."

Tom looked puzzled.

"I'm not going to question your word of honour, Cardew."

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he said quietly: "But I don't like this. And there's another thing I don't like—that bet of yours with Racke."

"So you've heard about that, old top?"

"Of course I've heard! You must have known I should hear. I tell you plainly, Cardew, it's going to take a jolly lot to make me apologise to you so that you can win that rotten bet, whatever reason there may be for an apology."

"You'd rather Racke took my fifty, I suppose?"

"Oh, don't be an idiot! I don't want Racke to win your money. He has too much already, as you have. I object to the bet on personal grounds, and, dash it all, it's rotten bad form, anyway!"

Cardew smiled in his best irritating fashion.

"Well, it's made, an' I can't get out of it," he said carelessly. "I suppose I shall have to pay. It's within your power to force me to it if it comes to the point. But to return to our muttons—what exactly have you heard against poor old Ropster?"

"Nothing very exactly—that's the point. They say he keeps open house for a crowd of our fellows, and feeds them liberally. And it's whispered that there's gambling going on at the Firs—drinking, too. Racke and Crooke and Clampe and that set have been along. Others, too, that I shouldn't have thought would have cared for such games."

"How told you all this, Merry?"

"I can't say anyone told me straight out. But the thing's in the air. Oh, and the Grammar School fellows are said to go there, too. I shouldn't have thought it of Gordon Gay and his crowd."

Cardew did not feel quite comfortable. It was true that Racke and Crooke, Serope and Clampe, had been to the Firs, and that there had been gambling and smoking, though there had been no drinking. The Grammar School crowd had been, well aware that Mr. Ropster was Cardew—Racke and the rest had not known that, of course, and had never even suspected it—and had partaken of a spread against the quality of which none of them had had any word of complaint to offer.

Others had been—Kerruish and Hammond and Reilly, but not Dick Julian, of whose acumen Cardew stood somewhat in awe, if Ralph Reckness Cardew ever stood in awe of anything. Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn had paid one visit, and had promised to come again. Gore was numbered among the callers. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence were also of the number.

But Arthur Augustus had not repeated his visit, and Blake and Herries and Digby were not among those with whom the bogus Mr. Ropster had scraped acquaintance. Nor were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. Nor were Talbot and the Terrible Three. Cardew had thought it safest to leave them outside. He had not roped in Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn, though he had hoped to do so.

He had wanted Kangaroo to be present when the last scene of his comedy was played. For Kangaroo was the referee in the matter of the bet; and all of this was leading up to the winning of that bet.

There were two reasons why Cardew did not feel comfortable.

One was the fact that Tom Merry had mentioned the bet while talking of Mr. Ropster—almost as though the matter and the man were somehow connected in his mind. If that were so he might smell a rat before the finish came, and the bet might be lost.

The other was one that did more credit to the better side of his nature.

He had not foreseen Tom Merry's getting worried like this beforehand. He had laid his plans for a sudden dramatic disclosure, counting Trimble and Mellish, his allies, as mere puppets whose strings he would pull when it seemed good to him so to do.

Tom Merry had his responsibilities as a junior captain of St. Jim's, and he bore them manfully. It was rough on Tom.

But it would soon be over, and, after all, no one would be able to chip Tom Merry much about it, Cardew reflected.

"The Grammarians aren't my concern of yours, anyway, old top," he said.

"No. Only—well, never mind that. Cardew, it hits me how this queer friend of yours has come to know so many fellows in so short a time. Have you introduced any of them to him?"

"Not a single, giddy, solitary one, Thomas. Not even my own pals."

That seemed a little strange to Tom. But he had not the remotest suspicion that Cardew was playing a deep game of his own.

They turned away towards their separate Form-rooms, for within a minute or so the bell would ring out for morning classes.

"I say, Ralph! I say, Tom!" cried Levison, rushing



At that moment the real Mr. Ropater walked in at the front door. "Here he is!" said Cardew quietly. "What? Who are you, sir?" asked Tom Merry in amazement. "My name is Ropater, and this, I understand, is the house which Mr. Ralph Cardew was so good as to hire for me," came the answer. (See page 22.)

up. "Have you heard the news? A burglar broke into the Head's house last night and got away with a bagful of plate. All the best stuff the Head had!"

"My word!"

"Didn't anybody chase him?"

"That's what's so rotten. We were left out of it all. But Railton and Kildare and Rushden and North went after him. They nearly ran him down; but he managed to get away from them in the fields by Rylcombe. Old Crump says he's going to nab him yet. But it's heavy odds against that old fossil ever catching a burglar."

"Some hope—I don't think!" said Cardew.

Then the bell gave its summons, and the juniors had to go in to classes. In every Form-room that morning, with the possible exception of the Sixth, there was more talking than usual, and masters waxed wroth, and impositions were handed out freely.

Among those who were booked for detention was Cardew. Quite half of the Fourth were booked. But Baggy Trimble was one of the exceptions.

Baggy saw his chance. He still yearned after the flesh-pots of Egypt—in other words, the good grub in the larder at the Firs. He and Mellish—the latter recognised now by Cardew as Baggy's partner in the blackmailing business—had had another pound from Cardew. That was all very well, but Baggy resented the fact that he was not invited to spreads as others were—fellows like Gore and Redfern and Kerruish, who had never done half as much for Cardew as he had.

So he saw his chance, and he took it. He did not tell Mellish where he was going. Mellish was kept in, anyway, and if he had been told he might have raised silly objections.

Baggy knew that there was to be quite a big party at the Firs that afternoon. Some of the Grammar School fellows were coming along, and Racke and Crooke were among those asked.

Cardew would have catered liberally for them, Baggy

was sure. It would be good business to get at the larder before they came.

This was, in fact, the day destined for the decision of the bet with Racke. To-day Tom Merry was to be forced into a position in which he must choose whether he would apologise to Cardew or refuse and let Racke take Cardew's fifty pounds.

And Baggy Trimble was cast for a part of which he knew nothing as yet. He was to do what he had threatened to do—tell Tom Merry, the junior captain of St. Jin's.

That was why he had been allowed to know about the party and that Racke and Crooke were among those coming to it. That was why he had been given hints that this was something more than a mere feed—that banker would be played and cigarettes smoked, and possibly strong drink offered to the guests.

When he was definitely refused admission and told that he would not get another bob out of Cardew—why, then, according to Cardew's plan, he was sure to sneak.

If he had any doubt about doing that, Mellish, who would share in the refusal and the cutting off of the black-mail cash, would back him up in it.

It was very inconvenient to Cardew to be kept in that morning. But he had to bear it with the rest.

As soon as he got away from detention he started to look for Baggy. He did this without ostentation. He asked no one whether he had seen Baggy. He merely wandered round to the fat junior's favourite haunts.

He did not find Baggy. Mellish also failed in a quest for that youth.

Even at dinner Baggy did not appear, and, of course, his absence was noted, and questions were asked about the missing junior. But no one could answer them. No one had even seen him go out of gates.

Baggy, who looked forward to having something like the time of his life at the Firs, was having something like the

time of his life, but in quite another way from that anticipated.

He had had no difficulty in getting in. Indeed, he found a window unlatched.

The difficulty came in getting out again.

Bundling his fat and unwieldy form in through the aperture, Baggy fell right on top of a man.

"Wow!" howled the fat junior.

In an instant a big, rough hand grasped his throat, and a big, rough voice, subdued to the occasion, demanded:

"Oo're you?"

Baggy was not quick in the uptake, but this time his mind did work swiftly. In a second he realised that this must be the burglar who had got away with the Head's plate, though why the fellow should be hiding at the First was more than he could guess.

"Nobody. At least, nobody much," burred Baggy, in fear for his life. "Groooh! Don't choke me!"

The rough hand had been relaxed enough to allow of his speaking. But now it closed again, and the burglar shook him viciously.

But he did not get up to do it. Still lying on the floor, he shook Baggy; and the fat junior was so terrified that he did not even wonder at this.

"Look 'ere, You're from the school, you are," said the man. "I'm in a 'ole. I did a little job there last night, an' I was chased—otly chased I was. Jest as I got near 'ere I ricked my ankle. I 'id in a ditch, an' they went past an' forst my trail. Then I crawled into the garden 'ere an' managed someways to git through the winder. An' 'ere I've bin lyin' ever since, for I 'urt my ankle wuss stumblin' in. An' now you fall in on me, an' I'm goin' to make you useful, young feller-me-lad."

"I—I'll do anything I can for you," mumbled Baggy. "But you might let go of my throat. You're hurting me. Groooh!"

"I know what I'm a-goin' to do with you at this moment," said the burglar. "I'm famishin'—that's what I am. An' if there's a bite of grub in this 'ouse—there don't seem to be no people in it—you're goin' to git it for me. After that—well, I dunno. I don't see 'ow I can let you go, 'cos you'd be certain sure to go an' tell the cops or the beaks at your school."

"I wouldn't! I promise you I wouldn't!" gasped Baggy, who, half choked, was ready to promise anything.

"Can't trust you, young 'un."

"I'll go and get you some grub, anyway. There's plenty in the larder," volunteered Baggy.

"You 'elp me up. With you to lean on—you're solid enough if you ain't pretty—I can make shift to 'obble. But don't you try to make a break for it, 'cos I got a gun here, an' I'm desprit. See?"

Baggy had thought of attempting a bolt, and no one could have blamed him for making the attempt. Charity suffers much, but it cannot reasonably be extended to a burglar who has lamed himself in the pursuit of his nefarious calling.

But the mention of the gun put out of Baggy's mind at once all notion of a rush for the front door.

Meekly he helped up the burglar, and with his heart in the region of his boots he aided him slowly to the larder.

The fellow's eyes gleamed when he saw the food there.

"My word! What's all this doin' in a blessed 'ouse where no one don't live?" he inquired. "Pull some of it down, sonny, an' I'll be gittin' on with it. You can jine me if you like. You an' I can be pals orl right as long as you don't try no tricks."

Baggy obeyed the order as to the grub. He had time to think, and if he had not been so obtuse he would never have told his captor about the party of the afternoon.

But he did tell. He did not explain everything, and the cracksmen, whose name, it transpired, was Mr. Albert Cogger, was still puzzled as to who occupied this strange house. Mr. Cogger saw at once, however, that he must find a hiding-place before the party began to gather, and, much to Baggy's disgust, he ordained that Baggy should hide with him.

"There's a cellar 'ere, I'll bet my boots," said Mr. Cogger. "There alwis is in a 'ouse like this. That's where you an' me are goin', sonny, arter we've grubbed."

Baggy dared not deny the existence of the cellar. He was too much afraid of the gun for that. But the idea of accompanying the burglar down there and staying with him took away his appetite completely. For once in his bright young life Baggy Trimble, with plenty of the best provender round him, had no will towards it.

"I—I shall be missed at the school," he said faintly.

"That's better than me bein' found in this 'ere 'ouse," replied Mr. Cogger.

Baggy could not avoid a glance at the bag which Mr. Cogger had brought along with him. He had no doubt that the Head's plate was in that bag; and he thought that if

there was any honesty left—Baggy really was not much of a judge of that—Mr. Cogger was not in possession of the remnant.

"Eat up!" said the burglar encouragingly. "You never got to that blessed size by turnin' up your sniffer at good vittles, I say!"

But Baggy could only make a pretence of eating.

Half an hour later he found himself in the cellar with the burglar and his bag. Getting Mr. Cogger down there had been a job such as Baggy had not often accomplished. The man was very lame, and Baggy was soaked with perspiration by the time they reached the lowest step. Within a few minutes the cold and damp of the cellar made him shiver and sneeze.

"None of that, young feller!" said Mr. Cogger fiercely. "I ain't a-goin' to be give away by a atishoo—not me! You jest hold it in. An' as for callin' out for 'olp—well, 'ere's my little gun, an' your reskoogers will be ap' to find only a dead corpus when they git down 'ere. If a bloke's goin' to 'ang, 'e may as well 'ang for a pig as a sheep!"

And Baggy had no more desire to sneeze.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Just Like Cardew!

CARDEW could not find Baggy. But Mellish came to his aid.

Mellish did not help him to find Baggy. It was not, however, really Baggy who mattered to Cardew. What he needed was someone to play the sneak. And at that game Percy Mellish was at least the equal of Baggy Trimble.

Lawson and Clive were not in Study No. 9 when Mellish looked in after dinner. Cardew was alone, and to Mellish he looked very thoughtful and worried.

"Aho!" coughed Mellish at the door.

"Come in!" said Cardew.

"I say, what have you done with Baggy?" Mellish asked, thinking a bold opening the best.

Cardew stared at him.

"What should I do with Baggy?" he returned. "There's not a fellow in all St. Jim's that I've less use for than Baggy—unless it's you, Mellish!"

Sneak though Mellish was, there was not much spite in him. But that speech was enough to put any fellow's back up—as Cardew had intended it to be.

"You be careful! I know a bit about you!" said Mellish meaningly.

"So does everyone, Mellish. My sins are shouted from the housetops, while the sins of others are hidden."

Cardew was in a queer mood. Mellish saw that. But he had no clue as to what really was worrying Cardew, and he guessed wrongly about it. He imagined that Cardew was responsible for Baggy's absence.

"I want to know where Baggy is!" Mellish persisted.

"There's no accountin' for tastes. But if you want Baggy you must go an' find him. I assure you that he's not in my pocket."

Mellish drew nearer, and his voice was lower.

"What's it worth, Cardew?" he asked. "I know you wouldn't do any harm to the fat idiot; but I know jolly well that you've got him out of the way somewhere, for fear he should sneak. And I think—"

"Better think again, an' think differently! I tell you that I know nothin' about where Baggy is!"

"Oh, come now! See here, a quid will square me!"

Mellish did not get his quid.

Instead, he got a slap on the right cheek that almost made him heel over, and another on the left to balance it.

He skipped back, with a red mark on each cheek, and a glitter in his eyes that was seldom seen there.

"You know what that means, Cardew?" he hissed.

"Will the worm turn, then?" sneered Cardew.

"I'll go to the Head!"

"Not you!" said Cardew.

"To Railton!"

"An' tell him you blacknailled me?"

"I'll go to Kildare, then!"

"I shouldn't. Kildare's not a suspicious chap, but he can ask awkward questions."

"I'll let Tom Merry know, anyway!"

"Dutch auction!" gibed Cardew. "You've got down to Thomas, have you? Go ahead, then! I don't care for anythin' Thomas can do!"

"When he hears about your party this afternoon—"

"Mr. Ropster's party, Mellish!"

"Don't I know that there isn't any Mr. Ropster, that it's all a giddy fake of yours?"

"Perhaps you don't really know as much as you think, Mellish."

"I'm going to Tom Merry!"

Even now, after those two slaps, Mellish might have been bought off, and Cardew knew it. But he had no notion of buying off Mellish again.

The day had come. Mellish was playing his game.

The sneak of the Fourth turned to go. Cardew moved quickly forward, and his right foot shot out.

"Yooop!" howled Mellish, departing in haste.

"Mustn't get into the way of that," said Cardew to himself. "There was some satisfaction in kickin' Gussy—he was such a stiff-starched ass with poor little Mr. Ropster. An' it was funny to kick the dear Ernest, an' see the Grammarians gape. But that was all in the way of friendship. 'This wasn't. But there was somethin' wickedly satisfyin' about it. What an insect Mellish is!"

Cardew passed out of the gates a few minutes later. He would not hurry, and there was no need for him to be at the Firs just yet; but he did not want Tom Merry coming to No. 9 for an explanation. He desired Tom's presence at the Firs.

Mellish did not go straight to the study of the Terrible Three. He had to think out first the story he must tell. Had he told everything he would have given himself away badly.

He thought it out to the last detail, and then he went to Study No. 10 in the Shell passage—just in time to catch the Terrible Three before they repaired to Little Side. Breathlessly he told his peculiar story.

"Baggy spirited away by Cardew. Cardew the real Mr. Ropster!" gasped Tom.

"The false Mr. Ropster, I should say, Tommy," put in Lowther.

"And the Grammar School chaps and some of ours due at the Firs this afternoon to drink and gamble! My hat, you're telling us something, Mellish!"

"In the great Amurrican language, Mellish has sure spoken a mouthful," said Lowther.

Neither he nor Manners regarded the news with the same gravity as Tom Merry. They had not his responsibility.

But both were interested, for all that.

"You say Baggy told you all this, Mellish?" said Monty Lowther. "Did Baggy tell you that Cardew had kidnapped him?"

"Yes," replied Mellish unthinkingly.

"My hat, Trimble is cleverer than I thought he was!"

"Oh, don't jape, Monty!" Tom Merry said impatiently. "This thing's serious! I'm going to look into this! Are you two coming with me?"

"Of course!" said Manners and Lowther in unison.

"I'll get Talbot and Kangaroo to come, too."

"What about Levison and Clive?" asked Manners.

"They're the silly ass' pals. We don't want them!"

"Just because they're his pals, I think they might be asked to come and see fair play. They're not in it—I'll answer for that. I don't believe they've seen much more of Cardew lately than we have."

"Right-ho! Ask them if you like!"

Tom hurried off to find Talbot and Kangaroo. Manners went to rout out Levison and Clive. Lowther, thinking he might do his bit, trotted along to Study No. 6, and gave an invitation to Blake & Co. to join the avenging band.

That was what Lowther called it. But he was inclined to think the whole business a jape.

Blake and Digby were much of his mind. Herries was doubtful. Arthur Augustus was not.

The memory of that kick still lingered. After that Gussy could believe Cardew capable of any crime. To think that he had been hooded by Cardew, and had been spoofed into believing that little Mr. Ropster's mild lunacy was responsible!

Some time was occupied by the gathering of the party. Meanwhile, Cardew, at the Firs, was welcoming his guests.

There came first Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Carboy. There followed, some ten minutes later, a little band of St. Jim's fellows, at whom the Grammarians looked somewhat askance.

Racke, Crooke, Clampe, Scrope, Chowle—the Grammarians barred them all. But these fellows thought they had come to visit Mr. Ropster, while the three from the Grammar School knew that the queer old bird in the grey gloves was really Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Cardew had something up his sleeve—a big spoof for Tom Merry & Co. The Grammarians were willing to help in that, though they had a lurking doubt as to whether Cardew was quite playing the game in enlisting them against his own school. That doubt was increased when they saw their fellow-guests.

Both Racke and Crooke had lost money to the supposed Mr. Ropster on their last visit, and they were eager for revenge. But—unless Racke won that fifty pounds—Cardew had no notion of giving them it that day.

He conducted his guests first into the dining-room, on the table of which was such a spread as would have made poor Baggy's mouth water, had he seen it under normal con-

ditions. He had seen its component parts, but they had not made his mouth water then, for the unpleasant company of Mr. Cogger had for once purged Baggy of his greediness.

Then Cardew took his guests into the room on the opposite side of the hall.

Here a table was also spread. Cards were upon it, and three or four bottles with whisky labels. There were also cigarettes and chocolates.

The black sheep helped themselves to cigarettes, the Grammarians to chocolates. Gordon Gay evidently did not fancy the whisky bottles. But Cardew whispered in his ear, and he grinned.

They settled down to play cards. The game was that known as "Pit"—a noisy game without too much skill in it. Cardew—or, rather, Mr. Ropster—produced a box of counters.

"I say—oh, dash it all, y'know, we don't want to play for those things!" protested Racke.

"Rather not!" said Clampe.

"It is safer, my dear boys. The reckoning can be made afterwards."

Again Gordon Gay and his chums did not quite fancy it. Card games for money were not in their line. It was not so much the notion of having to pay out to the black sheep they minded, as the principle of the thing.

But they trusted to Cardew. It occurred more than once to Gordon Gay that they were trusting a whole lot to Cardew, who had not yet been made to pay for his last trick upon them.

He had given them his word of honour, though, that this spoof was not directed against them; and they would not doubt that.

The game began. Within five minutes Racke discovered himself to be thirsty, poured himself out about a quarter of a glass of what he fancied to be whisky, and added water to it from the carafe on the table.

He drank. His face contorted.

"Why, what beastly stuff is this, Mr. Ropster?" he inquired, in aggrieved tones.

"It is very good stuff, Racke. No water is required with it, however. It is ginger ale."

"But why have you put it in whisky bottles?" asked Clampe.

"Oh, let's get on with the game!" said Carboy impatiently. "What offers for two barley?"

They proceeded with the game. One after another took ginger ale, though two or three of them took it in grudging fashion.

While the cards were being re-dealt Fynck Monk inclined his head in the direction of the door.

"What's that queer noise?" he asked.

"What noise?" asked Crooke.

"It was like a very loud sneeze, somehow muffled. I don't think it came from anyone in this room."

Cardew glanced at the window. But no face showed there.

It was Baggy who had sneezed, of course. The open door of the room in which they sat was close to the cellar door, and Monk's keen ears had caught the sound, though no one else had heard it.

The juniors got on with the game. Racke and Clampe had piles of counters before them. They reckoned that at penny points they must have won quite a few shillings. Their only doubt was as to whether the Grammarians would shy at penny points. Nothing had been fixed. But they noted that Gay and Monk and Carboy were also winners at present, and were sure that they would not mind how high the points were if they remained winners.

They had been playing about forty minutes when the window was obscured on a sudden.

"Dash it all, there's that blunderer Merry, with a crowd behind him!" exclaimed Crooke, looking up with a start.

"Open the door, Cardew!" came Tom Merry's voice grimly. "The game's up!"

Crooke and his precious pals stared. The Grammarians grinned. Little Mr. Ropster rose from his chair and walked meekly to the front door.

Even then Racke and his cronies did not understand.

In the hall Cardew cakewalked to the door, chuckling.

He threw open the door.

"You are all very welcome!" he said, in the high, squeaky voice that belonged to the bogus Mr. Ropster.

Behind Tom Merry were Manners and Lowther, Talbot and Noble, Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, Levison and Clive, and Figgins, Kerry, and Wynn. The New House trio had been met in the quad, and had joined up. They were in footer garb; the rest were not.

"Are we, Cardew?" returned Tom Merry.

Herries pushed forward and pulled away the false Mr. Ropster's wig. Cardew's hair was revealed.

Kangaroo and Blake and Figgins hurried into the room in which the card-party had been going on.

But no attempt had been made to conceal anything. The cards and the whisky bottles were still on the table. Three of the seven there knew that they were all part of the plot, and the other four were too utterly taken aback to do anything.

"You wouldn't come in with me, Ernest," said Cardew to Levison. "Now you're on the wrong side of the fun."

"Fun, do you call it, you idiot!" snapped Levison. "I call it rotten!"

A-shoo!"

Someone had sneezed again. But no one paid any heed. Not even Mr. Coger. That gentleman seemed to have fallen asleep, for no growling threat came from him this time.

Baggy tried to pluck up spirit for a bolt. There were St. Jim's fellows above, he knew. How many, he did not know. He had little hope that most of those who had been invited would aid in rescuing him. But there were Cardew and the Grammarians. They had pluck, anyway.

And then he heard Tom Merry's voice, raised in wrath. Nothing could have given Baggy greater encouragement than that.

"You rotter, Cardew! Cards—whisky—cigarettes! All this beastly deception just so that you could gamble and drink with rotters of your own sort—though I'd never have thought that Gay and Monk and Carboy were that!"

The Grammarians only grinned—grinned so cheerfully that some of those with Tom began to snell a rat.

But Tom was not watching the Grammarians. His eyes were on Cardew.

Cardew smiled enigmatically.

"It looks pretty dashed bad, Thomas, I'll admit. But really it's not so bad as it looks. Let me explain."

"I don't see how it's possible for you to explain all this away. You actually take a house, disguise yourself to look like an elderly man, and get fellows here to gamble and smoke and drink! On the face of it—"

"What's that?" cried Clive.

A howl of fear had come from somewhere. And now they heard the voice of Baggy Trimble, roaring for help, and caught some of the words he roared.

"Help! Cellar—burglar—got me by leg—gun! Yaroooh!"

Half a dozen started for the cellar door at once. But the foremost of them all were Ralph Rackness Cardew and Tom Merry.

Cardew wrenched open the door, but Tom dodged through before him. Cardew followed, and after him came Talbot and Gay and Kangaroo. And others were pressing behind them—Blake, Levison, Clive, Figgins, D'Arcy, and more yet. But Tom yelled to them to hold back.

"It's a fair cop," said Mr. Albert Coger. "I ain't got no gun—never don't carry one. I only got a sprained ankle an' a fat pig by the leg."

"He's the chap that did the burglary at St. Jim's last night!" howled Trimble. "Don't let him go, after all the trouble I've had to capture him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Trimble's statement broke the tension.

"Did you break into St. Jim's last night?" asked Tom Merry.

"Sure thing! Stuff's 'ere. You better fetch a copper. You can go, young fatty; but you'll never be a pal of mine no more!"

Trimble didn't wait to be asked twice. He flew.

Slam!

It was the simplest thing in the world for Tom Merry to lock the cellar door upon Mr. Coger. Indeed, it hardly needed locking. The fellow could not have got up the steps without help.

Tom Merry's mood had not changed, or had not changed greatly. He had never doubted Cardew's pluck. That Cardew should have been at his side in the front when danger had seemed to threaten did not surprise him. That Cardew should have played the rotter did not even seem a greater pity to him for that, for it had seemed so great a pity before.

But that dash side by side with Tom had had its effect upon Cardew.

He braced himself to go through to the end with his plot. But he had no feeling of satisfaction in the success that now looked certain.

"Go on with your charge, Thomas!" he said, when they had assembled again.

(Don't call me Thomas, you trickster! You took this house—)

"In a sense, yes. But I took it for Mr. Ropster."

Cardew glanced at his watch as he spoke.

"Don't fry that on. There isn't any Mr. Ropster—except you!"

"Your mistake! Proceed with the accusation, please."

"You get these fellows here to gamble—"

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"Is there any money on the table? We've been playin' for counters."

"And smoke!" went on Tom Merry warmly.

"Well, I won't deny that a few sags have been consumed. Guilty on that score."

"And drink whisky!"

"Tasto it!"

"It's ginger-ale, Tommy!" said Gordon Gay, grinning more than ever.

"What? But what's the game, Cardew? Where's the sense of it all? And if you're not Mr. Ropster, where is he?"

"You've accused me of bein' a rotter, Merry—of gettin' chaps to drink an' gamble—of takin' this house to—"

"I've done all that, and I'm sticking to what I say! You've spoofed me, perhaps, but—"

"You won't apologise, eh?"

Tom glared at him.

"So that's the game, is it?"

Cardew looked at his watch again.

"That's the game. You apologise, and I win fifty quid from Racke—see? Fair enough, eh, Noble?"

"I won't give my decision yet," said Kangaroo.

"Apologise?" snorted Tom. "After being had on toast like this? I think I see myself doing it! Yes, I'll apologise—when you produce Mr. Ropster!"

Cardew had lost! Racke was sure of it. Everyone was sure. No one present but Cardew knew of the existence of a real Mr. Ropster.

And at that moment the real Mr. Ropster walked in at the front door!

"Here he is!" said Cardew quietly.

"What? Who are you, sir?" Tom asked.

"My name is Ropster; and this, I understand, is the house which Mr. Ralph Cardew was so good as to hire for me," answered the old man.

He was a little old man, but otherwise he was not in the least like Cardew-Ropster. That was where Cardew had found it easy. He had not had to make up as some particular elderly man, but only as an elderly man.

Tom Merry gasped, Racke squirmed and turned almost green.

"I've given my word," said Tom. "I don't like it. I think you've played a game that isn't at all creditable to you, Cardew. But I can't draw back. I—"

"Stop!" cried Cardew.

He had all but won. Another second and he would have won. But in that critical moment he discovered that he cared far more about Tom Merry—the good fellow who had so often treated him generously when he had not deserved it, the plucky fellow who had raced him to be first into seeming peril just now—than he did about his own self-conceit, and infinitely more than he did about that wretched fifty pounds.

Tom paused in amazement.

"I can't accept your apology, Merry! You're right, an' I'm all wrong—as usual! Shut up! That's what you've got to do—shut up!"

"Then I win fifty quid!" booted Racke.

"Not likely!" objected Levison. "Does he, Kangaroo? It's a draw, isn't it?"

"Seems like it," Noble said. "Tom is willing to apologise—Cardew won't have it. Seems to me Racke ought to be jolly glad to call it a draw. He's had a narrow escape."

"I don't see it. Tom Merry hasn't apologised, an' so I've dashed well won!" Racke persisted.

Then came another surprise from Cardew.

"You've won all right, Racke," he said coolly. "Tell you what, I'll toss you double or quits!"

"Master Ralph!" protested old Ropster, who understood this part of the business, though he was plainly puzzled about the affair in general.

"A bluff!" sneered Racke. "You haven't got the cash to pay!"

Cardew produced his wallet and counted out ten and five-pound notes to the value of a hundred. Racke's eyes goggled.

"I don't like this, Cardew!" said Tom Merry.

"You wouldn't, Thomas," said Cardew, unperturbed.

"Naturally, there is nothin' in the whole low game that you do like. But what's the odds? In principle there's no difference between fifty an' a hundred."

All eyes were turned on Racke expectantly.

"Come on!" he said between his teeth.

He would lose nothing, anyway. He might win a hundred.

"Toss!" said Cardew.

Racke spun a florin in the air and caught it on the back of his right hand, covering it with his left.

"Heads!" Cardew said.

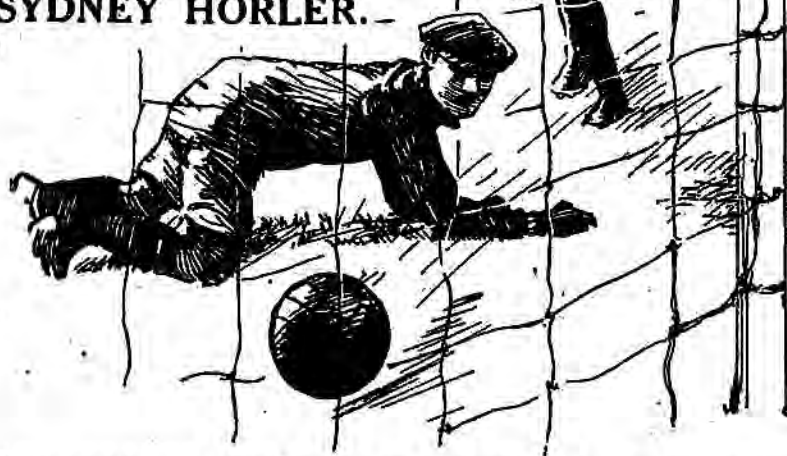
(Continued on page 28.)

CARRYING ON!

Although his father has mysteriously disappeared, leaving behind him a host of clamouring creditors, Dick Hastie, despite the evidence to the contrary, believes in his father's innocence. More than that, he pledges himself to fulfil his father's obligations!

# A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!

BY  
SYDNEY HORLER.



**A Topping Story  
of League Footer  
—good and bad—  
telling of a young-  
ster's hard fight  
against an un-  
charitable world.**

## In the Depths!

FOR several seconds Dick Hastie stood silent and dumbfounded. He could not even speak to himself. Then, feeling that the world which he had built up that afternoon was crashing about his ears, he went up to his bed-room, the fateful telegram still clutched tightly in his hand.

What could be this terrible news of which his sister spoke? It could not be death, or Sybil would have said so. Besides, that last great tragedy could only affect two people—his father and Sybil. It was terribly mystifying.

It was useless to speculate, however; the only thing he could do was to obey the dramatic summons and take train to Springdale at once.

He caught up a timetable and found there was a train leaving Euston at nine o'clock for the North. With luck

he would just about be able to catch it. There was much to be done—his suitcase to be packed, letters to be written, explanations to be made. All these things would take time.

Food? No, food was out of the question. He felt that any food at the present time would choke him. But his landlady, directly she heard the sad news that he had to tell her, made him swallow some hot coffee and a couple of sandwiches before he set out on his journey.

The journey itself was a nightmare. It was useless for Dick to tell himself that it was no use speculating; he was forced to speculate as to what constituted the "terrible news" of the telegram which his sister had sent him.

Yet none of the terrors that he conjured up during that long and tedious journey home was so awful as the grim reality which faced him when, in the early hours of the morning, he stood opposite his sister and heard what she had to tell him.

"I cannot believe it, Dick!" Sybil Hastie said, with a sob in her throat. "I cannot believe that father—our father—could do such a thing! Yet—yet he has gone, disappeared from the town; and Best, the chief clerk down at the office, was forced to tell me that the books are not in a satisfactory condition."

"In plain language, my dear, what does it all amount to?" asked her brother.

"This: That father has misappropriated some thousands of pounds which were entrusted to him by clients, and that rather than be found out he has run away! I know it's simply too terrible to be believed; but that's what I forced out of Best this afternoon, and directly I

knew the worst I telegraphed to you. I felt I simply could not face it alone, now that mother is dead."

"You sha'n't, my dear. I shall see this awful business out myself, of course. But when did you see father last yourself?"

"On Saturday. He came into my room early, kissed me, and said that he had to go away, and that I wasn't to worry. Of course, I had no suspicion that anything was wrong at the time, and I did not take any particular notice. I thought, naturally enough, that father was simply going away on an ordinary business trip."

"And you haven't seen him since?"

## THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

DICK HASTIE, a young fellow of twenty, who plays inside-left for the Bohemians, an amateur football team of considerable merit.

J. B. TOVEY, a football "scout" on the look-out for fresh talent for his club, the famous Swifts.

BOB LAYTON, a veteran winger of the Swifts, who takes a great fancy to Dick.

During a match between the Bohemians and an Army eleven Dick Hastie shows to great advantage his natural gifts as a footballer, and Tovey is desperately keen to sign him on for the Swifts. Tovey declares that, if Dick will join the Swifts, he'll make an international of him within two years. The offer is a tempting one, and Dick agrees to be "tried out" in a reserve match between the Swifts and Clapton Orient on the following Monday. He acquits himself well in the match, and is offered a regular place in the team. Dick rejects the offer to turn professional, however, but agrees to play for the Swifts in his amateur capacity. Feeling elated, he reaches his lodging in West Kensington, and there his elation suffers a severe blow; for, lying on the hallstand, is a telegram addressed to him. It reads: "Come home at once. Terrible news.—SYBIL."

Sybil is his only sister.

(Now read on.)

"I haven't seen him since, Dick, nor had a line from him. Oh, it's cruel, Dick! Our name will be disgraced, our character will be gone! Father was one of the best-known and most respected solicitors in Springdale. What shall we do now?"

"Nothing until the morning. You must go back to bed now, my dear, and leave things to me. Perhaps after all matters aren't as bad as what they appear to be at the moment. If there is anything to do, rest assured that I shall do it."

The words rang out firm and steadfast. They gave the fear-stricken girl of eighteen fresh hope. The brother she had summoned to her aid could be relied upon; she had never had any doubt about that, and now she was more than ever confident.

The fact was her brother, Dick Hastie, had changed from a boy into a man—and all in a single night! This great and tremendous trouble which had fallen upon him just at the moment when life had seemed very fair and the world a jolly fine show, had brought out the dawning manhood in him. Before he had received that telegram which had plunged him straightaway from one existence into another, he had been a merry, laughing lad, whose worst woe was that the examinations which he had promised his father he would pass were so frightfully hard. Now—well, he did not know, nor could he guess, what frowning difficulties might not lay ahead.

Yet, with as stiff a lip as he could manage, he had done his best to face the situation. That was why he had spoken as he had done; the words were not uttered boastfully, however boastful they might have appeared at the time. But he was resolved to stick this thing out; to face resolutely whatever had to be faced, not only for his sister's sake and his own, but for the sake of that absent man who had always been such a pal, as well as a father, to him, and in whom he was still forced to believe.

"You get back to bed, dear," he said again to his sister. "As soon as it is time I will be down at the office and get to know the real facts for myself. Don't you worry. I will take on the responsibility now that I have come home. It is only right that I should do so."

The real weight of this responsibility Dick Hastie did not realise until after the interview he had with Charles Best, his father's chief clerk, early the next—or, rather, the same—morning.

Best, a careful, cautious man, and a typical solicitor's clerk, seemed afraid to speak until Dick told him somewhat sharply to let him know the truth.

"Well, there's trouble—terrible trouble, too, I'm thinking—ahead, Mr. Richard. Your father kept himself to himself of late, and that was a suspicious sign to me, for formerly he had always taken me into his confidence. I happen to know that he invested heavily—Heaven knows for what reason—in Associated Oils a few months back, and it's my opinion that he has been using money of clients."

"Do you realise what you are saying, Best? Do you dare to stand there and say that my father is a thief?" interrupted Dick passionately.

"I'm as sorry this minute as you are, Master Richard," replied the faithful and trusted old servant of the firm;

"but if we are to do our duty we must face facts and the truth, however terrible it is. I haven't ventured to go through the papers in your father's private room yet, but now that you are here I think we had better do so together. There are ugly rumours about, Master Dick, and I expect a crowd of angry and desperate men here this morning—the men who have entrusted money to your father, and who will want to know what has become of it. There was a velled attack on your father in one of the local papers this morning. It won't be long now."

Dick shuddered—the picture which the chief clerk had conjured up was too dreadfully realistic—and then assented to the proposition that Best had made by nodding his head.

After the chief clerk had turned the handle of the door—Best explained that for years he had carried a duplicate key of Robert Hastie's private office in case he should be required in an emergency to go through his master's papers—it was seen at once that the office of the solicitor who had so mysteriously disappeared was in a terrible state of confusion. Papers were strewn about the floor, drawers were left open, and the room looked as though it had been ransacked throughout. Prominent amidst all this chaotic litter, however, was a blue envelope lying on the solicitor's desk. Going closer, Dick saw that the letter was addressed to himself. He had expected to find such a message as this letter evidently contained, yet it was with shaking hands that he picked it up.

"Best," he said slowly, "I think this envelope will contain the secret of the mystery—if it is a mystery. But I am almost afraid to open it. However—" And he ripped the envelope with a paper-knife.

"My dear Dick"—started the letter, which was in Robert Hastie's handwriting—"I am forced to go away for a time. When I am able to do so, I will return. I have left you a bad legacy of trouble, I am afraid, but I want you to carry on in my absence as well as you are able until I see you again. I am worried—terribly worried—"

The writing trailed off at this point, and the solicitor had not appended even his initials. With a sigh, Dick handed the tragic epistle over to the chief clerk.

The latter read it, and sighed also.

"You can see the pitiable state of mind your father must have been in to have written such a letter, Master Dick," he said. "Take, for example, the sentence about you carrying on. How on earth will you be able to carry on? You are not even qualified; and even if you were, who do you think in Springdale would trust our firm again after this?"

"But there are only rumours so far, Best, aren't there? You have no absolute proof that my father has acted in this deplorable fashion?"

"I should have told you just now, Master Dick, if you had not interrupted me. There is a shortage of over £6,000 of Trust Funds—and your father in that letter practically admits having taken the money. A more honourable or just man than your father I have never met; that is why the affair is all the more inexplicable. I—"

"Hark! What is that?"

"That" sounded suspiciously like the tramp of a marching army. There was a sudden scuffle, the clash of angry voices, and then the office-boy came rushing into the room.

"There's a lot of men outside," he said, his face showing his fright. "They aren't half kicking up a row, too. They all say they want to see Mr. Hastie."

"Tell them I will be out to see them immediately," said Dick Hastie, acting on the impulse which had suddenly come to him.

"What do you intend to do, Master Dick?" inquired the chief clerk when the office-boy—looking questioningly and almost contemptuously at the youth who had given him the order—had left the room. "What will you tell them?"

"This!" replied Dick, with passion riding in his voice. "That I will hold myself responsible for my father's debts—I will not call them crimes. Whatever money is owed to these men I will promise to repay. Until such time my father returns I will endeavour to keep his place."

At these words the older man wearily shook his head. This resolve on the part of the boy sounded beautiful in theory, he admitted. Charles Best felt also that the son of his employer really meant what he said, and was prepared to make any personal sacrifices. But what good could he possibly do in actual practice? Even if he were qualified and able to carry on his father's business, no one would come to the firm after this scandal. He had already told the youth this, but he had not seemed to remember.

"You won't be able to satisfy them—and if you don't go out to them they'll smash the office down; at least, that's what it sounds like." The chief clerk shook his head more gloomily than before.

Dick Hastie wasted no more time. A few strides took him out into the clerks' office. This was already filled with men who shouted and raved in their attempts to give relief to their feelings, whilst outside in the passage could be seen still more men struggling like mad persons to get into the room.

"Gentlemen," said Dick, facing them steadily, "I am Mr. Robert Hastie's son, and I am willing to serve you in any way possible. But will you please appoint a committee among yourselves first, for, as you can see for yourselves, this office is not big enough to accommodate you all."

There was a sudden hush at this, and the perspiring,



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It was a striking scene—the boy of twenty facing alone that infuriated mob whose passions were riding them so hard. "If you will select a committee, as I suggested before, gentlemen," said Dick, "I will do my best to give you all the satisfaction in my power." (See this page.)

turning creditors of the vanished Robert Hastie forgot their tempestuous grievances in their eagerness to look at the speaker.

"We don't want you—we want the man who's stolen our money!"

"Don't you tell us to get out of this office, young fellow—me-lad, or we'll break it into pieces with our own hands!"

"We've been swindled out of our hard-earned money, and we mean to get satisfaction! Hear that, young 'un?"

These, and a score of similar objurgations, immediately went up, and the angry words beat about the youth's ears like the dreadful hammers of Fate.

"If you will select a committee, as I suggested before, gentlemen, I will do my best to give you all the satisfaction in my power," replied Dick, keeping a tight grip on himself. If he once lost that grip he felt he would be lost. "I cannot say fairer than that, gentlemen," he added. "Select your committee, and the latter can communicate with the rest of you afterwards. It is only on account of the smallness of the office that I make this request."

The word "request" proved unfortunate in the circumstances. These men were suffering under a deep sense of grievance, and they felt that if there were any favours to be asked they were the ones to ask them. For a few seconds Dick felt that they were going to rush forward and attack him in person. It was a striking scene—the boy of twenty facing alone that infuriated mob whose passions were riding them so hard, with Charles Best and the rest of the office staff keeping well in the background, terror imprinted on their faces, and the paralysis of fear keeping them rigid.

Gradually this fresh storm died down. Perhaps it was the calm, resolute demeanour of the youth that had chief influence with the mob. In any case, there was a good deal of rumbling talk, and then six men strode forward.

"On behalf of the rest of the creditors we are prepared to hear what you've got to say, young fellow," said the first.

"As soon as the rest of you have left the office I will ask these gentlemen into my father's private room," said Dick Hastie. "As I have said before, they can communicate with you afterwards."

There was further grumbling and growling, but eventually good counsels prevailed, and the office was cleared of the great bulk of the besieging creditors. But, looking through the window, Dick saw, with a pang, that

the street below was black with people, and that the police had great difficulty in regulating the traffic in consequence of the crush outside the office. All the town would know by this time of the disgrace which had fallen upon the former honourable name of Hastie; the thought made him feel sick and weary.

But there was work to be done, and he had pledged himself to do it. He had promised his sister and Best, as well as himself, that he would take up his absent father's burden.

"This way, gentlemen," he said, and walked towards the room in which his father for so many years had transacted his most confidential business. In this room where so many family skeletons had been exposed to view, his own disgrace was now to be discussed—and by the son whom he had so dearly loved!

With the door closed behind the last of the visitors, Dick spoke—what was in his mind.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I only arrived home from London in the early hours of this morning, so that I cannot be expected to know a great deal about the unfortunate chain of circumstances which is the immediate cause of this meeting. Mr. Best, my father's chief clerk, will no doubt be able to answer any questions you may want later to put to him, and, in the absence of my father, I authorise him to answer fully and frankly any such questions."

"I want to be frank, gentlemen; I do not wish to hide anything which ought not to be hid. I have had a great shock, but I still have faith, gentlemen. I arrived home early this morning to find a terrible state of affairs. My father had disappeared, and—I am going to be perfectly frank with you, gentlemen, as I have promised—some thousands of pounds not accounted for."

"The scoundrel!" snapped a voice. "What excuse can you bring forward for a theft like that, eh?"

"No excuse," was the steady reply. "But it has yet to be proved that it is a theft. Appearances are against my father, I know, but I know him to be an honourable man, and—"

"That's enough gammon!" cried a second man, coming forward and shaking his fist in the youth's face. "You admit that thousands of pounds are missing. You admit that your father has left the town—disappeared. What excuse can you make in the face of the two damning facts?"



"Once let me lay hands on that gaolbird of a father of yours—" Smack! No more crude words issued out of that ugly mouth. Instead of continuing his frenzied tirade the man staggered back, blood streaming from a cut lip.  
(See this page.)

"The only excuse I wish to make is that my father must have had a very good reason for leaving so suddenly. If you will have patience, gentlemen, I feel sure that everything will come right in time."

"Oh, shut up, you young fool!" This was a third man speaking, and he was more angry than either of the previous speakers. "We are swindled out of our money by aascal, and then we are put off by a bit of a kid who's hardly left off his short trousers! If this is the best you can do, young man, you had better shut your mouth, and keep it shut!"

In the face of such scathing comments Dick Hastie found it hard to keep himself under control. That he did so reflected no small credit on himself, and also spoke volumes for the unflinching tenacity with which he followed out his original intention.

"The proposal I intended making, and which I was coming to in time, gentlemen, was that until my father returns I will hold myself responsible for my father's debts. I will now give you my pledge that I will pay you all back every penny which you have entrusted to my father—"

He could get no further. A gust of coarse laughter filled the room. These men seemed to be enjoying some preposterous joke.

Laughter soon gave place to furious rage.

"You young fool, do you think you can fool us like that?" snarled the man who had spoken first. "You—a kid of twenty or so, to pay back thousands of pounds! Clear out, or talk sense! Once let me lay hands on that gaolbird of a father of yours—"

No more crude words issued out of that ugly mouth. Instead of continuing his frenzied tirade, the man staggered back, blood streaming from a cut lip.

Dick Hastie had passed his limit. He had stood a great deal that morning, but now his patience was gone. Directly the man had called the father he still respected and loved that horribly suggestive word, "gaolbird," he had seen red.

All the passionate fury that he had hitherto kept under control went into the blow that he had flung with his right fist at the man's sneering mouth. It was fierce joy to him to see the blood spurt, and to feel the pain in his knuckles as his own flesh was torn.

"I have done everything I possibly could do in the circumstances," he said, turning to his father's creditors. "and all I have received in turn has been sneers and insults! I admit you have cause to be angry, but until you have

positive proof to the contrary I must ask you not to insult my father further, for I cannot and will not stand it!"

"All right, young fellow, we'll go. But wait! I'll get you for that smack on the mouth, just as I'll get your father! I'm going off straight away now to get a warrant issued for his arrest! We'll see who'll get the better of this deal! Come on, you chaps!"

The man, who was still holding his hand to his mouth, glared at Dick, but made no effort to come any nearer to the lad, who was still standing with clenched fists.

"One minute," said Hastie, as the men moved towards the door. "If you think, preposterous as it may have sounded, that I do not intend to keep to the promise I made to you just now, you are mistaken. If my father has gone, I shall remain in Springdale; I shall always be in the town if you want me. I wish you good-morning!"

The creditors of the man whose awful burden he had resolved to shoulder left the room, impressed, in spite of themselves, at the attitude of the youth who refused to be browbeaten.

When they had gone, Dick flung himself into a chair. He felt completely done-up, absolutely "whacked." All the life was gone out of him.

A hesitating knock on the door, and Charles Best entered the room.

"I don't want to add to your troubles, Master Dick," he said, "but I think we ought to come to some arrangement with regard to the future. The office staff are anxious to know what they are to do. You see, some of them are married men with families."

"Well, what do you suggest, Best?" asked Hastie wearily. "You mean they are anxious about their salaries, I suppose?"

"That is so. So far as I can ascertain, your father's account at the bank is overdrawn, and, now that legal proceedings are being taken, anything that might be left would be seized by the Official Receiver. I hate to have to say it, but it seems that the only thing we can do is to close the office and close down the business. I will do all I can myself, of course, but—"

"But what, Best?"

"Well, I am a married man myself, and the fact is that while I will be willing to give you all the help I can, Messrs. Groves, Morison, & Butler told me some time ago that if I ever wanted a change I had only to apply to them."

"I quite understand, Best. And, of course, you must

look after yourself. That is only natural, especially in such extraordinary circumstances as the present. If you will do what you think best—both in regard to yourself and the other members of the staff—I shall be obliged."

"Thank you, Master Dick."

With the chief clerk out of the way again, Dick Hastie groaned. There seemed nothing for it but to abandon himself frankly to despair. For what hope could he have left? His personal fortunes were wrecked.

How much had happened in those tragically few hours since he had left the Swifts' dressing-room!

The Swifts! Never again, it seemed, would he be able to wear the famous blue jersey of which he had been so proud the day before!

Indeed, it seemed that he would never be able to play football again for any team.

This thought, coming on top of all his other troubles, caused him to sink his head in his hands.

Then he sprang up, determination in his face.

"No one shall jolly well stop me playing football!" he said. "I'll get a game somehow!"

### "Work!"

**G**OING—going—gone!

The auctioneer brought his hammer down with a thud. If he had been hit over the head Dick Hastie could not have felt the blow more. The house in which he had been born and reared had been sold, and now he hadn't a roof over his head. His sister and himself were homeless. True, Sybil had been offered a refuge by an aunt, but that was not the same thing as having her own home. In some ways, seeing Ravenswood, the house he remembered and loved so well, sold, was the hardest grief he had yet known.

Gradually the crowd filed out. A sense of desolation was over the house, and everything in it. Dick wished he had stayed away. He ought to have done so, because his coming had brought him only fresh sorrow. The house and everything of value in it had gone under the auctioneer's hammer; nothing was left—nothing but memories too poignant to be borne.

"Sorry I am to see you like this, Dick!" It was the auctioneer speaking, a man he knew very well—a man who had been something of a friend of his father's. "Still, keep your heart up. Better times may be in store."

Dick did not reply. He did not know what to say. And the auctioneer walked past rapidly, evidently glad not to have to say anything more on what was an extremely difficult and embarrassing subject.

"Out of the way there! What're you doing here, poking your nose into honest people's concerns?"

The harsh, strident tones brought Dick to the defensive at once. His face flushed, and instinctively his fists became clenched.

He looked round, battle-fires raging in his eyes. A red-faced man dressed in vulgarly ostentatious fashion was superintending the removal of some furniture which he had bought. The men, whose backs were loaded, were waiting to pass along the passage.

Dick had some difficulty in recognising the man. He had been away from Springdale for so long that a great many of the people present at the sale were strangers to him.

But this particular man he remembered as he searched his memory. He was a local publican with a bad reputation, and he bore the house of Hastie a grudge. Some months before, when he was home on a brief holiday, Dick remembered his father having to prosecute this man, Sam Simister, for brutally ill-treating a customer at his public-house, who had immediately gone to a solicitor to gain redress. Mr. Hastie had won the case, but had made an enemy. Outside the police-court the publican had caught hold of the lapel of Robert Hastie's coat, and had said in a threatening voice: "Cost me five quid and over to-day, you have! Well, one day p'raps I'll cost you something!" The solicitor had thrown the man's hand off, and had not thought anything more about the incident; but now that Simister was showing so much open hostility to him, the memory of the threat came back to Dick.

"Knock the young cub over! It's only that swindler's brat!" Sam Simister, standing well out of harm's way himself, encouraged those he had addressed to do his dirty work. That he had recognised Dick, and meant to extract some evil satisfaction from the unfortunate position in which the son of the man he hated found himself, was evident.

Some would have crumpled under this attack, but Dick Hastie was not one of them.

Striding up to the publican, he shook his fist beneath the red nose, and said in a tone which made Simister give ground:

"Another word out of your horrible mouth, and I'll knock your head off!"

Waiting only long enough to see if the publican accepted the challenge he had made, Dick walked rapidly out of the house which he had left for ever. There was only one thing for which he was grateful; that was that his sister Sybil had not been present at that scene of final humiliation to the family name.

He was homeless, and without much money. Everything had gone to the Official Receiver, for Robert Hastie, the Springdale absconding solicitor, as he was being called in the newspapers, was now declared a bankrupt. All the money derived from the sale of the house and furniture would be seized upon.

Dick was glad this was so. He had insisted upon handing over even the money which, in the final clearing up at the office, Best, his father's former chief clerk, had insisted he should keep. But he had refused.

"Whatever happens to me, Best, in the future, I want to feel that I did not spend a penny more than I could help of the money which by rights belongs to other people," he had said, which was why, as he strode down the main street of the suburb, the cynosure of all eyes, he had exactly nine shillings and fourpence standing between him and starvation.

He must do something! Why, he couldn't even engage any lodgings for himself until he had acquired some more money; and in the circumstances, the only way by which he could gain this money would be by working for it.

Work!

It was natural enough that he should think first of all of the work he knew most about—law—and it was also natural enough, no doubt, that now he wanted practical help his thoughts should go to Messrs. Granlley & Harter, the firm with whom he knew his father had always been on the best of terms, and with whom Robert Hastie had had many business connections. He would go and see Mr. Horace Granlley, the senior partner of the firm.

But there was a shock in store for Dick.

(Mind you read next week's long instalment of this fine story, boys. Order your GEM now!)

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