

READ ABOUT THE SECRET SOCIETY AT ST. JIM'S—THIS WEEK!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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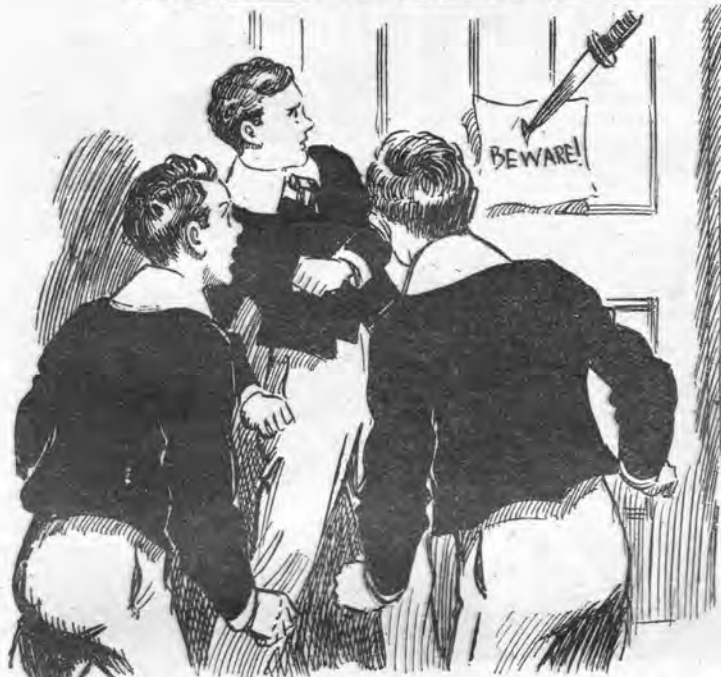
"TREE'D!"



GUSSY UP THE POLE—BOW-WOW!

GRAND LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S!

THE HIDDEN HAND!



St. Jim's is mystified and not a little terrified by the activities of a secret organisation which settles in their midst and sets to work to punish those unfortunates who have incurred the displeasure of the members of the Crimson Dagger!

This is the type of yarn at which your favourite author, Martin Clifford, excels.

CHAPTER 1. Brave Trimble!

LEAVE it to me, chaps!"

"Eh?"

"Leave it to me!" said Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, firmly.

"You fat ass!"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Leave what to you, old lard-tub?" demanded Lowther of the Shell. "We're not talking about grub."

"I know you're not!" said Trimble, staring.

"Then why leave it to you?" asked Lowther, with interest. "I know of nothing else that it's any use leaving to you—unless it's telling whoppers—"

"Or dodging work!" said Herries.

"Or playing at Peeping Tom!" added Manners.

"Or spying through keyholes and minding other people's business," put in Glyn, shaking his head.

"Well, I never thought of those things," admitted Lowther, nodding. "Of course; there are many things like that we always can safely leave to Trimble. But the question now is, which was Trimble referring to when he said leave it to him?"

"You silly dummy!" snorted Baggy Trimble. "You know jolly well what I'm referring to! I'm talking about what you fellows were talking about."

"You usually are!" groaned Blake. "A fellow can't open his giddy mouth without you shoving your oar in, Baggy. Travel! Roll away! Fade into the background, old fat man!"

Trimble snorted.

"Yah! Think you're funny, don't you?" he sneered.

"Why can't a chap speak if he wants to?"

"No reason at all," smiled Blake, "so long as he talks sense. As you don't possess any, that's the reason why you shouldn't talk, Baggy."

"Yah! Look here, you fellows!" said Trimble. "Don't talk rot, you know. I mean what I say. Leave it to me!"

"But, what, and which?" demanded Lowther. "The telling of whoppers, or the raiding of grub, or the peeping through keyholes, or the dodging of work, or being just a general nuisance? Which, or what?"

"Don't talk rot, Lowther!" sniffed Trimble. "You fellows know what I mean—what you were talking about—what everybody at St. Jim's is talking about—this giddy

secret society! Now, you fellows must admit that it can't go on for ever!"

"It can't, and it won't!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, then, it's got to stop, and if you fellows will leave it to me, I'm the man that's going to stop it."

"Bai Jove!"

"You needn't laugh!" said Trimble seriously. "Somebody's got to put a stop to it. The whole school's got the breeze up—"

"Fathead!"

"Well, a lot of chaps have!" said Trimble, shaking his head. "Nice thing to happen at St. Jim's, ain't it? A blessed secret society at St. Jim's just doing what they like. Tribune of the Crimson Dagger, eh? Sending chaps painted cardboard daggers as warnings, and then collaring 'em and yanking 'em off to a secret room and putting 'em through it!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Nice thing, ain't it?" snorted Trimble. "They've already played tricks on Selby, and put Cutts and Tom Merry and old Gussy and other chaps through it. A fellow never knows when his turn will come. I tell you it wants stopping!"

"Like your chin, old chap!"

"Yah! Fat lot you care what happens, Lowther!" snorted Trimble witheringly. "I jolly well hope they collar you next—make you less frivolous and more dutiful."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I hope I've got a sense of duty," said Trimble, puffing out his fat chest. "Anyway, if nobody else is going to track down this blessed secret tribunal, and find out who they are, and where they hang out, I shall have to do it. As I say, leave it to me!"

"You burbling chump!" laughed Tom Merry. "If they sent you a giddy dagger, Trimble, you'd die of fright!"

"What rot!" snorted Baggy Trimble, glaring. "I tell you I'm going to take the matter up myself. I've already got a clue!"

"Is that it on your collar?" asked Lowther, with interest. "That nice row of dirty finger-marks?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You needn't laugh!" snorted Trimble. "I only jolly well wish they'd send me a dagger, anyway. I'd just do what Tom Merry did—let 'em trap me, and then try to bowl 'em out. Only I wouldn't make a muck of it like Tom Merry did."

"You silly ass!" snorted Tom Merry, blushing crimson; and there was a laugh.

"Well, you can't deny it!" grinned Trimble. "You jolly well failed to discover who they were, but I shall! I'll show 'em that I'm not afraid of a blessed lot of avenging merchants, if they do wear giddy robes and cowls. You leave it—"

"Hallo, what's this sticking out of your pocket, Baggy?" demanded Cardew suddenly.

"Eh? What? Oh—oh crikey!"

Trimble's gallant voice almost ended in a shriek, for in Cardew's hand was a strip of cardboard, shaped in the form of a dagger and painted a deep crimson, and Cardew had—apparently—just drawn it from Trimble's trouser's-pocket!

Trimble started and stared at it, his eyes almost coming out of his head.

"Ow! Oh dear!" he gasped feebly. "Was—was that in my—my pocket? Oh dear! Oh crikey! M-mum-my hat!"

Trimble fairly trembled with fright. The juniors looked on with grins. Cardew was looking very solemn, however.

"Looks as if your number's up, Baggy!" he said gravely. "I should keep my eyes peeled if I were you. Still, as you've told us how brave you are and how little you fear them, it scarcely matters, does it?"

"Ow!"

Trimble groaned, his little, fat knees knocking together. And just at that moment the gas in the junior Common-room went suddenly low.

Blake had—unseen by Trimble—just turned it down, as a matter of fact. But Trimble was unaware of that—same as he was unaware that Lowther, after his whispered word to Blake, had quietly slipped behind Trimble out of the room. And as the light went suddenly low the fat Fourth-Former gave a startled yelp.

"All right, you fellows," called Blake, pretending to try to turn the light up again. "I'll have it right in a minute. Talk to the fellows, Trimble, so that they won't be afraid of the dark."

"Ow!"

Trimble did not feel equal to talking to anybody just then. As he stood trembling the door suddenly swung gently open and a figure appeared in the gloom.

It seemed a curiously gigantic and grotesque form, with black robe and a cowl. The face was invisible.

It stood in absolute stillness for a moment, and then a deep, blood-curdling voice came from it.

"Silence! Move at your peril!"

"Ow!" groaned Trimble feebly, getting behind the dim form of Tom Merry near him. "Oh dear!"

"I said move at your peril!" thundered the voice. "I have come to seek an individual named Bagley Trimble."

"Yow!"

"Bagley Trimble," went on the dreadful voice in thrilling tones, "you have been found guilty by the Tribunal of the Crimson Dagger of lying, of spying, of eavesdropping, of petty pilfering, of avoiding work, and of gorging your fat and unhealthy carcass. Your hour has come! Prepare to meet thy doom!"

As the voice finished the awe-inspiring form started to advance into the room. It had scarcely taken a dozen steps when a wild shriek rang through the Common-room, and next moment Baggy Trimble had dodged round Tom Merry and was leaping for the door. The fat Fourth-Former vanished through it at incredible speed, and his racing footsteps died away down the corridor.

There was a howl of laughter from the fellows in the Common-room.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The light suddenly went up as Blake turned it on full, and then the strange form shed its grotesqueness, so to speak. It took off the master's gown it was wearing, and unwound the jacket that had been twisted round its head, that in the gloom had looked so much like a monk's cowl.

Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, stood revealed, a cheerful grin on his face.

"Dear old Baggy!" he chuckled. "Blessed if I ever knew he could run like that. Better shove him in the quarter-mile for the sports after this, Tom Merry. He's a dark horse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The dear old chap must have left his courage at home in his study," remarked Lowther, shaking his head. "He told us how plucky he was, so he must have plenty somewhere. Perhaps he's gone to the study for it now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors in the Common-room roared with laughter. But whether Bagley Trimble had gone to fetch his courage or not, he did not return again to the Common-room that evening.

CHAPTER 2.

A Word of Warning!

"I'M vewy wowwied, you fellows!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark in Study No. 6 a little later in the evening. He made it to his chums—Blake, Herries, and Digby—who were seated at the table, just finishing their prep.

Blake looked up at Arthur Augustus, who was standing in front of the fireplace, looking very serious and thoughtful indeed.

"Fathead!" he said with a grunt. "You'll have something to worry about in the morning, sure enough, if you don't finish your dashed prep; you've scarcely done any. You'll get flayed by Lathom in the morning, my pippin!"

"I am far too wowwied to apply my mind to wotten pewp!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head gravely. "I have been thinkin' vewy sewiously about this w'etched secwet society mystewy, deah boys."

"Another mystery, then?" said Blake. "That's a bigger mystery than the other, though."

"Bai Jove! What is, Blake?" asked Arthur Augustus, looking puzzled.

"How you can think, old chap!" said Blake blandly. "It's a big mystery to me how any chap can think when he hasn't the necessary apparatus. You must have imagined you were thinking, old chap. Don't try again, though—you may strain something!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, while Herries and Digby chuckled. "This is not a mattah to be fivulous about. Blake, I have been thinkin' about the fealful wisk the membahs of this w'etched secwet society are wunnin', you know. They are wunnin' a big wisk of gettin' the sack, if captured, bai Jove!"

"That's so," agreed Blake carelessly. "Fairly asking for the high jump!"

"Begging and praying for it, in fact," added Herries.

"And serve the silly idiots right if they get it!" remarked Digby.

"So get on with your prep, Gussy, and stop worrying about them," advised Blake. "Let 'em rip!"

The swell of the Fourth frowned and shook his head.

"So long as there is any suspicion that the culpwits are Wally and his friends, I cannot help wowwying," he said.

"Aftah all, though Wally is a young wascal, he is my young bwothah, and I feel wesponsibul for him."

"More ass you, then," remarked Herries. "I'd rather feel responsible for a mad dog!"

"Chuck it, Gussy!" advised Blake again. "You've had these fits of brotherly love and duty before, you know. They've usually ended in your being ragged baldheaded by those cheeky fags. Leave 'em alone!"

"Let dogs delight to bark and fight!" quoted Digby. "And leave 'em to it. Let young Wally rip!"

"I have no intention of lettin' my young minah wip, as you term it, Digby," said Arthur Augustus calmly but emphatically. "I have my wesponsibilities as an eldah bwothah, and I do not intend to evade them!"

"Go hon!"

"Some of the fellows," resumed Arthur Augustus, "appeal to think that my bwothah Wally and eleven of his chums are the fellows who form this secwet Twibunal of the Cwimson Daggah. I myself suspected it until I was taken before the twibunal and tweated in such a wuffianly mannah. On seein' they were wathah tall fellows, how-evah, I changed my opinion."

"Same here!" grunted Digby. "They were much too big for fags. Goodness knows who they are! Can't be Figgins and his lot, 'cause Figgy himself and Kerr were yanked before the twibunal. And it couldn't have been Cutts and his lot, either. It's a thumping mystery!"

"That is quite twee, Dig!" said Arthur Augustus. "On the othah hand, my suspicions that it might, aftah all, be the fags have been wevived by Cardew, who suggests that the fags might have been weahin' somethin' undah their cowls to make them look tallah, you know. They were howwible masks, wemembah, and it was impossible to see their eyes. As Cardew vewy shwewdly suggests, their masks might not have been fixed on their faces at all."

"Phew! There's something in that," agreed Blake, nodding.

"As Cardew says, it is quite possible," said Arthur Augustus seriously. "There is also the vewy significant fact that Wally and the west of the young wapscallions have been makin' vewy mystewious thweats of late. They have also been disappaeahin' in wathah a mystewious mannah; they are nevah to be found when wanted, which is wathah wemarkable."

"Well, that's true enough," said Blake, grinning. "My hat! Supposing it is them, after all? The daring young scamps!"

"They'll get caught yet," said Digby. "They can't go on collaring chaps in broad daylight like this for long—in the blessed passages, too, when people are knocking about. It beats me how they manage it."

"It beats everybody!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy mysterious, and it is vewy wowwyin' to fellows like Levison and Mannahs and myself, who have minahs in the Third. If the twibunal had been satisfied with waggin' us fellows, and even with waggin' that wottah Cutts of the Fifth, it would have not been so vewy sevius. But they have actually wagged their Form-mastah in his own study; they have even covahed his face with ink while he slept in his study, you know!"

"Well, Selby deserves it!" grinned Herries. "He's an old tyrant!"

"Yaas! That is vewy true, Hewwies. But he is a mastah, and if the twibunal are discovahed they will most pwobably be sacked; or the leadahs will, at all events!"

"They'll be bunked, right enough!" agreed Blake. "My hat! The very fact that it's Selby they've ragged goes to prove it's those little scamps in the Third."

"That is what I feah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus very gravely. "And that is why I feel 't my duty to speak a word of warnin'—of vewy gwave warnin'—to my minah on the subject. I think I had bettah warn along now and see him. If he is not one of the culpwiits there will be no harm done, aftah all!"

"Excepting to you, old top!" said Blake. "They'll scrag you—"

"Wubbish!"

"You know what happened last time!" warned Blake. "If we hadn't turned up—"

"I'm goin'!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Nothin' shall turn me frowm my duty, Jack Blake!"

"You footling dummey—"

"I uttally wefuse to be called a footling dummey, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus coldly. "I fancy I can twust to my own tact and judgment in a mattah of this kind. I certainly see no reason why I should be scawged for offahin' a word of warnin' to those young wapscaillions."

"But, look here—" roared Blake.

"Wats!"

With that emphatic remark Arthur Augustus quitted the study and started off for the quarters of the Third Form fags. When Arthur Augustus had quite made up his mind the determination was father of the deed. Arthur Augustus prided himself upon that, forgetting that his resolves were not always wise ones. In the role of the elder brother Arthur Augustus always took himself very seriously. Unfortunately his minor never would take him seriously—far from it. While the noble Gussy looked upon it as duty and responsibility, young Wally looked upon it as "buttin' in" and dry-nursing; and he never failed to acquaint his major with his views on the subject.

In this case, however, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy certainly had grave cause to be worried. Since the activities of the unknown and mysterious secret society had caused so much excitement and conjecture at St. Jim's, many fellows had wondered if Wally D'Arcy and his chums could be the culprits. They were known to be daring young rascals, and the fact that the master of the Third was ragged made the suspicion grow.

Certainly there was no proof whatever that Mr. Selby had been ragged by the secret tribunal; he had been attacked whilst asleep in his own study in a very mysterious manner. The other cases were different, however.

Cutts of the Fifth, Figgins of the New House, and Kerr and D'Arcy major and Tom Merry and others had been attacked while walking along the passage beyond the Fourth Form corridor. The attacks had come swift and sure, for before they could even glimpse their assailants a sack had been dragged over their heads and they had been bound hand and foot and carried away—whether they knew not.

All had agreed, however, that the secret society occupied an apartment underground, for when their eyes had been uncovered, to their alarm and utter amazement they had seen before them twelve masked, robed, and cowed forms seated round a stone table. Then they had either been treated to a bath of flour and soot, or else had been "licked" soundly with a cricket-stump. They had then been enveloped in the sack again and carried back, finding themselves once again at the very spot where they had been attacked.

It was all very amazing and mysterious; the whole process having been carried through so swiftly and skilfully that not one of the victims had been able to discover a clue, either to the identity of the tribunal, or the whereabouts of their secret room. And though various indications seemed to point to the theory that the fags of the Third were responsible, all the victims agreed that the size of the hooded members of the secret tribunal put that theory out of court altogether.

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None the less, a keen-witted fellow like Cardew still believed they were responsible, and his suggestion that the cowl covered some ingenious gadget to make their wearers look taller was certainly possible.

At all events that suggestion had renewed the suspicions and alarm of Arthur Augustus, and he was resolved to speak to his minor on the subject—speak to him very seriously, in fact.

As Arthur Augustus reached the door of the Third Form room he frowned as he heard an uproar proceeding from within, high above which he recognised the voice of his minor, Wally.

He pushed open the door and entered.

Quite an interesting scene was being enacted in the Form-room. On the floor, spreadeagled on his back, was Reuben Piggott, the sneak and black sheep of the Third. On his chest was seated Curly Gibson, and on his wriggling legs was seated Jameson. Standing over him, just tipping the contents of an inkwell over Piggott's upturned face, was Wally D'Arcy, a cheerful grin on his heated, mischievous countenance.

"Bai Jove!"

The ink streamed from the inkwell, dripping on Piggott's flushed face and streaking it with blue-black ink. Piggott howled and gasped and spluttered as some of the ink entered his mouth.

"Yarroooogh! Groooooh!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"There!" shouted Wally, ignoring the appearance of his major. "That will teach you better than to sneak on your giddy Form chaps, Piggy! We'll give you sneaking to Selby, you rotten traitor!"

"Mum-mum-mum! Oh—groooooh!—you cads!" wailed Reuben Piggott. "Ow—yow! Oh, I'll pay you back for—groooooh!—this, you see if I don't! Oh erieky!"

"Now rub some of that gum in his hair!" ordered Wally.

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, Wally, you young wascal—"

"You dry up, Gussy!" said Wally grimly. "We'll attend to you presently, old nut!"

"Bai Jove!"

A less innocent fellow than Arthur Augustus might have taken warning from that significant remark. But Arthur Augustus was only concerned in the "cheek" of it. He frowned and waited patiently while a bottle of gum—taken from Mr. Selby's desk—was emptied over the hapless Piggott's hair and rubbed well home. Then Piggott went flying out of the Form-room, all arms and legs, to drop in the corridor without like a sack of coke, his howls awakening the echoes.

"Weally, Wally," remonstrated Arthur Augustus, "I am surprised at you twentin' that youngstah in that wotten mannah! I am aware that he is a young wottah; but weally—"

"You keep your sympathy for yourself, Gus," said Wally darkly. "You'll need it. That young sweep has been sneaking to Selby again. He told him it was me who greased the giddy blackboard in class this morning."

"Gweased it?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Yes; it was a lark!" chuckled Wally. "We rubbed the giddy blackboard over with grease, and you should have seen old Selby trying to write on it! He tried a whole boxful of chalk on it; but it was no go. You should have seen him; we were nearly busting with laughter! Then, just because Selby threatened to line the whole Form if the chap who did it didn't own up, that cad Piggott jumped up and split—got me and Curly a licking and three hundred lines apiece!"

"Bai Jove! It was vewy w'ong of you to play such disrespectful twicks on your Form mastah, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Bow-wow!"

"I am vewy much afwaid," went on Arthur Augustus, shaking his head gravely at his minor, "that you are gettin' vewy much out of hand, Wally! You appeal to have no pwopah wegard for wules or anythin' else, bai Jove! You are weckless and thoughtless, and you have no respect whatever for your eldahs!"

"Go it, old bean!" grinned Wally, eyeing his major in mock admiration. "My hat! Ain't he fine, you mon? He can go on talking like this for ever, I believe. Watch his chin wagging away—just like clockwork! Go on with the next spasm, Gus!"

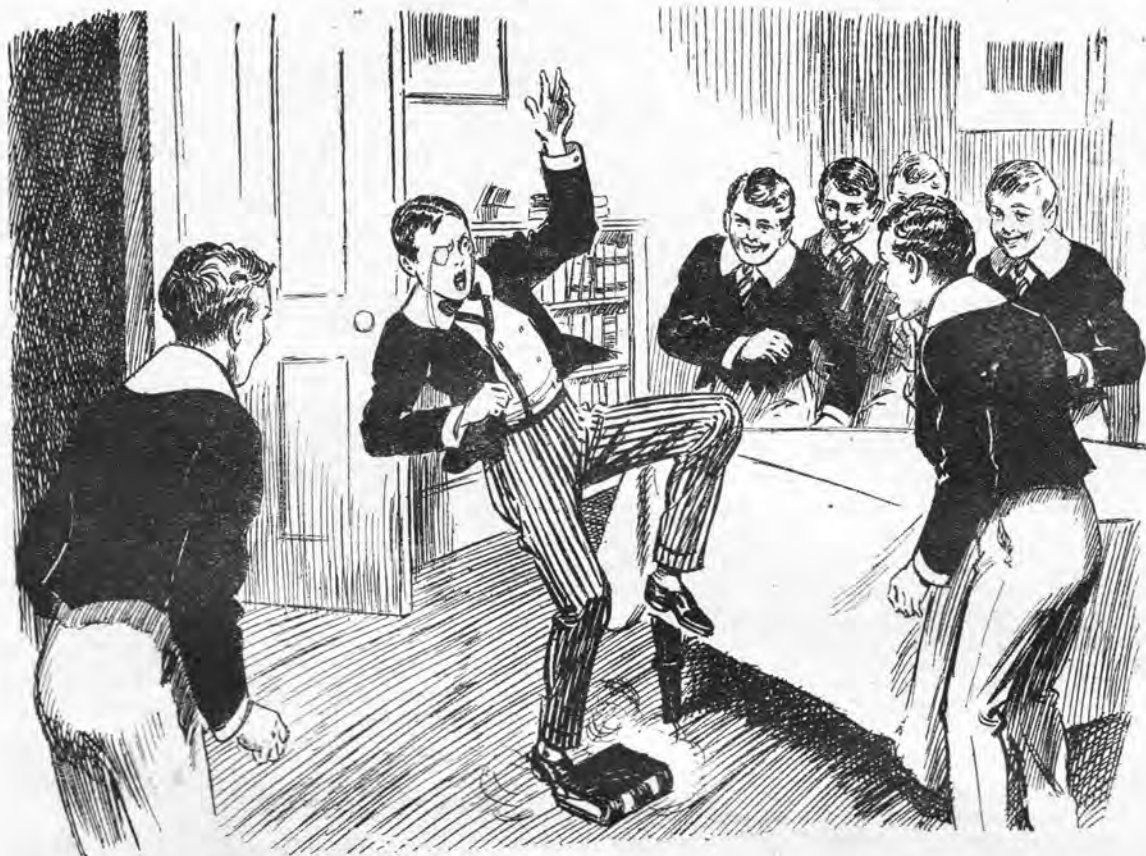
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you young wapscaillion!" gasped Arthur Augustus, with no little indignation. "It is not a mattah for hilawity, Wally! You make it vewy difficult for me to cawwy out my duties and wespensibilities as your eldah bwothah!"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally's chums and fellow Third-Formers seemed to be highly entertained at the conversation between the brothers, Arthur Augustus glared round him, breathing hard.



"You are wiskin' the sack," said Gussey, "and soonah or latah you are bound to be capchahed, bai Jove! So my sewious advice is—dwp it!" "Right—ho!" said Wally. "There you are, then!" And Wally dropped the heavy dictionary—full on the noble toe of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Crash! "Yawoooooh!" (See Chapter 2.)

"None the less, I am wesolved not to evade my wesponsibility," went on Arthur Augustus, with an effort. "If my suspicions are cowrect you appeah to be tweadin' on vewy dangewous gwound, Wally. I have come now for the purpose of warnin' you gwavely befoah it is too late. Already the fingah of suspicion is pointed in your diwection."

"Oh, my hat!"

"He talks like a gramophone!" remarked Wally. "How rude of the finger of suspicion to point at us, chaps! I hope it isn't your finger, Gus? It's rude to point—"

"You gwinnin' young wascal!" shouted Arthur Augustus, in great exasperation. "Cannot you undahstand that the mattah is vewy, vewy sewious? If you young scallywags are the Secwet Twibunal that is causin' so much upwoah, then I stwongly advise you to dwp it!"

"He advises us to drop it!" murmured Wally, his hand resting lightly on an English dictionary that reposed on Mr. Selby's desk. "You really advise that, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah! I can scarcely believe that even you weckless young waspalcions can be the dawin' culpwits. Yet so long as suspicion remains I was bound to dwp you a word of gwave warnin'. You are goin' too far—you are wiskin' the sack, and soonah or latah you are bound to be capchahed, bai Jove! So my sewious advice is—dwp it!"

"Right—ho!" said Wally. "There you are, then!"

And Wally dropped the English dictionary—full on the noble, patent-leathered shod foot of Arthur Augustus.

Crash!

"Yawoooooh!"

The volume was a very heavy one, and from the roar that came from Arthur Augustus it had hurt him very much.

"What's he yelling about now?" asked Wally curiously. "He gives a fellow advice, and when a fellow takes it he howls like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wascally young villain!" hooted Arthur Augustus, hopping about on one foot and hugging the other. "I did not advise you to drop that wotten thing at all! I was wefewwin' to the secwet twibunal, you little scamp! I have a vewy good mind to administah a feahful wollop'n' for that, bai Jove!"

"Go on, then—don't mind me!" said Wally cheerfully. "I'm used to being bullied. We in the Third are bullied by the Fourth and the Shell and the Fifth and the Sixth, and we're licked and lined by masters. We're used to being knocked about!"

"A well-mewited chastisement is what you badly need, you young wascal!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have neglected dealin' with you as you wicly deserve long enough, Wally, and as your eldah bwothah I shall neglect that duty no longah! I am goin' to spank you, you young wascal! A weally sewean spankin' will do you the world of good, Wally!"

"Go on, then—don't mind me!" said Wally, in a tone of resignation, the while he winked at the grinning fags. "Going to do it now, Gus?"

"Yaas, I am, indeed!" said Arthur Augustus in great wrath and indignation. "And I twust it will be a lastin' lesson to you. I wegwet the necessity, but it is for your own good, you know!"

And with that Arthur Augustus ceased hugging his injured foot and grasped his young minor. His intention was of the best, and it was to put the fag across his knee and spank him as he undoubtedly deserved to be spanked. It would not be bullying: it would be done calmly, in a fatherly manner, as a matter of unpleasant duty—an act of brotherly affection, in fact.

That was how Arthur Augustus looked at it.

Unfortunately, Wally had other ideas on the matter. As Arthur Augustus grasped him he hooked one leg neatly behind the noble leg of his major, and pushed hard.

Not expecting such a manoeuvre, Arthur Augustus lost his balance and crashed to the floor, with Wally on top of him. "Yawoooooh! You young scalliwag! Why, I— Oh, ewikey! Gweat Scott! Welease me!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Oh, bai Jove!"

"Come on, chaps!" called Wally. "We've wasted enough time on this ass. Put him across that form!"

"Ha, ha! What—ho!"

The chortling fags jumped to obey their leader's order.

Struggling desperately, and in a state of great wrath and amazement, Arthur Augustus was grabbed in many hands and fairly lifted and whirled across a form, face downwards, his noble face crimson, his celebrated eyeglass dangling forlornly at the end of its silken cord.

"That'll do, you men!" ordered Wally. "Now hand me that fives bat, young Levison. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Gussy thinks I ought to be spanked and I think Gus should be spanked. It will do him a world of good, and perhaps teach him not to butt into things that don't concern him."

"You young villain! Oh, bai Jove! You dare to spank me—" shrieked Arthur Augustus in great horror.

"I'm sorry, Gus," said Wally, shaking his head, "but I look upon it as an act of brotherly duty. I really cannot neglect my duty any longer, you know. I— Good, young Levison! Here goes! Remember, this sort of things hurts me just as much as it hurts you, Gus. That's what the beaks say when they lick us, you know!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yoooop!" roared Arthur Augustus. "You—you frightful young villain! Yawooooop! Oh cwikey! Wescue!"

But there was no rescue for Arthur Augustus. The grinning fags held him firmly, and his frantic struggles availed him nothing.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

The fives bat rose and fell and the howls of Arthur Augustus rose and fell, also. It seemed like a terrible nightmare to the noble and aristocratic Arthur Augustus. He—a member of the Fourth and the shining light of the School House at St. Jim's, was being spanked—actually spanked by fags!

It was incredible; but it was only too true.

"There!" gasped Wally at length, throwing down the bat and adding a few spanks with his hand to end up with. "I really trust that will be a lesson to you, Gus. I hope I shan't have to repeat the dose again. Now chuck the fathead out on his neck, chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Roaring with laughter, the fags grasped Arthur Augustus again and bore him in a struggling bundle to the door, his face crimson with outraged wrath and humiliation. The door was then flung open, and Arthur Augustus was pitched through it, to land in the passage outside as the hapless Piggott had done earlier on. Then the door of the Third Form-room was closed upon him.

At that moment three fellows came along the passage, and they looked with some interest but little surprise at the sight of Arthur Augustus sitting on the floor gasping and groaning. They were his study-mates, Blake, Herries, and Digby, who had decided—rather late—that it would be just as well to run along to look for their chum.

"Hallo! They've finished with you, then, Gussy?" inquired Blake calmly. "No bones broken, I hope?"

"Gwooooh! The young wascals!" panted Arthur Augustus, trying to get his tie from round the back of his neck. "Oh, cwikey! They—they've actually spanked me, the little fiends!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Well, you fairly asked for it, Gussy! We warned you, you know!"

"Gwooooh!"

"We were just coming along to pick up the pieces," said Blake. "If they've only spanked you, though, you'll be able to walk back. Still, we can't allow fags to spank Fourth Form chaps. How many are there in there, Gussy?"

"Ow!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "About twenty—the young wuffians!"

"Then I think we'll postpone dealing with 'em until a more suitable occasion!" chuckled Blake. "Twenty is rather a handful to deal with. Did they tell you they were the giddy secret tribunal, Gussy?"

"Wats!"

With that Arthur Augustus scrambled to his feet and marched away, leaving his grinning chums to guess the answer. And his chums guessed it easily enough. It was only too clear that Arthur Augustus had not obtained a confession of guilt from the fags, nor had they taken much notice of his "word of warning."

CHAPTER 3.

Cardew, the Detective!

"READY, Cardew?"

Levison major asked the question as he came into Study No. 9 in the Fourth after dinner the following day. Behind Ernest Levison was Sidney Clive, who shared that study with Levison and Cardew. Both of them were dressed for out of doors, and they fully expected Cardew to be ready.

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But it was a superfluous question to ask, for Ralph Reckness Cardew was obviously not ready. He lounged lazily in the study armchair, looking every inch of the slacker he was generally regarded as being.

He yawned and looked round with a lazy smile at his study-mates.

"Eh? Ready—ah, no!" he said. "What for, by the way?"

Levison frowned; but Clive chuckled.

"Ready—does the ass look as if he's ready?" he remarked, with heavy sarcasm. "Buck up, Cardew, or we'll miss that train, you silly chump!"

"Train!" said Cardew. "What train?"

"The train for Abbotsford, of course!" spluttered Levison wrathfully. "You said you'd be ready in five minutes. You've not even started yet."

"Oh, I remember something about it now!" yawned Cardew, rubbing his nose reflectively. "Did I say I was coming?"

"Of course you did, fathead!"

"Then it was a mistake; cancel the idea!" advised Cardew, gravely. "Unfortunately, you will have to visit the charming, old-world town of Abbotsford without my fascinating company. I've suddenly remembered that I shall be otherwise engaged this afternoon."

"Slacking about in a rotten armchair!" said Levison disgustedly. "You—you lazy dummy!"

"Not at all!" remarked Cardew calmly. "You do me an injustice Ernest, old bean! I anticipate quite a busy afternoon, in fact."

"But what doing?" hooted Levison. "There's no cricket this afternoon."

"Detectin'," explained Cardew blandly. "I'm goin' to get on the trail of the giddy secret society this afternoon. The days of the giddy Tribunal of the Crimson Dagger are numbered. Behold in me the sleuth who has sworn to track down the miscreants to their lair!"

"You silly ass!"

"Thanks, old bean!" said Cardew unmoved.

"You'll only get it in the neck!" said Clive, with withering scorn. "Didn't Tom Merry try to get on their trail, and didn't they collar him and put him through it? Leave them alone, you silly ass!"

"What the thump are you doing it for, anyway?" demanded Levison, eyeing his chum curiously. "Leave 'em alone, whoever they are, I say!"

"It's a matter of duty!" explained Cardew gravely. "It's also to satisfy my burnin' curiosity, you know. The giddy members of the society are headin' for the sack; and, like a kind, generous fellow, I propose to head 'em off the sack. I'm goin' to prove my theory that those cheery young fags are the culprits."

"You still think that, then?" said Levison staring.

"I'm sure of it."

"After what Tom Merry said?" exclaimed Clive impatiently. "Didn't he say they were too tall for fags, you silly dummy?"

"He did; none the less, I believe young D'Arcy and his cheery young warriors are the giddy culprits," said Cardew calmly. "I'm goin' to let 'em collar me if they will; but I'm goin' to bowl 'em out. Mysteries always did have a fascination for me, old top. You chaps shove off to Abbotsford and leave me to it."

"But look here—"

"Too much of a strain, Ernie!" said Cardew, shaking his head. "I've already got rather a nerve-racking experience to face, according to the accounts of the fellows who's been before the giddy tribunal. Why ask me to face one unnecessary by lookin' at you?"

"You—you silly ass!"

"Thanks, old chap!"

"Oh, come on and leave the burbling dummy to it!" snorted Clive. "We'll miss that first train at this rate!"

"Right!" said Ernest Levison grimly. "We'll clear off; but before we do we'll teach this fathead not to make a promise and then break it like this. Over with him!"

"Good wheeze!"

"Here—what— Yaroooooh!"

Cardew gasped in alarm, and then he howled as Levison grasped the chair and tipped it up, Clive jumping to aid him. Cardew sprawled forwards on hands and knees, and his two chums turned over the heavy chair on top of him as he sprawled. Then they marched out of the study.

"Yarooooop!" howled Cardew. "You burbling maniacs! Why, I'll—"

He scrambled out from beneath the chair, and found himself alone. Breathing hard, he righted the chair and closed the door. But he did not seat himself in the chair again. Cardew, as usual, was feeling bored, and he was not feeling up to much exertion. But he had been quite serious when stating that he intended to get on the trail of the mysterious tribunal. A mystery always did appeal to Cardew, and, having made up his mind to get to the bottom

of this one, he did not intend to allow either slackness or his chums to interfere with his determination.

After righting the chair and his ruffled hair and clothes, the slacker of the Fourth lounged out of the study, and made his way to the bag quarters. As he came up to the Third Form room the door opened and D'Arcy and Curly Gibson emerged. They eyed the Fourth-Former suspiciously. Cardew smiled at them blandly.

"Well, my little men!" he remarked. "And what are you goin' to do with yourselves this fine half-holiday—goin' fishin' for tadpoles?"

"You go and eat coke, Cardew!" said Wally D'Arcy darkly. "Better mind your eye, coming round here alone. What d'you want round our quarters, anyway?"

"I've come to deal with certain grubby little fags who are a trifle too cheeky," explained Cardew calmly. "Like this!"

With a spring, Cardew grasped the two fags, one in either hand. Then he cracked their heads together—hard!

Crack!

"Yaroooogh! Yoooooop!" roared Wally and Curly in unison.

"And like that!" went on Cardew coolly, and once again he cracked the heads of the astonished fags together. Then he sat Wally D'Arcy down hard on the corridor floor, and, grasping Curly Gibson, he sat him down on top of his chum.

Then he walked away, leaving the yelling, furious fags to sort themselves out as best they could. He walked rather hurriedly, for it was not part of Cardew's plan to be mobbed by a gang of fags in their own quarters.

A minute later Cardew was smiling cheerily in Study No. 10 in the Shell passage. Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners were there, busy discussing the problem of how to spend the afternoon, for it was quite early yet.

"Hallo! Want me, Cardew?" asked Tom cheerfully.

"Just a little information," said Cardew. "I'm rather interested in your little experience with the giddy tribunal, Thomas, an' I'd like to know exactly how it happened."

"Oh, would you!" snorted Tom Merry, flushing. "Come to pull my leg about it, eh—to rub it in?"

"Not at all," said Cardew coolly, while Lowther and Manners chuckled. "Far from it, in fact. I'm seriously seekin' information, dear man! I think I told you I intended to bowl out this giddy tribunal."

"You silly ass!"

"Perhaps I am," admitted Cardew, unmoved. "But because you failed to bowl 'em out is no reason why I should fail, is it? Even a duffer like myself may have luck, y'know. I've said I intend to bowl them out, and I fancy I shall."

Tom Merry grinned. Like Cardew, he had resolved to "bowl out" the mysterious society; he had allowed himself to fall into their hands for the sole purpose of trying to discover their identity and the whereabouts of their secret meeting-place.

But he had failed—failed lamentably. He had emerged from the experience sadder and wiser. Moreover, his leg had been pulled unmercifully since in consequence. But evidently his sad experience had not warned Cardew. Cardew was evidently determined to essay the same experience.

"Go ahead, then, you silly chump!" grinned Tom Merry, quite willing to let Cardew try his hand. "Remember, I've warned you, though. If you want to get it in the neck, do so!"

"I'm willin' to risk it," replied Cardew coolly. "But it's information I'm after, not advice, old top! I'd like to know just how you were collared."

"I'm blessed if I know myself," grinned Tom Merry ruefully. "The beggars were slippery, and no mistake. I knew that nearly all the victims had been grabbed in that long passage just beyond the Fourth quarters, and so I went there and mounded about. Sure enough they collared me—before I knew it. I hadn't a chance to see a thing, and they yanked me to their secret-room and put me through it."

"No idea where it was, what?"

"No. Only that it was somewhere underground," said Tom. "The crafty bounders gave me no chance to pick up clues. I'd hoped to discover something by counting steps, and all that. But it was no good. They were wise to that wheeze, and turned me round, and ran me up and down until my head swam. I found out nothing."

"Um!" murmured Cardew. "Perhaps I shall have better luck, though. Thanks, old bean! If you don't see me again, you'll know I fell doin' my duty like a good 'un!"

"Fathead!"

"If I fail to return, break the sad news to Sidney and dear old Ernie. Tell Sidney I leave him my Latin dic, and tell Ernie he can have that packet of fags in the drawer of my desk. So-long!"

"You burbling, footling ass—"

But Cardew was gone. He wandered away, smiling, and his lounging gait took him towards the passage just beyond the Fourth Form studies. This, besides leading to the old

staircase of the deserted wing of the School House, was also a roundabout way to Masters' Corridor and the senior studies, and was not frequently used. Moreover, it was dark and gloomy, no window breaking the lengths of oak-panelling, black with age, that stretched along its length on both sides of the corridor.

Cardew had passed along that corridor hundreds of times without a glance at the panelling, but he looked at it now with keen interest.

"Good gad! That's it!" he murmured suddenly, his eyes gleaming. "I never thought of the panelling! That's how it is done—eh? Well, we'll see!"

And Cardew resumed his careless pacing of the passage, as though he waited for someone.

Mr. Selby of the Third, and one or two seniors passed him as he waited, and then Cardew smiled as four youthful forms hove into view coming from the Fourth quarters.

They were Wally D'Arcy, Curly Gibson, Jamieson, and Hobbs.

They seemed to hesitate a moment at sight of Cardew, and at a whispered word from Wally they came on again, glowering at Cardew as they passed him. Cardew smiled gently at them, and watched them until they vanished round the corner. Then he chuckled.

"Looks as if I'm right!" he murmured. "Now, I wonder just how they work it? I fancy I shall know soon, though. Something's goin' to happen soon!"

And Cardew resumed his pacing cheerfully. But though he looked his usual careless, slack self, he was actually very much on the alert. He fancied something was going to happen, and he was determined not to be caught napping, as Tom Merry had been.

But, alert as he was, Cardew was not quite prepared for what did happen!

CHAPTER 4.

Before the Tribunal!

"GOT him!"

Wally D'Arcy murmured that emphatic remark under his breath as the four fags passed round the corner of the passage after passing Cardew. Wally's eyes were gleaming.

"Got him, right enough!" agreed Curly Gibson, looking just as excited. "My hat, the rotter's fairly walked into our hands if we're slippery!"

"I was just wondering how we could get the cad to walk into the passage there," said Wally gleefully. "And he's fairly obliged us without being asked! We've got him! We've had the bullying cad marked for days, and now it's his turn."

"Hold on!" said Hobbs. "Looks to me as if the cad's up to some game. You know what a crafty rotter he is. And don't forget there's a yarn out that Tom Merry purposely let us capture him, so that he could bowl us out."

"Well, what if he did?" snorted Wally witheringly. "He found out nothing, did he? Got it in the neck properly, all for nothing. Well, Cardew'll get the same. We'll see he spots nothing. Come on! Before the cad goes away from there!"

"Oh, all right!" grinned Hobbs. "We'll need to be careful with him, though. He's hefty, and he's slippery, you know!"

"We'll handle him all right," said Wally confidently. "Let's hope the other chaps buck up. Come along. There's a lot to be done this afternoon."

The fags hurried on. They reached the back staircase—which was out of bounds—and mounted the stairs to the first landing. There they stopped, and, after a cautious look over the banisters, entered a small alcove just off the landing. It was quite a tiny, blank passage, about four feet wide, and seemed to have been built for no purpose at all. And, like the staircase and the greater part of the walls of the old wing, it was lined with panelling, blackened and time-ravaged.

Wally chuckled and stopped before the end panel, and after a moment's fumbling among the carving above it there sounded a click, and the whole panel slid sideways with scarcely a sound.

Wally passed through into the blackness beyond, his chums at his heels. As they passed through, both Wally and Gibson produced pocket electric torches.

"Better wait here for the other chaps," said Wally. "Be shoving your masks on, in case—Hallo! Here's some of 'em!"

There was the sound of cautious feet on the bare stairs, and suddenly Levison minor, Manners minor, and Joe Frayne appeared, and Wally led them through the panel. They had scarcely been waiting another two minutes when three more of the fags turned up, and in another minute Kent and Watson turned up, making the number up to twelve.

"Here we are!" snapped Wally, carefully closing the panel, which ran on well-oiled, wooden wheels. "We've got to be busy this afternoon, chaps. Was that cad Cardew still in the passage when you came along, Kent?"

"Yes; I thought it jolly funny, Wally," said Kent, who was looking rather nervous. "Look here, why not leave that cad alone? He's too jolly cute!"

"Not much!" said Wally emphatically. "Why, it's only twenty minutes since he knocked me and Carly about—nearly busted our nappers. No fear! He's going through it! Come on! Get your masks on. Six of us will be enough to deal with Cardew. You—Frayne, Manners, Levison, Kent, Harvey, and Hobbs can go down to the 'torture-chamber' and get things ready."

"What ho!"

Most of the fags seemed more than keen, and they followed Wally eagerly enough, only Kent and one or two others looking a bit afraid. With the torches showing the light ahead, the fags crept along a narrow, dusty and smelly passage, and then down some rotting wooden stairs which obviously went between the walls of the House. Wally stopped at last, holding up a finger for silence.

As he stopped, the fag shone his light on a queer contrivance of springs and wheels fixed by one of the big, oaken panels in the wall.

It was a secret panel, and Wally handed his torch to Kent, and slid the panel aside very gently the merest fraction of an inch, and peered through, his chums standing in dead silence the while.

Then Wally withdrew his eyes from the slit and nodded gleefully.

"He's there!" he breathed. "Sharp's the word!"

All the fags were wearing tennis-shoes, and these six of them slipped off, standing in their socks. Then Wally picked up a sack from a pile lying in readiness close at hand. His chums also grabbed lengths of cord that were there. Evidently the daring young rascals were prepared for anything.

All the fags could hear somebody pacing beyond the panel now, and as the footsteps passed the panel Wally gave his chums a warning glance and gently slid the panel open wide. It moved soundlessly, and instantly Wally had slipped through, his five companions following one after the other like ghosts.

They glimpsed their quarry at once—a figure pacing along the passage ahead of them. And on the instant they acted, swiftly and deftly.

It was Cardew, and, despite his alertness, even Ralph Reckness Cardew was taken completely unprepared for that lightning attack. In a few soundless steps the masked fags reached him, and only then was Cardew made aware of their presence.

He turned swiftly, and, as he did so, the sack Wally carried was wrenched over his head, smothering and blinding him.

Instinctively he struck out, and one clenched fist connected with something—it was Jameson's nose, as it happened, and from that hapless youngster came a muffled yelp of anguish.

The next moment the attackers and Cardew were struggling together furiously. But the odds were too great—indeed, Cardew only started to struggle for the sake of appearances; his sole object was to get himself captured as Tom Merry had done.

And he succeeded only too easily. In a very few seconds he was trussed up helplessly, and then he was swiftly borne through the sliding panel, though Cardew had no knowledge of that.

He only realised he was being carried, and presently he felt himself lowered to the ground.

It was only while his kidnappers replaced their shoes, however, and the next minute he was being carried on again. And like Tom Merry, Cardew strove hard to make out where he was going. But it was useless—the crafty fags saw to that. They marched him backwards and forwards, turning him again and again, until his head reeled inside the smothering sack. And when at last he was lowered, and the sack wrenched from his head, he hadn't the faintest idea whether he had travelled far or only a few yards.

As he expected, he found himself in a vaulted chamber, dimly lit, and obviously underground. It was exactly as other victims of the tribunal had described to him, and he looked about him dazedly, his eyes half-blinded with dust.

He heard vague rustlings and chucklings about him, and then he glimpsed vague forms seating themselves at a stone table in the centre of the apartment.

In the light from a single, flickering candle Cardew blinked at the forms, and chuckled inwardly. They were all robed and cowed, and they certainly looked very eerie and terrifying.

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"Good-afternoon, gentlemen!" said Cardew cheerily.

There was no reply. For a full minute the twelve hooded figures sat there in silence, without moving, and then just as even Cardew's iron nerves were beginning to feel the strain one of them spoke in a deep, awe-inspiring voice:

"Rise, brothers!"

The twelve rose as if by clockwork, and Cardew chuckled to himself again. He saw now why Tom Merry and the others had sworn the Tribunal could not be fags—they were at least a head taller than any fag in the Third.

"Go it, old beans!" remarked Cardew encouragingly. "This is better than the giddy pictures!"

"Ralph Reckness Cardew!" said the voice sternly.

"Slacker and dandy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, you have been found guilty by the Tribunal of the Secret Society of the Crimson Dagger of bullying certain individuals younger and weaker than yourself! For that you are about to be punished by this tribunal. Should you dare to transgress again your punishment will be far more severe! Executioner, do your duty!"

Rattle! Swooooosh!

Cardew saw one of the hooded forms stretch out a hand and pull at a rope dangling from the ceiling above the table. He closed his eyes grimly, knowing what to expect next.

It came sure enough. That rope was connected by a pulley to a bucket slung on a hook above his head, and as the bucket tipped over a flood of mixed soot and flour swept down over Ralph Reckness Cardew.

There was no escape. Bound hand and foot, Cardew had realised that. He had to go through it, and he went through it. The soot and flour wrapped him round as in a shroud and blinded and half-choked him.

He rocked on his feet for a moment, and then he flopped down on the stone floor under the impact.

But that was not all. Apparently the tribunal considered his case needed severe punishment, for the next moment several of the hooded forms left their seats and surrounded him.

They turned him over; and while two of them held him in suitable position a third gave him a hefty twenty strokes with a cricket-stump.

In that painful moment Ralph Reckness Cardew bitterly repented himself of having been fool enough to go "detecting." He had scarcely expected this, and he struggled furiously, boiling with rage at the added indignity.

But it was in vain. And after the twenty strokes had been administered the sack was dragged over his flouzy, sooty head again, and he was lifted and carried back the way he had come.

At least, Cardew could only suppose that, for the journey was just as bewildering as the earlier one had been. He found himself alone at last, his legs free, but the tied sack still over his head and body, pinning his arms to his sides.

But he knew he was seated on linoleum now, and it needed little guessing to discover where he was. Nor was he left long in doubt.

As he staggered to his feet, gasping and panting, and fuming with fury, seven figures came round the corner of the passage. They were Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, and the Terrible Three.

They one and all stared blankly at the extraordinary figure with startled gasps. Then Tom Merry gave a yell.

"Great Scott! I—I believe it's Cardew!"

"Bai Jove! Cardew!"

"It is!" roared Blake. "Cardew's copped it, too! Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 5.

Herries' Brain-Wave!

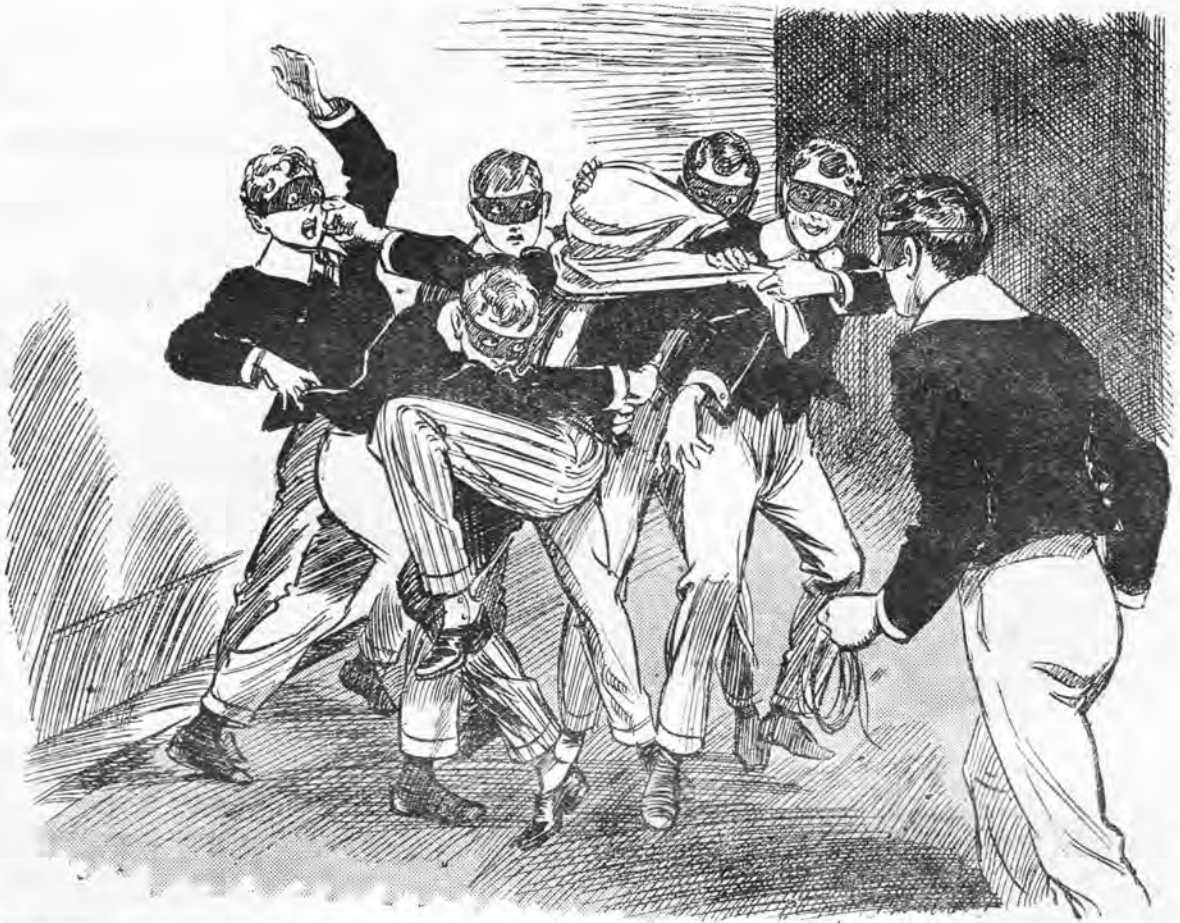
"H A, HA, HA!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared at the sight of the staggering form in the sack. As a matter of fact, it was very easy to guess who was inside it. Knowing that Cardew was on the trail of the mysterious tribunal, and from Cardew's remarks, they had guessed he had intended to try his luck in the passage where so many other fellows had been captured.

It was only too clear that Cardew's "luck" had failed him. He had found the trouble he had gone to seek without a doubt, just as Tom Merry had done. And from the remarks that proceeded from the interior of the sack it was clear that he was no more pleased with his success than Tom Merry had been.

In fact, the remarks that emerged from the sack were sulphurous in the extreme.

And Tom Merry & Co. roared with laughter. It had been Blake's suggestion that they should stroll along to see how Cardew was faring at his detecting; now they saw and knew.



Cardew turned swiftly, and as he did so the sack Wally D'Arcy carried was wrenched over his head, smothering and blinding him. Instinctively he struck out, and the next moment the attackers and Cardew were struggling together furiously. (See Chapter 4.)

Laughingly Tom Merry cut the staggering figure free and tore the sack from his head. Cardew, smothered in flour and soot, glowered at them, his face a sight, his eyes glinting with fury.

"You've asked for it, Cardew, if anybody did," grinned Blake. "You were a silly chump to go asking for trouble like that."

"Oh, rats!"

Cardew scowled and rubbed flour and soot from his face. But he was feeling a bit better now, and he realised he would be a laughing-stock enough unless he put a better face on things. After all, he had certainly asked for it, and the best thing to do was to take it smiling.

He pulled himself together and forced a grin. It was a ghastly effort.

"Yes, I did ask for it right enough," he said grimly. "But I fancy I've not gone through it for nothing. I'll bowl the little cads out yet!"

"You still think it's those fags, then?" grinned Tom. "Did you spot anything, old bean?"

"I marked one of the little sweeps, anyway," said Cardew, glancing at his knuckles. "I caught one of them a nasty old knock, though I didn't intend to. I'm going to look out for a swollen nose among those fags. And that's not all."

A sudden thought seemed to strike Cardew, and he drew something from his trouser's pocket. It was a rather dingy looking handkerchief.

Cardew looked it over eagerly, and then he gave a grunt of utter disgust.

"Done!" he growled, with a wry grimace. "Done, after all!"

"Why, what's that?" inquired Tom.

"When I was struggling with 'em on the floor," said Cardew grimly, "I felt my hand grab something, and I stuck to it. I knew at once what it was. It must have been hanging from one of the boulder's pockets. Anyway, I stuffed it into my pocket while they swarmed over me."

"But why—"

"I thought it would be a giddy clue," murmured Cardew. "I expected to find initials on it, or a name. But—"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders, and dropping the handkerchief on the floor he jumped on it. Then he tramped away, shedding flour and soot as he went.

The juniors watched him go with gleeful grins on their faces. There was something very funny in Cardew's downfall, especially after the confident, cocksure way in which he had set out on his "detecting."

"How are the mighty fallen!" chuckled Jack Blake.

"The giddy tribunal have proved too smart for Cardew, anyway."

"They're a bit too smart altogether," grinned Tom Merry ruefully. "They gave me no chance to spot a clue, anyway."

As he spoke Tom stooped and picked up the handkerchief Cardew had dropped and looked it over carefully. There was no mark or initials on it whatever.

"That's no good," said Tom. "But—but from the grubbiness of it I should fancy that handkerchief belonged to a fag. My hat! That's rather suspicious, chaps. I can't quite see a Shell or Fourth chap, or a senior, carrying about a rag like that!"

"Unless it was Trimble," chuckled Digby. "Trimble's hankies always give a chap the impression that he's in mourning."

"We can count Trimble out," laughed Tom. "But if we could only find out who that hanky belongs to—"

"Towser!"

"What?"

Herries made that interruption excitedly, his eyes suddenly gleaming eagerly.

"What?" repeated Tom Merry. "Whatever are you gassing about, Herries? Does old Towser carry a handkerchief, fathead? I know he's a giddy, wonderful dog, but don't tell me he carries a handkerchief about with him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly idiot!" snorted Herries, grabbing the handkerchief from Tom Merry's hand. "Can't you see what I mean? You fellows know what a splendid tracker old Towser is; he's as good as a bloodhound, if not better!"

"We know he's jolly good at tracking down red-herrings," said Blake, chuckling. "But that's about all—unless it's a bone. He'll track down a bone all right."

"You cackling dummies!" snorted Herries indignantly. "You know jolly well that Towser hasn't an equal at tracking. Hasn't he proved it?"

"Yes, old chap. That red-herring—"

"Don't talk rot!" said Herries excitedly. "Don't you fellows see my idea? I give this rag to Towser to smell, and he'll follow up the scent and lead us to the criminal—I mean to the giddy chap who owns it!"

"Ahem!" murmured Blake. "I can see him worrying it, if that's what you mean, old chap?"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus, with deep feeling. "The wotten animal has vowwed my trowsers more than once, bai Jove! Pway do not encourage him in his destructive habits by givin' the bwute hankies to chew, Hewwies."

"You silly owls!" hooted Herries. "Don't I tell you he wouldn't worry it—as if he would! Why, old Towser has more brains in his napper than Gussy here!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Well, that's saying precious little!" exclaimed Lowther, shaking his head. "If Towser has no more brains than Gussy I should say the case was hopeless. Still, if you claim that he has—"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Weally, Lowthah, you wottah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, don't rot, you fellows!" exclaimed Herries, with no little eagerness. "It's the chance of a lifetime, I tell you, to bowl the tribunal out. Old Towser just smells this, and then he'll—"

"Bow-wow!" suggested Lowther.

Herries glared at his chuckling chums. Herries, besides loving his pet bulldog with a deep love that was really touching, also had a remarkable and a most sincere belief in his intelligence. In Herries' devoted opinion Towser was far more intelligent than many humans—and possibly he was right there!

But, unfortunately, his chums did not share in his belief or opinion. They liked Towser as a dog; but they could not share in Herries' high opinion of his capabilities as a tracker at all events. Certainly it was on record that Towser had once followed up the trail of a red-herring and tracked it down successfully; but then any ordinary common or garden dog could have done that.

"You—you cackling dummies!" snorted Herries, with withering scorn. "I believe old Towser has more sense than the lot of you put together. Anyway, I'm jolly well going to prove what I say. I'm going to take this to old Towser and let him smell it; and if he doesn't get on the trail on the instant I'll—well, I'll eat my hat!"

"You're booked for a tough mouthful, then?" grinned Blake. "Don't be an ass, Herries, old chap! What about Rylcombe? Let's be getting off now."

"I'm not coming now—count me out!" said Herries, with stubborn determination. "I tell you, I'm going to prove what old Towser can do. The sooner old Towser gets a sniff at this the better chance he'll have of trailing the scent. You fellows can sneer and laugh; but you'll jolly well never give Towser the chance to show what he can do."

"My dear man—" began Blake patiently.

"Come and prove it!" snorted Herries excitedly. "Come with me now and you'll jolly well see."

"Well, why not?" grinned Lowther, winking at the others. "I vote we do; it'll be a lark to see old Towser chewing up the hanky. Come on; plenty of time for Rylcombe afterwards. You trot off right away, Herries, and get Towser ready!"

"You mean it—you'll come?" gasped Herries eagerly.

"Of course!" said Lowther, winking again at his chums. "Won't we, chaps?"

"Well, yes!" agreed Tom Merry, smiling.

"Go ahead, Herries!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove! You won't catch me goin' near the wotten bwute!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Towsah has no respect watheah for a fellow's trowsers! You fellows can go while I am changin'. I must change my clobber to go to Wylcombe, bai Jove!"

"Right-ho! That means an hour at least while we're waiting for Gussy to change," chuckled Blake. "So we'll spend the hour seeing what old Towser can do. Go ahead, Herries!"

Herries rushed away, his face showing his delight. His belief in his pet's wonderful powers of tracking was not affected in any way by his chums' doubts and scoffing.

Blake chuckled and turned to Lowther.

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"What's the game, Lowther?" he grinned. "I spotted your giddy wink. Got a wheeze?"

"Yes," assented Lowther, with a chuckle. "We'll give Towser something better than a hanky to trail. In our study cupboard there's a half-empty tin of sardines—been there over a week, I should think; forgotten, you know. I found them at the back of the cupboard, hidden, and forgot to chuck 'em away at the time. But they don't half niff, I can tell you!"

"Yes, but—"

"My idea," explained Lowther, "is to wrap the tin up in paper and stick it in my pocket. Old Towser always jumps up at a chap, and he's bound to niff 'em at once. Then I'll lead him on a nice little trail all round the school. I fancy Herries' face will be worth seeing when I yank 'em out at last and show him what Towser's been trailing all the time. I sha'n't let the giddy dog eat 'em, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Good wheeze, Lowther! We'll do it!"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Tom Merry. "What a lark! Come on!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, you fellows—"

But Arthur Augustus was left to finish his remarks alone, for his chums rushed away, eager to play their little trick on the enthusiastic Herries. Arthur Augustus shook his head and went up to the dormitory to change.

He had scarcely gone when the secret panel in the wall was opened cautiously and the cheeky, grinning face of young Wally D'Arcy peered out. He watched Arthur Augustus vanish, and then he rejoined his chums who were huddled together in the secret passage behind him. As Wally closed the panel gently, Curly Gibson granted.

"Have they gone, Wally?" he demanded.

"Yes!" grinned Wally.

"What the thump did you want to hang about for?" asked Jameson. "Let's be getting on with ragging Selby."

"Blow Selby for a bit!" grinned Wally. "The fact is, I suspected rather that Cardew might be trying to trail us, and I wanted to make quite sure he'd discovered nothing. Well, he hasn't, the silly owl!"

"But that hanky—"

"Blow the hanky—they can't find anything out from that! Thank goodness there was no mark on it. But your thumping nose is a different matter, young Jameson. Why the thump did you shove it against Cardew's fist like that?"

"How could I help it? Think I did it on purpose?" mumbled Jameson, who was hugging a red and swollen nose. "Blow Cardew! He's nearly busted my boko!"

"Well, you'd better keep it out of sight for a bit, and don't let that cad Cardew see it, anyway," warned Wally.

"Anyway, never mind that now. I say, you fellows, I've thought of a wheeze—a ripping lark!" added the scamp of the Third, his eyes dancing with mischief. "You heard what those chaps are up to? They're going to play a trick on Herries—give old Towser something to track down."

"Silly asses!" grinned Jameson. "Towser couldn't track a sausage."

"We're going to find something he will track, though," said Wally, with a low chuckle. "He won't bother with smelly sardines when he smells what I've got. Listen! You know that stuff I bought from the chemist's yesterday—oil of aniseed? Well, why not let Towser smell some of that?"

"Phew!"

"You know what I got it for?" grinned Wally, his eyes gleaming in the gloom of the passage. "Dogs love oil of aniseed; they can smell it a mile off, and nothing'll stop 'em going after it. It's the Wayland Dog Show Saturday afternoon, and I know those chaps intend to take Towser and show him there. Well, my idea was to sprinkle the stuff over their clobber so that all the blessed dogs at the show would go for 'em."

"Yes, we know all about that," grinned Hobbs. "But it's not Saturday yet, fathead!"

"I know. But why not make use of the stuff now, as well as Saturday," chuckled Wally. "Those chaps don't know about aniseed, I bet! That dog-fancier at Rylcombe told me about it when I took Pongo to him last week. Well, it'll give Towser something to trail, anyway."

"Good wheeze, Wally! But how—"

"No time to explain details now," murmured Wally quickly. "You kids can buzz off and be getting things ready to deal with old Selby, while I see to this."

And without further ado, Wally carefully opened the panel again and peered out. The coast was clear, and, slipping through, Wally stepped into the deserted passage. His chums closed the panel after him, and then Wally scudded away at top speed for the fog quarters.

Reaching his locker, Wally soon found what he was after—a bottle bearing a Wayland chemist's label, and a neat-looking water-pistol.

A strong smell of aniseed came from the bottle as Wally withdrew the cork, and with a soft chuckle the young rascal

hurriedly filled the water-pistol. Then he replaced the bottle in his locker and hurried away to Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

A glance inside showed him that it was empty, and after a moment's reflection Wally grinned and hurried up to the Fourth Form dormitory.

As he expected, he found his brother there right enough. Arthur Augustus was busy changing—and changing was a very serious and prolonged operation to Arthur Augustus. He was just taking off his waistcoat as Wally looked in, and he frowned round at him.

"Hallo, Gus!" said Wally cheerily. "Thought I should find you here, old bean! You're wanted downstairs!"

"Bai Jove! Who wants me? One moment, Wally, you young wascal!"

But Wally had disappeared from the door. He did not want to have to explain to Arthur Augustus that it was he who wanted him downstairs!

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in some annoyance. "Why couldn't the young wascal stop to tell me who

Then Wally slipped the pistol back into his pocket, his fell work done.

"Good!" murmured Wally. "Couldn't have been easier! I thought I should have had to shoot the stuff on his clobber while he had 'em on. Now I'll trot out into the quad and see what happens. Pity those other kids can't see the fun!"

And with that the young scamp quitted the dormitory, a cheery smile of anticipation on his face.

CHAPTER 6.

Extraordinary!

"HALLO, here he is!"

"Ready, Herries?"

"Good old Towser! Good boy!"

Round by the chapel Tom Merry, with Blake and the others, came upon Herries, just coming, apparently, from the kennels.

Herries' face was red with exertion, and he was fairly

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE.

COMMUNITY SINGING!



ST. JIM'S assembles in full force,
A crowded, gay community;
To sing, perchance, till we are hoarse,
The good old songs in unity.
For Doctor Holmes has laid it down
That singing is a tonic;
Chasing away each gloomy frown,
And troubles that are chronic!

The masters are assembled, too,
And Mr. Ratcliff's scowling;
For Ratty takes the killjoy view,
And calls our warbling "howling"!
But Mr. Raiton and the rest,
Seem neither sad nor sorry;
They are resolved to do their best
With "Drake" and "Annie Laurie."

We fellows vote it ripping fun,
Our song-books are before us;
Three hundred voices rise as one
In a concordant chorus!
With heads thrown back, we—"let
it go!"
Singing with lusty vigour;
The favourite songs of long ago
Upon our programmes figure.



"Sing up, you fellows!" Merry cries,
"And never mind the weather!"
And Lowther puns, as he replies:
"Now, kidlets, Alto-gether!"
Pat Reilly's voice is loud and keen
When chanting "Tipperary";
And when it's "Jock of Hazeldean,"
Kerr sings like a canary!

Deep booms the bass of big Kildare,
The choruses repeating;
While Gussy's tenor, too, is there,
Just like a lambkin bleating!
Gussy will burst himself, we fear,
He's pretty sure to do so;
He sings, that all the world may hear—
Shades of the great Caruso!

The fags are feeling in fine trim,
Piping away like linnets;
With such whole-hearted vocal vim
That in a few short minutes
Husky and hoarse is every voice—
Gibson, and Frayne, and Wally;
But, breathless, they will still rejoice—
"Mass Singing" is most jolly!



wanted me? Pwobably it is Mr. Wailton, howevah. I had bettah go!"

And hurriedly slipping on his waistcoat and jacket again, Arthur Augustus hurried out of the dormitory and downstairs. He had just vanished when from a doorway farther along the landing emerged Wally, who had been hiding there.

Chuckling explosively, Wally entered the Fourth Form dormitory again and hurried across to the bed by which Arthur Augustus had been standing. On the bed, nicely laid out, was a beautifully-creased pair of trousers, and a natty Eton jacket, likewise a beautiful fancy waistcoat. On the floor were a pair of neat walking shoes, and on a chair was a pair of spotless spats.

Taking the water-pistol from his pocket, Wally carefully sprinkled the insides of the shoes, the bottoms of the trousers, and the spats with aniseed. Then, as an afterthought, he sprinkled the remainder of the stuff in the bulb of the pistol on the lining of the waistcoat and jacket.

dragging on the lead, at the end of which was Towser, his pet bulldog.

Towser might or might not be a very intelligent dog, but he certainly had a will of his own. He never seemed to want to go where his master wanted him to go. Apparently he did not wish to accompany his master now.

"Here you are, you fellows!" panted Herries. "Blessed if I know what's come over Towser—he simply won't come."

"P'raps he'd rather sleep?" suggested Blake. "I've noticed he's a whale at sleeping."

"Has he smelled the hanky, then?" grinned Tom Merry.

"Not yet. I wasn't going to make a start until you chaps turned up," said Herries grimly. "There's going to be no doubts about this trial this time. Now watch, you chaps—I'm going to try him now."

With that Herries took out the handkerchief from his pocket and held it under Towser's nose. Towser happened to be sniffing round the other juniors at the moment. He

just gave one sniff at the handkerchief, and then, with another sniff—of disgust, it seemed—he turned his attention to Lowther again.

"Good dog!" murmured Herries, holding out the handkerchief again. "My hat! Look at him, chaps—jolly excited about something, I must say! Jove, I believe he's on the scent already! Out of the way, Lowther, and let him get to work!"

But it was easier said than done for Lowther. Towser had certainly scented something; it was the sardines in Lowther's pocket.

He was leaping up at Lowther, panting, whining, and obviously very excited.

"Get out of the way, you silly idiot!" hooted Herries. "Can't you see—Oh, great Scott!"

A sudden amazing suspicion seemed to occur to Herries. George Herries was noted for many things—his devotion to Towser, his rather large pedal extremities, and his stubborn belief that he played the cornet well; but he was not noted for his brains—indeed, Herries was rather dense.

And at sight of Towser leaping up at Lowther now it was not very surprising that Herries should jump at the first conclusion that occurred to his slow-working intellect.

"Oh, great Scott!" he repeated, staring blankly. "Look at that, you fellows! Oh, you awful, spoofing rotter, Lowther! It's you all the time, you crafty rotter! Well—well, I'm hanged! Lowther!"

"What the thump—" ejaculated Blake. "What—"

"Can't you see?" howled Herries excitedly. "That hanky must belong to Lowther! Towser knows! Towser never makes a mistake! He sniffed the hanky, and then went straight for Lowther! Can't you see, you dummies? Lowther must be one of the blessed tribunal, and Towser's howled him out!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry, Blake, Digby, Lowther, and Manners doubled up and roared with laughter. Even Lowther had scarcely expected Herries to jump to that amazing conclusion.

"You cackling dummies!" spluttered Herries, holding Towser off Lowther only by sheer force. "Are you jolly well blind? Look at Towser now! Jove! If I were to let him go I believe he'd tear Lowther to pieces! Now what about it, you scoffing rotters? Lowther, you awful spoof, you're howled out!"

"Bow-wow!"

"You rotten hypocrite!" yelled Herries. "Talking to us about the blessed tribunal like you've done and all the dashed time you're a member of it! But Towser's howled you out! Towser knows! The old beggar never makes a mistake. I tell you—Here, stop him!"

Herries ended in a wild, wrathful yell as Lowther suddenly snatched the handkerchief from his hands and tore away with it at top speed.

"After him!" howled Herries. "That proves it! He's got the dashed evidence now, the cad! Oh crumbs! Steady, Towser, old boy!"

But Towser needed some steadying just then. Those sardines might have been stale—from the smell of them they were undoubtedly worse than stale—but they seemed to appeal to Towser, and as Lowther raced away, Towser gave a deep-throated growl and went after him, Herries following, hanging on desperately to the lead.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Roaring with laughter, Blake and the others went in pursuit. Lowther's little joke was proving more entertaining than they had expected. They followed round the chapel and round the old ruins, and then round by the bicycle-shed and into the Close. Here Lowther doubled on his tracks, and went scudding round the back of the New House, round by the gymnasium, and under the old archway into the green-carpeted quadrangle.

By this time Towser was scarcely a dozen yards behind Lowther, with Herries still clinging on to the lead frantically. But as they passed under the archway Towser gave an extra strong wrench, and tore himself free.

In a few yards he had caught Lowther up, and Lowther pulled up, almost helpless with laughter, with Towser now making frantic leaps up at him, striving to reach his pocket.

Luckily Lowther was a great favourite with the grim old bulldog, but, none the less, Towser's attentions were just a bit too vigorous for Lowther's liking.

"Drag him off!" he howled. "Ha, ha, ha! Drag the old idiot off, Herries! Oh crumbs! Good dog! Go down you—ha, ha, ha!—awful brute!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and the others came pelting up just as Herries succeeded in grabbing the chain. They helped Herries to drag Towser off, though they were nearly helpless with laughter.

"You—you frightful idiot, Lowther!" panted Herries. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,005.

glaring at him. "What the thump did you want to run away for? Simply asking for trouble! Hand over that handkerchief, you rotter!"

"My dear man, why?"

"Hand it over, or I'll jolly well let him go for you again!" howled Herries.

"But why?" asked Lowther. "It isn't the hanky Towser was after!"

"I know it wasn't!" snorted Herries. "It was you, you spoofing rotter! He's tracked you from the scent of that handkerchief—your handkerchief! You needn't try to get out of it, Lowther; you're howled out!"

"Not at all!" smiled Lowther cheerfully. "Quite a mistake, old top! Towser wasn't after me—he was after this!"

And Lowther took from his pocket the tin of sardines, and unwrapped the paper. As he did so Towser yelped and made frantic efforts to get at them.

"Eh? What—what d'you mean?" gasped Herries.

"I mean what I say, old chap. Towser must have sniffed these sardines in my pocket. They've gone bad and are rather smelly, you see. Look at Towser now! He wants 'em!"

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. fairly howled at the expression on Herries' red features. He understood now—indeed, he could scarcely help understanding. It was undoubtedly the tin of sardines Towser was after—and not Monty Lowther.

"It's a pity to do poor old Towser out of them!" murmured Lowther. "But they might poison him if he got 'em! So I'd better put 'em out of danger!"

And with that Lowther stepped to one of the wire rubbish-baskets that lined the gravel-drive. Lifting the wire lid he dropped in the tin and closed the basket again.

Towser immediately turned his attention from Lowther himself and strained to reach the wire litter-basket, growling and yelping.

If Herries had had any doubts they fled then. It was undoubtedly the sardines Towser had been trailing—and not the humorist of the Shell!

"Oh!" he gasped. "Oh, you awful rotter, Lowther! You—you've been pulling my leg all the time!"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries fairly spluttered with fury as he realised how he had been taken in. For an instant he glared at the grinning Lowther, and then, forgetting all about Towser in his towering wrath, he dropped the chain and went for Lowther.

The next instant he had Lowther's hapless head in chancery.

"Yarooooogh!" roared Lowther, in great anguish, struggling furiously the while. "Leggo! Help, you grinning rotters! Rescue! I'll smash you, Herries! Yooooop!"

Meanwhile, finding himself free, Towser had, naturally, made a bee-line for the litter-basket.

"Stop him!" gasped Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! Separate those asses, you chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake, Manners, and Digby rushed to separate Herries and Lowther, who were scrapping furiously now. At the same moment Tom rushed at Towser, who had fairly howled the litter-basket over, and was worrying it in his efforts to get at the sardine-tin.

After a struggle, Tom managed to drag him away, whilst Blake, Digby, and Manners succeeded in separating Herries and Lowther.

"You silly idiots!" laughed Blake. "You can't scrap here under all the windows! Chuck it!"

The warning had its effect, and Herries and Lowther left each other alone—Lowther stopping to mop a streaming nose, whilst Herries rushed to help Tom with Towser. And at that moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came down the School House steps into the quad.

CHAPTER 7.

Unpleasant for Gussy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS came leisurely down the steps with stately stride, his eyeglass glimmering in his eye, his smart, gold-knobbed cane in his hand, and his silk hat fairly gleaming in the spring sunshine.

From the crown of his gleaming hat to the heel of his gleaming patent-leather shoes, Arthur Augustus looked the very picture of elegance. Anyone seeing Gussy at that moment would have known at once why the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was known at St. Jim's as the swell of the Fourth.

He looked a picture!

Yet his noble features quite lacked their usual air of quiet, sedate repose. There was quite a worried look on the

face of Arthur Augustus, and he kept looking down at himself and round about him in rather a puzzled manner. He also, every now and again, gave a gentle, puzzled sniff!

This was very unusual, for Arthur Augustus was not accustomed to sniffing—far from it.

But he was undoubtedly sniffing now!

As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus could not imagine what it was about his person that smelled so strongly. Up in the dormitory he had noticed it first; but he had ignored it, believing it was something in the dormitory that was responsible for that strange and not unpleasant aroma.

But, to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's surprise, on leaving the dormitory the aroma still hung about his person. He would have turned back to try to discover the meaning of the mystery; but he was afraid of being left behind by his chums. It was nothing unusual for Blake & Co. to leave him behind, for Arthur Augustus usually took a great deal of care over his toilet, and Blake and the rest were not always in the mood to wait patiently for him.

So Arthur Augustus tried to ignore the aroma, hoping the fresh air would take it away, whatever it may be.

But it didn't. And as he strode across the quadrangle towards his chums, Arthur Augustus was feeling very uncomfortable and mystified.

He had already been very much mystified by the strange behaviour of his minor Wally. Why Wally had told him somebody wanted him downstairs when nobody was there he could not imagine. He had wandered about for a long time, and had even gone to the Housemaster's study.

But though Mr. Railton was there he assured Arthur Augustus rather tartly that he had not sent for him.

The swell of St. Jim's, therefore, had been obliged to return to the dormitory to resume his changing, very mystified. And knowing what a young scamp Wally was he was also rather uneasy.

But despite this Arthur Augustus had no suspicion whatever in his innocent mind that there was any connection between that strange aroma and his mischievous minor. He was a very unsuspicious junior; rather a drawback for any fellow at St. Jim's, as Gussy was continually finding out.

Blake was the first to sight him.

"Hallo, here's Gussy now!" he said. "Looking like a giddy fashion-plate as usual! Take that dashed dog back, Herries, and let's get off. We'll—Phew! What an awful niff! What the thump have you been putting on your hair, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wondahed if you fellows would notice it, y'know. It is vewy, vewy strange! I weally cannot undahstand it. I noticed it first—Bai Jove! Keep that w'etched dog—Oh cwikey! Hewwies, you awful wottah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus in sudden alarm. "Take your w'etched animal away! Oh—oh, bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus jumped backwards, fairly shrieking, as Towser leaped up at him, yelping with excitement. Towser had been excited enough and eager enough to get at Lowther. But his eagerness and excitement were nothing to this. He almost went frantic in his efforts to get at Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!" yelled Herries, dragging with all his force at the chain. "Help me, chaps! What on earth is the matter with him? Towser—Towser, good dog! Help me!"

"What the thump—"

In great amazement Blake and Tom Merry rushed to help Herries, for really Towser's excitement was alarming. It was nothing unusual for Towser to leap up at Gussy. Arthur Augustus always did seem to possess a strange fascination for Towser; Herries claiming that it was the colours in Gussy's ties and waistcoats that did it. They were, according to Herries, enough to make any respectable dog get excited and hysterical.

But on this occasion Towser was undoubtedly unusually excited and keen to make a closer acquaintance with Arthur Augustus. He had already nearly sent Arthur Augustus flying backwards with that first eager bound, and his muddy paws had made a remarkably clear pattern on Gussy's smart trousers.

And as Tom Merry and Blake jumped forward to help, his grim teeth took a piece out of Gussy's jacket.

It was more than enough for Arthur Augustus. He shrieked again and, turning tail, he bolted for his life, his eyeglass streaming behind him at the end of its cord.

Arthur Augustus had no fear of being bitten by Herries' pet—far from it. Towser had a great deal of respect for the persons of his master's chums.

Unfortunately—as Arthur Augustus was always complaining—he had no respect whatever for their trousers; and especially the sacred and well-creased trousers of Arthur Augustus.

So Arthur Augustus fled, solely to save his trousers, his jacket, and other articles of his natty attire.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Herries, struggling desperately to

hold the almost frantic Towser back. "The awful dummy! Why the thump does he want to smother his blessed clobber with aniseed!"

"With whatter?"

"Aniseed!" yelled Herries furiously. "I niffed it at once. The awful ass has smothered his clobber with it for some reason or other—to get Towser's rag out, I suppose. I've a jolly good mind to let Towser collar him. It would serve—Oh, great pip! Hold him!"

Herries' voice ended in a wild yell of warning. But there was no holding Towser. A sudden, strong jerk had taken the chain out of Herries' hand, and Blake and Tom Merry jumped forward too late.

The next instant Towser was streaking for the gates after Arthur Augustus, who had taken that direction, hardly aware in his alarm that he had done so.

"After him!" roared Herries. "Oh, my hat! Old Towser will get lost or run over or something. Quick!"

Herries was obviously not thinking of the hapless Arthur Augustus, but of harm coming to Towser. He pelted after the flying dog, and Tom Merry and the rest followed him. They were looking rather serious now, for obviously Towser was not himself. There was no knowing what he might do to Arthur Augustus.

That unlucky junior was already scudding for dear life along Rylecombe Lane—a glance behind having shown him that Towser was following at terrific speed. When Tom Merry and the rest reached the gates they saw him well away along the lane, with Towser chasing scarcely twenty yards behind.

Even as they passed through the gates, however, they saw Arthur Augustus turn aside and take a flying leap on the back of a milk-float that happened to be jogging along towards the village.

The float was not going very fast; but the driver, a cheery-faced young fellow, grasped the position in a flash—or he imagined he did. The sight of the ugly-looking bulldog on Gussy's trail seemed enough for him.

His hand shot out to help Arthur Augustus aboard, and then he instantly whipped up his horse.

The horse shot ahead just as Towser came bounding along, panting and wheezing as he did so. Towser was rather an old dog, and good-living and little exercise had rather spoiled his wind. But he had been a little too much for Arthur Augustus for all that.

But Arthur Augustus seemed to be safe enough now. As the light float sped ahead, the disappointed Towser was rapidly left behind.

"Mad dog?" queried the driver of the float, glancing anxiously behind. "That were a close thing, mister! 'Nother yard an' 'e'd have 'ad you!"

"Bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus. "That awful animal! Bai Jove! Gweat Scott! I am all in a fluttah! Bai Jove! Yaas, I weally do believe the w'etched animal has gone mad!"

And Arthur Augustus sank exhausted on to the seat of the float and mopped his perspiring brow with a delicate cambric handkerchief.

"Look 'ere, youngster!" said the driver, still looking anxiously back. "I'm not sure as we oughter 'ave runned away from the brute. He may come across a kiddie or summat, like as not. If you likes you can jump out and run for it, an' I'll turn back and try to down 'im wi' my whip or summut. Mad dogs ain't—"

"Bai Jove, no, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus hurriedly. "Old Towser isn't weally mad, you know. But he is a howwid animal and he will jump up at a fellow's clobber!"

"Eh? What? Mean ter say as he ain't mad arter all?"

"Bai Jove no—not weally mad! He is weally a vewy decent and harmless animal—especially with kiddies!" said Arthur Augustus, anxious to make matters clear. "But he will muck up a fellow's clothes, you know. He seems vewy excited this aftahnoon, and he wushed at me like anythin' an' made all these feahful marks on my twousahs and tore my jacket, the wotten bwute!"

"Oh!" ejaculated the milkman. "Then you knows 'im?" "Oh, yaas! He belongs to a gweat friend of mine. Howevah, I am vewy gwateful to you for savin' me from the w'etched bwute. Are you goin' to the village?"

"Only to the farm yonder," said the driver, glancing behind him. "But you're safe enough now—he's far enough behind. You'll be in the village long afore 'im."

The float jogged along for a little longer and then stopped at the gateway of a farm. Arthur Augustus pressed a florin into the hand of the friendly milkman, and then he hurried on. There was now no sign of Towser behind, but he was taking no chances.

The adventures of Arthur Augustus were not ended yet, however—far from it. A hundred yards farther on was a cottage, and sunning itself in the gateway was a small, grubby-looking terrier.

Arthur Augustus scarcely gave the animal a glance as he

hurried past. But the mongrel gave Arthur Augustus more than a glance.

As Arthur Augustus hurried past, the dog suddenly sniffed, pricked up his ears, and stood up, sniffing hard. Then he went after Arthur Augustus like a thunderbolt.

"Yooooop! Oh, bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus leaped nearly a yard into the air as the terrier reached him and leaped up at him from behind. His teeth snapped within an inch of the junior's jacket.

Arthur Augustus had dropped his coat in the quad of St. Jim's, but he still retained his natty cane, and now he backed away in great alarm, swiping desperately at the frantic terrier with his stick.

It was not a procedure likely to improve the cane, and after the terrier had bitten it with his sharp teeth in several places, Arthur Augustus turned on his heel and ran for it.

The terrier went after him, snapping at his heels and barking furiously. He made no attempt to bite Arthur Augustus himself, but he seemed to have no objection to taking a bite at the junior's trousers and jacket whenever he got near enough.

But the troubles of Arthur Augustus were only just starting.

Another twenty yards or so farther on was another cottage, and at the gateway of this an Irish terrier was squatting in the afternoon sunshine.

As Arthur Augustus flew past him the Irish terrier joined his distant relative, and the two together soon made the unlucky swell of the Fourth put on a terrific burst of speed.

He was near the village now, and as he entered the outskirts he came upon an elderly lady with two Skye terriers. The little animals instantly tore the leads from their guardian's hand and tore after Gussy and the two terriers.

A little farther on a sheep dog, wandering along idly, was electrified into instant action as Arthur Augustus flew past, stumbling and panting and gasping, the four dogs snapping and yapping at his heels.

That made the number up to five, and by this time Arthur Augustus was in a state bordering on the hysterical. But he was fairly in the village street now, and the uproar soon aroused attention from shopkeepers and people in the High Street.

Still making desperate swipes with his cane—which was in a sad state now—Arthur Augustus dodged and ran, and turned at bay, and did all he could to drive off the excited canines. But it was useless.

Outside Blands, the butcher's, another sheep dog was sunning itself, and he joined in almost the same instant as the dog from Sands, the grocer's, came tearing across eagerly.

"Oh, gweat Scott!" almost wept the hapless Arthur Augustus. "Wescue! Yawwoooogh!"

A nip from the sheep dog penetrated through Gussy's trousers, and he shrieked. At the same moment he sighted another dog ambling at quite a good speed along the street. It was Towser, still on the trail of the aniseed.

The sight of him was the last straw for the unfortunate Arthur Augustus, who was on the verge of collapse from sheer exhaustion alone.

At that moment Mr. Sands, the grocer, came rushing across with a broom in his hands in a praiseworthy effort to help the St. Jim's junior.

He laid about him with a will, and a shrill chorus of yelps rang out above the general uproar. But it was of no avail; the dogs merely scattered and closed in again. But it gave Arthur Augustus one desperate chance, and he took it.

He jumped to the nearest lamp-post and swarmed up it frantically.

A chorus of disappointed barks and yelps went up at this manoeuvre, several sets of teeth missing Gussy by inches as he swarmed up.

But he was safe enough now. He had reached the arms of the lamp-post, and with one elegant leg slung over one arm of the post, Arthur Augustus clung on desperately, glowering down defiance at the defeated and disappointed canines.

A hearty cheer from the crowd greeted Gussy's smart performance. It was mingled by much laughter, many of the villagers evidently being under the impression that Arthur Augustus was doing it all as a sort of free entertainment.

CHAPTER 8. Up the Pole!

"OW!" panted Arthur Augustus, his breath coming in great gasps. "Oh, bai Jove! What a frightful experience! Oh ewikey! Ow-wow! Gwoooogh! Oh, bai Jove!"

He clung on to the lamp-post, his face red with exertion, his eyeglass dangling at the end of its cord, his silk-hat

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at a rakish angle at the back of his head. He had never had such an extraordinary exciting and unpleasant experience in his life before. He blinked down at the leaping, yelping swarm of dogs with eyes that almost goggled from their sockets. What it all meant he really could not understand; indeed, he was in no state to understand anything just then.

Again and again Mr. Sands charged the dogs with his broom, and the butcher came across with a stick and joined him. But they gave it up as useless at length. Strangely enough, the animals, excited as they were, made no attempt to bite either their attackers or each other. They seemed too eager to get closer to Arthur Augustus to bother about anybody else or fighting amongst themselves.



As if to make sure that there was no one in the room, Knox grovelled he had drawn blank, sent Wally and his chums behind the panel into the room. "Knox!" he thundered.

It was really extraordinary.

There were at least a score of dogs below the lamp-post now, many of them with chains and leads trailing behind them, having obviously scented the aniseed from afar and broken free from their owners as Towser had done, or been attracted by the noise.

"Oh, bai Jove!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "This is weally too awful for words! How on earth am I— Bai Jove! Wescue, Blake! Wescue, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry & Co. had arrived on the scene at last. They came along at top speed, panting heavily, and they stopped and stared in amazement at the strange scene—at least, all but Herries did.

Being a fellow who took a terrific interest in dogs, Herries knew all about them, and knew their likes and dislikes. But his chums did not, and the word aniseed had no meaning for them—yet!

"M-mum-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, staring from the yelping crowd of dogs to the hapless Arthur Augustus.

"What—what—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a howl of laughter from a youngster in a St.

Jim's cap, who came racing along on a bicycle just then. It was Wally D'Arcy. Having learned how Gussy had left St. Jim's, the young rascal had followed hot foot to find out how his little joke was panning out.

He saw now, and he almost fell off his bike in his gleeful hilarity.

But Tom Merry & Co. were far too scared at Gussy's predicament to laugh. They stared and stared, and then suddenly Tom Merry sighted a taxi, with hood lowered, coming along.

It was an ancient vehicle from Wayland, and, being empty, Tom saw a way of rescuing Arthur Augustus.

"Quick, you fellows!" he gasped. "We must get old Gussy out of this sharp. My hat, what a go! Come on!"

He rushed into the middle of the street and held up his



ed on the floor and looked underneath the couch. His face, when rumblings of silent mirth. At that moment Mr. Selby marched "What are you doing?" (See Chapter 10.)

hand. The driver of the taxi had slowed up to see what was happening, and he stopped on the instant.

Tom Merry hurriedly explained his plan to the driver and then to his chums, and as they tumbled aboard the ancient taxi the driver twisted the wheel and ran the car gently towards the lamp-post, running alongside the kerb as near as he could, and blowing terrific blasts on his horn.

Yelping madly, and in dire confusion, the excited dogs leaped out of the way. As the taxi neared the lamp-post, Tom Merry and Blake jumped to their feet.

"Come on, Gussy, jump for it! Here, grab my hand!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Dazed as he was, the swell of the Fourth grasped the idea on the instant, and as the taxi stopped he jumped, alighting amidst his chums, gasping and panting.

But he was safe at last!

Just then, Herries, who had spotted Towser, rushed and grabbed his pet, then, with the struggling bulldog in his arms, he jumped into the taxi. Manners and Digby helping him. As the door slammed Blake gave a yell.

"Right away! All clear, driver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

With all but Arthur Augustus and Herries yelling with laughter, the taxi moved on.

Honk, honk, honk!

Still blowing terrific blasts on his horn the taxi-driver drove home his clutch, and as the taxi buzzed away down the village street, a hearty cheer followed it, amidst plenty of laughter. And the dogs also followed it, yelping and barking their deep disappointment.

But the scattered swarm of animals were very soon left behind, and a moment later the taxi was humming towards St. Jim's.

"Safe enough now, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "My hat! You have been through it! Been bitten anywhere?"

"Oh, no, deah boy!" groaned Arthur Augustus, rising to his feet and examining his clothes in deep despair. "Only a few sewatches, at all events. But—but look at my clobber!"

"But what's it mean?" demanded Blake. "What in thunder did all those dashed dogs want to get at you for?"

But that was a question Arthur Augustus could not answer. His chums soon got the answer, though! When the taxi stopped outside the school gates at last, the juniors swarmed out on to the lane, only Arthur Augustus remaining where he was. He refused point-blank to leave the taxi until Towser, who was fairly quiet and subdued now, had gone.

"Get him away, for goodness' sake, Herries!" said Tom Merry, as he dropped down into the road. "He's done enough damage for one afternoon! I'm blessed if I can understand the whole affair at all!"

"It beats me, too!" said Blake. "Why—"

"Couldn't you guess?" snorted Herries, glaring at the face of Arthur Augustus. "Didn't I tell you before we started out? That awful idiot there must have smothered his clobber with aniseed!"

"Eh? What d'you mean?" gasped Blake, light beginning to dawn. "Why—"

"Aniseed!" snorted Herries. "Don't you thumping well know that dogs are no end fond of oil of aniseed—they'll follow the scent of it for miles! I believe cats are fond of it, too! I smelt it on Gussy when he came out this afternoon."

The juniors looked at Arthur Augustus.

"You awful ass, Gussy!" gasped Blake. "What on earth did you want to get that stuff over your clobber for?"

"You—you—" Arthur Augustus fairly spluttered at the unfounded charge. "You awful wottah, Hewwies!" he shouted wrathfully. "Do you think I would shove the wotten stuff on my clobber myself. I haven't the faintest— Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus suddenly recollected something.

"Oh, gweat Scott!" he went on, his face suddenly going red with wrath. "It must have been my minah. Bai Jove! That is it. It must have been that awful young wascal!"

"What? You mean Wally?"

"Yaas!" groaned Arthur Augustus, his face pink with outraged wrath; and he told his chums how Wally had tricked him into leaving the dormitory—for Arthur Augustus saw through that little dodge now.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Blake. "That—that young sweep is the giddy outside edge. No wonder he was roaring with laughter in the village. I spotted him and wondered then. Well, I'm—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared as they understood the meaning of the extraordinary happenings. Knowing Wally of the Third as they did they could not doubt it. It was another little jape on the part of the scamp of the Third.

"It looks to me as if the young sweep knew Herries was going to put Towser on the trail of that hanky," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, never mind that now—the taxi-man's waiting, chaps. I vote we go back with him to Rylcombo again. Coming, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no question of Arthur Augustus going to Rylcombo again; he had had quite enough of Rylcombo village for one afternoon.

"And count me out, too!" granted Herries, hugging Towser tightly to him. "I'm going to look over Towser and see he's come to no harm. You chaps can go—and blow the lot of you!"

With that, Herries tramped away, Towser giving tongue excitedly and struggling frantically, evidently still eager to get into touch with Arthur Augustus again.

"Come on, Gussy!" laughed Tom Merry. "Safe enough now, old chap. We want to be off."

"And mind Mrs. Taggles' cat!" called Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus watched Herries anxiously until he was out of sight, and then he clambered from the taxi, after which, glaring at the laughing juniors, he started off at a run for the School House and vanished indoors.

"And now for Rylcombe!" chuckled Blake. "And if we happen across young Wally we'll give him what for!"

But they did not happen across Wally—that young scamp saw to that. He was hiding farther along the lane behind the hedge, and not until the taxi, with Tom Merry & Co. aboard, had hummed past him did he move. Then he lifted his bike back over the hedge again, and a minute later he was riding cheerily through the gates of St. Jim's. It was quite a cheery afternoon for the scamp of the Third.

CHAPTER 9.

For Mr. Selby's Benefit!

"OH, here you are!"

Curly Gibson greeted Wally D'Arcy with that disgusted remark as the scamp of the Third appeared in the secret vault where his chums were awaiting him. Half of the fags had been passing the time away playing at leap-frog on the stone floor of the secret vault. The others were engaged in various ways—Kent and Hobbs were busy cooking kippers at an evil-smelling oil-stove, that filled the air of the gloomy room with fumes; Jameson, Gibson, and Levison minor were busy mixing a quantity of flour and soot together—apparently in anticipation of further victims of vengeance! Two more fags had the boxing-gloves on, and were pummeling each other with far more vigour than science.

In the absence of their leader the members of the terrible Secret Society of the Crimson Dagger were spending their time in their own ways—being off duty, as it were. For, in addition to being the trial and punishment-chamber of the tribunal, the secret room was, of course, used by the fags as a club-room. They had brought down there various articles to make the place more comfortable—a small cooking oil-stove, a hurricane-lamp—purloined from Taggles' woodshed—some old cushions and some crockery, in addition to a supply of candles, a kettle, and a spirit-stove, and other useful articles too numerous to mention.

Just now the place certainly looked a little more homely and less weird and uncanny than it had done earlier on in the afternoon when Cardew had been dealt with there. A dozen candles and the lamp made the dingy place quite bright and cheery, and the homely smell of cooking kippers quite swept away the eerie touch.

"Yes, here I am!" chuckled Wally, as he entered the place and looked around him. "Jingo, what an awful niff! Put out that giddy stove, for goodness' sake—the kippers alone are enough!"

"Where the thump have you been all this time?" snorted Jameson. "Half the blessed afternoon's gone already!"

"Well, I'm not responsible for the giddy time," said Wally cheerily. "I've been to Rylcombe, chaps."

"Yes," chuckled Wally. "I've never laughed so much in my giddy natural, you men. That aniseed wheeze came off, a perfect treat!"

And Wally told the sad story of the results of his little joke amidst splutters of mirth. His fellow-fags doubled up and roared at the news.

"My hat!" gasped Curly Gibson at length. "Why the thump weren't we on the spot?"

"Never mind!" said Wally consolingly. "You'll be able to pull Gussy's leg about it. And we'll still use the wheeze

on those chaps next Saturday at the dog-show. Plenty of giddy aniseed left. And now let's get to business, chaps. We've got to deal with that brute Selby this afternoon, remember. Got the giddy glue?"

"Yes," chuckled Curly. "All ready, capting!"

"Hold on," interposed Kent, his voice nervous. "Look—look here, you fellows! Haven't we done enough for a bit? Let's stick to the fellows and leave old Selby alone. It's asking for the sack!"

Wally D'Arcy glared at him—Curly Gibson and Jameson also glared at him.

"Well, you rotten funk!" gasped Wally. "Think we're going to slow up now everything's going so well? You—your footling funk!"

"We're going too far!" growled Kent.

"We are risking a lot!" said Reggie Manners. "Why not give old Selby a rest, Wally—for a bit, anyway?"

"Will we thump!" snorted Wally indignantly. "What did we form the jolly old society for, eh? Answer me that. Wasn't it to right our wrongs—to take vengeance on our enemies? We've been kicked about and bullied long enough; we've been down-trodden worms long enough, licked by masters, and licked and bullied and booted by seniors and blessed juniors!"

"That's right enough; but—"

"There's no but about it!" roared Wally wrathfully. "We've started well, and we're going on as we started, my lad! We're going to go on punishing those rotten bullies until it dawns on them that it don't pay to bully, and we're going on dealing with Selby until it dawns on him that it's solely because he's such a tyrannical old rotter that he's always getting it in the neck."

"That's right!" said Curly Gibson warmly. "We're jolly well going ahead full-steam! We'll make everybody at St. Jim's afraid of the giddy society; they'll fairly shiver every time they get one of our warning daggers! They laughed at first, the chaps who got them; but they jolly soon found out that the society meant business. And we'll make the punishments stronger and stronger, until they do see the reason for it and stop bullying!"

"That's the spirit," said Wally, giving Kent and Reggie Manners glares of scorn. "Why, we haven't really got going yet, you funks! Anyway, Selby's not improved at all—he's worse. He licked me twice this morning, and I've nearly five hundred lines to do for him. Life won't be worth living in the Third if something isn't done. Anyway, we're doing it. Come on, chaps! And I'll punch the nose of anybody who funks. So mind your noses!"

The fellows who showed signs of funk were conspicuous by their absence after that; nobody wanted his nose punched by the redoubtable Wally! But the majority were far from funkling dealing with Mr. Selby. They were only too eager to do so, in fact. Mr. Selby, the unpopular master of the Third, was a very unpleasant gentleman. He was intolerant, irritable, unjust, and very often bordering on the cruel in the treatment of his pupils. Certainly the fags of the Third were a handful; but it was just as certain that Mr. Selby was the wrong man for the job. An irritable, sour-tempered, and unfair master was not likely to get on well with the high-spirited and boisterous young gentlemen of the Third at St. Jim's.

Nor did he. He ruled his Form with a tyrannical rod, and of late he had been unusually severe, to use a mild word. So now Wally, in his role of Grand Mogul of the Tribunal of the Crimson Dagger, was prepared to deal with him.

Quickly preparations were made to deal with Mr. Selby. They did not take long. From a hidden box in a corner of the chamber Wally took out several tubes. On those tubes was a label, on which was printed the words, "Bulldog Liquid Glue," and underneath this was a guarantee to stick anything together excepting quicksilver and water.

Wally crammed the tubes in his pocket with a chuckle.

"Plenty here," he murmured, "and if there's any over we'll use it on Tom Merry's study, or Blake's. If Selby happens to be at home we shall have to postpone—Phew! That's an idea!"

While cramming the tubes into his pocket, Wally had come across the empty water-pistol, and the sight of it seemed to give him an idea.

"Bring along that big bottle of ink, Jameson!" he ordered.

"What for?" chuckled Jameson.

"Never mind what for!" said Wally, with a grin, chuckle. "Just you obey orders, and bring it along. We shall need it if Selby happens to be at home."

"Oh, good wheeze!"

Jameson and the others seemed to guess the idea now, and Jameson chuckled gleefully, as he picked up the big bottle of ink. It had been raided from the cupboard in the Form-room, and was intended for the features and hair of victims of the tribunal.



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The next moment Wally was leading Jameson, Gibson, and Hobbs out of the secret room and along the secret passage. The rest of the fags remained behind to make preparations for tea. Wally happened to be in funds, and he was standing his chums a feed in the vault that afternoon.

Wally stopped at length before the sliding panel that led into Mr. Selby's room, and motioned to his chums for silence. Then, very gently and cautiously, he slid the panel aside the barest fraction of an inch.

It moved without sound, for the fags had taken good care to oil the wheels and mechanism thoroughly. Wally found himself looking into the study. It was empty.

But even as Wally was about to slide the panel wide open, he slid it swiftly shut again.

"Is he there?" breathed Jameson.

"No!" said Wally, in a whisper. "I heard somebody knock on the door. Listen!"

From beyond the panel came the sound of a door opening and footsteps entering the room. Wally risked it, and peeped through the crack as he gently slid the panel open slightly. Then he grinned.

"Knox!" he breathed. "That bullying cad Knox! Quiet!"

Wally watched as Knox of the Sixth strode into Mr. Selby's room, looking for the master as he did so. Finding the room empty, the Sixth-Former was about to withdraw when he seemed to change his mind.

He strolled about for some moments looking at the photographs and things in the nosey way he had, and then he flopped down into Mr. Selby's armchair.

"Cheeky rotter!" murmured Wally, his eyes glimmering.

"That bottle of ink, young Jameson!"

Jameson handed over the jar of ink, and, withdrawing the cork swiftly, Wally dipped in the barrel of the water-pistol. He filled the pistol full, and then, warning his chums not to make a sound, he gently slid open the panel and shoved his arm through.

Knox's head just showed over the top of the chair, and, taking aim at it, Wally fired.

Swoosh!

"Yarroooooogh!"

The stream of ink struck the top of Knox's head and splattered far and wide. It also ran down Knox's neck and down his face.

Knox leaped up with a wild yell.

Swiftly Wally closed the panel almost shut, and through the crack again he watched gleefully.

CHAPTER 10.

Astounding!

WITH the ink streaming down his face Gerald Knox stood in the middle of the carpet, glaring about him in thunderstruck amazement. Then he grabbed out his handkerchief and mopped at his face and neck frantically.

"G-good gad!" he spluttered. "What in thunder—"

He glared about him furiously. Then a sudden suspicion seemed to occur to him, and he started hunting round the room, a savage expression on his ink-smeared face! He looked under the couch, he looked behind the chair, and round the bookcase and under the table.

His face when he had drawn blank was worth seeing. It sent Wally and his chums behind the panel into rumblings of silent mirth. Apparently Knox, the prefect, had imagined there was somebody hidden in the room—indeed, it was the only possible conclusion Knox could arrive at in the circumstances.

As if to make quite sure, Knox grovelled on the floor again and looked underneath the couch. He was just doing so when Mr. Selby opened the door wide and marched into the room.

He stared transfixed on sighting Knox half under the couch.

"Knox!" he thundered. "Bless my soul! Knox, how dare you?"

Gerald Knox jumped to his feet, crimson showing under the ink of his features.

Mr. Selby started back at sight of his face.

"Knox!" he gasped. "What—what is the meaning of this? How dare you take advantage of my absence to play the buffoon in my study! I am surprised that you, a senior and a prefect, should so far forget—"

"Do I look as if I'm doing this for fun?" bellowed Knox, too furious to choose either tone or words. "Look at my face and neck and clothes—smothered in ink!"

"Knox!"

"I don't care!" shouted Knox. "Somebody's played a rotten trick—chucked ink all over me only a minute ago. I was just hunting round to see if anyone was hidden in here."

"Nonsense! Rubbish!" snorted Mr. Selby, his anger rising as he noted the ink-spattered carpet and desk. "It is perfectly obvious to me that you have been interfering with the things on my desk and have had an accident with the inkwell. You had no right whatever to touch my desk, Knox!"

"But I tell you I didn't!" shouted Knox, glaring about him wildly. "I was just waiting here for you when the beastly stuff was chucked over me!"

"I do not believe one word of your story, Knox!" said Mr. Selby angrily. "What are you doing in my study at all?"

"I came to report young D'Arcy minor to you, sir," said Knox sullenly, still mopping his ink-stained features. "I saw the young rascal riding through the gates on his bicycle this afternoon!"

"Oh, indeed!" snapped Mr. Selby. In the ordinary way the Third Form master would have been very pleased to receive the information from Knox. Riding through the gates on a bicycle was against the rules, and usually earned the daring culprit a caning. But Mr. Selby scarcely took in the information. He was thinking about his ink-spattered carpet and desk. "Oh, indeed! And you amused yourself by interfering with the things on my desk whilst waiting for me, Knox. Did I think you had done the damage maliciously I should report this matter to Mr. Railton. As it is—kindly leave my study!"

"Look here, sir—"

"Not another word! I am not accustomed to being spoken to in this manner, Knox! Leave my study!"

There was such wrath in Mr. Selby's tones that Knox did not hesitate further. He left the study, banging the door after him angrily.

Mr. Selby breathed hard. He was a very suspicious gentleman indeed, and he suspected that Knox had been nosing among the things on his desk and had upset the ink in some extraordinary manner.

"The insolent fellow!" he murmured aloud, securing the door. "He has undoubtedly been prying among my things, and now wishes to throw the blame for the accident on others. Bah!"

With that expression of disgust Mr. Selby, who seemed in a very irritable mood indeed, flung himself into his armchair, drawing a newspaper from his pocket as he did so. That newspaper belonged to the masters' Common-room; but Mr. Selby had purloined it in order to read it in comfort in his own study.

He drew it out now, and, moving the chair a trifle nearer the fire, started to read.

Wally D'Arcy waited until he had fairly settled himself, and then, hurriedly filling his water-pistol with ink again, he gently slid the panel open a trifle and shoved his arm through.

Swoooooosh!

It was another bullseye.

The stream of ink splashed home on Mr. Selby's bald head, and spurted over his paper and over his person and over everything within a radius of a yard or so.

Mr. Selby leaped out of his chair with a stifled yelp. He stood glaring this way and that way; but he saw nothing to account for the amazing happening. He looked up at the ceiling, but there was nothing suspicious there.

"G-good heavens!" articulated the astonished master. "What—what—"

He snatched out his handkerchief hurriedly, for the ink was beginning to run down his face into his mouth and to drip on to his waistcoat. He mopped away vigorously, wiping his face and his bald head until the latter looked as if it was a black skull-cap.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "This—this is truly amazing! There is some miscreant—some ruffian concealed in my room!"

At the thought Mr. Selby's face grew thunderous, and, like Knox, he instantly started a thorough search of the room. But he discovered nothing. The young scamp of the Third had instantly closed the panel again, and it was scarcely possible for the master to discover anything.

He gave it up at last, his face black with ink and outraged dignity. He had already looked out into the passage and found nobody in sight.

"Amazing!" he muttered. "Simply astounding! But it is undoubtedly the work of some unknown young villain who has made himself scarce. But—but I am almost inclined to believe, from previous happenings here, that this room is haunted. Simply astounding! I see now that Knox must have been speaking the truth. Bless my soul!"

For another moment or two Mr. Selby stood mopping at his brow, and then he hurriedly opened the door and went out, looking back into the room almost fearfully. But whether he had gone to wash the ink off and change or because he suspected the room was haunted the fags had no means of telling.

They doubled up behind the panel, and fairly choked with silent laughter. Then Wally suddenly opened wide the sliding panel.

"Come on, you men!" he chuckled. "Work now! That was only to give that old rotter something to be going on with!"

As he spoke Wally slipped through the aperture, and, crossing to the door of the study, he locked it carefully, making sure the keyhole was covered.

Then, his chums having joined him, the young rascals started on their work.

It was not a long job. Wally started operations by coating the seat of the easy-chair with glue. Then he coated the couch in case Mr. Selby should select that to repose upon, also sticking the cushions to the couch as an afterthought.

Meanwhile, Wally's chums had been busy sticking everything movable to the top of the desk. Blotting-pad, inkstand, and inkwells, gum-bottle and brush, paper-weight and paper-knife, and various papers—all were stuck with a liberal coating of liquid glue to the top of the desk.

This done, the fags turned their attention to the table, which was already set for Mr. Selby's tea, though the maid had not yet brought the tea-tray in. The cloth was glued to the table, and knives, spoons, and plates were also glued to the table, likewise the jam-dish, butter-dish, and a silver-plated cake-dish, on which reposed several nice cakes. Not being like Trimble, Wally resisted the temptation to take the cakes; but he did not resist the temptation to glue them to the dish.

Then Jameson found Mr. Selby's slippers on the floor, and he glued those to the top of the mantelpiece. At the same time Wally had torn the newspaper into little pieces which he stuck on pictures, on the wall, on photo-frames, and wherever and on whatever the fancy took him to stick them.

The result was rather extraordinary. The whole room presented rather a patchy, piebald appearance when the fags had finished.

"That's about the lot," murmured Wally at last. "Time to move, I fancy, you men. Old Selby always was rather stuck-up, but he'll be more stuck-up than ever now. Jove! This is jolly good stuff. Sticks like—like glue!"

There was a chuckle from his chums. The fags were rather pleased with the result of their novel ragging. They were fairly certain, however, that their hated Form master would not be pleased with it. Whatever the marvellous claims the makers of that liquid glue made, their preparation was certainly good stuff for sticking. The fags had got it all over their hands, and they had to keep their fingers apart to prevent them sticking together.

But they did not mind that a bit. It was, as Wally remarked, for a good cause, so why grouse about that.

"It's a pity we can't be here to see what happens," said Wally. "But I'm hungry. So now we've done our giddy duty, I vote we go and have our tea. Better unlock the door first."

"Hear, hear!"

And chuckling explosively at thoughts of what a surprise awaited Mr. Selby, the fags re-entered the secret passage, and, after Wally had unlocked the study door, he followed his chums, and then closed the panel carefully. Then the avengers went down to the secret vault to have their "spread." And they went in high feather, little dreaming that a pair of very sharp eyes had watched them carrying out their little jape. Had they known that, they certainly would not have been in such high feather, and especially had they only known that those eyes belonged to Ralph Reckness Cardew, whose wits were as sharp as his eyes.

CHAPTER 11. Bowled Out!

"GOOD gad! That's it!"

Cardew's eyes gleamed.

The slacker of the Fourth sat in the armchair in his study alone. It was some time after he had parted from Tom Merry & Co. in the passage, and he had long ago got rid of the flour and soot that had adorned his elegant person. It had not been at all a pleasant task, and in addition to a thorough wash, he had been obliged to change all his clothes, and even his shoes.

But he had changed at last, and he was now feeling a bit better, and inclined to look upon his unpleasant experience in a humorous light.

Slacker and other things Cardew might be, but he was a sportsman, and he was ready now to acknowledge that he had asked for what he got, and that he had lost the first round.

Whoever the secret tribunal might be, they had certainly

beaten him, or, at least, they had allowed him to discover very little.

Yet Cardew was not wholly dissatisfied with the results of his "detecting," sad as they had been. Of one thing he was now quite assured; and that was that the tribunal were indeed composed of fags of the Third.

He was convinced of that, if he had not been before. True, the voice that had spoken in the vault was a deep one, and true, he had quite failed to recognise it. But then he knew of several youngsters in the Third whose voices were deep enough, and who, in any case, could easily have spoken like that.

But that was nothing. Cardew was relying on the evidence of his own eyes. The moment the sack had been removed from his head Cardew's keen eyes had been on the alert, and he had instantly noticed one thing—the size of the hooded forms' bodies to their legs was grotesque in their lack of proportion. He had noticed it when they had stood up, and he had noticed it still more when they had stooped over him.

He was certain now that his earlier suspicion was correct—that they were wearing something that held their cows up to make them appear taller than they actually were.

It was enough for Cardew, and instead of being inclined to throw the investigation up, he was more eager than ever to prove his contention. And it was after sitting thinking things out for some time that Cardew gave vent to that triumphant exclamation.

"That's it!" he repeated to himself. "That's the wheeze! Why the thump didn't I think of that cupboard before? Jove, I'll do it!"

On the instant Cardew made up his mind, and he hurried from the study, and made his way to the passage where he had been captured so neatly.

He walked down the full length of the passage, and at the end, where the passage turned the corner, he stopped before a large, deep cupboard that stood in the corner, scarcely visible in the deep gloom.

The cupboard was old and never used, and after a glance up and down both passages Cardew opened the door, which was merely fastened by a catch. Inside was a motley heap of dusty books and dusty papers, mostly old exercise books. There were three shelves in the cupboard, and, working swiftly, Cardew piled all the rubbish on the top shelf. Then he moved the two bottom shelves and placed the shelves flat on the floor of the cupboard.

Then he crept into the cupboard and pulled the door almost shut, leaving a mere slit through which he could watch all that went on in the long passage.

It was really a simple idea, and he wondered now why he had not thought of it in the first place, and he wondered with a chuckle why nobody else had thought of it. Practically all the mysterious attacks had taken place in that passage, and Cardew was resolved now that he should witness the next attack, if he had to wait hours. He felt fairly certain he would not have to wait very long before seeing something, however.

Nor was he wrong there. Cardew had his own suspicions as to how the mysterious attacks were accomplished with such lightning-like rapidity, and he fixed his eyes on the black, age-old panels of oak that lined the passage on both sides.

As he watched several fellows passed his hiding-place, but nothing of interest to Cardew happened, until suddenly he stiffened.

At the end of the passage a familiar figure had appeared—the youthful form of Wally D'Arcy. He came hurrying along, a cheery grin on his features. Wally had just returned from Rylcombe, and he was in a hurry to rejoin his chums in the secret retreat.

Possibly that was the reason why Wally did not take usual precautions, for, with scarcely a glance behind him, he stopped in the passage half-way down.

Cardew held his breath.

The next moment he gave vent to a low whistle as he saw Wally fumble for a brief moment with the carving on the wall, and then the next instant he had vanished and the corridor was empty!

But not for long. Cardew was just about to leave his hiding-place when he drew back abruptly. Somebody had appeared at the far end of the passage, and Cardew did not desire to be found where he was.

Moreover, there was something curiously sneaking and stealthy in the newcomer's approach, and Cardew's lips set grimly as he recognised Reuben Piggott, the sneak and spy of the Third.

What Piggott was after Cardew very soon saw. For a moment Piggott hesitated half-way down the passage, and then he started to fumble with the carving above the secret panel, just as Wally had done, his ferret eyes on the alert as he did so.

"Phew!" murmured Cardew, with a chuckle. "I'm not the only giddy investigator, then. That little sweep is on Wally's giddy track, or I'm a Dutchman!"

There was very little doubt of that. Piggott was very clearly spying on Wally, and he had found out the secret just as Cardew had done.

And Reuben Piggott was Wally's bitterest enemy.

Cardew actually was feeling very annoyed with Piggott. He had forestalled him, and Cardew grunted as he suddenly saw Piggott's face light up, and then the fag vanished through the wall just as Wally had done.

"Dash!" murmured Cardew. "Fairly done in the eye! But that little sweep's up to mischief, I fancy. I—Hullo! The little man has fouled it!"

Piggott suddenly reappeared—evidently he did not like the idea of venturing alone into that black, secret passage between the walls of St. Jim's.

He came out again, and closed the panel carefully. Then, his mean, pasty features convulsed with malicious triumph, the fag gave another stealthy glance about him and hurried away.

"Given the job up," murmured Cardew, with a soft chuckle. "Well, here goes!"

Cardew was about to leave his hiding-place, when again he paused and drew back. But it was only Mr. Railton this time, and after the master had passed Cardew emerged and hurried to the spot he had carefully taken mental note of.

He found the spot easily enough. There was a faintly noticeable line down the edges of the sliding panel that was lacking in the other panels.

In a very few seconds Cardew had discovered the secret of opening it; and after a hasty glance about, he clambered through. But as he saw the black, noisome passage stretching to right and left, Cardew grunted and stepped back into the passage again and closed the panel.

Then, taking careful note of the panel, he hurried away as Piggott had done. But he had not given it up by any means. He was back in less than three minutes, and in his pocket was an electric torch he had fetched from his study.

He was soon in the secret passage again, and, having slid the panel back and examined the mechanism, he started cautiously on his exploring.

He turned to the left first, and, after mounting the short flight of steep steps, he came to the panel the fags had first discovered by accident—the panel in the alcove of the old back staircase.

"So that was how dear old Gussy was collared," smiled Cardew, as he peeped out on to the bare stairs. "This is no end interestin', by Jove! Now we'll try the other way."

And Cardew hurried back the way he had come. He passed the secret panel he had entered by, and soon he was brought to a sudden halt.

Ahead of him—greatly to his surprise—he saw a shaft of daylight across the narrow passage. It shot across the passage, showing up the bare stone of the wall opposite; and, shutting off his light, Cardew crept nearer.

Then he understood. It was another secret sliding panel, and it was wide open, letting in daylight from somewhere. Moreover, to Cardew's straining ears came the murmur of subdued voices and laughter.

"Those giddy fags!" murmured Cardew. "I think I'll risk it."

And he did. With his torch switched off, Cardew crept cautiously nearer and nearer, until he reached the aperture. Then, keeping still as a mouse, he peered round the edge of the panel.

What he saw made him almost jump.

He found himself looking into a study he recognised—the study of Mr. Selby, the master of the Third. And in the study were Wally, Jameson, Curly Gibson, and Hobbs. And they were busy—very busy indeed!

Cardew chuckled inwardly as he saw what the young rascals were up to.

"That stuff's glue, I bet!" murmured Cardew to himself. "Dear old Wally! What a lad he is! So this is how old Selby gets it in the neck!"

For some moments Cardew watched, highly entertained, as the fags completed their preparations to surprise their Form master; and then as Wally gave the order to stop he moved away well back along the passage.

He watched the fags emerge into the passage; and as he expected they did not come his way. They disappeared along the passage, their lights flickering and dancing on the narrow walls. Then the lights vanished.

Cardew waited a second or two, and then he switched on his own light and went after them. He soon reached the second flight of steps, and at the bottom he saw the light streaming out from the vault; he guessed at once it was that from a glimpse of the arched doorway.

A few minutes later Cardew was peering round the doorway into the apartment where he had been "tried and punished." He recognised it at a glance, though it had only been lit by a single flickering candle then.

He chuckled as he saw the fags busily making preparations for their feed. On the great stone table were spread plates, and cups, and saucers, and other crockery, and there were numerous bags, obviously containing tarts and cakes.

"Dear little fellows," murmured Cardew, smiling as he watched and listened to the fags' cheery laughter. "What a pity to spoil their innocent enjoyment! But it must be done. The dear little fellows must be taught not to tip flour and soot over their elders, nor to whack 'em with giddy cricket-stumps! Your hour is at hand, my infants!"

And with that Cardew crept back the way he had come, a cheery smile on his face. He had succeeded as he had said he would. He had bowled out the Secret Society of the Crimson Dagger. And he wasn't going to be satisfied with doing that!

CHAPTER 12.

Cardew, the Mysterious!

"YOU fellows hungry?"

Tom Merry & Co. stared as Cardew looked into Study No. 10 with that question. Behind Cardew showed the grinning faces of Clive and Levison major. Inside the study, besides Tom, Lowther, and Manners, were Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were laying the table for tea. There was not much on the table at all, and Blake and his chums of the Fourth were eyeing what there was rather glumly.

There was a famine in the land, so to speak, and though the Terrible Three's study cupboard was in a very parlous state, they had asked Blake & Co.—their study cupboard having been raided by Baggy Trimble—or so they suspected—and being in a far worse state.

"Hungry?" exclaimed Tom Merry, staring. "Of course we're hungry. Why?"

"Like some nice juicy jam-tarts and some cream-buns, and heaps of other nice things?" asked Cardew. "All of it free?"

"What the thump is the chap gassing about?" grunted Blake. "Is that Cardew's way of asking us to tea, Levison?"

"Goodness knows!" grinned Levison. "Cardew just met us, and said if we'd come along with him he'd see we got a free feed. And as there's a famine in our study—"

"No need to go into details, Ernie!" smiled Cardew. "Yes, it's my way of askin' you fellows to tea. Care to join us?"

"Does that include us?" asked Blake, his eyes still on the table. "We all seem to be in the same boat. Somebody—that fat rotter Trimble, I suppose—has raided our grub, and we happen to be stony, that ass Gussy having given all his cash to his minor!"

"Weally, Blake!" protested Arthur Augustus. "It was a promise. I'd given my word to Wally that he should have half of that last fivah, bai Jove!"

(Continued overleaf.)

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"Well, wasn't that dashed promise got from you under compulsion?" snorted Blake warmly. "I told you to make the young rotter wait for it!"

"I wish I had now—afiah what the young wottah did this afiahnoon!" said Arthur Augustus, frowning. "Howevah, it is too late now. The young wascal got wound me this mornin', and I gave him all I had. He is standin' the fags a feed, or somethin'."

"Well, never mind that now," said Tom Merry, eyeing Cardew rather anxiously. "If Cardew really means it—"

"I do!" said Cardew blandly. "I promise you fellows that if you'll all come with me, I'll put you in the way of a giddy free feed. I'm absolutely certain you'll jump at the chance when you see it. But you must come at once and ask no questions."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Cardew—"

"No time for chin-wag, Gussy," smiled Cardew. "If you fellows will come, I think I can also promise you a surprise and a bit of real excitement."

"But, look here, Cardew!" began Tom, eyeing him curiously. "What's the game?"

"Come and see!" said Cardew.

And, nodding to Levison and Clive, he marched out. Tom Merry nodded to his chums.

"Come on!" he snapped grimly. "May as well see what the fathead means. But if he's pulling our legs, we'll smash him to a jelly!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors were very curious indeed now. They knew Cardew of old, and they knew he had some very good reason for wanting them, despite his light and jocular manner. The chums of the School House joined the grinning Levison and Clive, and they all followed Cardew.

They got their first surprise when Cardew took them along towards the deserted wing of the School House. And as Cardew started up the rickety old staircase Tom Merry spoke:

"Where the thump are you taking us, Cardew? If you're pulling our legs—"

"Not at all!" smiled Cardew. "Perish the thought, dear man! Look upon me as a Cooks' Tourist Guide for the moment. Here, gentlemen, is the first of the recently-discovered wonders of St. Jim's."

And, entering the little, blind passage on the first landing of the stairs, Cardew started to fumble with the carving above the secret panel. Cardew had already found out how it worked, and the next moment he had the panel open.

From the juniors came cries of startled amazement.

"What—what—"

"Bai Jove!"

"That's one way in," explained Cardew cheerily. "I'll show you the other later on. Follow the man from Cooks', and don't tell the world by making a row!"

"Rather not!" breathed Tom Merry.

Curious thoughts were working in his mind now as he remembered how Arthur Augustus had been captured by the members of the tribunal on that same spot. He followed Cardew through the aperture on the instant, and the rest followed a trifle gingerly.

Cardew chuckled softly, and switched on the light from his pocket-torch. Then he closed the sliding door.

"Come on!"

Cardew led the way along the dank, gloomy passage, the light casting grotesque shadows on the stone wall. He led them down the steps and along the passage beyond. Tom Merry called attention to the two other sliding panels as they passed them; but Cardew merely chuckled and passed on.

"We'll see them on our way back, dear man!" he murmured. "Mind these steps! And—quiet!"

In breathless silence Tom Merry and the others followed Cardew as he picked his way carefully down the steps. Tom did not need telling where Cardew was leading them; he guessed the trail would end in the secret vault that had caused so much mystery.

Two seconds later he saw that his guess was correct.

Cardew switched off the torch, and, creeping forward, they found themselves peering into the hidden vault.

All of them understood then. Wally & Co. were apparently just about to start their feed. They never did start, however.

"So—so you were right, Cardew—right all along!" breathed Levison. "Those—those young scamps!"

"Bai Jove!" mumbled Arthur Augustus, quite shocked at the discovery. "The—the faithful young wascals!"

"Well, here's the feed I promised you!" chuckled Cardew softly. "I think we're entitled to confiscate this grub as some little recompense for our sufferings at the hands of the giddy tribunal."

"My hat! Yes, rather!" breathed Tom Merry, staring into the apartment, which looked festive enough now. "The

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—the daring young scamps! So it was those young idiots, after all!"

"Phew!"

The discovery almost took away the breath from the startled juniors. It had been suggested that the fags were the secret and dreaded tribunal. But very few really believed they could have the nerve to do what had been done.

But evidently they had. There was no doubting that now. Wally and his fellow-conspirators were "bowled out"—bowled out completely by Cardew.

"Ready?" murmured Cardew.

"What-ho!" breathed Lowther, with a soft chuckle.

"Then go it! Don't let one of the little fellows escape!" chuckled Cardew.

And they "went it" quickly enough. They had neither forgotten nor forgiven their treatment at the hands of the Tribunal of the Crimson Dagger, and they meant to make Wally & Co. realise that it wasn't wise to smother Fourth and Shell men in flour and soot and ink and lick them with cricket-stumps.

As they rushed into the lighted chamber a series of alarmed yells arose from the startled fags, and the next moment all was confusion and uproar in that silent vault that had probably not been disturbed for centuries.

"Back up!" yelled Wally D'Arcy desperately. "It's only those Fourth and Shell rotters!"

But it was a very half-hearted resistance. Wally and one or two put up a good fight, but the rest, taken so utterly by surprise, were completely demoralised, and they were very soon dealt with. Cardew seemed to have come well prepared, and, in any case, there was plenty of string and cord ready at hand—Wally & Co. had seen to that, little dreaming it would be used on them in the end.

Yet it was! One by one the struggling, yelling fags were trussed up securely, and Wally, struggling gamely to the last, went down at length with the laughing Tom Merry and Cardew holding him.

"Oh, you rotters!" panted Wally, almost weeping with wrath and dismay. "You beastly rotten rotters!"

"Hark to him!" chuckled Cardew. "Gussy, old chap, I am surprised at the way you have brought your minor up!"

"Bai Jove! I should not like to be responsible for his bringin' up!" said Arthur Augustus, glaring down at his minor, who glowered back at him. "Pway do not let him get away, deah boys. I am goin' to spank him soundly, as he dared to spank me. And I am also goin' to punish him for that wotten twick this afiahnoon."

"Was it this merchant who smothered you with aniseed?" chorled Levison. "Oh crumbs! We've just heard about that!"

"Yes, it jolly well was!" panted Wally, glaring up defiantly. "Think I care for the lot of you? Yah! I'll make you sit up if you come any games with me, so mind your eye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally's defiance struck the juniors as funny, and they roared at his threats. Soon all the fags were seated in a row, glaring up defiantly at their captors.

"Behold the dark and desperate members of the Secret Society of the Crimson Dagger!" said Lowther. "Behold the giddy tribunal that has struck terror into the hearts of all St. Jim's. Don't they look desperate characters now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Here's their giddy robes and cowl!" chuckled Tom Merry suddenly. "Ah! So this is how it was worked!"

He shoved his hand inside the brown stuff that composed one of the hoods and drew out a stiff length of cardboard folded into three sides that had obviously been used to make them a good head taller.

"That's it!" grinned Cardew. "Ingenious—what? That held the cowl up, and you see the masks are pinned to the front. They'd got holes lower down to see through. It made them a good head taller."

"Jolly neat!" said Levison. "I must say these kids have brains as well as a thumping nerve! Pity they don't put 'em to better use, though! Now, what's to be done with 'em?"

"I know what I'm going to do with 'em!" smiled Cardew grimly. "What's good for the goose is good for the gander! We'll see how they like a bath of flour and soot!"

"Ha, ha! Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here—" roared Wally.

But they ignored Wally, and they ignored Wally's chums. The members of the tribunal had had their fun, and now they had to pay for it!

And they did! There was plenty of soot and a fair amount of flour, and there was also a goodly supply of ink. Wally and his gang of desperadoes got all there was. It was emptied over them, and then they were rolled in it.

When this was done the tribunal were in a fearful state—

both of mind and body. But even then the avengers were not satisfied.

There were a dozen or so kippers on the table, nicely fried and very smelly! Each fag got one stuffed down the back of his neck.

"Now I am goin' to spank that young wascal Wally!" said Arthur Augustus.

And he did so until Wally fairly howled! Not usually a vengeful fellow—far from it, in fact—Arthur Augustus felt his minor thoroughly deserved it—and doubtless he did! At all events he got it.

"And now, as I promised you chaps a feed I vote we have it," remarked Cardew. "Tuck in, you fellows—my treat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry & Co. tucked in despite the fearful threats of the luckless fags. The bags were opened, and they started work on the tarts and cakes, and other good things that Wally had purchased out of the money he had obtained from his major. The mere fact that Wally had obtained that cash by compulsion from Arthur Augustus was more than enough to satisfy Tom Merry & Co.

Eight juniors with healthy appetites soon made short work of the good things. The dim, gloomy vault was scarcely the right place for such a feed, but it made no difference to Tom Merry & Co.

They finished at last, when the last crumb had disappeared.

"Now we'd better be off!" said Cardew.

"Hold on!" said Tom, a rather serious look coming over his face. "We'd better have a talk to these young idiots now we've squared accounts! This silly game has got to stop after this. We none of us want to see these youngsters sacked, and sacked they will be, sure enough, if they're allowed to carry on their games! You hear, Wally—you've finished down here, my lad!"

"We jolly well haven't!" raved young Wally, almost beside himself with wrath and dismay. "You—you rotten cads! Oh, won't we just make you sit up for this!"

"Haven't you?" said Tom Merry grimly. "We're going to give you an hour to clear your rubbish out of here. At the end of that time we're going to screw up those panels. This game has got to be stopped!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You're very funny young merchants we know," went on Tom. "But, unfortunately, you don't know where to draw the line. We're not going to see you sacked, if we can help it. Understand?"

"You—you—you—" spluttered Wally. "Oh, you rotters!"

"Cut one of them free, Gussy!" said Tom. "Then we'll leave the young asses to clear up and clear out! And if there's any more secret society tosh, we'll make it warm for the young rascals!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, and he quickly cut the bonds of the nearest fag—Curly Gibson. Then the juniors left the vault, laughing at the furious yells of the enraged fags.

"So that's that!" chuckled Tom Merry, as they wended their way back. "I fancy this puts the tin hat on the operations of the giddy tribunal, chaps!"

"And a jolly good thing!" snorted Manners. "If my minor had been sacked—"

"And mine!" echoed Levison, compressing his lips. "By Jove, we'd better see nobody gets to know the facts!"

"Phew! That reminds me!" said Cardew, coming to a sudden stop. "Somebody does know—at least, somebody knows about the secret passage."

"What?"

"Young Piggott," said Cardew, shaking his head gravely. "I spotted the young rotter spyin' on dear old Wally. I saw him sneak after Wally when the young rascal entered the passage not so long ago. He funk'd goin' to explore, though. But—but I fancy the little sweep means mischief. He's always up against Wally's crowd, I believe."

"Phew!"

Cardew related what he had seen, and the juniors looked suddenly serious. Piggott was a mean-spirited young gentleman—a spy and toady to the core. It was known that he was in the habit of carrying tales to Mr. Selby, and it was almost a certainty that Piggott was tracking Wally & Co.,

having guessed they were up to something. And his sole reason for doing so was obviously to get them into trouble.

He would undoubtedly do so, too—unless something was done.

"We'd better get hold of the little worm and threaten to give him what for if he dares to split!" said Manners, his tone showing his sudden fear. "Let's—What's that?"

The juniors suddenly stopped, startled by a crash that sounded quite close at hand. It seemed to come from beyond the panelled wall on the left, and it was followed by a startled, angry voice yelling for help.

"That—that's Selby's voice!" gasped Tom Merry. "What the thump—"

"Oh crumbs!" exclaimed Cardew, giving a sudden deep chuckle. "It is Selby! He's found the glue!"

CHAPTER 13.

A Sticky Business!

"THE—the whatter?"

The juniors stared at Cardew's grinning face in the deep gloom. Cardew chuckled, and showed the light cautiously on the panel in the wall that gave admittance to Mr. Selby's room.

"I forgot to tell you chaps," he murmured. "That panel leads into Selby's study. I came along just now and caught those young imps gluing up everything in his study—liquid glue, y'know. The dear little infants do get ideas, and no mistake. They'd got a heap of glue and were sticking up every giddy thing in his study. I bet that crash means that dear old Selby's found the glue. Quiet!"

Cardew gently opened the panel a trifle and peeped cautiously through. Then he hurriedly closed it again and doubled himself up, rumbling inwardly with suppressed mirth.

"Bai Jove! What—what—"

"Come on!" choked Cardew. "Come on, dear men, or you'll miss the giddy fun."

The mystified juniors went stumbling after Cardew as he led the way along the passage again, his light dancing on stone and black oaken panels. He stopped at last at the next sliding panel, which the other juniors had not examined as yet.

Cardew cautiously opened it and peeped out. The passage was deserted, and he switched off his light and slipped out. Tom Merry and the rest followed.

They got a shock when they discovered where they were, though Tom Merry had half-guessed the truth.

"So—so that's how the little rascals worked those captures!" breathed Tom Merry. "We might have guessed it!"

"I did guess it at last!" chuckled Cardew, closing the sliding panel after him. "Now for— Phew! Here's that little sweep, now!"

It was young Piggott of the Third. He came sneaking round the corner, and he stopped undecided on sighting the juniors standing there.

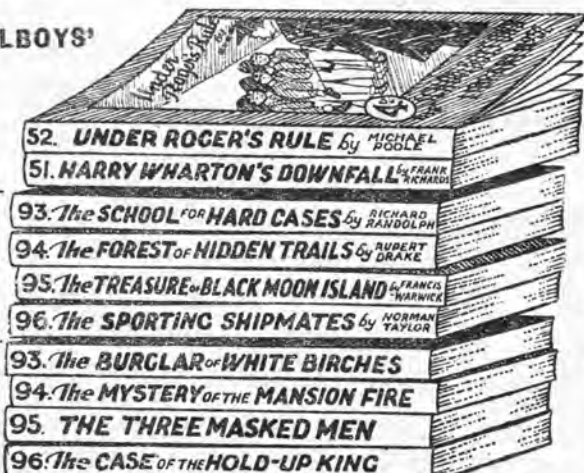
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"Never mind him now," murmured Cardew. "We'll deal with the little man afterwards. Come along! I wouldn't miss seeing what happens to Selby for worlds!"

And he led the way at top speed for Masters' corridor. They arrived there to find a swarm of fellows outside the door, and they understood why when they had heard the uproar that proceeded from the study. Just then Mr. Railton came up and he hurriedly pushed his way through the crowd and flung the door open.

Then he started back in dumbfounded amazement and alarm.

And no wonder! There were startled gasps from the crowd as they saw into the study.

The room was in confusion, and the decorating Wally & Co. had done made the study look ludicrous in the extreme. But it was at Mr. Selby the crowd was staring.

He was lying on the floor, still seated in his armchair, which lay on its side on the carpet, and it was obvious enough what was the matter.

Mr. Selby was stuck fast—very fast—to his chair. And he was bellowing for help as he struggled in vain to release himself.

Nor was Mr. Selby the only curious sight in the room.

The table had evidently been knocked over during Mr. Selby's desperate struggles. On the floor was an upturned tray and several smashed articles of crockery wallowing in tea and milk.

But the remainder of the things that had been on the table had not parted company with it, having been so carefully glued on by Wally & Co.

"Good—good heavens!" gasped Mr. Railton. "What—what an extraordinary thing! Mr. Selby—my dear Mr. Selby—"

"Help me instead of standing there gaping!" howled the almost hysterical master furiously. "Cannot you see that I am stuck to my chair? I cannot free myself! The miscreant who is responsible for this scandalous affair shall be made to suffer dearly. Help me!"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Railton seemed to have grasped the position now, and his mouth went very grim indeed as he stepped forward to his colleague's aid. Kildare also hurried into the room to help.

Together they pulled and dragged at the master and at the chair, and at last a loud tearing sound announced the fact that something was giving way.

It was not the liquid glue, however, but Mr. Selby's trousers!

But a sudden interruption just then saved Mr. Selby from further humiliation for the moment.

The interruption came from Baggy Trimble, who ran up just then, panting and breathless with excitement.

"I say, you fellows, come quick!" he yelled. "Come along to Long corridor! Quick! Is Mr. Railton there?"

"Yes, yes! What the thump—"

"Tell him he's wanted there. Mr. Lathom sent me for him! Oh, my hat! Piggott and me found it—a blessed secret panel in the wall! That's how those secret society chaps did it! Come on!"

Trimble fairly yelled with excitement. At that moment Kildare and Mr. Railton looked out of the study, Mr. Railton's brow dark with anger.

"That's done it!" hissed Cardew to Tom Merry. "Quick! After me! We'll do that little worm Piggott yet! The sneaking little sweep!"

With that Cardew tore away, Tom Merry scudding at his heels.

The position was desperate, there was little doubt about that. Piggott had sneaked in his own treacherous way. He had not dared to split openly. He had obviously opened the panel himself, and left it open. Then he had taken Trimble along, knowing Trimble would spot it at once and shout the news of his find from the house-tops.

In a matter of seconds Cardew and Tom were in Long corridor, and then they stopped dead in dismay. For standing in front of the opened panel, peering short-sightedly into the black passage, was Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth!

Mr. Lathom looked round, showing an amazed face as they appeared.

"Never mind him!" snapped Cardew. "After me, Tommy! We'll save those kids yet!"

Without taking the slightest notice of Mr. Lathom, who had turned to examine the opening again, Cardew hurried past the master and Tom Merry followed. They fairly flew the moment they were round the corner and out of sight.

Tom had guessed Cardew's intention, and he followed in a flash as Cardew reached the old back staircase and flew up to the first landing. In another second they were through the sliding panel in the alcove and had shut it after them.

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"Come on!" snapped Cardew, snatching his torch from his pocket. "I'm going to get that panel closed somehow, and while I hold the dashed thing, you send down and tell the fags—get them out of that place as soon as you can, or they're done!"

Tom nodded. He understood only too well the danger for the fags, especially after this last outrage on Mr. Selby. It would mean certain expulsion for the ring-leaders of the tribunal—that much could not be doubted.

The juniors fairly ran along the passage, only slowing down when near the sliding panel leading on to Long corridor. Then Cardew raised his hand warningly. The shaft of daylight from the open panel showed clearly, and Cardew shoved the torch, which he had just switched off, into Tom's hand. Then he crept forward towards the light.

No movement showed at the aperture, but voices could be heard, and Cardew suddenly dashed forward, and his hand caught the panel and sent it crashing shut—narrowly missing Mr. Lathom's head as he did so—though Cardew did not know that.

"Now!" panted Cardew.

Tom Merry was past him in a flash, and hurrying down the gloomy passage, the light turned on now. Behind him he left Cardew, his back to the closed panel, his feet braced against the opposite stone wall of the passage.

If anyone succeeded in opening that panel while he was there it would not have been Cardew's fault.

But nobody did. Cardew heard Mr. Lathom speaking in amazed and angry tones beyond the panel, and then he heard hurried footsteps and many voices, among which he soon recognised Trimble's excited chattering. Then came Mr. Railton's voice.

"What is this, Mr. Lathom? Trimble tells me—"

"It is quite true, Mr. Railton," was Mr. Lathom's agitated answer. "I happened to come along this corridor when I was amazed and startled to see an aperture in the wall. I examined it, and to my great astonishment it proved to be a sliding panel—a secret panel leading to a tunnel or passage beyond. I must confess that I was amazed—astounded! But—"

"Is this the panel?" came Mr. Railton's cool, hard voice.

"But why is it closed if—"

"That is the astonishing part of my story, Mr. Railton," answered Mr. Lathom's agitated voice. "I was just about to take another look into the passage, when suddenly, without the slightest warning, the panel was slammed to from within."

"Bless my soul!"

"There is someone hidden inside there!" snapped Mr. Lathom. "Of that I am quite assured. I distinctly saw a hand—an arm—as the panel shot to, narrowly missing my head."

"Then it must be opened again without delay!" snapped Mr. Railton.

As he spoke the Housemaster thumped and knocked on the panel. Then Cardew heard him fumbling round it. He only smiled grimly, however, and braced his shoulders anew for the struggle he felt was coming.

"Kildare, run and bring a hammer and a chisel here at once!" snapped Mr. Railton. "The panel must be—Ah, I distinctly felt something give way then."

Cardew had also. Mr. Railton had pressed a piece of carving that released the spring, and the panel moved a fraction behind Cardew's back.

But it did not move again—Cardew saw to that!

But Kildare could not be long—it was only a matter of minutes, and Cardew strained his ears anxiously for sounds of Tom Merry.

He heard hurried footsteps at length; lights flashed along the passage, and a couple of seconds later half a dozen fags, with scared faces, came hurrying along the narrow passage.

All of them were carrying articles, for Tom Merry had warned them to leave nothing that could possibly lead to them being traced.

"Under my legs!" breathed Cardew. "Sharp, you young idiots!"

The fags were plainly scared to death now, and they ducked under Cardew's legs. They had scarcely gone when the remaining six came hurrying along, and behind them was Tom Merry.

"Good man, Cardew!" breathed Wally D'Arcy, as he dodged under the slacker's legs. "See you again, old top!"

He vanished after his companions.

"All serene!" muttered Tom Merry. "Better clear now!"

Crash!

Even as Tom spoke the crash of a hammer striking steel sounded beyond the panel, and the panel splintered slightly.



As Gussy entered the outskirts of the village with the two dogs snapping at his heels, he came upon an elderly lady with two Skye terriers. The animals instantly tore the leads from their guardian's startled hands and joined in the chase. "Oh, gweat Scott!" yelled the hapless Arthur Augustus. (See Chapter 7.)

"Run for it!" breathed Cardew.

And Tom Merry ran, Cardew scudding at his heels. From behind came a second crash of splintering wood. But they were clear now—flying up the narrow steps. In a matter of seconds both had reached the sliding panel in the alcove on the landing, and Tom Merry shoved the torch into his pocket and glanced out with a deep sigh of relief. "All clear!" he panted. "Those kids are gone, thank goodness! Now we'd better make ourselves scarce!"

"Good wheeze!" murmured Cardew, with a chuckle. "But I think I'll trot along and see how the giddy house-breakers are getting on."

Two minutes later Cardew and Tom Merry were standing looking on with interest, hands in pockets, as Mr. Railton, followed by Kildare and Darrell, entered the secret passage through the secret doorway, which was wide open now. And they were still standing there amidst a buzz of excitement when Mr. Railton reappeared, torch in hand, and with Kildare and Darrell behind him. They had explored the secret passages and the secret vault; but though they found many interesting things there they found nothing and discovered nothing that took the cheery smiles from the faces of Cardew and Tom Merry. And, feeling very satisfied, Cardew and Tom went along to join their chums in a second tea, in Study No. 10—Cardew being the guest of honour!

That evening Taggles, the porter, was busy nailing a board over the split panel in Long corridor. He was also busy with screws and a screwdriver, screwing up the other two sliding panels. That evening, also, Mr. Railton, under

the Head's instructions, set on foot a thorough investigation into the amazing mystery. But it came to nothing—the mystery of the secret passages and who had been using them remained a deep mystery—just as did the mystery that shrouded the identity of the twelve daring members of the Secret Society of the Crimson Dagger.

With the exception of Tom Merry & Co., Cardew & Co., and the conspirators themselves, only one fellow knew the secret—and that fellow was Reuben Piggott. But Reuben Piggott, though it caused him agonies to do so, kept his knowledge to himself. The ragging he received at the hands of Wally & Co. that same evening convinced him that it would be as much as his life was worth to "split"—moreover, Tom Merry & Co. had a heart to heart talk with him on the subject, and the sneak of the Third did not split!

Certainly, many fellows guessed something of the truth; but they were few and far between. Possibly Mr. Selby and Mr. Railton guessed something also; but a mere guess was of little use without proof to back their suspicions up. And they never got that proof.

That was the last of the Secret Tribunal of the Crimson Dagger—though nearly all St. Jim's roared over the jape played on Mr. Selby; and it was a long time before St. Jim's in general forgot the activities of that dreaded and mysterious society.

THE END.

(Look out for another fine yarn of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "THE LOYALTY OF LEVISON!" A story dealing with such a prime favourite will sell like hot cakes—so order next week's GEM in advance!)

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THE LAND OF COLD DEATH! That's the disturbing sort of place Adam Byrne and his companions have to explore if they are to rescue Professor Byrne and his daughter, who are prisoners in the hands of a race of unknown people!

BEYOND the SILVER GLACIER!



A Grand Story of Peril and Adventure in
Central Africa.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

A Weird Race!

ATTRACTED by his cry, Harry Franklin, Sandy McTavish, and Jimmy Brown crowded close to look, whilst the Portuguese, who was swaying unsteadily on the ground below, a victim of flying sickness, whipped his hand to his belt, where the butt of a revolver showed.

At first the friends could see nothing but the short and sun-scorched grass waving in the wind. But as their eyes grew accustomed to the scene, and they looked at where Adam's finger pointed, they could see black heads bobbing up and down, heads with bright, glistening eyes set in them—first of all one or two, then dozens, then hundreds. It was, as Adam had said, they were surrounded.

Adam swiftly descended the rope-ladder, and dropped to the ground.

He saw Del Rivo take aim at one of the bobbing black heads, and firmly closed his hand over the barrel of the revolver.

"No!" he cried. "I'll have no killing unless it is necessary. We are in an unknown country. The natives may be friends. We may need their aid. Put the weapon up, Del Rivo."

For a moment the giant Portuguese eyed Adam defiantly. "Bah! Put the fear of Hades into them and you're safe!" he growled. "I don't believe in bargaining with a lot of ignorant savages. This may cost us our lives!" For Adam had wrenched the weapon away from him whether he liked it or not, and was watching those black heads which bobbed up and down among the stunted grass so comically.

Over the side of the aeroplane came Jimmy Brown, now supporting upon his shoulder a portable machine-gun with stand. It was fitted with its feeding-belt and cartridges, and was ready for action.

Sandy McTavish was busy with another of these death-machines.

As he came down the rope-ladder, feeling for the wood battens or footholds of it carefully, with one eye set upon those black heads as he balanced the machine-gun, Jimmy Brown's face was a study.

The Cockney evidently believed that they were in for more trouble.

"Can't see no sense in flying about a wilderness like this when a fellow can live in civilisation for next to nothing!" he muttered. "Gimme the Waterloo Road!"

Then, with a howl of dismay, he tumbled headlong the last ten feet, landing on his back, with the machine-gun on top of him, scared out of his wits at a most remarkable sight.

All of a sudden those black heads came clearly into view—hundreds of them. The aeroplane was completely surrounded, so that if the natives were hostile, Adam and his chums had not a dog's chance of escape, even with machine-guns to aid them.

Whilst Jimmy Brown was picking himself up and anathematising the machine-gun, which had bruised him, in round, set terms, Adam watched the oncoming horde of natives in blank amazement. Never had he seen such a curious sight. Those black heads, set with piercing eyes, were carried upon broad and rounded shoulders. But it seemed to Adam that the natives must be advancing upon their knees, for their legs were completely hidden by the stunted grass.

Yet they moved at a rare pace. Some of them carried arms—primitive and strange bows and arrows—which they were not attempting to use.

Wild, piercing cries in high-pitched tones accompanied their rush, and of a sudden, when but fifty yards away, down bobbed the whole lot of them with one simultaneous movement so that not a native could be seen.

Jimmy Brown dumped the machine-gun down beside Adam, breathing hard, his eyes gleaming brightly.

"We won't give in without a fight, sir!" he muttered.

Adam laughed.

"There'll be no fight. These fellows are bowing down in reverence," he said, darting a keen glance at the scowling Portuguese. "But what strange little fellows they are!"

Another cry sounded, at which hundreds of heads came into view again.

Small bright eyes blinked at the white men and the little group of stalwart natives. Then rang a voice in command.

In response, the black heads came further into view, and a second rush was made, which brought the natives into close range of the aeroplane, and made Jimmy Brown's fingers itch to set the machine-gun barking.

WHO'S WHO IN THIS STORY!

ADAM BYRNE, accompanied by his three companions, HARRY FRANKLIN, SANDY McTAVISH, and JIMMY BROWN, set out in search of Adam's father and sister, news having been received that the great white explorer, GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, and his daughter ROSA, who left England four years ago to explore the African jungle, are alive and well, but prisoners in the hands of a strange people at Barcoomba, which lies north of the Silver Glacier and beneath the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

Soon after leaving Baruda for the interior, however, one of the planes is wrecked. Next, the party is pursued by a strange race of natives known as the Hekebus, or Skeleton Men, and despite the charm Adam is wearing which, according to a witch's prophecy,

is alleged to bring luck to the wearer, three of Adam's friends are whisked away by the Skeleton Men, whose intention it is to burn them at the stake. A bold plan of rescue is suggested by Muta, a native friend of Adam's, with the result that the captured trio are rescued together with another stranger—a white bearded man—who, upon being released, shoots indiscriminately at the warriors, much to Adam's annoyance. Later, Adam learns to his astonishment that the stranger is Julian del Rivo, an old friend of his father's, and in consequence of this the man is allowed to join up with the party. The flight is continued, and the party are in sight of their goal, when Adam, fearing the petrol supply gives out, decides to land. He is looking round their landing-place when he gives a sudden cry of dismay. "We're surrounded! The machine-guns—quick!" (Now read on.)

Yet the little black men did not attack. Throwing up their arms, they uttered wild and piercing cries.

The adventurers could see now that these men were all round-bodied, tiny little fellows with strange faces, dwarfs, pigmies, with bowed and stunted legs, and the funniest round bodies.

They moved nervously nearer, then suddenly flopped, burying their heads in the grass, and spreading their arms as if in worship.

Strange cries rang from their smothered lips, and Muta, creeping close to Adam, whispered:

"Strange, but I know their tongue, O White Flyer. They are worshipping the big white bird. They are welcoming the air god. Whow! It is good!"

Adam handed the Portuguese back his revolver.

"You see," he said, with a wistful smile, "it was not necessary to kill."

Signals From the Air!

It seemed that all the land within miles of the place where the aeroplane had come to rest belonged to the king of the pigmies. From where the sun rose to where the sun set the country belonged to him and his people, and they were a people of peace.

Such was the information gleaned by Muta, the great black man, from the important chief of the pigmies, whom he greeted, and whose words he interpreted. The pow-wow was a long one, the curious, grotesque little men gathering respectfully in a ring many rows deep to watch and listen.

Adam could have laughed aloud as he saw them blinking at the great aeroplane, which they were too frightened to approach.

"The chief of the Warakees," interpreted Muta, "places his house, his land, and his people, at the disposal of the air god. Gifts of food and cattle he will make to the white men of the air. We have but to ask to have, O white master."

Adam laughed, whilst Julian Del Rivo, standing with arms crossed, stared gloomily at the army of pigmies which had now camped in a wide, sweeping circle round the aeroplane.

"That is just as well, Mutt!" Adam cried. "For now we shall be able to get that help we will need in order to reach the city of Barcoomba!"

He gave instructions to Sandy McTavish and Jimmy Brown, who ordered the natives who had flown with them up into the aeroplane to bring out the supplies.

Breaking open one of the cases which they brought him, Adam handed to the pigmy chieftain—a quaint little pot-bellied man, with funny bandy legs and close-growing white hair—a length of bright-coloured fabric, and some necklaces of bright hue and certainly very pretty beads.

These beads the chief proudly draped around his short, thick neck, whilst the cloth he tucked under his arm, grinning the while.

Now the travellers camped, Muta explaining that the air gods wished to eat and rest.

While they ate, a line of pigmies came waddling across the open from the direction of the forest, bearing upon their heads baskets of fresh fruit, crude earthenware jars filled with a syrupy liquid—a native wine, they later discovered—and trophies of heads and horns of wild beasts, some of these being the finest specimens Adam had ever seen—specimens which caused Julian Del Rivo to open wide his eyes and regard them covetously.

The gifts were piled in front of the adventurers and surrendered to the accompaniment of a loud harangue on the part of an official of the pigmy tribe.

The gifts having been suitably acknowledged, and the fruit sampled and found delicious, Adam and his party smoked—causing again a profound sensation.

So the day waned, the pigmies drawing away a little, but remaining to stare and wonder—the simplest and kindest of folk, if Muta's interpretations were to be relied upon.

"How comes it, Mutt," asked Adam later in the day, "that you know the tongue of this people, of whose existence you say you were unaware until we landed here?"

Muta shrugged his broad shoulders, flashing his teeth in a grin.

"How can Muta say?" he answered. "I only know I know, O white master. The pigmy chief, he speaks words which I understand. So it is with the Hekebus. They talk, and Muta understand, though that is not so strange, perhaps, seeing that Muta and his mother, the witch O-Kama, dwelt in the country of the Skeleton Men since Muta first could think. All I can tell you, white master, is that I have heard my mother, the witch, speak the words the pigmy chieftain spoke. Whow! It is a language I have always known."

"Mutt, my black friend," smiled Adam, "you are the

biggest treasure in the way of black servant and friend that a white man has ever known!"

Now, as they rested and the day drew in towards its close, Adam pulled from a case a thing which looked like a black leather bag. Opening this out, he revealed to the astonished eyes of Julian Del Rivo, who had been sulkily and thoughtfully silent ever since the landing, four glistening valves and many gadgets, set upon an ebony base.

Also, there was a frame containing many wires, arranged in an even and regular fashion, which he set in position. There was, besides, a quaint-looking trumpet, the sight of which made Del Rivo frown.

"Are you foolish enough to bring with you into the unknown wilds such a stupid thing as a gramophone, or talking-machine, to make music for a horde of savages?" he sneered.

"No, my friend," replied Adam, taking out and fixing to the instrument a pair of head telephones. "This is a wireless set. If there are messages being flashed from the haunts of civilisation, one may be able to pick them up even in this outlandish place. There is no harm in trying, anyway."

Del Rivo pointed at the thing, his eyes widening.

"You mean you could pick up messages from the air—with that?" he queried.

"It is possible. It was arranged before we started upon our adventure that messages should be broadcast from the station nearest to our starting-point. It is nice to hear the news. Harry, want to try?"

Seating himself cross-legged, Harry Franklin set a pair of the headphones upon his head, Adam doing likewise. The chums were smiling. They expected nothing from the experiment. But in a moment Adam's face stretched with an air of incredulity, his eyes widened in surprise. Then he removed the headphones.

"Did you pick up anything, Harry?" he asked.

"Most distinctly," Harry replied. "But how odd that is, considering we must be hundreds of miles beyond the range of any broadcasting station, you would think!"

"Could you make out anything?"

"A signal or signals," Harry replied. "Seemed to me like Morse code. But it could scarcely be that. No amateur would be experimenting out here. It's incredible!"

They listened again, whilst Del Rivo scowled at them, manipulating the tuning screws and making the signals now louder, now fainter, till they adjusted it to a nicety.

There were strange ticking noises decidedly. Now and again Adam believed that he could make out a letter or two—"D E," for instance, "B A R," "I M P," and similar groups of letters—but neither could form a word out of the signals, or make sense of any of it.

"Bah!" Del Rivo said, with a sneering curl of the lips. "It is possible to imagine anything! How could messages be sent through the air to here? Morse code—I do not believe it to be Morse code. Something agitates the air. That instrument, I take it, is sensitive. It vibrates the diaphragm of the telephones. You imagine the rest. Ridiculous!"

"Do you understand the Morse code, then Del Rivo?" asked Adam.

"I learnt it years ago. I do not suppose I have forgotten."

"Then listen," said Adam, handing over his set of headphones.

The Portuguese scowled as he took them, glancing at the lamps with their faint glowing illumination.

"What happens," he inquired, "if the lamps break and the lights go out?"

"No messages or signals can be picked up then," explained Adam.

"I see."

The Portuguese, setting the phones to his ears, listened attentively, his swarthy face expressing a growing wonder, and even fear.

It was long before he gave them back, and all the time Harry, too, was listening.

"Well, it's an attempt by someone to put out a message in Morse code, isn't it?" asked Harry Franklin, when the signals ceased and the Portuguese gave him back the headphones.

"It sounded like it," Del Rivo grudgingly admitted. "It is a miracle. I could make out a letter here and there—sometimes a number, I thought. But who could send out the signals in this wild place?"

"How can one say? But you believe they were signals?" asked Adam.

"Of a surety, yes!" The Portuguese, frowning at the wireless set, shuddered. "I do not like these modern wonder things!" he growled. "The world went well enough without them. It is somebody back there in civilisation flashing messages upon the air which that"—and he pointed again at the set—"is not powerful enough to reproduce."

The Field of Snow!

WHEN, with the dawn of another day, the friends awakened from a deep and refreshing sleep, Adam began a search for the wireless set, and presently found it lying a hundred yards away, with its cover smashed in and the dull emitter valves broken—the whole thing completely and wantonly destroyed.

Adam began a search for the wireless set, and presently found it lying a hundred yards away, with its cover smashed in and the dull emitter valves broken—the whole thing completely and wantonly destroyed.

"It's those pigmies who have done it, Adam!" growled Harry. "We have some spare lamps and plenty of dry batteries; but can we rig the thing up and make it workable again now?"

"Perhaps," replied Adam, as he examined the wreckage. "But the pigmies have not done this, Harry. They would be afraid to touch the thing. Besides, they would not understand the significance of the instrument, and therefore would not want to destroy it. One of our party has done this—one who understands—"

"Del Rivo?" said Harry, startled.

Adam shrugged.

"It looks like it. Jimmy Brown would not do it, nor would Sandy McTavish. You didn't do it, and I didn't do it."

The two chums picked up the wreckage of the set, and carried it away, saying nothing about it.

The next startling discovery made that day was when they went to the aeroplane to see what supplies of petrol remained. Every reserve can was empty—had been deliberately emptied, they supposed. There the cans were stacked in the back of the flying machine, as neatly as ever.

Adam sent for Jimmy Brown and questioned him.

"Blessed if I know anything about it, guv'nor!" cried the startled Cockney. "The cans should be full o' gas!"

They examined the petrol-tank. It contained about fifteen gallons of petrol.

Adam frowned.

"The aeroplane will have to be left here. We will have to pack whatever luggage and supplies we want, and take them, with rifles, machine-gun, and other portable stores and materials through the forest to the borders of the glacier," he said. "Luckily we have the native bearers with us—and the friendly pigmies may help."

It was Jimmy Brown who drew their attention to a reek of petrol that was everywhere upon the grass around the aeroplane.

"Sandy," he said to McTavish, "that's where our petrol store has gone. Emptied out while we slept."

"Och hie!" growled Sandy. "But who could ha'e done it?"

"Those black fellows of ours, though they have not complained much, hated the flying, Sandy. They've seen enough of the way we use petrol to know that emptying it away would tie the machine down here where she lies. I think that's the solution of the problem."

"You'll be trekking it then afoot, Mr. Byrne?" growled Sandy.

"It's the only way, Sandy. I wish we could fly the old bus over that silver glacier—ice-field or snow-field, whatever it may be—and so on to Barcoomba. It would save us so much trouble. But we're stranded. We shall have to work it out the other way."

They told the burly Del Rivo what they intended to do, and, with a grunt and a nod, the Portuguese approved.

"For my part I prefer to remain on earth," he said, in a tone of relief. "Up there," and he pointed to the sky above, "I am afraid!"

They began now to make their preparations for the last stage of their journey. Through Muta the position was explained to the chief of the pigmy tribe. He received the news of their coming departure with some concern.

"White men stay here with the Chief of the Warakees," he suggested. "To try to pass the land of the cold death would be madness. He who would defy the Spirit of the Mountain of the Hidden Crest must bear with him a charm to render him immortal. Are the white men air gods so provided?"

Muta interpreted these words.

"Tell him that the gods of the air do not fear the cold death or the Spirit of the Mountain," said Adam to Muta. "Say that all we ask is to be directed upon our way."

And the chief informed them that he would give them guides who would show them the quickest route through the forest and over the rocky ground beyond it to the field of ice.

"Then say," Adam told Muta, "that as a reward for his

great service and his friendship, the gods of the air will leave behind them, for him to keep, the great air bird in which they have flown to the Land of the Pigmies."

The message was given. Flinging aloft his arms, the pigmy chieftain informed the men of his tribe, who rallied to a summons, that the great air bird was his. Shout upon shout rang echoing through the forest.

Then Adam led the chieftain of the pigmies to the aeroplane, helped him to climb up into it, and from that moment onward the king spent most of his days in state seated in the aeroplane, whilst hordes of misshapen dwarfs performed strange religious rites about it.

Adam and his party packed their luggage at last. Then one morning, an hour or two after the dawn had broken, the adventurers, with their native bearers, helped by some fifty of the pigmies, each loaded with luggage, arms, food and other necessities required by the expedition, wished the chieftain of the pigmies a formal good-bye and started on their journey.

During those last days a great mound had been built in the open where the aeroplane had descended. Under the direction of Jimmy Brown, the aeroplane had been pushed and wheeled to this mound and swung on to the top of it. There it lay, ten feet above the ground, like some giant flying thing at rest.

Every bit of it had been painted or varnished by Jimmy Brown and Sandy McTavish before the day of departure.

The sight when they turned just before entering the forest to begin what Adam believed to be the final stage of their strange journey was a thing to remember. They could see thousands of the little men, with their long, dragging arms and bandy legs, gathered rank upon rank around the mound upon which the aeroplane was perched.

At the foot of the mound stood the king of the pigmies, and behind him his high priests, each of them bedecked in strange and gorgeous raiment.

From the clearing echoed wild chanting, while from the sky a shaft of sunlight lit up the weird scene.

Then Adam gave the order, and the party dived into the heart of the forest, making their way along a beaten track which the Warakee guide knew well.

All that day they marched onward, sometimes emerging into a clearing, then diving into the forest again. At sundown they halted. Next day the march was resumed. So they journeyed on for days, whilst the weather grew ever colder and colder and the character of the vegetation changed.

At last one night they paused on the fringe of a wood of pine where trees grew thinly. Ahead of them a boulder-strewn country stretched upward and onward over which icy winds swept. The natives eyed it without enthusiasm whilst their teeth chattered and clashed.

Julian del Rivo grumbled.

"Why have we come to this land of desolation?" he growled. "I have heard tell of this silver glacier over which no man may go and return alive. The journey is madness."

"Yet we go on," said Adam, with a smile.

He ordered Muta to find some clothing for the shivering natives who had travelled with them from beyond Baruda, and who had been muttering and grumbling much of late. This was done, and, after eating, they wrapped themselves up and lay down to rest.

When they awakened in the morning their natives, the black men whom they had believed to be loyal, had vanished. They had left all their baggage behind, and also the clothing which Muta had given them, but not a sign of them was to be seen. They had bolted, it seemed.

"Scum!" grumbled Sandy McTavish. "Scum! Aweel, aweel, we can do wi'out them!"

Adam, through Muta, made an appeal to the pigmies. It was answered loyally. The Warakees would help the gods of the air to find the land of the cold death, they were informed.

Manfully the little fellows shouldered the extra burden, and the journey was resumed. The way was rough and progress slow. They toiled upward and ever upward in the teeth of an icy blast. And at the end of the third day after leaving the forest, on topping a great mass of rock from which Adam believed he would be able to obtain an extensive view, the boy saw stretching before him, white and cold and terrifying, a sheet of unbroken snow—the silver glacier his father had written about—and beyond it, miles and miles away it seemed to him still, white capped foothills, above which, rising in awful majesty, towered the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

(Look out for another thrilling instalment of this great adventure serial next week, chums.)

A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR!

BY SPECIAL REQUEST.

JUST recently several enthusiastic GEM readers have complained that Ernest Levison wasn't getting a fair show in our stories of St. Jim's. In a way that is true; the different series of yarns we have published during the last few months certainly have had little to do with Ernest Levison. Things happen that way, you know, for Levison is essentially a character that should be reserved for the strong, dramatic, human type of story where sacrifices are made, where the value of a friendship that braves all storms, that scoffs at public opinion, and takes whatever consequences there are, constitute the theme. When Martin Clifford is handling Levison on these lines he is at his best; Levison lives; we see him before our eyes the whole time we

are reading. His nobleness of character is no fictional humbug, for there are thousands of Levisons in our midst. Undoubtedly our St. Jim's Levison is a popular character—a character Mr. Martin Clifford keeps up his sleeve for special occasion. And such an occasion has arisen. Gemites have asked for a "Levison yarn," and their favourite author has not failed them. Indeed he has gone one better, for the admirers of Ernest Levison can look forward to two stories in which Ernest plays the principal part. How's that? And the first of this series—"The Loyalty of Levison!"—appears in next week's grand issue of the GEM. While we are on this subject I can mention, too, that Ralph Reckness Cardew has a heap to do with these coming stories. That's another item of news that will please the admirers of Study No. 9, in the Fourth, at St. Jim's. Don't forget, then, chums, to order next week's GEM to-day. There's bound to be a rush to bag this "special request" story, and some of the casual fellows are likely to get left. Don't you be one of them. "Null said!"

Your Editor.

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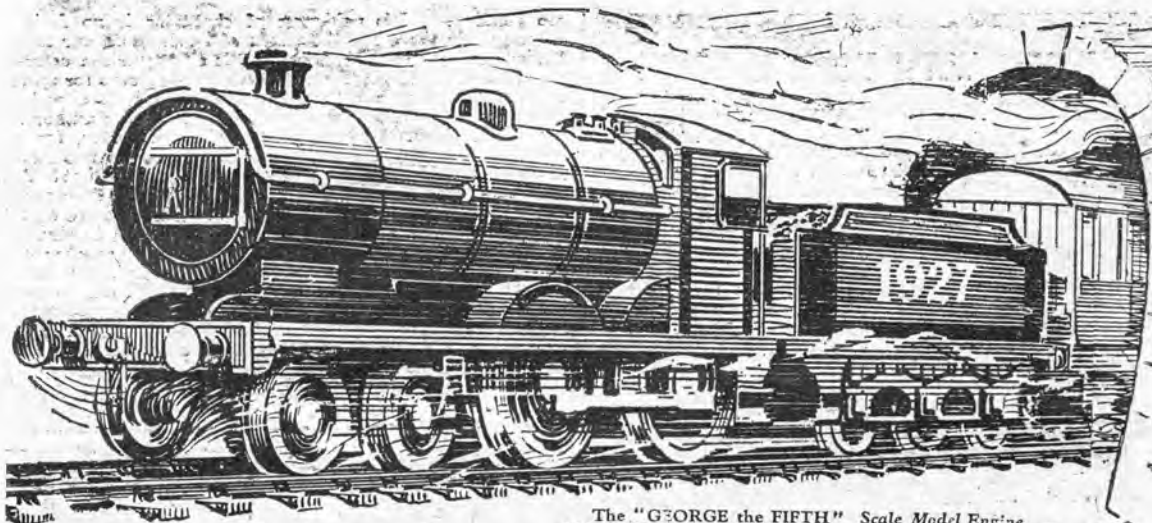
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