

The GEM^{2D} LIBRARY

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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



"Ooooooh-er!"

(A roaring incident from this week's rousing story of school life and adventure — inside.)

A ROUSING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.—

The Slacker's



CHAPTER 1. Nothing Doing!

"NOTHIN' doin'!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew shook his head as he made that remark, and then yawned.

Levison and Clive looked disappointed.

"Oh, don't be a slacker, Cardew!" remonstrated Levison. Cardew yawned again.

The slacker of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's was stretched out on the study sofa in an attitude of elegant repose. Under his head were two cushions, under his feet was another. On his well-cut features was an expression of boredom. Cardew was tired.

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Levison and Clive, his study-mates, looked the picture of sturdy energy. Both of them were in scouting kit.

"Oh, come on, Cardew!" said Clive impatiently. "It's a glorious afternoon!"

"I have no intention of doubtin' that statement, Sidney," Cardew murmured. "You see, I read the newspaper this mornin'."

"What on earth has that got to do with it, you chump?"

"A certain clever johnny predicted that it would rain all day to-day," said Cardew, with a drawl. "Now when a weather expert gives his well-considered judgment, I have found by bitter experience that the directly opposite view is the correct one. Thus, dear man, if the newspapers say that it is goin' to be wet, we know that it is goin' to be fine. If—"

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—OF ST. JIM'S, STARRING RALPH CARDEW OF THE FOURTH!

Awakening!

by Martin Clifford

Ralph Reckness Cardew is something of an enigma to his Form-fellows, for they never know quite what the Slacker of the Fourth is going to do next. That he is capable of doing "big things" many of the juniors are prepared to acknowledge, but his declaration of making a serious bid for the junior captaincy is treated almost as a joke—at first!

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Ernest Levison.

"You duffer!" said Clive, with a faint smile.

Cardew waved a well-manicured hand in a gesture of dismissal.

"Now that you have been let into this little secret of the vagaries of our climate, you had better trot along and make the most of this glorious afternoon," he drawled. "You see, dear men, to-morrow will be wet."

"How on earth do you know?"

"By that same simple process of deduction with which I acquainted you a few moments ago," explained the slacker of the Fourth. "Our weather experts are all convinced that there's a hot-air patch—or somethin'—comin' up from the Atlantic. They are unanimous in their opinion that to-morrow will see the beginnin' of a good spell of weather. As I said before, if you take the opposite view you will back a winner, so to speak, which means in this case that to-morrow will see the beginnin' of a particularly bad spell of weather. Simple, isn't it?"

And Ralph Reckness composed himself on the pillows again.

Levison and Clive looked at each other hopelessly. The sun streamed in at the window of Study No. 9, as if beckoning all and sundry out of doors. Most of the fellows at St. Jim's were taking advantage of that glorious burst of weather. It was a half-holiday, and there was a constant stream of fellows leaving the school gates for the river, for a ramble, or for a picnic.

Tom Merry & Co. had decided to put in an afternoon's scouting as they had no football fixture for that half-holiday, and, with the exception of Ralph Reckness Cardew, the Eagle Patrol had paraded in the quad with commendable punctiliousness. The absence of Cardew being noticed

at roll-call, the captain of the Shell had dispatched Clive and Levison to "dig" their errant study-mate out.

But that was easier said than done.

Levison and Clive had appealed to their study-mate to join up with the Eagle Patrol for an afternoon's scouting in the woods. Cardew had shuddered at the suggestion. Exertion in any shape or form sent a shiver down his back. Cardew was tired. Some fellows declared that he had been born tired. But how much of his languid outlook upon life was a cloak, perhaps only Cardew himself knew. Certainly he looked tired as he sprawled there on the study sofa and gazed languidly at his chums through half-closed lids.

"Trot along, dear men," he said, with a whimsical smile. "I can see you're simply bubblin' over with energy."

"But Tom Merry sent us to fetch you, Cardew," said Levison. "Join up, there's a good chap."

Cardew yawned again.

"At the imminent risk of displeasin' you, Ernest," he drawled, "I must decline. Have the kindness to tell the energetic Thomas that I shall not be there. Runnin' round the woods with a scout-pole, dear man, certainly makes an appeal that I find it difficult to resist, but this study sofa presents a stronger one."

"You silly ass!" said Levison, with a smile.

"Thank you, Ernest," drawled Cardew. "I have always valued your opinion."

"Oh, don't rot!" exclaimed Levison.

Sidney Clive looked impatient.

"Let's turf the slacker off that sofa," he said. "We can't hang about here all the blessed afternoon!"

Cardew's face broke into a whimsical smile.

"I assure you, my dear Sidney," he said, "that the process of turfin' me off this sofa would make a great call upon your store of energy. Think of that. Let better judgment prevail, you know."

Levison and Clive smiled ruefully. With all his slacking habits, Cardew could be energetic enough when he liked,

and they knew that he was not likely to submit tamely to any forceful methods of drawing him out into the open-air that sunny afternoon.

"For the last time," said Levison, "are you coming or are you not?"

Cardew stifled a yawn, and shook his head.

"Not!"

And he closed his eyes.

For a moment it looked as if Levison and Clive contemplated employing violent methods, but apparently they thought better of it. They moved towards the door.

"You're a blessed slacker, Cardew!" exclaimed Levison reproachfully.

Cardew's eyes opened.

"Thank you, Ernest!"

"You're a worse slacker than Baggy Trimble!" exclaimed Clive.

"Thank you, Sidney!"

Cardew's eyes closed again.

"Fancy frowning in the blessed study on a day like this!" said Levison, in a last attempt to persuade Cardew to join up with the patrol.

Snore!

Apparently Ralph Reckness did not hear that appeal, for he appeared to be breathing deeply, and a gentle snore echoed through the study.

"Slacker!" roared Clive.

Snore, snore!

Cardew's eyes remained closed, his breathing remained deep, his snore became intensified.

And with a last reproachful look at their elegant study-mate, Levison and Clive withdrew from the study, slamming the door after them.

The noise awoke Ralph Reckness. Indeed, it was sufficient in volume to have awakened the celebrated seven sleepers of old. He sat up and blinked in the stream of sunlight that poured in at the window.

"If it wasn't too much fag," he murmured, "I'd get up an' pull down that blessed blind!"

But apparently that simple task was more than Cardew was capable of performing, for, with another yawn, he settled himself on the cushions again and closed his eyes. A few moments later his gentle snore was the only sound that disturbed the silence of Study No. 9.

Out in the quad the Eagle Patrol, looking very spick and span in their scouting kit, were moving off. Tom Merry had received news that Cardew did not intend to join up with equanimity. Perhaps he had anticipated it. All the same for that, he made a mental note that the recalcitrant member of the Eagle Patrol would be bumped, and bumped severely, when the Scouts returned that afternoon. But for considerations of time the bumping would have been put into operation there and then.

"Ready, you men!" said Tom Merry as a preliminary warning. "Shun!"

The patrol came to attention as one man.

"Move to the right in fours!" bellowed the patrol leader. "Right wheel—quick march!"

The quad echoed to the steady tramp of feet as the Eagle Patrol moved off in column of fours, their scout-poles at the "trail."

Knox of the Sixth was at the gates as the Eagles approached. By his side was a hamper. There was an unpleasant expression on the face of the unpopular prefect as Tom Merry & Co. approached.

"Stop!" commanded Knox.

The patrol did not stop. Their movements were in the command of their patrol leader, and if Tom Merry did not

give the word to halt they, as good Scouts, had no intention of halting.

"Stop!" bawled Knox. "What's this fool's game?"

The Eagles did not stop.

"Stop!" roared Knox, for the third time. "I want a fag to carry this hamper to the boathouse. Stop!"

Still the patrol kept moving. They were within a yard of the prefect now, and both he and the hamper were directly in their line of route. That Knox of the Sixth should want a fag on that sunny half-holiday was only to be expected, Knox not being noted for his thoughtfulness for other people. Certainly it never occurred to him that the fags of the Second and Third might want to take advantage of that glorious afternoon in their own way. But it had occurred to the fags to make themselves scarce!

As a prefect, Knox had the right to call upon any member of the Second or Third Form at St. Jim's to fag for him. That he should call upon any junior of the Shell or Fourth to fag for him was sheer, unadulterated "nerve."

In the circumstances it wasn't likely that Tom Merry & Co. would pay heed to the prefect's order to stop, he could select a fag to carry his hamper.

"Left, right, left!" called out Tom Merry. "Heads up, you men!"

"STOP!" bawled Knox. "Yarooooop!"

As the prefect and his hamper were in the way of the marching troop of Scouts, something had to go.

Bump!

The prefect suddenly found himself swept off his feet.

"Yaroooooh! You young scoundrels! Ooooooh!"

Somehow or other a Scout pole jabbed on the middle button of Knox's waistcoat. He subsided like a punctured balloon. Next moment innumerable feet were walking over him. Other feet were marching over the hamper at the same time, with the result that its sides caved in.

"Grooooooh! Guggggggg!" gasped Knox.

The Scouts passed on like the trained troop they were—heads erect and keeping to marching time. They left behind them a battered hamper and a battered and breathless prefect.

Once outside the gates the features of Tom Merry & Co. relaxed. There was a hearty roar of laughter at the expense of Gerald Knox.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then the Eagle Patrol turned off into the woods, still leaving the enraged prefect drawing in great gulps of air and breathing furious threats on their devoted heads.

Gerald Knox had wanted a fag, but it was doubtful whether it would be worth while calling upon any fag to carry that battered hamper to the boathouse now. Certainly its contents were no longer fit for human consumption.

And as Gerald Knox realised that fact, his face became convulsed with rage, and his feelings were almost homicidal.

CHAPTER 2.

Awful!

"I SAY, old chap!"

Baggy Trimble thrust his bullet head round the door of Study No. 9.

"I say, Cardew—"

Snore!

Ralph Reckness Cardew was deep in the arms of Morpheus.

It was exactly ten minutes since the Eagle Patrol had set off for their afternoon's scouting.

Baggy Trimble grinned as he observed the sleeping figure of Ralph Reckness Cardew sprawled on the sofa.

"I say, old chap—" This time Baggy Trimble's voice was raised.

But if Cardew heard it he heeded not. His gentle snore still echoed through Study No. 9.

"Cardew!" bawled Baggy Trimble.

Still the slacker of the Fourth did not stir.

"Slacker!" grunted Trimble, in disgust.

He rolled across the study and shook the sleeping junior by the shoulder.

"Cardew! I say, old chap—"

Snore!

Then the fat Fourth Former resorted to more vigorous methods. He pulled Cardew's nose.

"Yoooooop!"

Cardew came out of his sleep with a jerk as he felt that painful tweak at his nose. Next minute his head smote Baggy Trimble fairly under the chin as he sat up.

"Yaroooooh!"

This time it was Baggy Trimble who howled in anguish. He jumped back clutching his chin, what time Cardew, only half awake, rubbed his head.

"You silly ass!" gasped Trimble. "You've made me bite my tongue!"

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Cardew rubbed the sleep from his eyes and blinked at Trimble.

"What's the game?" he inquired angrily.

"Grooooooh!" gasped Trimble. "My chin! Ow!"

The slacker of the Fourth looked grim. He slipped from the sofa.

"What the thump do you mean by buttin' in here an' playin' the goat?" he demanded wrathfully.

"Wow!"

All Trimble's attention was concentrated on assuaging the pain in his chin. Next moment he had a pain somewhere else as Cardew planted his elegantly-shod foot in the seat of his nether garments with considerable force.

"Yooooop!" howled the fat junior. "Stoppit, you beast!"

But Cardew did not stop it. Doubtless he felt he did right to be angry, for the slacker of the Fourth had been enjoying that afternoon nap. He fairly dribbled Baggy Trimble round the study.

"Whoop! Stoppit, you rotter! Ow! Oh, erikoy!"

"I'll teach you to play your silly tricks on me, old fat man!" said Cardew. "Take that, old bean!"

"That," was a well delivered kick that made Trimble squirm and bellow anew.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Now get out, you fat frog," growled Cardew, "an' let a fellow alone."

A final kick sent Baggy Trimble scuttling towards the door.

"Yah! Beast!" he hooted. "I came here to do you a good turn—"

Cardew made a threatening gesture with his foot, and the fat junior retreated to the open doorway.

"I know your good turns, old lard barrel," growled Cardew. "You go and touch someone else for a loan. Beastly bad form, you know, to wake a fellow out of his well-earned repose."

The fat Fourth-Former fairly spluttered with wrath and indignation.

"You ungrateful rotter!" he roared. "I won't jolly well tell you now. Yah!"

"Outside!"

There was such a grim look on Ralph Reckness Cardew's face that Baggy Trimble wisely got "outside."

Slam!

With more energy than he was accustomed to showing, Cardew slammed the study door and then returned to the sofa. He had just settled himself on the cushions when the door opened again.

Baggy Trimble's fat face peered in.

"I say, Cardew— Yooooop!"

Trimble had not meant to say that, but he had no other alternative, so to speak, as Cardew suddenly snatched up a cushion and whizzed it at him.

"Now will you get out?" inquired Cardew angrily.

"Next time it will be a boot."

"You rotter!" roared Trimble. "I was going to tell you that—"

His words trailed off as Cardew leaped from the sofa with a ferocious expression on his face. Really it was too bad that a fellow couldn't be allowed to have forty winks without the fascinating society of Baggy Trimble being thrust upon him.

The study door closed hurriedly, and Baggy Trimble retreated down the passage at a great rate.

Breathing blood-curdling threats, Cardew picked up the cushion and lounged back to the sofa. Before making himself comfortable, he dragged a pair of football boots from the cupboard and placed them ready to hand for the benefit of Baggy Trimble, should he elect to try a return visit to Study No. 9.

A few moments later the slacker of the Fourth was dozing, but he started into instant wakefulness as he heard footsteps coming along the passage.

"The fat ass again," he muttered. "I'll slaughter him!"

Cardew's hand closed on one of the footer boots.

The footsteps grew nearer.

They halted outside the study door.

Cardew's hand came tip with the footer boot all ready for a throw.

The study door opened.

Whiz!

The boot sailed through the air like a cricket-ball.

"What— Grooooooh! Oh gad!"

There was a gasping cry from the newcomer, but above it rose a cry of horror that came from Ralph Reckness Cardew as he realised the identity of his victim.

It wasn't Baggy Trimble. It was Lord Reckness—Cardew's grandfather!

"Guggggg! By thunder— Ooooooh!"

Lord Reckness sat on the floor and gasped and panted like a fish out of water. Never had he been greeted like this before.



"Left, right, left!" called out Tom Merry. As Knox and his hamper were in the way of that marching troop of Scouts, something had to go. Bump! Knox suddenly found himself swept off his feet, as a Scout staff was jabbed in the middle of his waistcoat. "Yarooop! You young scoundrels! Ooooh!" gasped the prefect. (See Chapter I.)

Cardew's face was filled with horror as he saw what he had done. He ran forward to assist the old gentleman to his feet.

Lord Reckness glared up at him. The old peer was very fond of his grandson, but if looks could kill, Cardew would have shrivelled up on the spot just then.

"I'm—I'm awfully sorry, sir!" stuttered Ralph Reckness Cardew, for once at a complete loss for words. "I—I—I—"

Lord Reckness, still gasping in deep gulps of air, shook a fist in his grandson's face.

"You young rascal! By gad, sir, is this the way you treat your elders?"

Cardew licked his lips.

"I—I—I thought it was—"

"You thought nothin', young man," hooted Lord Reckness, "but to indulge your misplaced sense of humour. Groooh! I'm ashamed of you, Ralph!"

"But, sir—" began Cardew helplessly.

"Enough!" exclaimed Lord Reckness, scrambling to his feet, and shaking off the proffered hand that Cardew stretched out. "Ooooooh! Enough, sir! I've tolerated your foolish pranks long enough! Good gad, sir! Do you think it right an' seemly to throw boots at a man of my years?"

"But I thought it was—"

"Do you think it funny?" stormed Lord Reckness, "for a man of my years to be greeted like this? Now, listen to me, young man, I'm disappointed in you—"

"Oh, sir!"

Lord Reckness leaned on his stick and shook his finger perilously close to his grandson's nose.

"I've indulged you long enough, Ralph," he said. "I am to blame in some measure for having encouraged your lawless ways. But this is the limit!"

"But won't you let me explain—"

"Silence!" rapped the old peer. "I want to hear no explanations. But just understand this, Ralph, things have got to change. Here you are frowsting in your study on

a glorious afternoon when every other fellow is out of doors. You're slack, my boy, you're slack, by gad!"

Cardew's face fell. His grandfather had hit him on the raw, so to speak.

"I can see now," went on Lord Reckness, "that I have encouraged you in your slackin' habits. But, by thunder, things have got to change! My grandson must make his proper place in the world. You must justify your existence."

"I purposely made this journey this afternoon," continued Lord Reckness, "to have a quiet talk with you—to encourage you to do somethin' at school, instead of wastin' your time. I won't stay any longer. But you understand me, Ralph, you've got to pull yourself together."

Cardew's face softened. He was fond of his grandfather, and Lord Reckness had a warm feeling for him. Their natures had much in common, despite the great disparity in their ages.

"I understand you, sir," said Cardew quietly. "You want me to do things like—like Tom Merry an' his crowd. Footer, an' cricket, an'—an' rowin'—"

Cardew repressed the shudder as he voiced all these energetic pursuits. Not for worlds would he have displeased his grandfather further.

"That's it, my boy," said Lord Reckness; and his face softened. "Just put your back into life, an' try not to be a passenger."

"If it will please you, sir—"

Lord Reckness placed a kindly hand on his grandson's shoulder.

"It will please me immensely, Ralph!"

"Very well, sir," said Cardew manfully. "I'll pile in with the footer, an' the cricket—an' the rowin'. But do let me explain, sir, that that boot was meant for Trimble—"

"Trimble?"

Cardew grinned faintly.

"He's our porpoise, sir. He'd been worryin' me, an' I was tryin' to get forty winks. I'd kicked him out twice,

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"An' I thought it was the fat bounder returnin' when you came—came along."

Lord Reckness' face broke into a smile of understanding.

"Ah! I follow, Ralph. But it is a reckless proceeding to throw boots at anyone comin' into the study. It might have been—been anyone. Humph!"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir!" apologised Cardew. "You know I wouldn't shy a boot at you, really."

"I believe you, my boy," said Lord Reckness. "Perhaps I was hasty tempered just now. But at my time of life it isn't exactly pleasant to be bumped over unexpectedly and winded into the bargain."

"I'm sorry—" began Cardew again; but Lord Reckness cut him short.

"I must be goin', my boy," he said, glancing at his watch. "I only broke my journey to have a little chat with you. Next time you write me I expect to hear that you're doin' your best to please me."

He patted Cardew affectionately on the shoulder and moved towards the door.

"I'll come an' see you off, sir," said Cardew.

The old peer and his grandson chatted about home matters as they sauntered along the Fourth Form passage. Lord Reckness had taken that footer boot like a sportsman, and the matter had now passed completely from his mind.

A Rolls Royce car stood in front of the School House steps. The chauffeur held open the door as Lord Reckness approached.

"Good-bye, Ralph!" said the old peer. "An' don't forget what I said."

"I won't forget, sir," replied Cardew quietly. "Good-bye, sir!"

He shook hands with his grandfather, and stood staring after the car as it moved silently down the drive to the gates.

"He's a rare sportsman," muttered the slacker of the Fourth. "One of the best!"

With a thoughtful expression on his face, Ralph Reckness Cardew lounged back into Study No. 9. Instinct led him to the sofa. He was about to compose himself upon it when he pulled himself up with a jerk.

"Gad!" he muttered. "This won't do! I've got to make a start. No more slackin'! Oh dear! What a life!"

He paced up and down the study carpet, thinking things over. Suddenly his hand dived into his jacket pocket. A gold cigarette case came into view. Abstractedly Cardew selected a cigarette, tapped the end of it, and then lit up. But he had scarcely taken two puffs at it when he jerked it out of his mouth.

"Good gad! This is a bad start!"

Force of habit had prompted that cigarette, but for all his weaknesses Cardew was in the main a strong character. He broke the cigarette in two and tossed the ends into the fireplace. Then he destroyed the remaining cigarettes in the case.

A whimsical smile crossed his face as he put the case back into his pocket.

"No more playin' the goat!" he muttered. "No more smokes, no more little card parties. Gad! Won't Ernie and Sidney be surprised. Cardew, my son, you're goin' to do big things. You're goin' to be a mixture of Good Little Georgie and Alexander the Great."

He laughed as he ruminated.

"There'll be some fun in it," he reflected. "It'll be a change, and, anyway, it'll please the old boy."

A determined expression came over the slacker's face. Anyone seeing him then would have said that Ralph Reckness Cardew was a character born to do great things. Nature had fitted him out with all the necessary qualities—but it remained to be seen whether he would make full use of them. Certainly, the unexpected visit of Lord Reckness was the one thing likely to bring about the reformation of the slacker of the Fourth if anything could.

CHAPTER 3. The Enemy!

"QUIET!"

Gordon Gay uttered that whispered command. The leader of the Grammar School juniors was in scouting kit, and a force of twenty Grammarians, similarly attired, was at his back.

Like Tom Merry & Co., Gordon Gay had decided to fill in that glorious afternoon with a little scouting, and he had elected to make the Rylcombe Woods his scene of operations.

The Grammarian Scouts had been halted in a glade in the woods, and Gordon Gay was just issuing orders for the

afternoon when he caught sight of a moving figure some distance away.

A grin broke over Gordon Gay's face as he identified that moving figure as being Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth at St. Jim's.

The Grammarians and the St. Jim's juniors were always in a state of friendly warfare, neither side missing any opportunity of ragging one of the "enemy." And here, it seemed, was one of the "enemy" fairly walking into the Grammarians' hands.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking immaculate as ever in his scouting kit, was approaching the Grammarian Scouts, all unconscious of their near presence.

"It's the one and only Gussy," said Gordon Gay to his troop. "Get into cover, you men. We'll collar him as he passes and give him the ragging of his life."

"What-ho!" said Frank Wootton, with a grin.

"What's the silly ass doing?" asked Monk, staring curiously at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Gordon Gay considered for a moment.

"Looks as if the silly ass is laying 'sign,' " he said thoughtfully. "That means other St. Jim's fellows will be coming along soon."

Gordon Gay had hit the right nail on the head. Arthur Augustus was laying "sign"! Tom Merry had given him twenty minutes' start, and instructions to leave "sign" at intervals of fifty yards. Then, the twenty minutes having elapsed, it was the task of the rest of the Eagle Patrol to endeavour to pick up Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's trail.

Arthur Augustus had set out fully confident that he would baffle his pursuers. To do him justice, he was a well-trained Scout. Certainly the trail he was laying would test the observation powers of the Eagle Patrol to the full.

He approached the clearing at the double, unconscious of the surprise that awaited him.

The Grammarian Scouts were in cover, awaiting their leader's signal.

Pheweeep!

It was a soft whistle, and at sound of it Arthur Augustus started. Next moment the glade was alive with Grammarian Scouts.

"Collar him!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Gwanman School boundahs!"

In a moment he was on the defensive. "His Scout pole was sweeping the air in a circle, offering combat to any man, so to speak. But if Arthur Augustus imagined that he was to be 'fought' in Scout style he was greatly mistaken. Before he knew what was happening his legs were swept from under him, and his Scout pole sent whizzing into a near-by bush.

Bump!

"Gwooooooh!"

The swell of the Fourth went to earth with a crash and a roar. Over him swarmed a regular horde of Grammarians. "Grooooooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus, and he made a frantic effort to get at his whistle.

"Stop him!" commanded Gordon Gay. "Don't let the silly ass warn the other St. Jim's fatheads!"

The whistle was wrenched out of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's mouth just as he was about to send out a piercing blast for help. Next second a scarf was rammed into the St. Jim's junior's mouth, effectually stifling any cries for help that Arthur Augustus might have given voice to.

"Truss him up," commanded Gordon Gay.

Arthur Augustus was duly trussed up. His hands were tied behind him, his ankles were bound together and another scarf kept the gag in place. The elegant St. Jim's junior, not looking so elegant now, sprawled in the grass glaring ferociously at his grinning captors. He tried to speak, but the gag was too great an obstacle to coherent conversation and Gussy's efforts ended in an unintelligible gurgle.

"That's number one of the St. Jim's dummies," grinned Gordon Gay. "Unless I'm mightily mistaken, the rest of 'em will be along soon."

"That's a slice of luck for little us," said Wootton, with satisfaction, and the rest of the Grammarian Scouts apparently thought so, too, for they grinned broadly.

"We'll set an ambush in this clearing," said Gordon Gay briskly. "It's an ideal place."

"Rather!" said Monk. "Let's get busy."

"Shin up that tree, Carboy," said Gordon Gay, "and keep a look-out for the St. Jim's chaps."

"Right-ho!"

Carboy darted off, and in a very few moments was perched at the top of an oak-tree. His keen eyes scanned the woods, and he chuckled to himself as he saw a number of moving figures some three hundred yards away from the glade. He slithered down the tree and rejoined his leader.

"They're heading this way," he said.

"How many of the enemy?" asked Gordon Gay.

"I should say about fifteen," said Carboy.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, with a chuckle. "You take half the troop, Monkey, and I'll take the other. When I blow the whistle we go for the St. Jim's asses bald-headed. You chaps catch on?"

Apparently the "chaps" did catch on, for there was a vigorous nodding of heads.

"Carboy, you look after the prisoner," commanded Gordon Gay. "See that he doesn't get that blessed gag free and give a warning."

"Bet your life!"

Carboy and Oliver lifted Arthur Augustus and carried him to a spot on the other side of the clearing. The swell of the St. Jim's Fourth glared balefully up at his captors and received cheery grins in response. If words were denied Arthur Augustus, there was no mistaking his thoughts.

"This is where you St. Jim's rotters get it in the giddy neck!" grinned Carboy, squatting down beside his captive.

"Mmmmmmmmm!"

"You want to get up early in the morning to put it over us," went on Carboy cheerfully.

"Mmmmmmm! Guggguggguggg!"

"Don't try and loosen that gag, my son," said Carboy. "We're Scouts, you know. It would take a Houdini to get out of those knots."

"Guggugug! Mmmmmmmmm!"

And after that Arthur Augustus gave it up. He lay there with feelings too deep for words, his chief concern being the fate of his fellow Scouts. Would they walk into the ambush? He felt like groaning aloud as he thought how easily he had been captured, but even that was denied him; in the circumstances groaning was a painful operation.

Meantime, the Grammarians had divided into two forces. They lined the glade on either side eager for the approach of the enemy.

And all unconscious of what lay before them, Tom Merry & Co. were approaching that ambush. Kit Wildrake, the boy from British Columbia, was a past master at following a trail. Like a bloodhound on the scent, he picked up the sign that Arthur Augustus had left and explained many points in woodcraft that were unknown to the rest of the patrol.

"We're catching Gussy up," said Tom Merry, as he doubled along by the side of Wildrake.

But Wildrake did not make reply to that remark. His keen eyes were scanning the trail ahead, and a puzzled expression came over his face.

The Eagles trotted on and entered the glade.

"Stop!" said Wildrake suddenly. "There's been some funny game on here!"

"Eh?" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What do you mean?"

Wildrake pointed to the trampled grass.

"There's been about a dozen people tramping about here recently," he explained. "And Gussy was taken prisoner!"

The news came like a bombshell to the St. Jim's Scouts.

"But who took him prisoner—" began Tom Merry.

And the answer came from behind the bushes lining the glade:

"THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL!"

With that shout rang out the shrill blast of a whistle. In a moment the Grammarians were pouring into the glade like an army.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Grammar School bounders!"

"Collar 'em!" roared Gordon Gay.

"Hurrah!"

"Grammar School for ever!"

"Down with St. Jim's!"

The glade was the scene of a whirling battle next second. The St. Jim's Scouts, taken thoroughly at a disadvantage, put up a valiant resistance. But the surprise attack put them in wild disorder from the outset.

"Line up!" roared Tom Merry.

"Up, St. Jim's!"

"Grammar School!"

"St. Jim's!"

"Yah!"

Clash, clash, clash!

Staffs rang on staffs as the Scouts engaged in battle, but it was soon evident that the St. Jim's troop was to lose the day. Half the Eagle Patrol had been swept off their feet at the first attack. These were quickly made prisoners.

Back to back, Tom Merry and Wildrake, Jack Blake and Herries, were putting up a stout resistance. Their whirling Scout poles kept the enemy at bay. But weight of numbers told in the end, and within eight minutes of the commencement of that battle it was lost and won.

Tom Merry went down with a bump, with three Grammarians clutching at him. Before he knew what was happening, the leader of the Eagle Patrol was being trussed up like a turkey.

"That's the giddy lot!" chuckled Gordon Gay, rising to his feet. "Sixteen of the prize asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters!" panted Tom Merry. "You took us by surprise!"

"Go hon!" grinned Monk. "It's a little grey matter you want! Call yourselves Scouts?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, we'll make you sit up for this!" growled Tom Merry. "Not just now, my son," said Gordon Gay. "This is where we smile!"

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians chortled loud and long over their victory. Carboy and Oliver joined them, dragging between them the bound figure of Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry glared at the swell of the Fourth.

"You burbling idiot!" he roared. "You led us into this!"

"Mmmmmmmmm!"

"Take that gag away now," said Gordon Gay. "I expect that tailor's dummy wants to say something."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The gag was untied, and Arthur Augustus took a deep breath.

"You wottahs!" That was his first ejaculation as he stared up at his grinning captors. "You fearful boundahs!"

"You burbling blitherer!"

That was Tom Merry's contribution to the conversation, and it was addressed to the swell of the Fourth. It seemed to be the signal for a regular tirade of similar epithets from the rest of the St. Jim's Scouts.

"You footling bandersnatch!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You wall-eyed galoot!" exclaimed Kit Wildrake.

"Weally, Wildwake—"

"You chuckle-headed idiot!" roared Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Never had Arthur Augustus been told so plainly in his life what his Form-fellows thought about him. His aristocratic face went crimson. Undoubtedly Arthur Augustus would have made a valiant attempt to avenge those insults had his hands been free. Fortunately for Arthur Augustus they were not.

"You St. Jim's asses shut up for a bit," said Gordon Gay, "and let us do a bit of talking."

"What are you going to do with us?" demanded Tom Merry apprehensively.

"That's what we want to hold a pow-wow over. That's why you duffers have got to keep quiet."

"Weally, Gay—"

"If that alarm-clock over there won't ring off," said Gordon Gay grimly, indicating Arthur Augustus, "show that gag in his blessed mouth again!"

"To hear is to obey," said Carboy, with a grin.

"Look here, Gay," roared Tom Merry, "I'm—"

"You'll be gagged, too, and the same applies to the rest of you, if you don't shut up," said Gordon Gay darkly.

And Tom Merry & Co. wisely "shut up." Albeit their expressions were apprehensive in the extreme as their captors gathered round to discuss the important question of what was to be done with the St. Jim's Scouts now that they had been taken prisoners.

CHAPTER 4.

The Procession!

"A JOLLY good idea!"

Gordon Gay chuckled as he made that pronouncement, and the rest of the Grammarians roared with laughter.

All manner of wheezes had been suggested and rejected, but one had been favoured with the unanimous approval of the Grammar School juniors.

Tom Merry & Co. watched the grinning Grammarians with anxious faces. They were fairly in the toils, and they knew Gordon Gay & Co. of old. Not one of the St. Jim's Scouts but had wriggled in his bonds in a desperate attempt to get free, but the Grammarians had tied their knots too securely.

"Look here, Gay," said Tom Merry desperately, "let us go. You've had the good fortune to ambush us. That's a win for you. Let's make it pay for the time being."

"Nothing doing, old bean," said Gordon Gay. Then aside:

"Cut off, Oliver, and get that motor-van."

Oliver, a comparative new boy to the Grammar School, set off at the double to enlist the help of his brother, who carried on a small furniture business. Tom Merry & Co. watched him go with woe-begone faces. Next moment their faces assumed even deeper expressions of woe, for the Grammarians hauled their captives to their feet and linked them together with lengths of cord.

"What's this game?" demanded Tom Merry warmly.

"You'll see soon enough," said Gordon Gay. "Free their legs, Monkey."

Monk passed down the line of St. Jim's juniors and cut the cords that bound their ankles together.

The St. Jim's Scouts looked a sorry party. Their wrists were tied behind their backs, and from the middle of each junior a cord linked him up with his neighbour.

Tom Merry & Co. literally burned with rage, but they were helpless, and they knew that pleading for leniency would fall on deaf ears. Undoubtedly the Grammarians had got their old rivals "where they wanted them."

"Here comes Oliver!"

That cheery-faced youth came back at the double.

"All serene. The van's in the lane. We can do the decorating there," he said breathlessly.

Tom Merry & Co. groaned. They knew in advance what form the decorating would take. But the van—what did that portend?

"Get moving, you St. Jim's duffers!" commanded Gordon Gay. "Follow Monk!"

Tom Merry, who was the first junior in the "chain," stood firm.

"Look here, Gay," he said, "we've had enough of this. We'll give you best this time."

"Yaas, watah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "The fortune of war, you know!"

But Gordon Gay shook his head.

"Not so fast, my pippins," he chuckled. "You'll wish you hadn't been born by the time we've finished with you. Quick march, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry did not move.

"Quick march!" roared Gordon Gay.

"Nothing doing!" said Tom Merry resolutely.

Gordon Gay shrugged his shoulders and took a safety-pin from his Scout shirt.

"Just as you like, old bean," he said cheerily. "But if you don't get a move on by the time I've counted three you'll get a taste of this!"

Tom Merry bit his lips. The Grammarians held the whip-hand all along the line, it seemed.

"One—two—"

Gordon Gay was counting.

Still the junior captain of St. Jim's did not stir.

"Three!" said Gay finally. "Well, don't say you didn't ask for it," he added.

"Yeooooop!"

Tom Merry let out a fearful yelp as the pin pricked him. A second later he found himself moving, whether he wanted to or not.

"I thought that would decide you, old scout," chirruped Gordon Gay. "You St. Jim's chaps are frightfully dense, you know. Now why on earth didn't you get moving at the first time of asking?"

"You cackling rotter!" hooted Tom Merry, with a crimson face. "I'll slaughter you when I get free!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That dark threat didn't seem to upset the cheery spirits of Gordon Gay.

"Keep moving!"

The St. Jim's Scouts kept moving. With Tom Merry in the lead, striding out after Frank Monk, the St. Jim's Scouts had to keep moving.

They reached the lane at last, and stared with growing apprehension at the roomy motor-van drawn up there.

A red-faced young man on the driving-seat grinned as he saw the party approaching. He was Oliver's elder brother. From the cheery expression on his face it was apparent that he was not averse to giving up a little of his time that afternoon in his brother's cause. Indeed, young Oliver had found him only too eager to join in the rag when he had approached him in the village a few minutes earlier.

"Got the stuff ready, George?" asked young Oliver, and he received a vigorous nod in reply.

The "stuff" was a fearsome-looking mixture in a bucket, composed largely of soot and water. Tom Merry & Co. eyed that bucket with dismal faces.

"Now get busy, you chaps," said Gordon Gay, "and hold the silly asses while I'll make 'em up."

Grammarians lined up on either side of their captives and gripped them firmly.

Then Gordon Gay dipped his handkerchief in the bucket of soot and water and advanced on Tom Merry.

That luckless junior struggled, as was natural. But his struggles were in vain. In a few seconds his face was as black as the ace of spades, except for two white circles that had been left round his eyes. The effect was comical in the extreme, and the Grammarians chortled loud and long at their leader's handiwork.

"You rotter!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Save your breath; you'll want it in a minute," said Gordon Gay, with a grin; and the captain of the Shell wondered what the next stage of the scheme would be.

Meantime, Gordon Gay had passed along to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That elegant youth gazed at the fearful-looking mixture in the pail with a horrified countenance.

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"Don't you dare to put that stuff ova my face, Gay, you wottah!"

But Gordon Gay dared.

Arthur Augustus struggled wildly.

"If you don't keep your head still," said Gordon Gay, "some of the blessed stuff will go into your mouth like that—"

"Gwooooooooh!"

"And that," said the Grammar School leader, dabbing a liberal quantity of the sooty mixture in Arthur Augustus' mouth.

"Mummmmmmmmm!"

And after that the swell of the St. Jim's Fourth kept his head still. He was treated in a different fashion from Tom Merry. First Gordon Gay covered his captive's face all over with the sooty mixture. Then, as an afterthought, he streaked diagonal lines across D'Arcy's noble features with the aid of a clean handkerchief. The effect was startling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammar School juniors voiced their appreciation in no uncertain fashion. The lane echoed and re-echoed with their laughter.

"You fearful wottah, Gay!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus fiercely. "Bai Jove, if I had my hands free, I'd give you an awful thwashin'!"

"Spare me!" cried Gay, in mock horror. "Mercy!"

"Weally, you wottah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay continued with the good work. At the end of five minutes the St. Jim's juniors had all been "decorated" with the sooty mixture. Each blackened face bore a different design, and the spectacle, as a whole, was alarming yet entertaining. Certainly the Grammarians found it entertaining, for they roared with laughter. Equally certain, the St. Jim's juniors, as they gazed at each other's countenances, found it alarming.

"Now for the posters," said Gay.

Oliver fetched three old newspaper posters from the van. On the blank side of each, Gordon Gay continued his activity with the sooty mixture, which made an effective substitute for paint. When he had finished the posters, each bore a legend. They ran as follows:

"THE MORE WE ARE TOGETHER
THE SILLIER WE SHALL BE!"

and

"WE BELONG TO THAT HOME FOR PRIZE
IDIOTS KNOWN AS ST. JIM'S!"

and

"WE ACKNOWLEDGE ABSOLUTELY THE
SUPERIORITY OF THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL!"

"That's the stuff, my lad!" said Monk, giving his leader a hearty slap on the back. "That'll give the villagers a treat!"

And as the captives heard Monk's words they groaned again. They were beginning to see why Oliver had cut off to get that van.

"Shove the posters on these dummies," said Gordon Gay. "Pin them on so that the Rylcombe people on each side of the road can read 'em. Pin the last poster to the back of that chump, Herries; he's the last St. Jim's prize ass in the line."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The first two posters were pinned securely to the left and right sides of Blake and Digby respectively. The poster containing the "acknowledgment" was pinned to Herries' back. Then Gordon Gay fixed a length of cord to Tom Merry's waist, which in turn was made fast to the tailboard of the van.

At a word from Gordon Gay the Grammarians swarmed into the van, three of them squeezing up beside the driver. From the tailboard Gordon Gay looked down on the hapless St. Jim's juniors, and grinned.

The procession will make a complete round of the village," he called out, "and then return to this spot."

"Hurrah!" yelled the Grammarians.

"You rotters!" howled the St. Jim's juniors.

"Order please!" roared Gordon Gay. "The driver of this van has orders to proceed slowly—at the rate of a jog trot. You St. Jim's chumps came out for exercise this afternoon, and you'll get it. Your motto must be 'Keep Moving.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ready, driver?" shouted the leader of the Grammarians. "Off we go, then!"

To the accompaniment of roars of laughter and derision from their captors, Tom Merry & Co. broke into a trot.

They had no other alternative. It was a case of going wherever the van went.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tom Merry. "This is awful!" That was the general opinion of his luckless followers. With faces that were crimson with rage and mortification—under the sooty mixture—the St. Jim's juniors all trotted. They were encouraged by the Grammarians who had swarmed into the closed van.

In a very few moments the village of Rylcombe was reached, and the entry of that strange procession caused quite a sensation. Elderly shopkeepers, men, women, and children, stopped and stared as the procession trotted through their ancient High Street. And as they saw the weird "make-up" on the faces of the hapless St. Jim's juniors, and read those startling posters, the High Street echoed to their laughter. Even Mr. Tweezer, the man who had never been known to smile, suffered that facial relaxation.

they had none to waste on words, and words, after all, were useless in the circumstances.

"What price the Grammar School now?" queried Gay mockingly. "Who's top dog?"

And the answer came in a mighty shout from the triumphant Grammarians:

"GRAMMAR SCHOOL!"

"We won't let you walk back," said Gordon Gay, after a moment's reflection. "You've done enough exercise for the afternoon. You can ride back in the van."

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Tom Merry.



"Collar them!" roared Gordon Gay. There was a rush of the Grammarians, and the next moment Tom Merry & Co. found themselves fighting back to back. "Back up, St. Jim's!" roared Tom Merry, as he lashed right and left with his staff. Clash! Clash! Clash! (See Chapter 3.)

"Well, I never!" he gasped. "Well, I never!" And Mr. Tweezer was left gasping, "Well, I never!" long after the procession had passed him by.

Tom Merry & Co. ground their teeth with rage. Never in all the history of their feud with the Grammar School had they suffered such a public humiliation. One and all swore vengeance on Gordon Gay & Co. That, alas, could only materialise in the future, and their old rivals were basking in a blaze of glory of triumph in the present. And it was the present that concerned Tom Merry & Co. most.

"Oh deah!" groaned Arthur Augustus, as he trotted along. "Stop it, Gay, you awful wotah!"

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

"Save your breath, Gustavus!" chuckled Gordon Gay. "We've a long way to go yet!"

"Oh, lor'!"

A crowd of village children kept pace with the procession, and their remarks on the subject of the St. Jim's juniors' appearance were naturally frequent, and painful, and free. Tom Merry & Co. trotted on with burning ears.

But all good things come to an end some time or another, and the Grammarians had enjoyed their joke to the full by the time the procession had traversed the village and back again to the starting-point. Then Gordon Gay gave the order to halt.

Tom Merry & Co. were panting for breath. Certainly

"Drive 'em right into the school, Oliver!" chuckled Gordon Gay to the driver. "We'll dump 'em at the steps of the School House."

The driver, who had thoroughly enjoyed the job, nodded. Before they knew what was happening, the Eagle patrol found themselves bundled neck and crop into the closed van. Then the waterproof sheet was let down at the back, and the van moved off towards St. Jim's to the accompaniment of a prolonged roar of laughter.

Undoubtedly the honours of the day rested with the Grammarians.

— — —

CHAPTER 5.

The Man Who Stayed at Home!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW lounged up against the door of the School House.

The slacker of the Fourth was waiting for the return of his chums, Levison and Clive. They were due back at any moment now, for the afternoon was well advanced, and most of the fellows who had taken advantage of the sunshine to get out of doors were now trekking towards St. Jim's for tea.

"You ungrateful rotter!"

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Cardew looked round as that familiar voice fell on his ears, and he grinned slightly as he beheld the indignant, podgy face of Baggy Trimble.

"Beast!"

"What's bitin' you, old fat man?" drawled Cardew.

Baggy Trimble snorted.

"You shied a cushion at me this afternoon, you rotter!" hooted Trimble.

Cardew smiled.

"An' I dribbled you out into the passage as well, old bean. Mean to say that you want some more?"

Most decidedly Baggy Trimble did not want any more. He glared at the slacker of the Fourth with a deadly glare that ought to have withered up Cardew on the spot. Fortunately the elegant junior was spared that horrible fate.

"I came to the study to do you a good turn," hooted Trimble.

"You mean you came to relieve me of a little spare cash, an' you backed a loser. Is that it, old frog?"

"You know it isn't!" retorted Trimble. "You saw your grandfather, I suppose?"

Cardew started.

"What's my grandfather got to do with it?"

"I only came to tell you that he'd arrived," said Baggy, in injured tones.

"Oh, gad!" exclaimed Cardew, as a light of intelligence dawned on him. "Then I treated you rather shabbily—what?"

Baggy Trimble snorted.

"I should jolly well say so," he said peevishly.

"Dear man, you have only yourself to blame," drawled Cardew. "It's that fearful habit you have of buttin' in on a fellow's privacy."

"Oh, really, Cardew—"

"Still," continued the elegant Fourth-Former, "accept my deep apologies for the misunderstandin', old bean. Consider yourself unkieked an'—an' uncushioned, as it were."

Snort!

Baggy Trimble apparently found little solace in those considerations. He felt aggrieved and hurt.

"Oh, really, Cardew—"

The slacker of the Fourth dived a hand into his trousers-pocket.

"It is customary in this country, I believe," he drawled, "to award some compensation to an injured party if he is innocent. Will you accept a little financial compensation from your humble?"

Baggy Trimble's eyes glistened. Would he—

"I see the truth of the ancient proverb that silence gives consent," said Cardew, with a smile. "Catch, old fat man!"

A piece of silver was flicked through the air in the direction of Baggy Trimble.

Baggy caught it—on his nose!

"Yoooooop!"

Cardew grinned.

"You'll never make a stockbroker or a giddy lawyer," he drawled. "They're taught to catch money from birth. Now, trot along, old bean. Five minutes of your fascinatin' society is exactly four and three-quarter minutes too much, you know."

"Oh, really, Cardew—"

But the fat Fourth-Former took the tip, in more senses than one, and scuttled off. He was prepared to be an "injured" party all day, so to speak, if compensation came in the form of a stream of half-crowns. But Baggy's one aim now was to "blue" that half-crown on tuck—liquid and solid.

Cardew watched the fat junior roll away to the tuckshop with an amused smile. Then he resumed his watch at the top of the School House steps for the return of the Eagle Patrol.

About fifteen juniors belonging to the Shell and Fourth Form were tramping in at the gates, when a motor-van passed through their ranks and made for the School House steps.

Cardew watched its approach lazily. But he jumped when the driver, having climbed down from his seat, pulled aside the waterproof covering at the back of the van and pulled out a figure clad in scouting kit.

Cardew nearly collapsed a moment later, for the first figure was followed by a regular stream of figures similarly attired.

"Oh, gad!"

The slacker of the Fourth stared down at the dishevelled heap of humanity gasping and groaning at the foot of the steps, hardly able to believe his eyes.

"Oh, good gad!"

Cardew did not need telling that the roped-up figures were Tom Merry & Co., even if their faces were unrecognisable, their voices were not. And those voices were raised in howls of wrath.

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"Stop that Grammar School bounder!"

"Wescue, Fourth!"

"Oh dear! My nose!"

"Owl! My eye! Take your silly elbow out of my eye, Herries!"

"Keep your blessed boots to yourself, Tom Merry!"

"Wow!"

"Rescue!"

Cardew started into activity as he caught a glimpse of Gordon Gay in the interior of the van. But he was too late; for as he leaped forward the driver of the van slipped in his clutch, and the van moved off towards the gates.

The whole scene had been enacted in a few seconds, and Gordon Gay and the van driver made the most of them. They were safely outside the gates of St. Jim's before any junior could make an attempt to stop them. Indeed, the Shell and Fourth Form juniors coming up the drive were principally concerned with that extraordinary heap of humanity that still struggled and panted and groaned at the foot of the School House steps.

And when the identity of those hapless youths became known the drive echoed to such a burst of uproarious laughter that the cries and groans of the Grammar School victims were completely drowned.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Cardew broke into a fit of helpless laughter as he gazed down at the once spick and span Eagle Patrol.

"Lend a hand, you chaps!" howled Tom Merry, struggling to his feet.

"Don't stand there cackling like a lot of silly owls!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the onlookers.

"There's not much doubt as to who look the silly owls!" chortled Aubrey Racke.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boys!"

There was a rustle of a gown from the top of the steps, and Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, appeared.

"Bless my soul!" he articulated faintly. "What—what does this mean?"

The Housemaster gazed at that queerly assorted mixture of struggling humanity roped together like so many monkeys with eyes that almost goggled out of his head.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What—what—"

Cardew came to the rescue.

"It's a rag, sir," he explained.

"A what, Cardew?"

"A jape, sir," said the slacker of the Fourth, with a grin.

"I rather think the Grammar School have pulled off a record joke at our expense."

"Hem!" Mr. Railton blew his nose violently, doubtless to stifle the laughter that threatened to make itself manifest, and wisely retreated.

As for Tom Merry & Co., they groaned in anguish of spirit. This was the crowning misfortune of the afternoon.

"Cut us free, for goodness' sake!" gasped the captain of the Shell.

Cardew, Dick Julian, the Jewish junior, Bates, and Clifton Dane hurried to cut their schoolfellows' bonds, what time Aubrey Racke, Crooke, Mellish, and a few other characters less charitably minded stood by and spoke their minds.

"He, he, he!" chortled Trimble. "Don't they look guys?"

The fat junior, with a bag of pastries in his hand, had been drawn away from the tuckshop by the commotion. He rolled up, his face sticky and shiny, and cachinnated in his own unmusical fashion.

"He, he, he!" he cackled. "This is rich—Yowp!"

Tom Merry, freed of his bonds now, reached out and prodded the fat Fourth-Former in the waistcoat, and Trimble's cachinnations changed to a roar.

"You think it funny, do you?" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "Then perhaps you'll think this funny!"

And he seized Trimble's bag of jam-tarts and plastered them over his face.

"Yaroooooh! Stoppit, you rotter!" howled Trimble.

"What are you cackling at, Racke?" roared Blake, who was simply boiling with rage.

"You, old bean," said Racke. "You do look a treat, you know! I—Whoooooop!"

Aubrey Racke's laughter changed to a howl of pain as Blake's knuckles connected with the black sheep's prominent nose.

"Any more cackling duffers about?" demanded Blake furiously. But Racke & Co. were retreating into the House now. Evidently the Eagle Patrol was a bit touchy on its weird appearance.

"Oh, Sidney," said Cardew, as he helped his study-mate to his feet, "if this is scoutin', give me a miss!"

"Oh, don't rot!" snapped Clive.

"An', dear old Ernie," went on Cardew, "you do look a

picture! This is the result of an over-abundance of giddy energy."

"Shut up!" said Levison testily. "And let's get up to the study, for goodness' sake!"

"Hold on, you chaps!" called out Tom Merry suddenly.

The Eagle Patrol glared at their leader. For some reason, perhaps known only to themselves, they regarded Tom Merry as being responsible for the afternoon's misadventures.

"Oh, ring off!" snapped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The junior captain crimsoned under his sooty make-up.

"I only want to say that we simply must think out a wheeze to get even with those Grammar School rotters."

His words were greeted with a chorus of groans and hisses. Even the most even-tempered member of the Eagle Patrol was feeling ratty just then.

"Oh, ring off!"

"It's time we had a new skipper!" said Gore meaningly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Someone who can lead without running us into a trap!" supplemented Grundy.

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry's fists clenched. He was just as short-tempered as any of his followers just then.

"You rotters!" he said heatedly. "Was it my fault that all this happened?"

"Well, you were leader!" said Gunn peevishly.

"Be reasonable!" snapped Tom Merry. "You know it wasn't my fault."

"Brrr!"

The Eagle Patrol was unreasonable—very unreasonable. But tempers were at straining point. It was a case of a victim being wanted, and a victim being found.

"We want a new leader!" It was Digby who said that, and in a moment the Eagle Patrol almost to a man had taken it up.

"We want a new leader!"

Tom Merry faced his troop fiercely.

"Well, find a new captain!" he snapped. "If there's any fellow here who can do better than I have done, I'm quite willing to stand down from the captaincy."

And with that Tom Merry stalked into the House.

Monty Lowther and Manners followed him in silence.

It was a sorry party of Scouts that trooped into the House after the Terrible Three, and for the next half an hour the bath-rooms resounded to the splashing of water freely intermingled with angry words and dark threats as the Eagle Patrol endeavoured to rid themselves of their complexions.

Only one member of the patrol seemed happy over the fiasco of the afternoon, and that was Ralph Reckness Cardew—the man who had stayed at home, so to speak.

And as the slacker of the Fourth sauntered along to Study No. 9 his brow was thoughtful, for the words of his grandfather were running through his mind: "You must do somethin' to justify your existence."

Really, it seemed that Fate had provided him with an early opportunity of justifying himself, for the slacker of the Fourth was already casting a covetous eye on the junior captaincy.

Tom Merry had said he was prepared to stand down in favour of a fellow who could do better than he had done. And although Ralph Reckness Cardew was not conceited, he had an idea that so far as the Grammarians were concerned, he could do better than the present junior captain of St. Jim's had done.

CHAPTER 6.

Fully Awake!

"At every national crisis—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"At every national crisis," reiterated Cardew, "a man arises who is equal to the emergency."

Levison and Clive looked at their study-mate in open-mouthed astonishment. It was two hours after their inglorious return from the afternoon's "scouting."

"What on earth are you burbling about, you duffer?" asked Levison.

"A lot of silly rot, as usual!" said Clive, whose temper was still a trifle ruffled.

Cardew shook an admonitory finger at Sidney Clive.

"That is where you are wrong, my dear Sidney. You will admit that the awful humiliation St. Jim's suffered at the hands of our erstwhile enemies of the Grammar School was complete an' utter? In short, it is comparable with a national crisis."

"Oh!"

Neither of the two juniors wanted to be reminded of the afternoon's adventure.

"You follow my meanin'?" drawled Cardew.

"Oh, don't rub it in about this afternoon!" said Levison.

"We've been chipped to death about it. Give it a rest!"

"My dear Ernest, I have no intention of rubbin' it in. I merely wish to point out we have reached a crisis. St. Jim's has been defeated; its pride has been lowered in the dust, an' all that!"

"Well?"

"You will admit, too, dear men, that just recently the Grammarians have pulled off quite a number of successful japes at our expense? The rot has got to stop!"

"The rot?"

Cardew nodded.

"St. Jim's wants buckin' up! St. Jim's wants a new leader!"

It was typical of any member of the Fourth and Shell to refer to their respective Forms as St. Jim's, just as if the Second, Third, Fifth, and Sixth Forms didn't exist.

"You men heard what Tom Merry said this afternoon?" went on Cardew.

"Oh, blow Tom Merry!"

Cardew smiled.

"Blow him—bless him—burst him, if you like, but unless my auricular appendages played me false, I distinctly heard the dear Thomas say that he was prepared to stand down from the captaincy if a better man could be found."

"So he did," admitted Levison. "But what about it, you long-winded dummy?"

"A better man has been found, my dear Sidney an' my esteemed Ernest," drawled Cardew.

"Eh?"

"Whom?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew tapped his chest.

"Little me, dear men!"

Levison and Clive grinned. That their study-mate was possessed of unusual qualities they knew, and were the first to admit; that with a judicious amount of self-

(Continued on next page.)

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discipline he would be a power amongst his Form-fellows, both of them fully realised. But Cardew was Cardew—a born-tired slacker, with a whimsical outlook on life; a being apart from the rest of the fellows at St. Jim's.

"You don't seem over impressed," said Cardew, eyeing his study-mates through narrowed lids. "You don't fancy my chances—what?"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't say you wouldn't make a junior captain Cardew—he began diffidently.

Cardew grinned.

"You think, Ernest, that I would not be in the same street as our dear Thomas—what?"

Ernest Levison smiled.

"Frankly, no, old chap."

"Thank you, Ernie," said Cardew gravely. "An' what does Sidney think?"

Clive grinned.

"I think you're an ass, old chap!"

"Thank you, Sidney! I don't exactly strike you as bein' a fellow who would inspire confidence in his followers—what?"

"Hardly!" said Levison and Clive in unison.

"Your frankness does you credit," said Cardew. "I like it, but I don't think you do me justice."

"Well, put up for the captaincy, and see," said Levison. "We'll back you up, of course."

"Rather!" chimed in Clive. "Put it to the test, Cardew."

Cardew nodded gravely.

"That's exactly what I'm goin' to do, dear men," he answered. "An' if I were a bettin' man I would lay odds that R. R. Cardew is the next junior skipper—what?"

Levison regarded his study-mate curiously.

"You're serious, are you?"

"Never more serious in my life," returned Cardew. "I'm just goin' along to Tom Merry to ask him if he really meant what he said this afternoon, an' then I'm goin' to call a meetin'."

"Oh!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew rose from the armchair and strolled towards the door.

"I take it I can count on your support, dear men, if this thing goes through—what?"

"Of course!"

And Cardew smiled confidently and lounged along the passage.

As he came to a halt outside Study No. 10 in the Shell quarters the sounds of a heated altercation from within assailed his ears. Evidently harmony did not reign supreme amongst the occupants of that celebrated apartment.

Cardew tapped at the door.

"Come in, fathead!" called out Tom Merry irritably.

Cardew sauntered in.

"What do you want?" demanded the captain of the Shell impatiently. "Have you come to tell me what a cropper we came this afternoon, like these burbling fatheads are doing?"

"Not exactly, my dear Thomas," replied Cardew, with a slight smile.

"Then what do you want?"

"I just want to verify somethin' you said about the junior captaincy this afternoon, dear man," said Cardew imperturbably.

"And what did I say?" asked Tom Merry bluntly.

"Unless my memory serves me false," returned Cardew, with a drawl, "you mentioned that you'd be willin' to stand down from the job of skipper if a better man came forward."

Tom Merry grinned faintly.

"So I did."

"Does your word hold good, Thomas?"

"Of course," said Tom Merry. "If the fellows want a new captain—and some of them seem to think they do—and if they find a better skipper than I am, of course I'll take a back seat."

"Nobly said," drawled Cardew. "Then you will have no objections, old bean, if I put in for the job?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Manners and Monty Lowther broke into a roar of laughter as Cardew made that statement. The idea of the worst slacker in the Lower School putting up for the captaincy tickled them immensely.

Cardew's expression was inscrutable as he waited for the laughter to die down.

"Thank you for the applause," he remarked seriously. "I hope it will be just as hearty when I'm elected junior captain. I have the honour, gentlemen, to bid you adieu!"

The slacker of the Fourth bowed solemnly and withdrew from the study. When he was gone Tom Merry & Co. looked at each other and burst into roars of merriment.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fancy that giddy slacker having the awful nerve to think that the fellows would elect him!" chuckled Manners.

"It's too rich!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It seemed an awful nerve on the part of Ralph Reckness Cardew, but then Tom Merry & Co. did not know the calibre of the junior whom they chose to regard as a slacker.

Meantime, Cardew had returned to his study. Levison and Clive looked at him inquiringly as he came in.

"All serene, you men!" said Cardew, with a smile. "I'll get busy on a notice right away. Nothin' like strikin' while the iron's hot, you know."

"Well, if you're serious," said Levison doubtfully, "we'll back you up for all we're worth. But—"

"As that remarkable johnny, Shakespeare, said: 'But me no buts,'" said Cardew. "Just rally round your humble an' abide by results."

With that, Cardew crossed to the cupboard and took out paper, and pen, and ink. For the next few minutes he was busy writing.

"What do you think of that, you men?" he asked, laying down his pen and holding up a sheet of foolscap for his chums to see.

The notice ran:

"THE HONOUR OF ST. JIM'S!"

Is St. Jim's going to the dogs?

Is the pride of St. Jim's to be lowered in the dust by a mob of measly, half-witted Grammar School idiots? Is there no man amongst us that will rise and lead us victorious against the enemy?

There is such a man, born to meet this crisis in the affairs of St. Jim's.

HEAR HIM SPEAK TO-NIGHT AT A MEETING TO BE HELD IN THE JUNIOR COMMON-ROOM AT SEVEN O'CLOCK!

Members of both Houses are cordially invited.

Roll Up In Your Thousands!"

Levison and Clive read and re-read that peculiar notice.

"Think that will bring the fellows along?" drawled Cardew, watching his chums' faces.

Levison and Clive nodded. There was no doubt that that peculiar notice would intrigue all who perused it, and, curiosity at St. Jim's being no less in existence than in any other section of the community, it was pretty safe to assume that the fellows would roll up to that meeting in their "thousands."

"O. K., what?" asked Cardew.

"That'll fetch 'em, all right," averred Clive, half admiringly.

"I'll run along and stick it up on the notice-board for you," said Levison.

"Do!" said Cardew. "It's an awful fag all that long way."

And Levison's hand was on the door-handle when Cardew jumped to his feet.

"I'll take it, Ernie!" he said firmly. "No more slackin', you know. I've got to take life seriously now!"

Before the astonished chums of Study No. 9 could make any answer to that surprising statement, Ralph Reckness Cardew had taken the sheet of paper from Levison's hand and walked briskly out into the passage.

"I do believe Cardew is serious," said Levison at length.

Clive nodded.

"He seems a different chap, somehow," he said, thoughtfully. "Mind you, Ernest, Cardew could do anything if he put his whole heart and soul into it."

"You're right there. Good luck to him!" replied Levison warmly.

And when Ralph Reckness Cardew came back to the study, his study-mates crossed over to him and thumped him on the back.

"You're going to wake up at last!" said Levison warmly.

"Good man!"

"The best of luck, Cardew!" exclaimed Clive enthusiastically.

Cardew's face was solemn.

"You're wrong, Ernie!" he said.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

Cardew shook a finger at his chum, somewhat in the manner of a magistrate reproving a prisoner.

"You said, dear man, that I was goin' to wake up."

Ernest Levison looked puzzled.

"Well, aren't you?"

Ralph Reckness shook his head.

"No, I'm not goin' to," he said gravely. "You see, I woke up early this afternoon. I'm fully awake now, what?"

CHAPTER 7.

The Man !

"O H, my sainted aunt!"
 "Great snakes!"
 "Who is it?"
 "Blessed if I know."

A regular babel of conversation was taking place round the notice-board five minutes after Cardew had pinned his contribution to it.

"He's got a nerve, whoever he is!" snorted Figgins, of the New House.

"Rather!"

"Cheeky boulder!"

Tom Merry pushed his way towards the board. Immediately he was the object of a score of questions.

"Who put this here?"

"Who's the man?"

"What do you know about it, Tommy?"

The junior captain smiled. He fancied he could guess the identity of the "man" referred to in the notice in view of the whimsical wording of it and the call a certain member of the Fourth Form had paid him that afternoon.



A SPECTATOR at a recent League match had his bowler hat battered in by a blow from the ball, and he claimed a new hat from the home club. He didn't get it, though, the idea being, I suppose, that the fellow ought to have been mighty proud of having done the "hat trick."

Leonard Thompson, the forward of Swansea Town, is an artist off the field as well as on the field. Painting in water colours is one of his hobbies—pasting goalkeepers with hard shots is another.

Before the end of March every club in the First and Second Divisions of the League had been defeated at least once on their own ground this season. There may be no place like home, but you can't always win there.

Tommy Clay's wages when he started with Leicester Fosse were ten shillings per week. He has had several "rises" since then.

"Who the thump wrote this, Tom Merry?" demanded Figgins. "Do you know?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"I fancy I do," he replied.

"Well, give him a name."

But Tom Merry shook his head.

"I rather fancy it would spoil the whole affair," he said. "Let it go as it is. You chaps will know at seven o'clock." There was an immediate roar of dissension from the New House juniors.

"Catch me coming to a silly School House meeting!" hooted Figgins.

"Same here!"

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Not so fast, you New House duffers!" he said, with a grin. "For all you know the 'man' referred to in the notice may be a member of your own casual ward."

"Oh!"

Figgins & Co. hadn't thought of that possibility. Still, they had to admit that it existed, and their expressions changed.

Tom Merry sauntered away with Manners and Lowther. "It's Cardew's notice, all right," said Lowther. "Any fool could see his handiwork."

"He means business, too," said Manners. "What are you going to do about it, Tommy?"

"Let him rip," answered the captain of the Shell. "I'll stand by my words of this afternoon. If Cardew can satisfy

the fellows that he's a better leader than I am I'll take a rest from the job. It's a thankless one, anyway."

Apparently the possibility of his being superseded by Ralph Reckness Cardew did not worry Tom Merry unduly. He was a sportsman to his finger-tips. The fellows had elected him captain, and he had always done his best to justify their confidence. If the fellows were "fed up" with him it was up to them to elect another fellow in his place. That was their concern, not his.

Monty Lowther and Manners took the matter far more seriously. Popularity was always a fickle jade, and they knew that the events of the afternoon had given birth to a storm of criticism of Tom Merry's shortcomings as junior skipper. If ever a time was ripe for an ambitious fellow to push himself to the front it was now. At the back of their minds, too, Monty Lowther and Manners had a wholesome respect for Cardew, with all his whimsicality and slacking habits; it was a respect bred not of knowledge of his character, but of ignorance of it. With Cardew one always got the impression that there was a latent strength in him that was dangerous.

As the Terrible Three strolled along the Shell passage

Overheard at one of the recent bye-elections. Candidate, waxing eloquent as he winds up his speech: "Now I ask you, am I the man Middlesbrough wants?" "No," came the reply; "we want a good half-back."

In seven months' football this season Clem Stephenson, the Huddersfield captain, did not score one goal. But you don't judge a forward like Stephenson by the number of goals he scores; you judge him by the number his colleagues score.

A study of the number of players tried in each position by the various clubs this season shows that there have been more inside-rights than players in any other position. In other words, most clubs find their biggest difficulty is to get the inside-right.

Arsenal have a horseshoe which was worn by Ivanhoe when that horse won the Cesarewitch. It hangs in the board-room, and has certainly brought the club quite a lot of luck.

Bob Turnbull, now the centre-forward of Clapton Orient, has had the unique experience of playing for four different League clubs in London—Arsenal, Charlton Athletic, and Chelsea having been his previous clubs.

Recently Bristol Rovers tried a left-wing pair, consisting of John Evans and Ronald Dix. The latter was only fifteen years of age, and his partner was actually playing for Cardiff City before Ronald was born.

Marshall and Ramsay, two men who were with Sunderland, had a strange experience a few weeks ago. In the middle of the week they were colleagues at Sunderland; on the Saturday they played against each other for Manchester City and Blackpool respectively.

they were simply bombarded with questions. Everyone seemed anxious to know the identity of the "man." But the Terrible Three vouchsafed no information on the subject. Cardew himself came along and stood on the fringe of the crowd surrounding the notice-board. There was a peculiar smile on his face as he heard the excited comments. Then he strolled back to Study No. 9.

"Everythin' in the garden is lovely," he announced to his study-mates. "The chaps are simply eatin' themselves out with curiosity."

"They'll turn up en masse," said Levison. "You can be certain of that, Cardew."

"The more the merrier," said Cardew, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction.

By the time seven o'clock came round the one topic of conversation in the Shell and Fourth was the meeting, and there was a general move towards the Common-room as the last note from the school clock in the tower boomed out.

Cardew, Levison, and Clive had made their way there earlier.

"Here they come!" muttered Cardew, as the door of the Common-room opened and Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn strolled in.

The chums of Study No. 3 were followed by Tom Merry & Co., and Talbot, Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Glyn strolled in with Frere and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, Digby, and Jack Blake.

"Looks like a full house," murmured Levison to Clive. "Here come the New House chaps."

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn were the next arrivals. The last-named was eating a jam-tart, and the bag under his arm rather suggested that it contained a quantity of tarts. Fatty Wynn was a great believer in "laying in a solid foundation." As he had remarked to George Figgins: "Might as well have a little snack while he listened to some idiot spouting" he had done.

In less than five minutes practically every member of the Shell and Fourth from both Houses had congregated. Indubitably it was a record attendance for a Lower School meeting.

The hubbub died down somewhat as Cardew, followed by Levison and Clive, moved towards the platform at the far end of the room.

"Go it, old bean," murmured Cardew, as Levison mounted the platform and held up his hand.

"Order!" bawled Clive loyally.

And, strange to say, for once in the history of a junior meeting "Order" prevailed.

"Gentlemen of the Shell—" began Levison.

"Hurrah!" That was permissible in the circumstances.

"Gentlemen of the New House—"

"Hurrah!" roared the New House contingent, not to be outdone.

"And gentlemen of the Fourth—" said Levison with a grin.

And the School House Fourth promptly responded:

"Hurrah!"

"This meeting has been called," began Levison, "to place before you the claims of a certain junior who is convinced that he will lead us to victory in our campaign against the common enemy, the common enemy being, of course, the Grammar School rotters."

"Hurrah!" There were cheers for the victory in advance, so to speak.

"Boo!"

"Down with the Grammar School rotters!" There were more boos and hisses and uncomplimentary epithets for Gordon Gay & Co.

Levison held up his hand for silence, what time Clive shouted for order at the top of his voice.

"The gentleman who has declared his confidence to lead St. Jim's to victory is well known to me," went on Levison. "He is a man of ideas, of strength, of initiative."

"Hurrah!"

"Who is he?"

"Who is this giddy paragon of all the virtues?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He is a member of our community," resumed Levison, "who has hitherto kept himself in the background. But do not let that prejudice your minds, gentlemen; a retiring character is often completely and utterly misunderstood."

"Oh, cut the cackle and get to the horses!" roared Figgins.

"Who is this merchant, anyway?" demanded George Alfred Grundy truculently.

"Yes, who is he?"

There was a sudden silence as Ernest Levison beckoned to Ralph Reckness Cardew to step on to the platform. The assembly—with the possible exception of Tom Merry & Co.—stared at Cardew with unbelieving eyes. But that silence was of only a few seconds' duration. Next instant pandemonium broke loose.

"That slacking rotter!"

"That smoky ass!"

"Take him away!"

"Throw him out!"

"Order!" shrieked Clive.

"Let 'em have their say, Sidney," murmured Cardew.

"They'll run short of breath in a moment, then I'll jump into the giddy breach, what!"

Figgins & Co. were wild with rage. They had attended that meeting on the off-chance that the mysterious candidate might turn out to be a member of the New House. That it was a School House junior was enough to rouse their ire; that it was Cardew, the biggest slacker of the Fourth, made them doubly furious.

"Rag the funny ass!" roared Figgins.

"It's Cardew's idea of a joke."

"School House rotter!" exclaimed Figgins in a loud voice.

That was a dangerous remark for the long-legged leader of the New House to make. Whether Cardew was a slacker or not, he belonged to the School House, and for a New House "worm" to howl him down was sufficient to make all the School House juniors resent it.

"You New House worms shut up!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway dwy up!"

"Rats, you glass-eyed dummy!" howled George Francis Kerr.

"The Gem Library.—No. 1,052.

"Weally, Kerr, I shall be under the painful necessity of administewin' a feashful thwashin' unless you wetwact that insultin' epithet."

"Ring off!" bawled Figgins.

"Chuck those rowdy New House kids out!" This time it was George Alfred Grundy's voice that rose above the tumult.

The great George Alfred was a redoubtable fighting man. Rows rather appealed to his pugilistic nature.

"Start the chucking out and see what happens," said Lawrence of the New House.

"Yah! New House doffers!"

"School House idiots!"

Cardew looked on that rolling assembly, which threatened at any moment to come to blows, with a keen glance. He signalled to Clive and Levison to yell for order.



A roar of laughter greeted the St. Jim's Scouts as they entered the van procession. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Grammarians from the van. "on behind the mo—"

"Order! Order!"

Those combined shouts brought the angry juniors back to earth, so to speak. After all, it was Cardew who had caused them to be present.

The slacker of the Fourth held up his hand.

"I won't keep you long, gentlemen," he said; and there was something about his demeanour that held his audience, in spite of all the uncomplimentary things the great majority of them wanted to say.

"Thank goodness for that," muttered Figgins.

"You fellows all know what happened this afternoon," went on the elegant Fourth-Former.

It was a good note to strike, for all the fellows who were not in the Eagle Patrol but who held the good name of St. Jim's at heart felt constrained to boo. Cardew, feeling that he had "got" his audience, indulged them. When order was restored he continued:

"Gentlemen of St. Jim's, it is time the Grammar School"

bounders were put in their proper place once an' for all. Is everyone agreed upon that?"

"Hurrah!"

Everyone was agreed upon that point.

"Gentlemen," resumed Cardew, "you have done me the honour of attendin' this meetin'. If you will give me a few moments longer I will deliver my proposition to you."

"Get it off your chest!"

"It was said this afternoon by a large number of you now present that what St. Jim's wanted was a new junior skipper. I am in entire agreement with that statement."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is more, gentlemen," went on the elegant Fourth-Former, "I am prepared to make you all a sportin' offer!"

"We don't back gee-gees," said Figgins, with a sniff.

"Turn that New House gas-bag out!"

"Try it on!"

"Order, please! Order, please!"

"My sportin' offer has nothin' to do with the gee-gees this time," said Cardew imperturbably. "Briefly, it's this. I guarantee that within a week from date I'll spring such a record jape on those Grammar School asses that they'll wish they'd never been born!"

"Hurrah!" roared the Fourth Form juniors loyally.

"All gas!" howled the Shell.

"Talking out of the back of his neck!" said the New House, in effect. Cardew smiled.

"I'm not talkin' out of the back of my neck, you men,"



the village street. Never before had the villagers seen such an amazing an. "Oh, what a gang!" With burning ears, Tom Merry & Co. trotted home in a van. (See Chapter 4.)

he said earnestly. "I can do it. If I fail I'll stand every man jack of you here a feed."

"Bravo!"

"Good old Cardew!"

Certainly that side of the proposition was sporting enough.

"On the other hand," continued Cardew, "if I succeed, I seriously mean to challenge Tom Merry an' any other aspirant for the job of junior skipper!"

"Oh!"

"And what does Tom Merry say about it?" roared Blake.

"Forward, Tom Merry!"

The junior captain mounted the platform. Immediately he was the recipient of a mixed chorus of groans, cheers, and hisses, the latter coming from Aubrey Racke & Co., who never let an opportunity go by of publicly showing their opinion of Tom Merry if it were safe to do so.

Tom Merry crimsoned.

"I've very little to say, you chaps, except that I wish Cardew luck!"

"Hurrah!"

"I'm willing to admit that Gordon Gay & Co. have certainly been scoring over us just recently. That's the giddy fortune of war. But if Cardew can square the account, I should like to think of him as a serious candidate for the job of junior skipper!"

Groans from the New House section.

"He's certainly got more grey matter than a good many fellows here!" said Tom Merry meaningly, at which there was a howl of laughter from the School House juniors and fresh groans from Figgins & Co.

"Collar that School House waster!"

"Chuck the New House rotters out on their necks!"

"Yah!"

"Boo!"

In a moment the members of that assembly were at grips—not an uncommon ending to any meeting which necessitated the presence of both Houses.

Backwards and forwards swayed the mob, and in the general excitement and confusion friends and foes hit out right and left with but little thought of the "politics" of the recipients.

Cardew, Levison, and Clive looked on with grins. The last-named had entertained many misgivings at the opening of the meeting as to whether he and his chums would emerge at the end of it with their lives, so to speak. But in the excitement of the "party" quarrel, Cardew, Levison, and Clive were forgotten.

One by one the New House juniors, struggling gamely to the last, were dragged towards the door and thrown out into the passage. When the Common-room was cleared of all New House juniors, the Shell and Fourth glared at each other truculently. Really it seemed that it was the turn of the School House to quarrel amongst themselves. Fortunately, however, Eric Kildare, the captain of the school, came along to inquire about the terrific din that was going on.

No inquiries were needed. The passage strewn with gasping New House juniors told its own painful tale. Kildare did not waste time in words; his ashplant slipped down into his hand, and then commenced operations. In a remarkably short space of time the passage was cleared. A similar result attended Kildare's entry of the Common-room.

"Rowdy young rascals!" breathed Kildare. "Clear!"

Again the ashplant came into play, and there was a wild stampede for the door. On all sides rose howls of anguish as Kildare's ashplant found a billet. When the last junior was gone the captain of the school breathed deeply. That unexpected exercise had taken quite a lot out of him.

He smiled grimly.

"Noisy young scamps!"

Then the captain of the school tucked his ashplant under his arm, closed the Common-room door, and strode along the Shell and Fourth Form passages. But there was no further disturbance. Cardew's meeting had come to an end, and those who had attended it were now attending to their aches and pains, or, alternately, their prep.

CHAPTER 8. The Great Idea!

TAP! Cardew, Levison, and Clive looked up as that knock disturbed the silence of the study.

It was exactly three days since Cardew's memorable meeting. Cardew was reclining in the armchair in a state of reflection. Levison was reading the "Magnet," whilst Clive was splicing a cricket-bat.

Since Cardew had put his proposition to the junior school there had been a noticeable difference in him. No longer was his gold cigarette-case in evidence; no longer did he trowst in the study idling away the time which his Form-fellows devoted to sport. In short, Cardew seemed to be an entirely reformed character. He had turned up each day on Little Side for games practice, and, moreover, had acquitted himself well. His languor and his disinterested attitude towards life had fallen away from him like a cloak. None noticed the change more than did Levison and Clive. This was a glimpse of the Cardew they liked and respected. Of his great wheeze to score a triumph over the Grammarians Cardew had said nothing, but his study-mates knew that something had materialised in his mind and but awaited his mood to learn what the great scheme was.

That it was high time Gordon Gay & Co. were made to feel that St. Jim's was a force to be reckoned with grew more apparent each day, for since the memorable scouting

incident Skimpole of the Shell had had the ill-luck to fall into their hands.

The duffer of the Shell had been returned in a baby's perambulator, with an applicable notice tied round his neck and a feeding-bottle gagged into his mouth. But that was not all. Doubtless acting on the old maxim that nothing succeeds like success, Gordon Gay and his merry men had the unparalleled audacity to make a nocturnal visit to St. Jim's armed with pillows and bolsters. The very daring of the scheme ensured its success from the outset. First the Grammarians had swept down on the Shell dormitory like vultures on the fold. Having annihilated the enemy, so to speak, they had then retired, first locking the door of the Shell dormitory. Then they had repaired to the Fourth Form dormitory, stripped all the bedclothes from the sleeping juniors, and bolted with them.

In a well-conducted retreat, the Grammarians had made their exit via the box-room window. The bedclothes belonging to the Fourth-Formers had been dumped in the quad, and Gordon Gay & Co. had sealed the school wall and marched back to their own quarters in triumph.

It had been a bitter pill for the St. Jim's juniors to swallow. That it was high time they found a leader who could cope with the daring Grammarians came home to them with more force than ever.

But despite Cardew's confident words uttered at the meeting, nothing, so far, had been done.

Tap!

"Come in!" sang out Cardew, as the knock on the door of Study No. 9 was repeated.

Toby, the page, entered. He was accompanied by a carrier's man, who supported a large packing-case on his back.

Cardew was expecting that packing-case, for his face lit up.

"Shove it in the corner!" he said.

"Suttin'ly, sir!"

Breathing hard, as though the exertion of carrying that packing-case had been almost more than he could manage, the carrier dumped it in the corner. But his heavy breathing ceased miraculously as Cardew slipped a ten-shilling note into his hand by way of compensation.

"Thankee, sir!"

The door closed on Toby and the carrier's man. Then Levison and Clive looked inquiringly at Cardew and the packing-case.

"Might a fellow ask what that packing-case contains?" said Levison, with a grin.

Cardew grinned.

"You may," he returned. "That packing-case, dear men, contains the wheeze that's goin' to put the giddy kybosh on our friends at the Grammar School!"

"Oh!"

Levison and Clive were on their feet in a moment. They stared at the large case curiously. Meantime, Cardew had fetched a hammer and chisel from the study cupboard, and a moment later he was beginning to prise up the lid of the case.

Levison and Clive looked over his shoulder. Once the lid was wrenched back, all that came to view was a quantity of packing.

"Lock the door, Ernie!" said Cardew suddenly.

Levison hastened to comply.

"Don't want that nosy boulder Trimble in here!" said Cardew, commencing to pull away the packing. "Ah!"

He broke off with that ejaculation as the last layer of packing came away.

Levison and Clive jumped at what they saw.

"Oh, my hat! A lion's skin!"

"Great Scott! What's the idea?"

Cardew smiled.

"Three lions' skins, to be precise, dear men!" he said.

And Cardew was right, for in that packing-case, carefully packed, were three brand-new lions' skins!

They looked fearsome enough, with the staring eyes and the tousled manes, as Cardew drew them out from the case and dumped them on the floor.

His chums regarded them with astonishment.

"What on earth do you want with these things?" asked Levison.

"You'll see in good time, old bean! Just take another squint at them; they won't bite, you know!"

"We know that, fathead!" said Levison, with a grin.

"But I shouldn't like to bump across them in the dark."

He examined one of the skins, and Clive did likewise. Cardew watched his chums with an amused twinkle in his eyes.

"Catch on to the idea, you men?"

Levison looked puzzled, Clive looked more enlightened.

"I've got it!" ejaculated the latter suddenly. "These have been fitted with fasteners, and the giddy jaws work and the eyes move!" he added excitedly.

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"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Levison. "I tumble to it Cardew!"

"Good man!" said Cardew cheerily. "Do you two fellows fancy yourselves as lions?"

"Oh, my only Sunday bonnet!" ejaculated Clive. "These are topping skins, Cardew! Where on earth did you get 'em?"

Cardew smiled.

"You know I've always thought uncles were a deuced nuisance, an' all that, but I must amend my ideas."

"What are you burbling about, you ass?"

"I was about to speak of my Uncle Roger," said Cardew seriously. "He's an awful bore, really. Spends most of his time chasin' lions an' tigers an' things."

"Oh!"

"The dear chappie came back last week from a big-game hunt in Africa," explained Cardew. "For some unfathomable reason he thinks a lot of me. Strange, ain't it?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Levison, grinning.

"Well, he said so in his letter," said Cardew; "said he'd like to do somethin' for me. It was only on Wednesday that it struck me that nunks might be useful. I knew he'd bagged umpteen lions an' things. That's what started the idea. I wrote an' let him into a little secret an' asked him to get three lions' skins fixed up like the chappies wear in the pantomimes an' things."

"Oh!" said Levison and Clive, grinning.

"I specially pointed out to uncle that the job had got to be done carefully," continued Cardew. "They're real skins, you can see, an' the old sport has seen to it that they have been prepared to look as lifelike as possible when Study No. 9 take it into their heads to have a stroll in them. You follow?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison and Clive could restrain their merriment no longer. They saw now the form Cardew's great jape against the Grammarians was to take.

"Like the idea?" asked Cardew at length.

"Top hole!"

"Do you think you can roar like a lion?" he added gravely.

"Rather!" chuckled Levison.

"Then I can set my tired mind at rest," said Cardew smoothly. "If you chaps will tie me up I'll practise emulatin' the majestic tread and fearsome roarin' of friend lion without delay."

CHAPTER 9.

Seeing Things!

LEVISON and Clive were wildly enthusiastic. They had seen pantomime lions before, and despite the terrific roaring and antics of the pantomimist, so to speak, had accepted them for exactly what they were worth. But these were real skins, with majestic heads and flowing manes. It would take a very cool head and a clear eye to see through the deception if properly carried out.

In less than five minutes Cardew was tucked up in the skin. There were string attachments inside the head of the skin which opened the ferocious jaws and rolled the savage eyes at the discretion of the person operating them.

Even Levison and Clive were taken aback at the lifelike effect of the skin when Cardew dropped on all fours and opened his—or, rather, the lion's—mouth.

"What's the verdict, old beans?"

Levison and Clive jumped as Cardew's muffled voice came to them.

"Topping!" exclaimed Levison delightedly.

"Ripping!" chortled Clive.

"Grrrrrrrr!" It was a terrific roar that awoke the echoes as Ralph Reckness Cardew endeavoured to complete the imposture. And added effect was gained as the lion's tail swished viciously.

But for the fact that they were in the know, Levison and Clive, without a doubt, would have thought that a denizen of the African veldt had somehow or another found its way into their study.

"How's that?" came Cardew's voice.

"Wonderful!"

"Top-hole!"

Clive and Levison were wildly enthusiastic.

"I'll just try a little walking," said Cardew. "That's more difficult."

It was certainly more difficult, but the dandy of the Fourth managed it very creditably.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Levison delightedly. "That's fine!"

Knock! Knock!

Levison and Clive started as that summons rang out on the panels of the door.

"Open dis door at vunce, mit you!"

It was the voice of Herr Schwartz, the new German master.

Levison and Clive looked at each other in alarm, and then looked at the "lion." Of the three, Cardew seemed to be the most cool.

"It's Schwartz, isn't it?" he whispered.

"Yes!"

"Open the giddy door, you men," whispered Cardew. "I'll try it out on the old blighter!"

Levison hesitated, but another thunderous summons on the door decided him.

"Donner und blitzen, why nod is der door open, hein?"

Evidently Herr Schwartz was waxing impatient and wrathful at being kept waiting.

The key turned in the lock, the door swung open, and the German master stalked in. But he had hardly progressed more than a couple of feet when he caught sight of a fear-some-looking monster right in his path.

"Grrrrrrrrrr!"

Inside the lion's skin Cardew's growls were very realistic. His tail swished, and the dreadful fangs of the lion were bared.

Herr Schwartz leaped back as if he had been shot.

"Mein Gootness! A lion! Himmel!"

Like an indiarubber ball the German master bounced back into the passage and slammed the door. Next moment his heavy, running feet echoed along the passage.

"Quick!" gasped Cardew. "Get me out of this!"

In feverish haste the two juniors unfasted the lion's skin. In a very short space of time Cardew was himself, so to speak. Without a word to his chums, he shoved the lion's skin back into the packing-case. Then, with a gesture to Clive and Levison, he began to push the packing-case underneath the table. His study-mates caught on then. In less time than it takes to tell, the packing-case was hidden from view by the ample folds of the table-cover.

Cardew turned a perspiring face on his chums.

"Did it work?" he gasped.

"Rather!" said Levison. "Old Schwartz bolted like a hare. But what's the idea?"

Cardew grinned.

"Schwartz is sure to fetch Railton, or somebody, here," he explained. "That might spoil the jape we've got against the Grammarians if things leaked out. When the dear old bean comes back he'll find three quiet youths about to commence their prep."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sssh!" whispered Cardew, as he caught the sound of approaching footsteps in the passage without. "Here they come!"

The chums of Study No. 9 pulled out their books and sat round the table. Next minute the door of the study was thrown open and Mr. Railton looked in. There was an extraordinary expression on the Housemaster's face.

"Hem! Ah!" The master of the School House was evidently at a loss for words. "I have been told an amazing story, my boys, by Herr Schwartz."

"Have you, sir?" said Cardew demurely.

"Nothing less amazing than that a lion is at large in this study!"

"A lion, sir?" The chums of Study No. 9 took the cue offered them with remarkable promptness.

Mr. Railton searched their faces keenly.

"Of course the story is ridiculous!" he said, somewhat testily. "Herr Schwartz a moment ago informed me that he came to this study and that a ferocious lion jumped at him."

"Oh, sir!" ejaculated Cardew.

"A lion jumped at him?" said Clive incredulously, implying that Herr Schwartz had been seeing things. Certainly no lion had jumped at him.

Mr. Railton's brow contracted in a frown.

"As I remarked, the story is ridiculous!" he said testily. "Herr Schwartz, I am afraid, must have imagined things!"

The master of the School House was interrupted by the trembling voice of the gentleman in question, who was lurking at the far end of the passage, ready to bolt at a moment's notice.

"Himmel! Be careful, Herr Railton! Do not take the risk unnecessary!" he called out. "I will fetch a gun mit mineself, hein!"

Mr. Railton stepped out into the passage.

"Come here, Herr Schwartz," he beckoned. "There is no lion here. You must have been the victim of an hallucination!"

"Himmel!" gasped the German master. "Vot vos it tat you say? No lion? Himmel, de ferocious monster he sprang at me, ain't it?"

"Ridiculous!" snapped Mr. Railton. "Come here, sir!"

"Naffer!" called back the language master. "I no coward am, Herr Railton. But not for all der tea in China, as you say, would I into dat room go pefore!"

"Then I advise you to go and see the doctor at once, sir," said Mr. Railton acidly. "This is really beyond my comprehension."

The long distance altercation, as it were, had attracted attention. On all sides study doors were opening and inquiring heads were poked out. Mr. Railton looked angry. He was firmly convinced that Herr Schwartz had been the victim of a too-vivid imagination. Really, it was too bad for him to maintain that there actually was a lion in Study No. 9. The idea was ridiculous on the face of it.

"Get back to your studies, boys!" rapped out Mr. Railton. "This is the hour for preparation."

Immediately there was a slamming of study doors as the Fourth-Formers, very much intrigued to know what all the fuss was about, resumed their interrupted preparation.

In Study No. 9 Cardew, Levison and Clive were striving manfully to suppress their laughter. Mr. Railton gave them a keen glance.

"I am sorry to have interrupted you in your work," he said. "Herr Schwartz—"

But the Housemaster checked himself. Whatever he had been about to say respecting that Teutonic gentleman remained unsaid, but the chums of Study No. 9 were not hard put to it to fill in the gap, as it were.

Mr. Railton closed the door of Study No. 9 and whisked away. His next journey took him to Herr Schwartz' study. That frightened gentleman was tinkering about with an ancient-looking shot-gun which he had taken from the wall. What he could have done with it without any ammunition was known only to the German master himself.

Mr. Railton closed his colleague's door, took the ancient shot-gun out of his hands, as if he were removing a dangerous toy from a small child, and led Herr Schwartz to a chair.

And for the next ten minutes the master of the School House spoke very clearly and emphatically to the German master, much to that unfortunate gentleman's bewilderment and inward wrath. For ten minutes Mr. Railton endeavoured to prove to Herr Schwartz that the lion in Study No. 9 was merely a product of his overworked imagination. The German master heard him through with many ejaculations of "Himmel!" "Donner und Blitzen!" "Mein Gott" and the like, but he was no less convinced that he had seen a lion in Study No. 9 than Mr. Railton was convinced that he hadn't, which spoke rather well of Ralph Reckness Cardew's pantomimic activities inside the lion's skin!

CHAPTER 10.

"Good old Cardew!"

"HALLO, another blessed notice from that cheeky idiot Cardew!"

It was George Figgins who made that remark.

And George Francis Kerr and Paddy Wynn nodded. All the same for that, the notice attracted them.

It was the following Wednesday and the juniors were streaming out of the Form-rooms for morning break. Cardew had taken that opportunity to affix another notice to the green baize board. It ran as follows:

"AN AFTERNOON'S FREE ENTERTAINMENT!"

"Whereas the undersigned propounded a proposition for the complete and utter downfall of the Grammar School, exactly a week from date, he is prepared to make good his boast or abide by the consequences as agreed. Interested parties are requested to attend a FIVE MINUTES' meeting immediately after morning lessons in order to be acquainted with the nature of the wheeze, which will provide all who

(Continued on next page.)



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"Of all the nerve!" ejaculated Figgins.

"Looks as if he's got something up his sleeve," said Kerr thoughtfully.

"Cardew's a deep boulder, you know, Figgy," added Fatty Wynn.

"Well, I'm not going to his blessed meeting, anyway," hooted Figgins wrathfully. "Who's Cardew to call a meeting? A slacking School House rotter!"

Kerr linked an arm in that of his chum.

"Yes, you are coming along, old scout," he said. "I've got an idea that Cardew's struck something good."

"And you know what the alternative was!" chimed in Fatty Wynn. "He said at the meeting that if he didn't put the kybosh on those Grammar School rotters within a week he'd stand the whole meeting a feed!"

And Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened at the prospect. At that moment Fatty Wynn almost hoped, patriotic as he was, that Cardew's scheme would be a miserable failure.

"A feed!" snapped Figgins. "Who wants a feed? Don't suppose we'd get it, anyway. That was all soft soap!"

"Not a bit of it," chimed in Kerr. "With all his faults Cardew's word is his bond."

"Well, if you're going along, I suppose I'd better go with you," said Figgins grudgingly.

And the New House trio stalked off, leaving a buzzing crowd of Shell and Fourth-Formers round the notice board.

In the Form-rooms after morning break the Form-masters were wondering why it was that their respective Forms were so inattentive. Lines and lickings fell as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. But the inattention remained. Juniors, one and all, were turning over in their minds what the nature of Cardew's wheeze would be. Both masters and pupils felt relieved when morning lessons came to an end, and it was a buzzing crowd of juniors that streamed into the Common-room.

Cardew was already on the platform with Levison and Clive. On the desk beside him was the lion's skin carefully wrapped up.

"All here?" asked Cardew, at length. "Then shut the door and lock it."

"Why all this mystery?" inquired Figgins crossly.

Cardew smiled.

"Gentlemen of the New House, the Fourth, and the Shell. This afternoon our deadly enemies at the Grammar School will be put to rout."

"I seem to have heard that before," remarked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" supplemented Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Without wastin' your time," continued Cardew. "I will proceed to demonstrate the scheme rather than talk about it."

"Good egg!"

Levison and Clive dragged the lion's skin out of the parcel. There was a murmur of amazement as the juniors saw what it was. In a very few moments Cardew of the Fourth was tied up inside the skin. Then he stalked down the Common-room rolling his eyes, or rather the lion's eyes, swishing his tail and occasionally emitting ferocious growls and roars.

His Form-fellows watched him spellbound. Not one of them but have bolted for his life had he not seen that Cardew was the "lion," for the effect was amazingly realistic.

"Oh, my hat!" chirruped Tom Merry. "What a wheeze!"

"Hurrah!"

"Jolly good, Cardew!"

From all sides and factions there broke out a round of enthusiastic applause. Full details of the scheme had yet to be explained, but the demonstration gave a very good idea in advance what form it was to take.

With lion-like tread and flowing mane Cardew returned to the platform. Here he divested himself of the skin and faced his audience.

"Hurrah!" Another burst of applause rang through the ancient Common-room and Cardew smiled as he heard it.

"Like the stunt?" he asked, when the cheering had died down. "Now let's proceed to details, dear men! At two o'clock a van will call for three lions—"

"THREE LIONS!" It was a regular chorus.

Cardew held up his hand.

"Three lions!" he reiterated. "Levison and Clive, old beans, will assist your humble in a little deception."

"Oh, my sainted aunt!"

"With all due modesty, gentlemen," drawled Cardew. "I can say that the keenest eye amongst our hated foe the Grammar School will not detect the deception. Ernie and Sidney here have been practising the gentle art of roaring and snarling and generally playing the goat, I mean the lion—"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They are now adept at it. At two o'clock, then, the three lions will leave here. In the van, well out of sight, will be as many of you chaps as can squeeze in. The programme is that the van dumps the lions outside the gates of the Grammar School and waits."

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Kerr. "This is rich!"

"Go it, Cardew!"

"Then the giddy lions will stroll in at the Grammar School—"

"Mistaking it for a Zoo," chimed in Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And proceed to put the Grammar School to rout," resumed Cardew. "Once inside the buildin' the lions will indulge in a few antics, what time, unless I'm mistaken, Gordon Gay and his prize asses will be fleeing for their lives."

"Where do we come in?" demanded George Alfred Grundy in a loud voice.

"Just then!" was Cardew's cryptic rejoinder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Once inside, you men will have the chance of your lives to square accounts, what?" drawled Cardew. "You can rely on Study No. 9 to hold the fort while you're goin' it!"

"Good old Cardew!"

"What a wheeze!"

There was no mistaking the sincerity of the congregated juniors. Even Racke & Co., who had come along to the meeting, ostensibly to sneer and scoff, caught the infection.

Cardew bowed modestly.

"Thank you, gentlemen; but let us resume. When you have done your giddy turn on the programme you will sneak out, shin over the school wall by the back an' stand in readiness at the gates. Then, hey presto, out will trot three lions, roarin' like—like anythin'. St. Jim's will then show these Grammar School bounders that we're not afraid of lions. You will pat the heads of these ferocious beasts an' generally make-home pets of 'em, so to speak."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That will provide the finale," concluded Cardew. "I've kept the van in the programme, as perhaps it would be judicious to make our return journey to St. Jim's as expeditiously as possible. That's all, gentlemen; the show will commence at two o'clock."

With another bow, Ralph Reckness Cardew stepped down from the platform and lunged towards the door. A mighty cheer went up as he passed his Form-fellows. Even Tom Merry, realising as he did what the success of Cardew's scheme might mean personally to him, cheered as loudly as anyone present.

The slacker of the Fourth had set out to surprise his Form-fellows, and he had done so. Indubitably his scheme had been hailed on all sides with joy and acclamation. It now remained to put it into effect.

CHAPTER 11.

Spoofted!

"A L.L. clear!"

It was a chain whisper, so to speak, that travelled the length of the passage leading from the School House steps to the door of Study No. 6. At regular intervals about a dozen juniors were spaced along the passage waiting to give Cardew, Levison, and Clive the signal that the coast was clear for them to essay the journey from their study to the waiting van.

It was a necessary precaution, for if a master or a prefect had chanced upon three grown "lions" walking about St. Jim's on their hind legs the programme that had been planned so carefully for the benefit of the Grammar School juniors would, of a certainty, have been cancelled on the spot.

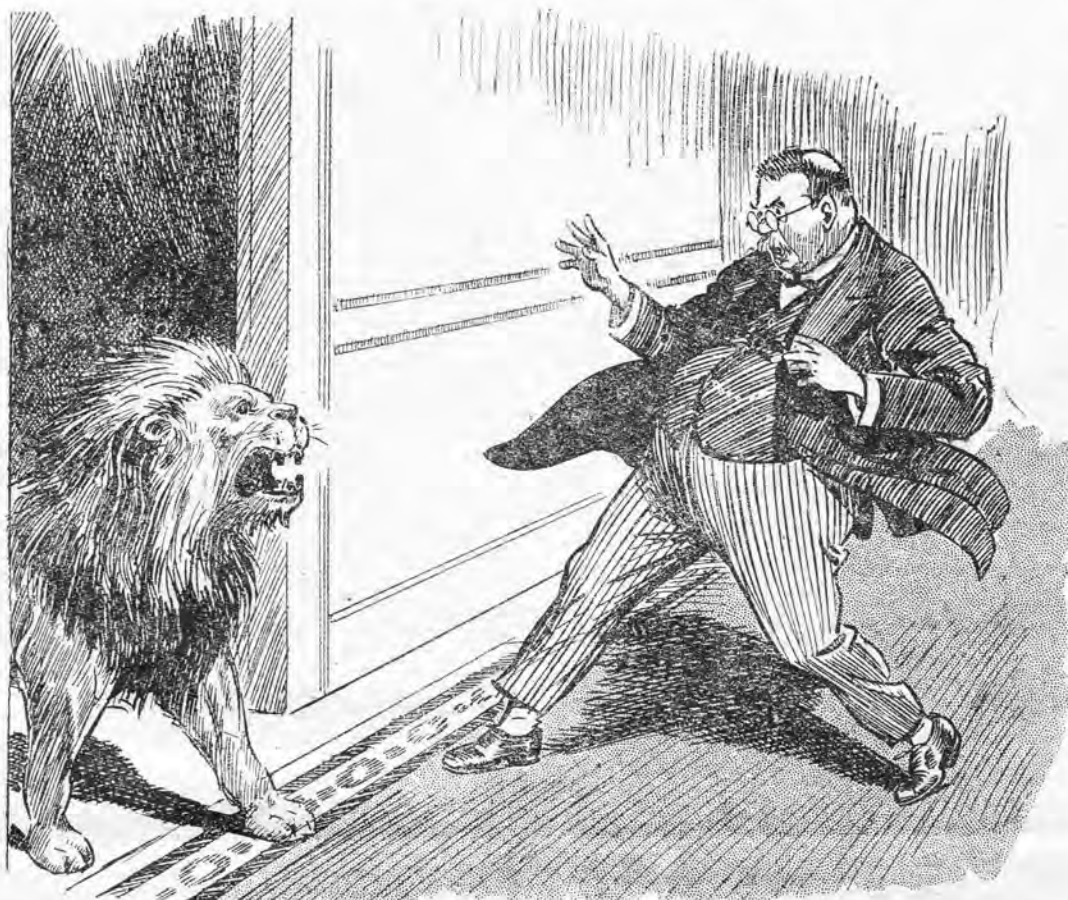
"All clear!" This time it was the message for which the chums of Study No. 9 had been waiting.

They stepped out into the passage, looking very weird in their lion's skins, as they walked as naturally as was possible. Luck was with the venturesome trio, for no master was encountered, and inside a minute the lions were safely stowed in the motor-van. Then a crowd of juniors from the Shell, Fourth, and New House swarmed in after them. There was not room for all who wanted to go, but those left behind could either follow on foot or stay at the school, just as they wished. A good number, however, chose to follow the motor-van at a discreet distance.

Inside the van all the juniors were bubbling over with suppressed excitement. Would Cardew's scheme work out in practice as well as it appeared to do in theory?

Only the future could tell.

The van, the driver of which was, of course, in the know, moved along smartly. By the time it drew near



As the German master opened the door of the study there was a terrific roar from within, and a fearful-looking monster emerged into the passage. "Grrrrrrrrrr!" Herr Schwartz leaped back as if he had been shot. "Mein goodness! A lion! Himmel!" (See Chapter 9.)

the Grammar School gates the road was deserted. Came the grinding of brakes, and then the driver opened the doors at the back of the van.

"All clear, sir!" he whispered.

Cardew, Levison, and Clive climbed out on to the roadway. What anyone would have said could they have seen three full grown lions "climbing" out of that van is hard to conjecture. Fortunately, no one was about. With the whispered messages of good luck following them, the chums of Study No. 9 padded in at the gates.

They had traversed half the drive before any Grammar School fellow spotted them.

"Ooooooooooh!"

That piercing shriek which awoke the echoes signified that a junior boy had seen the visitors. In a moment he was running into the House, yelling at the top of his lungs.

The lions stopped and sniffed the air in the appropriate fashion. Then they gave tongue and bounded for the steps of the House.

"Grrrrrrrrrr!"

"Ooooooooooh! Grrrrrrrrrr!"

Cardew had timed his programme well, for the Grammar School fellows were just coming out from dinner. And as the crowd of them saw those three ferocious-looking lions barring their path there was a wild stampede.

"Oh!" gasped Gordon Gay wildly. "Lions!"

"Run for it! Look out!"

"Into the Common-room!" hooted Gordon Gay. "Quick!"

Panic took hold of the Grammarians. In wild disorder and alarm, they fled for their studies, the Common-room, anywhere, to be safe from those fearsome-looking monsters. The whole thing was so unexpected, so uncommon in the life of an English school, that collected, cool thought was out of the question. One thought was uppermost in every mind—bolt!

"Grrrrrr-groceerr! Grrrrrr!"

The lions roared at frequent intervals, and if their rendering of roaring lions was not strictly in keeping with the real thing it was certainly just as terrifying.

Cardew leaped into the Common-room just as Gordon Gay was going to lock it. But the near proximity of that

ferocious beast was too much for Gordon Gay's nerve. He fled.

"Grrrrrrrrrr!"

With swishing tail, Cardew, on all fours, of course, stalked into the Common-room. And every time he bared his lion's teeth the scared juniors tried the harder to get out of his reach. Two juniors were clinging like monkeys to the gas-bracket, shaped like an inverted "T," that was suspended from the ceiling. Another terrified youth had climbed on top of the easel, doubtless fondly imagining that the lion could never get at him there. Half a dozen juniors were standing on the mantelpiece, with white faces, their knees knocking together in their fright.

"Keep it off!"

"Shooo!"

"Oh, heavens!"

"Grrrrrrrrrr!"

Again Cardew grinned and bared the lion's teeth, and yells of terror rang out on all sides.

In the three high window-seats a score of terrified Grammarians had collected, huddled together like so many sheep. On the top of the big desk Gordon Gay and Frank Wootton were standing at bay, the former armed with a poker, the latter with an ebony ruler.

"Get away, you brute!" shouted Gordon Gay, who was beginning to recover his nerve now that he saw the lion was not particularly anxious to come to too close quarters.

"Shoooooooo!" gasped Wootton, as if it were a small cat he was addressing.

"Gerraway, you brute!" hissed Frank Monk, waving his pocket handkerchief.

"Don't be afraid!" called out Gordon Gay, although he looked as white as a sheet himself. "The brute's not dangerous!"

"Grrrrrr!" roared Cardew. "Meorrrrrrr!"

At which fresh shrieks escaped the more timid of the juniors.

Up and down the Common-room padded the lion. Inside it Cardew was feeling jubilant. The scheme was a great

success. As he stalked about, snarling and roaring, Cardew wondered how Levison and Clive had fared.

As a matter of fact, his study-mates were getting along famously. Clive, who knew his way about the Grammar School, had headed for the Masters'-room. Anyone whom he came across promptly bolted for dear life. Outside the Masters'-room Clive first made certain that he was not being observed; then he turned the key in the lock and resumed his way along the passage. He visited more than one study en route, and the occupants of them, upon seeing a ferocious-looking lion, had quite naturally turned tail and fled. And after they had disappeared from sight Clive proceeded to "do things" in their studies. Carpets were pulled up, coal-scuttles were emptied, pictures were dragged off the walls, chairs were turned over and the contents of the cupboards scattered about the general havoc.

In like fashion Ernest Levison was doing his part. He was stalking along the passage, uttering sundry growls and snarls, when three of the Grammar School prefects, coming out of the Prefects'-room, sighted him.

"Good heavens!"

"A lion!"

"Run for it!"

The three startled prefects turned tail and bolted back into the Prefects'-room like rabbits down a warren. Levison halted outside the door, snarled in truly terrifying fashion, and promptly turned the key in the lock.

Then, resuming his way, he ran into Carboy, Oliver, and a crowd of lesser lights.

The party stopped in sheer, paralysed terror.

"Groooo! A lion!" stuttered Tadpole.

"Oh, jeminy!"

"Run, you silly asses!" panted Carboy, and he pluckily caught up a broom a housemaid had left in the passage and covered the retreat of his companions.

"Grrrrr! Boooooerrrrr! Greerrrrr!"

Levison roared and snarled to good effect, taking care to keep out of the way of the broom which Carboy was whirling about him like a flail. But even Carboy's courage failed him when the lion's teeth were bared.

He dropped the broom and scuttled off full pelt after his companions, who had bolted in the direction of the playing fields.

And while the three lions held the fort, so to speak, a horde of St. Jim's juniors were entering the Grammar School from the rear. By devious routes they gained the dormitories and stripped the beds, carted the bedding to the nearest box-room, and then, returning, emptied all the wardrobes and chest of drawers into a glorious heap of confusion.

"This is great!" gasped Figgins.

"Rather!" agreed Kerr. "The jape of the term!"

"Hark at the lions!" said Blake, with a chuckle, as three terrifying roars echoed throughout the building.

"That's the lot for this dormitory," said Herries, at length. "Come on, let's get down to the studies!"

It was the busiest ten minutes Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. had ever spent in their lives, and in that period of time the Grammarians' studies, dormitories, and box-rooms underwent startling transformations.

Then, satisfied that they had avenged the honour of St. Jim's, Tom Merry gave a shrill blast on his whistle, which was to warn the lions that their followers were about to retreat.

In three minutes the St. Jim's juniors were waiting outside the gates of the Grammar School. In four minutes from the time of the whistled signal, three lions padded their way down to the gates, leaving behind them a host of Grammar School juniors—and seniors—breathing deep sighs of thankfulness that they had gone.

From the region of the Masters'-room came a prolonged hammering on the door. The masters cooped up in there, conscious of the uproar that had been going on around them, almost began to believe that a foreign foe had invaded the school.

In the Common-room a crowd of terrified Grammarians collected round Gordon Gay at the window. They were staring out towards the gates watching the progress of the three lions fascinatedly. Suddenly Gordon Gay started.

"Spoofed!" he roared.

"Spoofed!" howled his followers.

For, at the gates of the Grammar School was a crowd of grinning St. Jim's juniors. Apparently unafraid of the three ferocious-looking lions that stalked towards them, they poured in at the gates. Then, to Gordon Gay & Co.'s astonishment, which speedily gave place to rage, the St. Jim's juniors calmly patted the heads of the three ferocious beasts. What was more, Cardew, Levison and Clive, to complete the picture, stood upright and planted their "fore-paws" on the juniors' shoulders.

"Spoofed!" roared Gordon Gay, almost inarticulate with rage. "Oh, my hat!"

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"Pantomime lions!" exclaimed Wootton furiously.

"St. Jim's cads!" howled Frank Monk.

"Ha, ha, ha!" A roar of derisive laughter floated up to the enraged Grammarians.

That did it. Gordon Gay made a furious dash for the door of the Common-room. A crowd of excited, angry juniors followed hard at his heels as he raced out of the House and down to the gates.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

"What price St. Jim's now?"

"Who's top dog? St. Jim's!"

"Collar the rotters!" roared Gordon Gay breathlessly.

"Give 'em socks!"

But that was easier said than done. As yet the Grammarians were unaware of the motor-van that awaited the St. Jim's juniors just outside the school.

The three lions, standing upright now, bowed to the oncoming Grammarians, and a combined roar rent the air, that recalled memories of cats on the tiles:

"Meow-grrrrrrr!"

Then the St. Jim's raiders turned on their heels and fled precipitately for the motor-van. They swarmed into it like monkeys; the driver slipped in the clutch, and the party was on the move before the foremost Grammarian had passed the school gates.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" sang out Levison from the tail-board of the van. "If ever you want to know anything about lion-taming just come to Study No. 9 at St. Jim's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A howl of wrath floated after the retreating St. Jim's juniors, and the last Tom Merry & Co. saw of the Grammarians, for that day, at least, was a swarm of them standing in the centre of the road shaking their fists in impotent rage.

Cardew's scheme had been a pronounced success! Of that there was no shadow of doubt, no possible probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever.

CHAPTER 12.

The Vacant Post!

"I TELL you, Cardew's our man!"

Aubrey Racke, the black sheep of the Shell, made that remark next morning to Croke and Mellish, behind the locked door of Study No. 7.

"But even though Cardew's scheme was a success against the Grammarians, that won't get him a junior captaincy," declared Croke, tapping the ash off his cigarette.

"Yes it will, if we give him our backin'," said Racke, with a grin.

"What do you mean?"

Aubrey Racke smiled in superior fashion.

"There's nothin' to stop us chivvyin' Tom Merry that he's an absolute failure," he remarked languidly. "The saintly Thomas is a trifle sensitive. If fellows shout an' shout often enough for a new skipper, he'll lose heart."

Croke, who was not so deep a young blackguard as his crony, shook his head.

"That's not quite fair," he ventured.

Racke sneered.

"Listen to who's talkin'!"

"Well, it isn't fair!" retorted Croke uneasily. "Mark you, I'll admit I'd much rather see Cardew in the captaincy," he added. "He's not so pi as Tom Merry, and he wouldn't chivvy a chap into playing footer and cricket when he doesn't want to!"

"And he wouldn't come butting into our little parties like Tom Merry does," said Mellish, who was making a pretence at enjoying his cigarette, and failing miserably.

Croke shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll admit that, too," he granted. "But if there's going to be an election, let it be a straight one."

"Oh, you're gettin' pi, too!" sneered Racke. "I suppose there's no harm in a fellow tellin' another fellow that he's no thumping good as a skipper, is there?"

"None at all!" admitted Croke. "But if we all keep telling him the same to his face on all possible occasions, it amounts to sharp practice."

"Oh, come off it!" said Racke, with a grin.

Since the events of the previous afternoon, Aubrey Racke had been giving Cardew's claims to the junior captaincy close attention. Cardew was still a slacker in the eyes of Aubrey Racke; his sudden burst into activity and the lime-light Racke charitably regarded as so much dust thrown into the eyes of the rest of the school. And with Cardew as captain, Aubrey Racke counted on having a free and easy time; certainly a much less strenuous time than he was experiencing under Tom Merry's regime.

The success of Cardew's enterprise on the previous day was the talk of the school. Never in all the history of the endless feud that existed between St. Jim's and the Gram-

marians had Gordon Gay & Co. been put so much in the shade. Here was a chance for Cardew to reap glory, if he received sufficient backing. And Aubrey Racke was weighing up the possibilities of that backing.

Up and down the junior school the chances of Cardew as junior skipper were being freely discussed. It seemed apparent on all sides that a change was indicated.

Tom Merry was not slow to see the lie of the land. In actual truth he was not sorry, either. The duties of junior captain were more strenuous than many of his followers imagined, and presented a constant source of petty worries and irritation.

In Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, Tom Merry was walking up and down the carpet. Manners and Lowther were watching him anxiously. Both of them thought that Tom was certain to hold the captaincy should it come up for re-election, and that an election was imminent even Baggy Trimble, the fatuous Falstaff of the Fourth, could see.

A little dissatisfaction spreads like the plague, and in the

As the enraged Grammarians tore into the road the motor-van started, and the "lions" waved their paws to Gordon Gay & Co. "Good-bye, Bluebell!" sang out Levison. "If ever you want to know anything about lion-taming just come to St. Jim's." "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 11.)



common grouse the good qualities of the person under discussion are apt to be overlooked, if not forgotten entirely. No one realised this more clearly than Tom Merry himself. On the playing fields his captaincy had met with fair success; but there were certain juniors who thought that someone else could have done better.

And the string of reverses at the hands of the Grammarians had made the critical element of the Form more critical than ever, although, in fairness to Tom Merry, the blame for these reverses, strictly speaking, did not lie at his door.

Tom Merry ceased his agitated perambulation of the study carpet and faced his chums.

"I'm going to resign," he said calmly.

Monty Lowther and Manners jumped to their feet.

"Don't be an ass, Tommy!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"I'm not making this decision without thinking over the matter, Monty," he said. "For one thing, I want a rest. I'm rather fed-up with all the bickering; for another, I don't like to think that I've lost the confidence of the fellows."

"But you haven't," protested Manners.

"There's Grundy always shouting about what a skipper he'd make," said Tom, with a grin.

"Blow Grundy!"

"There's Figgins always reminding me that a New House chap could run things better."

"Figgins is talking out of the back of his neck, old chap."

"There's Racke & Co. always grouching about games practice—"

"Hang Racke!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"And Kildare constantly reminding me that I'm too lenient with the slackers."

"Kildare doesn't know what he's talking about!"

Evidently Lowther and Manners were not prepared to take seriously anything in the way of an objection Tom Merry put forward.

"This last affair with the Grammar School," went on Tom Merry, "was a corking success."

"A lot of luck about it, old scout," said Monty Lowther grudgingly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I won't say that," he remarked. "It was well planned out, and Cardew and his crowd did the job thundering well. You fellows remember that Cardew declared openly his intention of having a tilt for the captaincy?"



"Oh, he's a slacking fathead!" growled Monty Lowther. "Nobody would take his candidature seriously."

"I'm not so sure, anyway," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "But in any case I've decided to resign. If the fellows want me back at any time it'll be up to them."

"You really mean you're going to pack up, Tom?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Most emphatically I do."

"Very well," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "I shall put up for the captaincy, too."

Tom Merry started.

"You will?" he asked incredulously. "What's the idea?"

Monty Lowther smiled faintly.

"If I get in it'll mean that the captaincy remains as it is now," he declared. "If I'm elected I automatically hand the reins over to you."

"You champion chump!" said Tom Merry.

"Nothing of the kind," said Monty firmly. "Better that way than for some wooden-headed New House man to bag the job."

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"Please yourself, old scout," he said in a tone that suggested he had said the last word on the subject of the junior captaincy.

With that he sat down at the study table and wrote on a sheet of paper his resignation. Monty Lowther and Manners watched him walk out of the study with the notice in his hand, without a word. Then, when his footsteps had died away along the Shell passage, Monty Lowther banged the table savagely.

"Tom's a silly ass to throw in his hand like that," he declared. "The fellows haven't been fair to him."

"I'll agree with the last part of what you said, but not the first," said Manners thoughtfully. "I think Tom's doing the sensible thing. If the chaps want him back they'll soon yell loud enough."

"Well, I think he's rushing matters," said Monty Lowther. "But, Manners, old scout, you'll back me up if there is a new election."

"Of course. If we can get you nominated, and get you in, the captaincy will, to all intents and purposes, remain unchanged."

Further conversation was put a stop to by the appearance of George Alfred Grundy.

"Tom Merry here?" he demanded in his truculent way.

Monty Lowther looked under the tablecloth.

"Don't think so, old bean. Have a look round for yourself."

George Alfred Grundy snorted.

"I don't want any of your cheek, Lowther, or you'll get a thick ear!"

"As long as I don't get a thick head like yours, old chap, I shan't worry overmuch!" he retorted cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners.

"Look here, I came to see Tom Merry about the captaincy," snorted Grundy. "The fellows are shouting for a new skipper, and I'm going after the job—see?"

Monty Lowther looked puzzled.

"But I thought you said you came to see Tom Merry about it?"

Grundy glared.

"So I did!"

"Then why on earth are you wasting your time and breath telling us?" inquired Lowther blandly.

"If I wasn't busy just now, you cheeky ass," snorted George Alfred, "I'd bang your head on the wall!"

"Mercy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

Slam!

The great George Alfred retired in high dudgeon, and five minutes afterwards Tom Merry re-entered the study.

"I've seen Railton," he said, "and explained that I wanted a rest. He didn't say anything. Just gave me one of those queer, penetrating glances of his, you know, and said he was sorry."

"Then the deed is done," said Monty Lowther, with a hopeless gesture.

"It is," replied Tom Merry. "And my resignation is on the notice-board for all to see. I—"

He broke off as the study door opened suddenly and Aubrey Racke appeared.

"Don't they teach you manners where you come from?" demanded Monty Lowther.

Aubrey Racke smiled superciliously.

"I came here to tell Tom Merry that I consider it high time someone else was junior skipper," drawled Racke.

"Oh!"

"In my opinion, we want a change," said Aubrey, with an unpleasant grin. "We're gettin' into a rut, you know. I think—"

"You what?" chimed in Monty Lowther.

"I think—" repeated the black sheep of the Shell.

"We know what you think," said Monty Lowther. "You think that gambling, smoking, slacking, and any form of dingy blackguardism is better than playing the game. Well, we don't want to listen to your thoughts!"

he added savagely. "Get out!"

"I came here to tell Tom Merry what I thought of him—" began Racke.

"And I've told you what I think of you!" snapped Monty. "Now travel!"

And there was such a look of ferocity on Monty Lowther's face that Racke wisely travelled.

"That's the second one," said Manners to Tom Merry.

"Grundy came along a few moments ago."

Tom Merry smiled.

"Then it seems that I've done the right thing. Hallo, here's another of 'em!"

Once more the study door opened. This time Percy Mellish came in.

"Just a word about the captaincy," he began, and got no further, for Monty Lowther picked up a Latin grammar and hurled it with unerring aim.

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Whiz!

Crash!

"Yaroooo! Wow!"

And that was all Percy Mellish had to say about the captaincy.

That afternoon a notice appeared on the board in the well known caligraphy of Mr. Railton, intimating that names of candidates for the junior captaincy, made vacant owing to the resignation of Tom Merry, should be handed in to the Housemaster by four o'clock.

And at four o'clock sharp four juniors met outside the Housemaster's study, the four being Ralph Reckness Cardew, Montague Lowther, George Alfred Grundy, and George Figgins of the New House.

CHAPTER 13.

The Winning Vote!

"WHAT'S the bettin'?"

Cardew asked that question of Levison and Clive that same evening.

"You're referring to the election?"

"Of course. Did you imagine I was speaking of the Derby, dear man?" drawled Cardew. "I'm surprised, you know. Haven't I told you that I've put away those childish things?"

Levison and Clive grinned, and then looked thoughtful. "I think you've got a fair chance of getting in," said Levison quietly.

"I think so, too," added Clive.

"Let me tick off my parliamentary foes," said Cardew.

"There's Grundy. He'll have two votes—"

"Eh?"

"Two votes, dear man," reiterated Cardew. "An' those I venture to prophesy will come from Wilkins and Gunn under penalty of sudden and violent death!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But, for all Cardew's whimsicality, he was very near to speaking the truth. Only one person at St. Jim's took Grundy's candidature seriously, and that was George Alfred Grundy himself. And Wilkins and Gunn being great believers in a "quiet life," had already promised to vote for their study-mate rather than listen to an interminable election address, with a scrap at the end of it, if they refused to support him.

"Then there's the irrepressible and irresponsible Lowther," resumed Cardew. "Now the irresponsible and irrepressible Montague may prove a thorn in my side."

"Quite likely," said Levison. "The fellows who would have backed Tom Merry, had he stood for re-election, will of a certainty give their votes to his chum."

"The idea bein', I take it," drawled Cardew, "to keep the honour in the giddy family. Hum! I fancy Monty, the irrepressible, will give me a run for my money."

"Then there's Figgins," said Clive. "The New House will follow him almost to a man."

"Yes, he's a danger, too," agreed Cardew. "Still, I'm goin' all out for it, dear old beans."

"And we're backing you up tooth and nail," said Levison.

"Hear, hear!" concurred Clive.

Aubrey Racke and Crooke looked in the study. Both of them nodded affably to Cardew.

"Best of luck, Cardew," said Racke. "You can count on our votes."

"You're extremely kind," said Cardew.

"I'm doin' a bit of canvassin' for you, old scout," went on Aubrey Racke. "You won't forget that when you get in, will you?"

"I shall not forget," replied Cardew, who remembered in time that every vote counted, even if some of them came from the likes of Racke and his cronies.

"I can rope in a few fellows from the New House," said Crooke.

"Can you, bogad!" said Cardew. "That's interestin'."

Racke winked.

"It'll be quite like old times when you're skipper, old chap!"

Cardew's face grew grim.

"Will it?"

Racke winked again.

"This pi stuff is all right for an election," he said, with the air of one who is in the know. "But you can't pull the wool over my eyes, Cardew."

"Oh!"

That was all Cardew said, but there was such meaning behind it that Racke decided to move off.

"You silly ass!" breathed Crooke, as he followed him.

"You shouldn't have said that in front of those other chaps."

Aubrey Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"They don't count," he said, with a supercilious grin. In No. 9 Study Cardew was eyeing his chums grimly. "You hear what that dingy bouncer said?" he remarked. "You know at times I feel an overpowerin' longin' to alter the shape of the dear Aubrey's nose. I'm sure I shall do it one of these days."

"Better keep it for after the election," said Levison, with a grin. "After all, Cardew, votes are votes."

Cardew nodded. "That's the frightful part about it, begad! Racke thinks that if I get in he'll have the time of his giddy life. Slackin' and smokin' and generally playin' the giddy goat ad lib—what? Poor Aubrey—"

"Eh?" "Poor Aubrey!" said Cardew. "Life is full of disappointments, an' there's one comin' to dear Aubrey, if I manage to bag the giddy captaincy."

Levison rose to his feet, and Clive followed him. "Come on, Cardew," said the former. "We're going to do a little canvassing."

"Gad! That's a splendid idea," agreed Cardew. "Some wise Johnny once said 'the early bird catches the worm.' Let's see if the old fruit knew what he was talkin' about."

And, linking arms with his chums, Ralph Reckness sauntered off down the passage for a tour of the studies.

He met Baggy Trimble on the way. The fat junior stopped him.

"I say, Cardew—"

"Say on, old fat man!"

"You can count on me for my vote," said Trimble, with an ingratiating smile. "I think you'd make an ideal captain."

"Do you really?" drawled Cardew. "You're very frank. Let me be equally frank. I think you'd make an ideal hog. You've got the necessary dimensions, the requisite dirty habits, and a remarkable faculty for digging your nose in everywhere. Yes, I'm sure you would," added Cardew seriously.

"He, he, he!"

FOR NEXT WEEK!

As Captain of the Lower School, Ralph Reckness Cardew more than lives up to his reputation as a "surprise packet." Now that he has sufficient incentive behind him, the erstwhile dandy of the Fourth drops his slacking ways and proceeds to make the fur fly in a manner that is the talk of St. Jim's. But it is really too good to last, and when once the urge to "do great things" has gone, his new-found energy dies a sudden death, and Cardew is once more Cardew—the slacker!

Still, lots of exciting things happen before Cardew begins to yawn, so to speak, and not the least of them is a record rag against Mr. Ratcliff of the New House. Look out, then, chums, for:—

"CARDEW COMES A CROPPER!"
and get ready for a good long laugh!

Baggy Trimble chose to cachinnate at that moment as if he had heard the best joke of his life.

"What an awful row!" said Cardew solemnly.

"Ho, he, he! I can take a joke," cackled Trimble. "Count on me for a vote, Cardew, old chap."

"I am honoured," said Cardew gravely.

"I say, old chap," piped Trimble, suddenly altering the conversation. "I'm in urgent need of the loan of a quid."

Cardew looked surprised. Levison and Clive grinned.

"You surprise me, old bean. Trimble in need of a loan, Emie. Would you believe it?"

"The fact is, I'm waiting for the post, you know. I'm expecting a fat remittance from my Uncle Benjamin. Could you help me out with a quid temporarily?" Trimble asked.

"I could," admitted Cardew.

The fat junior's face lit up greedily.

"Oh, good! Hand it over!"

"I could," repeated Cardew; "but I'm certainly not goin' to."

And, nudging Levison and Clive, he sauntered on down the passage.

Baggy Trimble stood glaring after him in speechless rage.

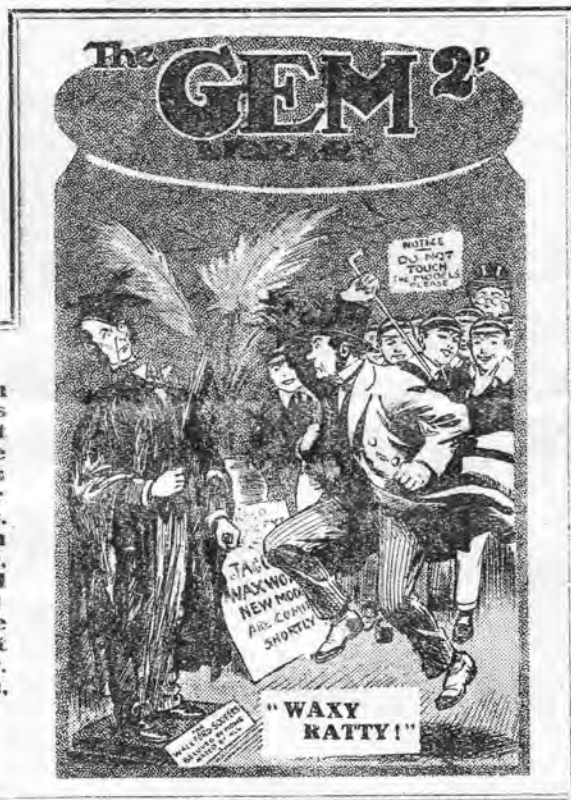
"Yah! Mean beast!" he called out. "Fine sort of captain you'd make! I wouldn't vote for you if you asked me on your bended knees! Yah!"

With that Partisan shot Baggy Trimble rolled on his way, a very peeved and disgruntled person.

By bed-time that night Cardew and his chums had made a complete tour of the "constituency," so to speak, and the former was very gratified at the hearing he had received. Now that Cardew the Slacker had disappeared, as it were, his claim to the captaincy could not be overlooked, for Cardew was an all-round sportsman. What was more, his close contact with two steady and popular fellows like Ernest Levison and Sidney Clive did a lot to enhance Cardew's prospects.

Grundy had also been electioneering, and it was noticeable when he came up to the Shell dormitory that one of his eyes was darkening. Doubtless Grundy had collected that black eye instead of collecting a vote from one of the juniors. However he became possessed of it, no one in the Shell dormitory seemed unduly concerned about it. What election talk there was centred round Monty Lowther's chances.

His prospects appeared equally as bright as those of Cardew's, and Monty had the backing of Tom Merry, the former skipper, and Manners. Between Lowther, Cardew, and Figgins of the New House there was certain to be a close contest.



The next morning dawned bright and cheerful, and the respective candidates took it as a sign that augured well for their prospects in the election that was to take place that afternoon.

During the morning little knots of fellows were to be seen standing at corners listening to the eloquent speakers enumerating and glorifying the remarkable qualities of leadership their respective candidates possessed.

Election fever was in the air, and when at three-thirty—the time appointed for the election—came round, the junior school poured into the Common-room as one man. Even at that late hour the candidates were haranguing the crowd. But silence settled on the juniors when Mr. Railton, followed by Eric Kildare, rustled in.

"Boys," said Mr. Railton, "you all know that this election has been rendered necessary by the resignation of Tom Merry, and before we pass on to the business of electing a new captain, I would like publicly to thank Merry for the services he has rendered."

There was some slight demonstration, and then the master of the School House proceeded to the business in hand.

The four candidates were called to the platform.

There were cheers from the rival factions as their "selected" made his bow.

Then Mr. Railton held up his hand.

"We will take the ballot by the simple method of showing

(Continued on page 28.)

BABBINGTON COMES OUT STRONG! Acting in direct defiance of a Housemaster's commands is asking for trouble. No one realises that better than the juniors under Mr. Manders' charge. Yet they take the risk—and thanks to Babbington, the new boy, who is regarded as an absolute duffer, consequences that might have been extremely painful are escaped at the eleventh hour!

FOR THE HONOUR OF ROOKWOOD!

A New Story of Schoolboy Fun and Frolic, featuring Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

James Montgomery Babbington, a new boy and a champion duffer, arrives at Rookwood smothered in dust as a result of his encounter with Pankley & Co., the chums of Bagshot, the rival school. Babbington's leg is simply made to be pulled, for on his very first evening at the school he is kidded by Leggett to polish off the Housemaster's tea. Later, Babbington succeeds in making the bullying Higgs the laughing stock of the school—an action which rather indicates that Babbington isn't quite such a duffer as he looks. Shortly after this Tommy Dodd & Co., the leaders of the Modern House, in direct defiance of the Housemaster's orders, visit the circus at Coombe. The juniors are in the act of feeding Rancee, the elephant, when Mr. Manders happens upon the scene. Infuriated beyond measure he makes a grab at Tommy Dodd, misses him, and goes sprawling into the elephant's stall. The next minute the Housemaster finds himself held aloft, some twelve feet from the ground, in the grip of the elephant's trunk!

(Now Read On.)



The Man of the Moment!

"MY hat, that's done it!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "Faith, and he'll be kilt entirely!" groaned Tommy Doyle.

Tommy Cook said nothing. He only gazed at Mr. Manders as if mesmerised.

Mr. Manders himself seemed to be paralysed with fear. His face was white and his eyes were staring, while he appeared to be struggling for breath.

Mr. Joseph Burgess, hustling from his caravan at the sounds of alarm, nearly fell down the steps as he saw his elephant brandishing a perfectly respectable schoolmaster high in the air.

"Lor' love us! There's old Rancee up to her tricks!" he gasped. "Where's Ali?"

He rushed up to the elephant and addressed it in wheedling tones:

"Put him down, Rancee, there's a good old girl! Come on, now, Rancee, put him down, do!"

But Rancee was obdurate. She appeared, in fact, to be enjoying herself, and the wheedling tones of her proprietor were quite wasted on her.

"Drat her, she's a bad-tempered annymile, she is!" gasped Mr. Burgess. "Where's that blessed nigger? Ali! Ali! Ali!" he roared, in a voice that might almost have been heard at Rookwood.

"Shall I see if I can find him, sir?" said Tommy Doyle anxiously.

"Yes, run along, my lad! He may be round the back of the tent. Tell him to come here quick! No one else can do anything with that there Rancee!" said Mr. Burgess excitedly.

"Help! Help!" came faintly from Mr. Manders.

"She won't hurt you, sir!" cried Mr. Burgess. "It's only her fun—at least, I hope it is," he added, under his breath. "But she's a queer-tempered creature."

"Help! Help! I shall be killed! Make it put me down!" raved Mr. Manders, apparently recovering the use of his voice somewhat.

The showman shook his head and mopped his perspiring brow.

"I can't help you!" he muttered. "Nor no one can't, except only that black beast, Ali! Where is he, I wonder? Hallo! Who's this?"

The newcomer was a mild-looking youth with large spectacles and wearing, in his simplicity, the cap which

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proclaimed him to be a junior of the Modern Side of Rookwood.

It was James Montgomery Babbington, and Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook stared at him hard for a moment.

"Dear me, is that you, my dear Dodd?" he remarked. "I just wondered what was happening over here, so—"

"That's Mr. Manders up there. The elephant's got him!" gasped Tommy Cook. "It's awful!"

"Good gracious! My dear Cook! How really terrible!"

"It's frightful!" said Tommy Dodd shakily. "I don't believe Rancee will hurt him—but you never know! Tommy Doyle's looking for the Hindu attendant now."

"Ah, that is indeed interesting!" remarked James Montgomery Babbington mildly, eyeing the squirming figure of Mr. Manders with a good deal of interest. "Will the elephant not put him down?"

"Help! Save me!" shrieked Mr. Manders. "Help! Help!"

Joe Burgess mopped his brow and groaned.

"Where's that blessed Ali got to?" he mumbled. "Blessed if I know what to do!"

"Perhaps I could help?" ventured Babbington.

Mr. Burgess stopped mopping.

"You! What do you know about elephants?"

"Not much, but I have lived in India," said Babbington mildly.

"Oh, you have, have you, young shaver? Well, speak to the brute."

"Certainly, my dear sir!"

Under the eyes of the amazed Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook, Babbington ducked under the bar and walked into the stall.

He reached up and pulled the big elephant by one ear. In a low voice Babbington broke into a curious speech which sounded like the rapid drawing of corks.

Rancee's ears twitched as if the big elephant could hardly believe what she heard.

James Montgomery Babbington, apparently quite fearless, pulled the big ear again and uttered another burst of Hindustani. To the red-faced showman's blank amazement, Rancee lowered her trunk slowly; and the next moment the gasping Mr. Manders, to his enormous relief, found his feet once more upon the ground.

Babbington slipped his hand down the elephant's trunk, which remained coiled round the Housemaster.

"Quick—quick!" gasped Mr. Manders. "Make it release me! Quick, Babbington!"

"But, my dear Mr. Manders—"

"Quick, boy!"

"My dear sir, I cannot refrain from mentioning that I came to the circus—"

"What—what?" cried Mr. Manders. "What are you talking about, Babbington? Make it release me at once."

"As I was saying, my dear sir, I came to the circus without your permission."

"What? You do! You imbecile! Make it release me at once—quick!"

"May I take it, my dear Mr. Manders, that I shall not be punished for coming to the circus without your permission?" said Babbington mildly.

Mr. Manders simply squirmed in the embrace of the elephant's trunk. Not for one moment did Rancee relax the continued pressure round the Housemaster. Babbington still held his hand caressingly on the big trunk.

"Fool, will you make it release me?" hissed the Housemaster.

"If you will pardon me," recommenced Babbington gently.

"Of course—of course! That is nothing!" raved Mr. Manders. "Now, release me at once!"

"And Dodd, here?"

"Ah, Dodd!"

Mr. Manders' eyes gleamed.

"Ah, Dodd—that wretched boy!"

"But you will pardon Dodd also, my dear Mr. Manders, I am sure?"

"Certainly not!" snapped Mr. Manders. "Now, release me at once! Oh, help!"

For Babbington withdrew his hand from the elephant's trunk, and Mr. Manders was slowly raised in the air again. He gave a shriek.

"Help! Help! Make it release me—make it set me down, Babbington!"

Babbington muttered in quick Hindustani, and the trunk was slowly lowered until Mr. Manders' feet were once again on the ground.

"Then you will pardon Dodd?" began Babbington.

"Yes, yes!" shrieked Mr. Manders.

"And Cook?" said Babbington gently.

"Yes, boy, yes! Now release me!"

"And Doyle?" breathed Babbington.

Mr. Manders would have danced in his anguish, but the trunk held him too firmly.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he raved. "Dodd and Cook and Doyle and you and everybody else! For Heaven's sake, release me!"

Babbington muttered two words, and the great trunk uncoiled, perhaps as though reluctantly, from round the Housemaster's waist.

Mr. Manders was free!

In a trice he had scrambled out of the elephant's reach, and the next moment he had collapsed on the ground.

Mr. Manders, stern Housemaster of Rookwood, at whose frown every junior trembled, was reduced to a pitiable condition. He was almost sobbing with relief and with the freight he had undergone as Joe Burgess picked him up and endeavoured to smooth him down.

Joe Burgess was very apologetic.

"The animal meant no harm, sir," he said. "I am sure I am very sorry it should have happened!"

The three Modern juniors looked on in silence, waiting for the storm to burst. But all the fight was gone out of Mr. Manders.

"Let me go—let me go!" he murmured.

And, gathering up his hat and umbrella, he almost staggered out of the circus field.

Tommy Cook gazed after him raptly.

"By Jove, old Manders is fairly done, for once!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "My hat! What a lark! What a treat to see him wriggling up there in Rancee's trunk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tommy Dodd.

The two Tommies had recovered their spirits very quickly. They had been alarmed before at Mr. Manders' peril, but now that the Housemaster had escaped with nothing worse than a shock and a severe fright they were jubilant.

"It was priceless!" chuckled Tommy Dodd, giving full rein to his mirth and patting Rancee appreciatively on the flank. "Priceless! Good old Rancee!"

"All very well for you boys!" grunted Joe Burgess. "But it was no laughing matter for the gentleman, I'll lay!"

"He is not a gentleman; he's a Housemaster!" said Tommy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

James Montgomery Babbington was smiling his gentle smile.

The fat circus proprietor made a stride towards him and held out a huge red hand.

"If you ask me, this is the young gentleman we have got to thank," he said. "Shake hands, sir! It is thanks to you no damage was done—that's my belief!"

James Montgomery Babbington blushed like a schoolgirl and shook hands with the beaming showman shyly.

"I am sure I was very pleased to render a little assistance," he said modestly.

"Wonderful, it was!" said Mr. Burgess enthusiastically. "You have got a way with annymiles, sir, that's evident. Old Rancee would do anything for you."

"I believe she would," said Babbington. "You see, I am used to elephants." And he rubbed the big elephant's trunk affectionately.

"By Jove, you're a nut, Babbington!" cried Tommy Dodd enthusiastically, clapping James Montgomery on the shoulder. "You're a sport, too! You've got us out of a thundering row when no other chap at Rookwood could have done it! Hallo! Here's Tommy Doyle with Ali—too late, of course."

"What about going into the big tent now?" asked Tommy Cook.

"What ho, we will!" said Tommy Dodd. "All the lot of us—and you, too, Babbington!"

"Really, my dear Dodd—"

"Oh rats! Cut it out! You're a nut, Babbington! Come on! We'll pay your entrance, too!"

"Hear, hear!" said Tommy Cook.

And the three Tommies, with Babbington in their midst, entered the tent and pushed their way as near as they could get to the front row. If Tommy Dodd told Babbington he was a nut once that afternoon, he told him a dozen times.

And all Rookwood, when the story became known, emphatically endorsed that verdict.

That evening James Montgomery Babbington was the hero of the school!

Babbington's Brain-Wave!

"IT'S up to us, chaps!"

Tommy Dodd, the leader of the Modern House juniors at Rookwood, made that momentous announcement in portentous tones.

Tommy Cook, who was scribbling an imposition at the study table, continued to scribble.

Tommy Doyle, who was making toast by the study fire, continued to make toast.

"It's up to us," repeated Tommy Dodd.

Still his two chums went on with their occupations. Tommy Dodd glared round at them.

"Will you stop scribbling, Cook!" he exclaimed exasperatedly.

"What for?" mumbled Tommy Cook, writing away industriously. "I've got to finish these lines for Manders, you know."

"Oh, rats! Stop making toast, Doyle, you duffer!"

"Faith, and it's getting on for tay-time!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Will you drop it?" roared Tommy Dodd. "I tell you it's up to us to do something!"

Tommy Cook threw down his pen resignedly, while Tommy Doyle hung up the toasting-fork. They could see that Tommy Dodd had something on his chest, as it were, and would give them no peace until he had got it off.

"What's up to us, old bean?" asked Tommy Cook. "Out with it!"

"Well, look here," said Tommy Dodd, "here's Bagshot been beating us all along the line lately! You chaps know that, as well as I do."

"Sure, we do!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Well, it ain't good enough. Our last wheeze for ragging 'em bald-headed was a ghastly failure, and we got ragged instead," said Tommy Dodd. "That was Jimmy Silver's wheeze. Jimmy's and Lovell's together, wasn't it?"

"It was. It were."

"Well, it was a rotten one. The truth is, those Classics are no good at wheezes. Now, what I say is, it is up to us to think out a really good wheeze. What about it?"

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle both scratched their heads and looked rather blank.

"Faith, and it isn't aisy," said Tommy Doyle. "That spalpeen, Pankley, is hot stuff, and no mistake!"

"He is," said Tommy Dodd, "and that's why it will take a Modern wheeze to down him. Can't you think of anything, Cook?"

"Well, I—I—"

Tommy Cook broke off and scratched his head again. It was pretty evident that he had nothing valuable to suggest at that moment.

Tommy Dodd gave a snort.

"Blessed if you are not as big a duffer as those Classics!" Tommy Dodd coughed.

"Ahem! I was just thinking I— Hallo! Who's that?"

A round, mild face, adorned with a pair of large spectacles, was poked into the study.

"It is I, dear Thomas!"

"Cuffy! Oh, lor'!" groaned Tommy Dodd. "Buzz off, Clarence!"

"Really, my dear Thomas!" said Clarence Cuffy, the greenest junior at Rookwood, with reproach in his voice.

"That hardly strikes me as a hospitable remark, my dear Thomas. I have come—"

"Faith, and ye can go!" said Tommy Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clarence Cuffy blinked at Tommy Doyle.

"Really, my dear Thomas! I have brought my cousin, Babbington, along."

"Oh, Babbington?" said Tommy Dodd. "Well, bring him in, for goodness' sake!"

Clarence Cuffy sidled into the room, followed by his cousin, James Montgomery Babbington. Both looked as solemn as owls.

"Come in, Babbington!" said Tommy Dodd more genially. "Cuffy is a freak, of course—"

"Really, my dear Thomas!"

"But you are not such a fool as you look."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sit down, Babbington!"

The three chums looked at James Montgomery Babbington rather curiously. Rookwood was still talking of this strange new boy's amazing exploit at Burgess' Circus, where he had shown himself capable of controlling an excited elephant, thereby saving his Housemaster from possible serious damage. In addition, the three Tommies remembered gratefully that he had saved them from severe punishment.

The fact was that Tommy Dodd & Co. were beginning slightly to modify their opinion of James Montgomery Babbington.

His mild manner and his greenness—for he had never been to a Public School before—added to his personal resemblance to the ineffable Clarence Cuffy, had caused Rookwood as a whole, and Tommy Dodd in particular, to write him down as a good deal of a simpleton.

It did not escape notice, however, how Babbington had more than held his own with Alfred Higgs, who was a good deal of a bully, when the latter had visited him in his study with the intention of ragging him. On that occasion Babbington's pet snakes had provided a diversion of which James Montgomery had not been slow to take advantage.

Tommy Dodd & Co. had therefore considerably modified their first impressions of Babbington during the last few days, and their feelings towards him were quite friendly.

They were curious to know exactly why Cuffy had brought his cousin to see them. Clarence Cuffy enlightened them in his long-winded way.

"You are doubtless curious, my dear Thomas, as to the exact reason for this visit to your study," he began ponderously.

"Well, we are a bit!" grinned Tommy Dodd.

"It was really my Cousin Babbington's suggestion," said Clarence. "My Cousin Babbington has a little plan that he would like to confide to you."

"Indeed!" said Tommy Dodd, trying to appear interested. "Well, confide away, Babbington. What's it all about?"

Thus adjured, James Montgomery Babbington gave a little cough.

"Well, really, Dodd, perhaps there's nothing in it, but it occurred to me that you might perhaps be glad to hear of a scheme which would bring about the discomfiture of the rival school."

"What school?" asked Tommy Dodd, roused to interest at once.

"Why, Bagshot School!" said Babbington.

"Bagshot!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Have you a stunt for putting it across Bagshot?"

Babbington nodded.

"Yes, I think I have," he said.

"Good man!" cried Tommy Dodd excitedly. "Out with it, then, Babbington! We were just trying—ahem!—that is, we were discussing that very matter when you came in."

"Faith, and 'tis a broth of a bhoy ye are!" said Tommy Doyle enthusiastically.

"Shurrup, Doyle! Get on with it, Babbington!" said Tommy Cook impatiently.

"Well," said Babbington modestly. "I owe Bagshot one, as you know."

Tommy Dodd grinned and nodded.

"I thought that if Pankley received a letter from the captain of a football team asking for a match on the Bagshot ground on a day which the Bagshot fellows have vacant, a rather amusing game of football might be fixed up."

"Eh?" said Tommy Dodd, staring. "I don't quite understand."

"Well," said Babbington, "if Pankley got a letter from, say, the captain of Lingfield House School Team, asking him to fix up a match, he would probably do so."

"Well, what about it? Where's Lingfield House School?" said Tommy Cook.

Babbington smiled.

"Wait a minute. Suppose such a match was fixed up, and the team arrived at Bagshot just in time for the match. All the fellows would be standing round, wouldn't they?"

"Of course they would! What's the idea?"

"Some of the Rookwood chaps would come over to see them, too, I suppose?" pursued Babbington.

"Yes; we sometimes go and watch their matches," said Tommy Cook; "but what—"

"Well, suppose the team turned out to be girls?" said Babbington.

The three Tommies stared.

"Dotty!" said Tommy Dodd, with conviction.

"Balmy!" said Tommy Cook.

"Faith, but the bhoy's dippy!" said Tommy Doyle.

"If the team turned out to be a girls' team, and Bagshot could be persuaded to play them, it would be a jolt for Pankley & Co. if they were beaten hollow in front of the whole school, wouldn't it?" pursued Babbington.

"If!" said Tommy Dodd scornfully. "But Pankley would not play a girls' team."

"He might, if he were shamed into it," murmured Babbington.

"Yes; but—but—"

"Pankley would lick 'em for certain, in any case."

"Faith, and it's rot ye are talking, Babbington."

"Absolute rot!" said Tommy Dodd, with conviction.

Clarence Cuffy gazed at the three Tommies reproachfully.

"Really, my dear fellows, you have not given my Cousin Babbington a chance to explain properly; but if you will let him do so—"

"Well, let him get on with it!" said Tommy Dodd crossly.

"Blest if I can see much sense in his wheeze so far!"

"You see," said Babbington gently, "the girls' football team will be really Rookwood fellows."

"What?"

The word was shouted by the three Tommies simultaneously.

For a moment they stared incredulously at Babbington. A great light broke in upon them. Then Tommy Dodd, with a yell, rushed at the new junior and clasped him round the neck.

In a moment the amazed Babbington was being waltzed round the study grasped tightly in the embrace of the exuberant Tommy Dodd.

"Splendid! Magnificent! A1! Gild-edged!" carolled Tommy Dodd. "You're a nut, Babbington! I told you so before!"

"Absolutely!" shouted Tommy Cook enthusiastically.

"Faith, and you're a janus!" roared Tommy Doyle. "It's the giddy kybosh for Bagshot at last!"

The Challenge!

"HERE you are, chaps! Listen to this!"

The great Pankley, leader of the Bagshot juniors and the inveterate, if friendly, enemy of the Rookwood chums, pulled out a letter he had just opened and proceeded to read it:

"To Master Pankley,

"Junior Captain,

"Bagshot School.

"Dear Master Pankley,—Our school team, of which I am captain, has no match for Saturday next, and we were wondering if you could give us a game on your ground at Bagshot. The average age of our team is about fifteen, and we are considered quite good at football. If you think you could take us on we should be very pleased to give you a game.—Yours sincerely,

J. GOLD.

"Lingfield House,

"Near Litcham."

"Cheek!" said Poole.

"Nerve, I call it!" said Putter.

Pankley frowned thoughtfully as he looked at the letter.

"This duffer Gold seems to fancy himself at football, anyway," he said slowly. "We're considered quite good."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then, if you care to take us on, I don't altogether like that," pursued Pankley. "Looks as though the beggar thinks we may be frightened of him. What about it, chaps?"

Putter snorted.

"I think it's a bit of check on Master Gold's part! Tell him to go and boil his head!"

"Hear, hear!" said Poole.

"Well, I don't know," said Pankley slowly. "We haven't got a game for Saturday, as you know. If this chap Gold's team is really hot stuff, we might have a jolly good match."

"Where's Lingfield House School, anyway?" said Potter. "Never heard of it myself. Is it near Latcham?"

"Can't be very far away," said Pankley. "I s'pose it's just a private school."

"Some of those private schools have jolly good teams," said Potter thoughtfully. "It might be rather fun to take 'em on and lick 'em!"

"Can't do any harm, anyway," said Pankley. "I think I might write back, upon the whole, and tell the beggar to bring his merry crush over on Saturday, and we'll play their heads off. What do you chaps say?"

"I still think it's cheek," said Potter; "but if you think it's all right, Pank, old son—"

"Well, I can't see what harm it can do," said Pankley. "I'll write and tell him to come along. If they are sportsmen we might have a bit of fun with them."

"Right-ho!"

And so the matter was settled.

Had Pankley only known it, there was very little doubt about it that there would be some fun on the following Saturday!

Meanwhile, at Rookwood, the juniors who were in the great secret were awaiting a letter from Pankley with bated breath.

When James Montgomery Babbington saw a letter in the rack addressed to himself in the well-known handwriting of his Aunt Jane, he grabbed it and legged it up to his study at top speed.

There he shut the door and feverishly tore open the missive. Inside were a few words from his maiden aunt, written in a neat hand upon letter-paper headed "Lingfield House, near Latcham." Accompanying this note was an unopened letter addressed to "Master J. Gold, Lingfield House, near Latcham," and it was upon this letter that Babbington pounced, his eyes gleaming with excitement behind his big spectacles.

"So he's fallen for it!" he breathed. "Good old Pankley!"

Ten minutes later the contents of Master J. Gold's letter were being read in Jimmy Silver's study on the Classical Side, amidst loud chortles from a crowd of juniors who were present.

"So you've wangled it, Babbington!" said Jimmy Silver enthusiastically. "Good man! Good man indeed!"

Besides Jimmy Silver and his three chums—Lovell, Raby, and Newcome—the three Tommies and Babbington were in the study, with the addition of Val Mornington, Putty Grace, Conroy, and Oswald—all of the Classical Fourth. These were the chosen ones whose participation in the great jape had been agreed upon between Tommy Dodd and Jimmy Silver.

A roar of laughter greeted the conclusion of the letter



The proprietor of the circus, drawn from his caravan at the cries of alarm, nearly fell down as he saw his elephant brandishing Mr. Manders high in the air. "Put him down, Ranee!" he cried. "Come on now, Ranee, put him down, there's a good girl!" (See page 24.)

accepting the challenge, while Babbington grinned delightedly.

"You got your aunt to send this on to you? Splendid!" said Jimmy Silver, addressing Babbington. "You have worked the wheeze finely so far!"

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd warmly. "It takes a Modern—"

"Oh, shut up, for goodness' sake!" said Lovell. "We're sick of hearing that!"

"Well, this is a Modern wheeze, ain't it?" demanded Tommy Cook heatedly.

"Peace, my infants!" murmured Jimmy Silver chidingly. "For goodness' sake, don't let's start ragging amongst ourselves. It will wreck the whole business. This is Babbington's wheeze, we all know, and if we pull it off it will vindicate the honour of Rookwood once and for all. Now, what about our costumes, Dodd?"

"I've been over to Judson's at Rookham," said Tommy Dodd, calming down. "and I've fixed up for eleven sets of girls' gym clothes. Short skirts, you know!"

"And stout-ribbed stockings, and all that."

"Good!" said Jimmy, with a grin. "I suppose old Judson will let us change at his place?"

"Oh, yes, he's quite a sport. He'll let us have the barn at the back of his house," said Tommy Dodd. "I've arranged for a motor—a sort of private bus—to take us from Judson's to Bagshot. They'll think we've come from Latcham, of course."

"We shall have to push along to Judson's as hard as we can go on our bikes directly after dinner on Saturday," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "We've not got too much time. Kick-off two-forty-five, sharp, you know!"

(It looks as if Pankley & Co. are going to be taken down a peg this time, doesn't it, chums? Be sure and read next week's thrilling instalment of this splendid serial.)

"THE SLACKER'S AWAKENING!"

(Continued from page 23.)

of hands," he announced. "Figgins, will you kindly stand forward?"

"Good old Figgins!" roared the New House contingent.

"Silence!" commanded Mr. Railton. "All those in support of Figgins' candidature will extend their left hand."

Immediately a score or more of hands shot aloft.

"Kindly count them, Kildare," said Mr. Railton. "I will do the same."

Kildare moved amongst the juniors counting the upraised hands methodically.

"Eighteen," he announced.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"That is what I make it, Kildare," he said, and he entered the figure on the writing-pad before him.

Figgins looked a trifle crestfallen. In his heart of hearts he knew that a poll of eighteen would not see him through.

"Grundy," said Mr. Railton, "please step forward!"

There was an ironical burst of cheering as the burly Shell junior complied that sent a wave of crimson to his rugged features.

"Those in support of Grundy," said the Housemaster, "put up their hands!"

Two loyal hands—and two only—sailed aloft, and they belonged to Wilkins and Gunn.

"Any more?" asked Mr. Railton.

Apparently two was the sum total of Grundy's supporters, and the Shell junior's expression was truly ferocious as he faced that grinning assembly.

"You rotters!" he bawled, shaking a massive fist at his audience. "You know I'd make a better captain than any of 'em! Why, I'll smash the blessed lot of you!"

"Grundy!" It was Mr. Railton's voice, and the Shell junior pulled himself up with a jerk. "Grundy, you will kindly step back and refrain from addressing the meeting!"

And George Alfred stepped back.

"Cardew!"

As his name was called Ralph Reckness stepped forward. He looked as cool as a cucumber, and his face remained impassive as a storm of cheering rang out. His exploit against the Grammarians was still fresh in mind, and, at the moment at any rate, Cardew was undoubtedly very popular.

A forest of hands shot up as Mr. Railton called upon the assembly to answer in the usual way.

Kildare and the master of the School House checked the number.

"Twenty-four!"

And twenty-four it was!

A hearty cheer greeted that announcement, for it was a distinctly good poll. Still Cardew's face remained impassive. There was Monty Lowther to come yet.

"Lowther!"

The humorist of the Shell got a round of applause as he appeared on the platform.

The same process of counting was gone through again, and dead silence reigned as other fellows kept count with Kildare.

"Well, Kildare?" said Mr. Railton.

"Twenty-three, sir!"

"That is correct, Kildare."

There were mixed feelings in the Common-room following

that announcement. The supporters of Monty Lowther and Ralph Reckness Cardew went hot and cold by turns as the count had neared twenty. But Cardew, the slacker, held the winning vote!

"Hurrah!" roared his supporters. "Bravo, Cardew!" The Housemaster shook Cardew by the hand, at which fresh cheering broke out.

"Let me congratulate you, Cardew," he said kindly. "I am pleased beyond measure to see that the Lower School has such faith in you! Good luck, my boy!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Railton rustled out of the Common-room.

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, Figgins, and Grundy shook the newly-elected captain warmly by the hand.

"Bravo, Cardew!" said Tom Merry. "And the best of luck!"

"You just beat me," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "But I gave you a run for your money."

"You did that, old bean!"

"You're a School House fellow, but I suppose you can't help that!" said Figgins, with a grin.

It was half an hour before the excited meeting broke up, Cardew sauntering off with Levison and Clive, who were simply radiating smiles.

"Granddad will be pleased to hear of this," said Cardew. "I promised the old bean that I'd pull my weight!"

"So that's what started you off, was it?" said Levison. "Good chap! Keep it up!"

"I'm goin' to, old bean!" drawled Cardew, with a smile. "Just watch your humble!"

As the chums of No. 9 Study halted at their doorway, a fat figure rolled up to them.

It was Baggy Trimble.

"I say, old chap," he began. "You owe me a lot, really, you know!"

Cardew stared.

"Do I, old fat man?"

"Yes," replied the fat junior. "If I hadn't shoved my hand up you wouldn't have got in, you know. In the circumstances the least you can do is to let me have that loan!"

"Dear me!" said Cardew. "You really think that if you hadn't shoved your hand up I wouldn't have got in?"

"I do!" averred Trimble.

The elegant Fourth-Former seemed to contemplate for a moment.

"Of course, dear old bean, that's a question open to doubt. But let me answer it this way."

Biff!

Trimble jumped back as if he had been shot and clasped his podgy nose.

"Yarooooop! You beast! What did you do that for?" Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled.

"Well, if I hadn't put my hand up, you wouldn't have got out—the way! Think it over, old fat man!"

And the door of Study No. 9 closed.

From within came the sound of chuckles, from without came the sounds of Trimble's wrath. But Trimble's wrath was of small account just then, for Cardew was scribbling a telegram to Lord Reckness telling him of his good fortune—his election to the junior captaincy.

As yet, however, Ralph Reckness Cardew knew nothing of the cares and troubles in the life of a junior captain, but the future was destined to prove to him that such an exalted job wasn't exactly all milk and honey!

THE END.

(Be sure you read the sequel to this grand yarn, entitled "CARDEW COMES A CROPPER!" which will appear in next week's GEM. You'll rate it a real good story, chums.)

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