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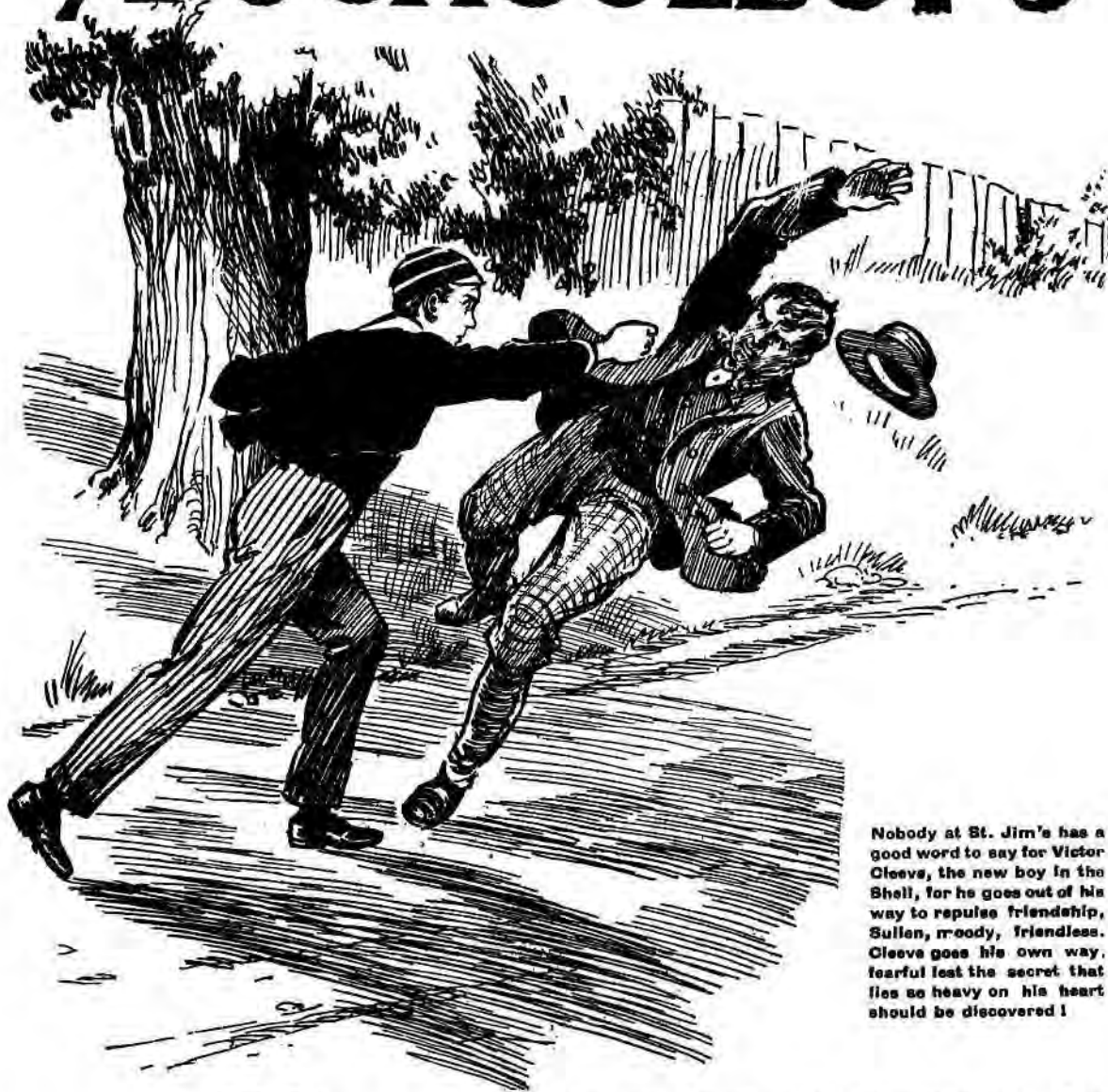
**LARGEST
AIRSHIP IN
THE WORLD**

Next week:

**SIR ALAN COBHAM'S
"ROUND AFRICA" PLANE.**

A ROUSING YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S—

A SCHOOLBOY'S



Nobody at St. Jim's has a good word to say for Victor Cleve, the new boy in the Shell, for he goes out of his way to repulse friendship, sullen, moody, friendless. Cleve goes his own way, fearful lest the secret that lies so heavy on his heart should be discovered!

CHAPTER I Alone in a Crowd!

VICTOR RAILTON, Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's, looked from his study window and frowned.

Frowns were unusual on the good-natured countenance of Mr. Railton; and really there seemed little in the view from his study window to cause anyone to wrinkle his brows with annoyance.

It was a sunny summer's day. Fellows were going down to Little Side to cricket.

Tom Merry, a handsome figure in spotless flannels, with his favourite bat under his arm, passed before the eyes of the Housemaster.

Certainly, Tom Merry, with his good-looking, cheerful face, was not calculated to make a Housemaster frown.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth was walking with Tom. In his cricketering rig, D'Arcy looked as elegant as in Etons or anything else. His celebrated eyeglass gleamed

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in his eye. The swell of St. Jim's might have caused an observer to smile; but certainly not to frown.

Other fellows passed under the Housemaster's gaze, all looking merry and bright.

A House match was about to begin; and the School House men were going to knock Figgins & Co., of the New House, into a cocked hat. That prospect was a happy and enlivening one, and, on their looks, the School House juniors seemed to be enjoying life.

It was true that Figgins & Co., of the New House, had exactly the same intention; they were going to knock the School House into a cocked hat. So the New House men, on their side, were just as merry and bright, and had the same happy anticipations.

The sight of so many cheery cricketers ought really to have bucked a Housemaster who was a keen cricketer himself, and entered heart and soul into the life of his House.

But Mr. Railton frowned grimly.

From the cheery cricketers, his glance wandered to a junior who was standing at a little distance—also watching Tom Merry & Co.

FEATURING VICTOR CLEEVE THE STRANGE NEW BOY!

SECRET *By* MARTIN CLIFFORD



That junior leaned against the trunk of an elm, with his hands in his pockets, and a moody, lowering look on his face.

He was still in Etons, so evidently he was not going to take part in the game.

He was quite alone—and fellows who passed near him did not take the trouble to nod or to speak.

Victor Cleeve, the Housemaster's nephew, was alone in a crowd—he could hardly have been more solitary on Robinson Crusoe's Island than he was in the midst of the stirring life of a crowded school.

There was a slight sneer upon his dark, handsome face; an expression of disdain which probably did not encourage St. Jim's men to waste any attention upon the new junior. Darker and darker grew Mr. Railton's frown.

He opened his study window at last, and called: "Victor!"

Cleeve started and looked round.

Probably it had not occurred to him that he was lounging within sight of the Housemaster's window, and that his uncle might glance out.

He coloured with vexation, and made a movement as if to walk away. But he could not affect not to have heard Mr. Railton's voice; and Victor Railton was his Housemaster as well as his uncle. Slowly and reluctantly, the new junior came to the study window, and stood there, looking up at his uncle.

Mr. Railton scanned his clouded face.

"You are not playing cricket to-day, Victor?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Cleeve shrugged his shoulders.

"I dare say the House team is full," he answered.

"Have you been asked?"

"No."

Mr. Railton glanced after the cricketers again.

He could not understand it.

That the fellows of his House liked him personally, he knew well enough. That Tom Merry, the junior captain of the House, would not willingly slight his wishes, he was sure. He had told Tom that Cleeve was a good cricketer; that he had been a good man at games at his former school. He had taken it for granted that Cleeve would be given a chance in a House match—which was more or less a trial game for School matches. Yet the fellows were all passing his nephew by like a fellow they did not know; and he was left out of the cricket.

"Have you quarrelled with Tom Merry, Victor?" Mr. Railton asked.

"No."

"Do you get on with him?"

"We're civil to one another."

"I should have liked to see you his friend. That was why I placed you in his study in this House."

Cleeve made no answer to that. "You seem to have made no friends since you came here, Victor."

"No."

"Why not?" snapped Mr. Railton. "I believe you were popular and had many friends at your old school."

"This isn't Barcroft."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"Go to Tom Merry and tell him to come to my study," he said.

The new junior flushed.

"I don't want to ask any favours of him. I don't want you to ask any for me," he muttered.

"I am speaking as your Housemaster, Victor, not as your uncle. Do as I tell you immediately."

The Housemaster stepped back from the window, and Cleeve turned sulkily away.

He moved off very slowly, as if debating in his mind whether to obey his uncle or not.

But Cleeve, though he had not been long at St. Jim's, had been there long enough to learn that Mr. Railton was not a master to be lightly disregarded. His affection for his nephew was not allowed to interfere with his duty as a Housemaster. Cleeve realised that he had no choice in the matter, and he hastened his steps, and overtook Tom Merry.

"Merry!" he snapped.

Tom glanced round good-humouredly.

He did not like Cleeve, and had little to say to him, though he shared the same study. Manners and Lowther were on the same footing with the new fellow. They had been willing to make friends with the Housemaster's nephew; and indeed to make much of him; and they had received insolent disdain in return. And now they let Victor Cleeve severely alone.

But Tom's cheery face was quite good-natured now. He never bore a grudge, and he was particularly merry and bright that afternoon. He gave Cleeve a friendly nod.

"Here I am," he said.

"Railton wants you."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"Bai Jove! That is wathah tactless of Wailton," remarked Arthur Augustus. "He weally ought not to call a fellow in when we're goin' down to cricket. Pewwaps Cleeve, as his nephew, might give him a hint."

"Fathead!" remarked Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I think Railton is going to speak to you about the cricket," said Cleeve. "I'd like you to understand that it's not due to me. I've nothin' whatever to do with it, and I want that clear."

"All serene," said Tom. "You fellows get on—I'll be after you in a jiffy. Railton won't keep a man late for a match."

But Tom's face was rather worried as he walked back to the House and went to his Housemaster's study.

CHAPTER 2. On the Carpet!

"COME in!"

Tom Merry entered the study. Mr. Railton was not frowning now; but his face was a little set. Tom was feeling extremely uncomfortable.

The terms upon which Cleeve stood with the other fellows of his House had been bound to come to Railton's notice sooner or later. Tom Merry was not to blame in the least; he had rather exceeded the usual limit of good-natured tolerance in the direction of Railton's nephew. He had done all he could do to drag the fellow into the House games, and he had failed. But he could not very well explain all that to Railton; certainly he could not "run down" the nephew to the uncle. It was a rather disconcerting position for the junior captain of the House.

"You are playing the New House to-day, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

"I should have been very glad to see Cleeve in the Junior House Eleven," said Mr. Railton. "You will not misunderstand me, Merry; I am sure you know me well enough to be aware that favouritism towards a relative of my own would never enter my thoughts."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Tom. "Of course, I know that."

"If Cleeve were not a cricketer, or if he were a poor player, I should not mention the matter. But at his last school he was junior captain of his House and captain of cricket. He is a first-class man at the game, for his age—quite as good, in my opinion, as any man here, even Talbot of the Shell or yourself, Merry. You do not doubt my judgment in such matters?"

Tom smiled.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Well, then, it appears to me that this matter requires some explanation," said Mr. Railton. "You have many good men to choose from, but in selecting an eleven from one House you must be putting in many men who are not anything like Cleeve's form. In this match, I understand, you will make a final choice of men from both Houses to play Greyfriars next week."

"That is so, sir."

"Then surely you should be playing Cleeve—if you can trust my judgment that he is a better man than at least six or seven members of the House team as it stands at present."

Tom was dismayed.

"Surely, Merry, you must have observed Cleeve's form in games practice," said Mr. Railton sharply.

"N-no-no, sir!"

"I am surprised at this, Merry! If you desire to beat Greyfriars, you should surely look out for the best men available. Cleeve is a new boy; but a cricket captain should keep his eyes open for new talent. In this case, too; I had already told you he was a valuable player."

"You see, sir—" stammered Tom.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have not taken the trouble to observe Cleeve at all in games practice?"

"Well, I—I couldn't, sir!"

"And why not?"

Tom flushed uncomfortably.

"Cleeve hasn't joined in games practice, so far, sir."

"What?"

That was evidently surprising news to the Housemaster. The frown returned to his brow more darkly than ever.

Tom stood silent, wishing that he was anywhere but in the presence of that exceedingly unpleasant new fellow's uncle. There was quite a long pause before Mr. Railton spoke again.

"I was not aware of that, Merry. I cannot understand why Cleeve has not played, as he is a keen cricketer. There has been at least one compulsory practice since he came to the school. How does it happen that he did not join in that?"

"He—he didn't want to, sir, I think."

"On compulsory days, Merry, it does not matter what a junior wants—he has to join in the games practice, and it is your duty, as junior captain, to see that he does so."

"I—I know, sir."

"You must have let him off, then?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Why?"

Tom Merry's hapless face was crimson now. He had let Cleeve off because he did not want a row with the Housemaster's nephew, for old Railton's sake.

But that was not an explanation he could give to Railton.

"He was not ill, I suppose?" asked the Housemaster.

"Nunno, sir."

"Or detained by his Form master?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"He did not desire to join in the practice?"

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"Did you report him to Kildare, as head of the games, for neglecting to join with the others?"

"N-no, sir."

"You have done wrong, Merry."

"I—I know, sir," mumbled Tom.

"I think I can guess the reason. I am afraid, Merry, that you did not report Cleeve, because he is my nephew!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

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Tom did not speak. He realised that he might have known that old Railton would guess that much.

"I blame you for this, Merry. You surely did not imagine that I desired any favouritism to be shown to my relative."

"Oh, no, sir! But—"

"But what?"

"Nothing, sir," mumbled Tom.

"You will not allow this to occur again, Merry. I am very much surprised and displeased!"

Tom Merry stood with crimson cheeks, conscious of a deep yearning to punch Victor Cleeve's head. Not that that would have mended matters.

"We will say nothing further about that," resumed the Housemaster. "As you have not seen Cleeve play you have been unable to observe his quality. But you can, I presume, trust to my judgment?"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"I suggest, therefore, that you should play Cleeve in the House Eleven to-day, on my judgment. My belief is that you will find him a very valuable recruit for the School eleven next week. You will tell your friends that I have selected Cleeve for the eleven, and that I take responsibility. The result will justify the selection."

"I've no objection, sir," said Tom. "If you think Cleeve is a good man I know he must be; and I'd be glad to strengthen the team with another man as good as Talbot—especially as Talbot will be away next week when the Greyfriars match comes off. I'd be jolly glad to get a new man as good to take his place. But—"

"Well?"

Tom almost wriggled with discomfort.

"I don't think Cleeve will care to play, sir!" he blurted out. "I'd like him in the team if he's keen on the game; but—"

"I think you do Cleeve injustice, Merry. I am sure that he will be glad to play for his House," said Mr. Railton, with a touch of sternness in his tone. "There can be no question as to that."

Tom was silent.

"In any case, you will tell him that he is to play, and that it is an order from his Housemaster," said Mr. Railton.

"Very well, sir."

"That is all, Merry. I think you will be satisfied when you have seen Cleeve's form."

"I—I know you know best, sir."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Very good! I will not keep you longer from the cricket."

And Tom Merry left the study.

His face was much less bright as he went down to Little Side. That Mr. Railton knew the summer game inside

out, and that Cleeve was a good cricketer if Railton said so, did not admit of argument. If he was as good a man as Talbot of the Shell—and he was, if Railton said he was—Tom Merry would have welcomed him with open arms into the team. But to drag an unwilling fellow into the game, to drop a keen player to make room for him, to put up with his cheek and disdain—these things were not pleasing.

However, Tom Merry was "for it" now, and he made up his mind to it as cheerfully as he could.

CHAPTER 3.

High Words!

"READY?"

George Figgins of the New House called across cheerily to Tom Merry as the latter arrived on Little Side.

Tom shook his head.

"Not quite, Figg!"

"Don't hurry, of course," remarked Figgins. "But this isn't a three days' match, you know!"

"Fathead!"

"These School House men take a long time to get ready for a licking!" Fatty Wynn remarked to Kerr of the New House.

And Kerr grinned.

"They do!" he agreed.

But Tom Merry did not heed the badinage of the New House men. His own men gathered round him, rather concerned by the expression on Tom's face. They could see that there was trouble of some sort.

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Do It Now!

"What's up?" asked Blake.

"I twust old Wailton isn't watty about anythin', deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom glanced round.

"Where's that new man Cleeve?" he asked.

"He hasn't come down to Little Side," said Talbot of the Shell.

There was a snort from Jack Blake.

"He doesn't care about cricket! He won't play, and he won't watch, and he don't care whether the House wins or loses!"

"Yaas, wathah! I dislike to uttah any dewogatory remarks concernin' a wrelative of old Wailton, but, weally, I must say that that man Cleeve is a slackin' wottah and a frightful boundah!" said Arthur Augustus, with a sage shake of the head. "I wouldn't wun the fellow down for anythin', but he does stwike me as a wank outsidah and a feahful beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Captain of his House at his old school, I hear!" snorted Monty Lowther. "I'd like to know the name of that old school!"

"Perhaps they played marbles instead of cricket!" suggested Kangaroo of the Shell. "Cleeve gives one that impression!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, he's wanted!" said Tom Merry. "He was in sight a few minutes ago. Some of you men tell him he's wanted—he must be about somewhere. Tell him he's to play in the House match, and he's to come here at once!"

"I'll go!" said Digby of the Fourth.

Dig was not in the House eleven, but he had turned up loyally to see his chums play. Three members of Study No. 6 were in the team—Blake and D'Arcy and Herries.

"Buck up, old chap!" said Tom.

Dig started off. All the House cricketers looked at Tom Merry, and they looked at him very aggressively.

"Did my ears hear aright?" asked Monty Lowther. "Have mine ancient ears deceived me in mine old age?"

"Does this run in your family, Tommy?" asked Talbot politely.

"Oh, don't rot, old chap!" said Tom crossly. "It can't be helped!"

"Eh—what?"

"This sort of lunacy! I suppose you're not making out that you're in your right senses?"

"Look here——"

"You're proposing to play that rotter Cleeve in a House match—a new kid who hasn't been here a week, and who hasn't condescended to touch a bat or a ball since he blew in! Call that sense?" demanded Blake hotly.

"Bai Jove! I do not like the ideah of cwiticeisin' my skippah, but I must say that you seem to me a sillay idiot, Tom Mewwy, if you do not mind my mentionin' it!"

"I say, Tom, are you serious?" asked Levison of the Fourth. "You've left out Cardew, and you talk of putting in that fellow Cleeve——"

"I've left out Cardew because this is a trial match for the school game next week!" said Tom sharply. "Cardew's dropped out of that, so he's not wanted to-day. I don't care twopence if the New House beat us so long as I pick up a good crowd to beat Greyfriars next week! It's school matches that count!"

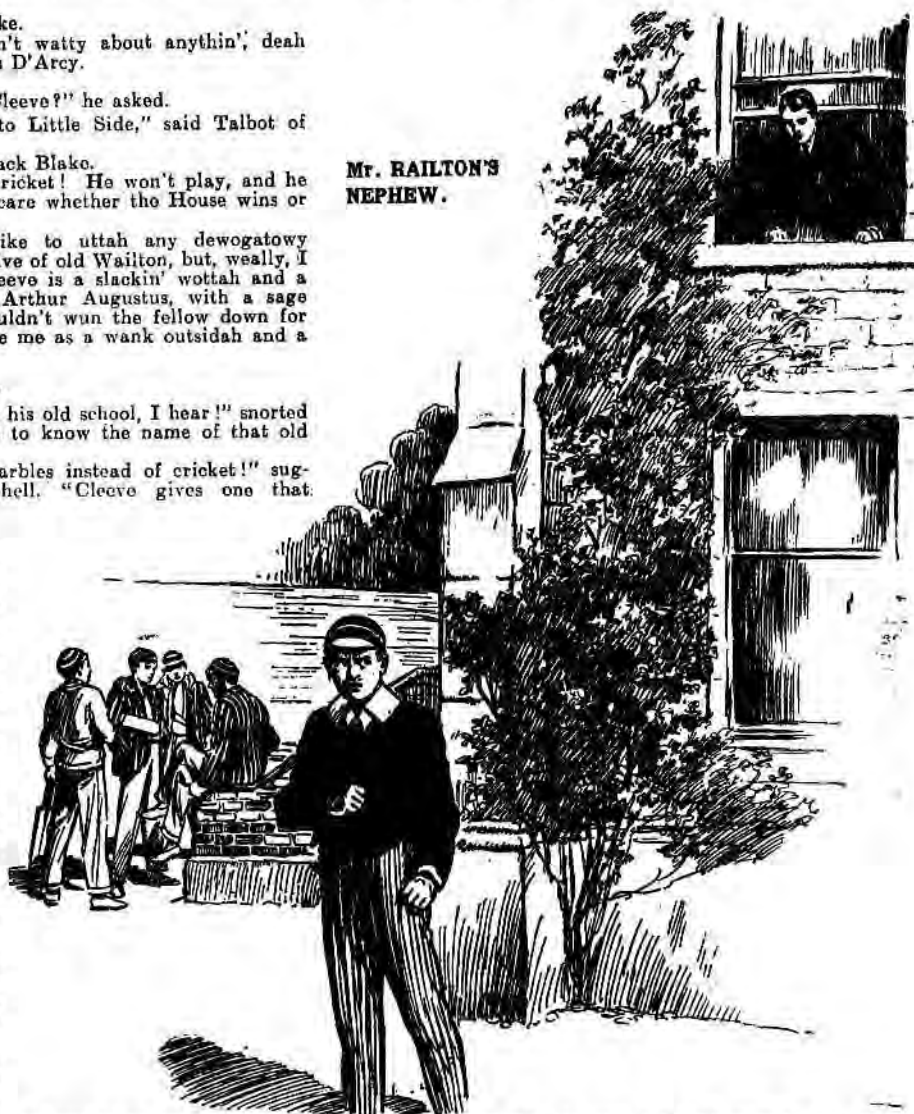
"I know that!" Levison spoke sharply, too. "But you won't gain anything by playing Cleeve! The fellow's no good at games!"

"Railton says he is."

"Avuncular prejudice!" said Lowther. "Railton has the awful misfortune to be the toad's uncle!"

"That's rot, Monty, and you know it!" said Tom. "Railton knows all about a man's form at cricket, and what he says goes!"

Mr. RAILTON'S
NEPHEW.



"Go and bring Tom Merry to my study!" snapped Mr. Railton. "I don't want to ask favours of him," said Cleeve sulkily. Mr. Railton compressed his lips. "I am speaking as your Housemaster, Victor, not as your uncle," he said. "Do as I tell you immediately!" Cleeve turned slowly away. (See Chapter 1.)

"Well, if the fellow can play, why doesn't he play?" demanded Ernest Levison tartly. "He's cut games practice ever since he's been here, and he dodged compulsory practice yesterday! You let him off!"

"I know I did!" growled Tom.

"And you've chucked my pal Cardew out of the Greyfriars match because he cut practice!" said Levison. "If you call that fair play all round, Tom Merry, I don't agree with you!"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"You can agree or not, just as you like!" he answered. "Cardew refused to turn up for practice, and I chucked him out, and he stays out, and be banged to him! The same would apply to Cleeve, only Railton has ordered me to play him in the House match to-day!"

"Oh!" said Levison, rather taken aback. "I didn't know that, of course. If it's a Housemaster's order——"

"Well, it is!" snapped Tom.

His temper was getting a little sore by this time, and the mention of Ralph Reckness Cardew was like fuel to the fire. Tom was only too conscious that the loss of Cardew was a severe loss to the eleven, but the careless impertinence of the dandy of the Fourth had left him no choice but to "chuck him." A fellow who coolly defied his captain's authority was not a fellow who could play for his House or his school.

"I think Railton might as well leave our games alone, if this is the way he butts in!" said Blake. "He's no right to plant that dud on us!"

"Railton wouldn't plant a dud on us, old chap," said

Talbot of the Shell mildly. "If he says Cleeve is a good man, Cleeve is a good man!"

Blake grunted. He knew that Talbot was right, but he was not feeling disposed to admit as much. Cleeve had put up the backs of all the School House men, and nobody wanted him in the team.

"I weally considah, Tom Mewwy—" began Arthur Augustus in his most fatherly—or, rather, grandfatherly—manner.

"Cut it out!" interrupted Tom. "I'm not going to argue about it! Railton asked me—which is the same as ordering me—and jaw's no good!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, rats!"

"I should weally like to point out—" began Arthur Augustus, with stately dignity.

"What's the good of jawing, you ass? I tell you we're landed with Cleeve in this match!"

"I was not goin' to wefer to Cleeve," said D'Arcy calmly. "I was goin' to point out that it is wathah bad form for a fellow to lose his tempah when things go w'ong! That is all, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom stared at the swell of St. Jim's for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.

"Sorry, Gussy, old man! I didn't mean to be ratty. But you fellows can all understand that this isn't nice for me. I don't want that rotter in the team, and I've got to chuck a man I do want to make room for him. It doesn't make me feel happy."

"Yaas, wathah, old chap! I assuah you that I sympathise vewy deeply!" said Arthur Augustus. "Would you like me to wun back to the House and speak to old Waitlon about it? As a fellow of tact and judgment, I have no doubt I could make him undahstand—"

"Drop in at Study No. 6 on your way," suggested Blake.

"What for, deah boy?"

"To put some exercise-books in your pants! Railton will make you bend over if you give him any of your chinwag!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Which man are you going to chuck, Tom Merry?" asked Blake. "Like me to stand out to make room for that dud?"

Tom was looking over the team. He hated dropping a fellow to make room for Victor Cleeve—hated it like poison. The cricketers, understanding his feelings, sympathised to a certain extent, but they looked a good deal like chickens might be supposed to look when the chopper was coming down. No man there wanted to stand out.

Talbot of the Shell would have offered had he been in the team, but he was only a looker-on to-day. He was to be away from the school the following week, and so was not available for the Greyfriars match when it came off. And Tom—at the risk of getting a beating from Figgins & Co.—was playing only men from whom he was going to pick players for the school match. House matches counted, but school matches were the "thing." Tom would have let all the House matches go to pot to win a school match against an outside team.

"It will have to be you, Herries, old chap!" said the captain of the Shell at last.

The expression on the face of George Herries immediately resembled that of a Hun in his most Hunnish frame of mind.

"Me!" he exclaimed hotly.

"Yes, sorry! Somebody must go."

"To make room for that sneaking, sneering rotter from nobody knows where, who doesn't even want to play!" shouted Herries.

"I must say it's thick," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"For goodness' sake give a chap a rest!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in exasperation. "Have I got any choice in the matter? Do you want me to go to Railton and tell him to mind his own business?"

"That would be wathah bad form."

"Besides, it is his business, as he is games-master," said Tom. "He's told me this not as Cleeve's uncle, or as Housemaster, but as games-master. It can't be helped."

"Oh, we know all that!" said Herries gruffly. "But I don't see why you pick on me!"

"Well, I do pick on you!" said Tom tartly. "If you can't see why, you'd better think it out, and it may dawn on you in a term or two."

"Look here—"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say I agwee with Tom Mewwy there," said Arthur Augustus. "Be weasonable, Hewwies, old chap! If Tom Mewwy is goin' to dwop a man at all, he is bound to dwop the least valuable membah of the eleven. That stands to weason."

If Arthur Augustus D'Arcy expected this remark to soothe George Herries' ruffled breast, he was utterly disappointed. Some of the other fellows grinned.

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Herries did not grin. He fixed a look on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that a basilisk might have envied.

"You silly idiot!" he said, in measured tone.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You footling chump!"

"Bai Jove! I—"

"You burbling lunatic!"

"Look heah—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Herries, and he turned and tramped off the field with a red and angry face.

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and stared after Herries, and then looked at the other fellows.

"Bai Jove! Hewwies seems watty about somethin'," he said. "I can undahstand his bein' watty with you, Tom Mewwy, for chuckin' him. But why should he be watty with me?"

"I wonder why?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I do not compwehend—"

"Here comes Dig!" said Blake. "That rotter isn't with him."

Tom Merry breathed hard and deep. All eyes were on Robert Arthur Digby as he came back to the field.

"Couldn't you find him?" called out Tom Merry.

"Yes, I found him all right."

"Well, where is he?"

"Loafing in the quad," answered Digby, with a sniff.

"Isn't he changing?"

"He isn't going to change."

"What!" roared Tom Merry.

"He says he's not going to play in the House match, and that you can go and eat coke!"

CHAPTER 4.

Coming to Blows!

TOM MERRY stared at Digby of the Fourth.

He could scarcely believe his ears.

Some of the other fellows frowned, and some of them grinned. Cleeve of the Shell was a fellow who had his own ways. That he had not wanted to come to the school where his uncle was Housemaster was no secret. That he did not want to make friends in his new school, that he preferred to keep to his sulky self, was quite well known. But such an answer to a message from his House captain was rather unexpected, even from Victor Cleeve.

"He says he's not going to play!" repeated Tom Merry at last. "He says I can go and eat coke!"

"Just that!" assented Dig.

Blake gave a snort. His chum had been dropped to make room for Cleeve—for the fellow who refused to play. It was too much for Blake.

"Let the rotter have his own way, then," said Blake.

"We don't want him. Nobody here wants him."

"Wathah not!"

"I suppose you're not going on your knees to beg him to play, Tom Merry?" demanded Blake, with savage sarcasm. Tom set his lips.

"I'm not going to beg him to play, certainly," he said. "I'm going to make him play, and thrash him till he can't crawl, if he raises any objection. That's what I'm going to do."

"Better get a move on, then," grinned Dig. "He was starting for the bike-shed when I left him. I fancy he's going out of gates to save argument."

Tom Merry started off.

"I say, Merry," bawled Figgins, "are we going to play cricket, or kick our heels about here all the afternoon?"

"Go and eat coke!" answered Tom, over his shoulder, without looking round. He disappeared at a rapid run for the bike-shed.

Figgins stared after him.

"Tommy's got his rag out to-day!" he remarked.

"Bai Jove! It's weally enough to get any fellow's wag out!" said Arthur Augustus. "I twust that Tom Mewwy will give that cheeky wottah a feafuhl thwaashin'."

"Housemasters oughtn't to butt in like this!" growled Blake.

"Our Housemaster never butts in like this!" smiled Figgins.

Snort from Blake.

"Your Housemaster can't play cricket! Your Housemaster don't know a wicket from a willow! Your Housemaster never plays anything but the giddy ox. I admit that he can beat Railton in that line."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, you School House rotter—" roared Figgins. Figg was rather touchy on the topic of his Housemaster. The New House were not very proud of Mr. Ratcliff. Still, Figg really had asked for that rejoinder.

"Oh, cheese it, you New House worm!" said Blake.

"School House cad—"
 "New House rotter—"
 "Look here—"
 "Look here—"

It looked as if there would be a House row instead of a House match on Little Side that afternoon. Talbot of the Shell hastily interposed.

"For goodness' sake chuck it, you men! Tom's got enough trouble on his shoulders without a row going on here. This is jolly hard on him."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway keep your tempahs, deah boys. Aftah all, we're goin' to lick those New House wottahs at cwicket, Blake!"

"Not in your lifetime!" snorted Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Bow-wow!"

But the threatened rag ceased, though nobody on Little Side was looking very amiable by this time—excepting Talbot of the Shell. Talbot had an equable temper that nothing ever seemed able to exasperate.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had arrived, breathless, at the bike-shed. Dig's warning had only been in time. Cleeve was in the act of wheeling his machine out. He stopped as Tom appeared in the doorway. He had to stop, as Tom was directly in the path of the bicycle.

Tom looked at him with a grim face. His usually sunny temper was sadly ruffled now. For once—probably for the first time in his life—Tom Merry was as ready to use his fists as his tongue. The most peaceable fellow at St. Jim's, the best-tempered junior in his House, with scarcely an exception, Tom was quivering with anger now, and almost inclined to hit before he spoke. However, he restrained that impulse, and spoke as calmly as he could.

"You're not going out of gates, Cleeve?"

"Yes."

"You got my message from Digby?"

"Yes. I sent an answer."

Tom Merry clenched his hands, but he kept them down at his sides. He would not hit the Housemaster's nephew if he could help it.

"Perhaps you didn't quite catch on," he said, controlling his voice. "I'm not asking you to play because I want you—"

"I know that!"

"Railton has told me to play you to-day."

"I fancied that that was the case."

"Well, you know it now for a fact. I suppose you know that I can't go against Railton's orders."

"That's for you to settle."

"I suppose you know," went on Tom, his voice rising, "that I am junior captain of the House, and any Lower fellow is bound to take orders from me, in matters connected with games, the same as I am bound to take orders from the games-master?"

Cleeve yawned.

"I've been ragged by Railton for letting you off games practice," said Tom, "I'm not letting you off again, Cleeve. Every compulsory day after this you will turn up on Little Side, or take a batting."

"Is that all? If you're done, I'll get goin'."

"You're playing to-day."

"I'm not playing to-day!" said Cleeve coolly.

"It's your Housemaster's order."

"I'm not playing."

"Do you want me to report to Railton that you refuse to obey his direct order?"

Cleeve hesitated for a moment.

"You can do as you like about that," he answered finally. "I'm askin' no favours at your hands, or the hands of anybody else here. I hate the place, and I loathe all the fellows. I belong to another school, and I'm not going to take up games or anything else here."

"You're going to do as you're told."

"Not in the least."

"Half the fellows believe that you were bunked from your last school," exclaimed Tom Merry. "I wish to goodness you had stayed there. Nobody wants you at St. Jim's, I can tell you."

"Exactly. We agree on that point—I don't want to be here, and nobody wants me here. All I ask is to be let alone. That's not much to ask, so far as I can see."

"I'd let you alone fast enough, if Railton would let me," said Tom scornfully. "A fellow who dodges games isn't the fellow I'd seek out. But I've no choice in the matter now."

I've got to obey orders, and you've got to do the same. Put that bike up, and get changed for cricket."

"I'm going out!"

"You're not going out!"

"I am!" said Cleeve coolly.

Tom's hands clenched almost convulsively. All this time he was listening to Cleeve's impudence, the game was waiting on Little Side. He had come to the end of his patience now.

"Put that bike up!" he said, his voice almost husky with anger.

"I won't!"

"I shall take it from you."

"I'll stop you fast enough if you try."

That was the finish! Tom Merry grasped the bicycle, and wrenched it away from Cleeve, and flung it clattering across the bike shed. It curled up and crashed to the floor.

"Now come!" said Tom, between his teeth.

Cleeve's teeth were set, and his eyes glinting.

"Not a step!" he answered.

"Make me if you can."

"For the last time—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Tom ran at him, with his hands up. Cleeve's hands came up like lightning, and in a moment more they were fighting fiercely.

Cleeve was a good man with his hands, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had discovered in his scrap with the Housemaster's nephew. But he was simply nowhere now. He was not, perhaps, a match for Tom Merry at any time; but in Tom's present mood he was nothing like a match for him. Tom could have handled two or three of them just then. In less than a minute Cleeve

had received some severe punishment, and at the end of a minute he was sprawling on his back among the bike-stands, gasping for breath.

"Will you come now?"

"No!" panted Cleeve. "Less now than ever."

"Then get up and take your gruel, you cad!"

A moment more, and the two juniors—equally enraged now—would have closed in fierce combat again. But at that moment the doorway was darkened by a tall figure.

"Stop!"

It was Mr. Railton's voice.

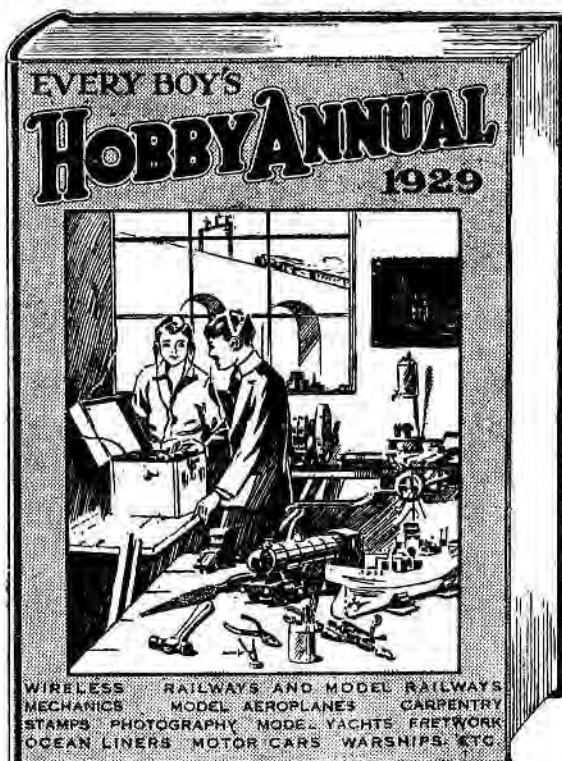
CHAPTER 4.

The Shadow of a Secret!

MR. RAILTON fixed stern eyes upon the two Shell fellows. Both of them dropped their hands immediately at the sound of the Housemaster's voice.

Tom Merry turned a flushed face to his Housemaster. He was feeling utterly discomfited. Hitherto, he

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had kept his hands off Railton's nephew, in spite of much provocation. It was miserable luck that old Railton should have found them fighting—on the very first occasion. Tom's dislike of the nephew made no difference to his affectionate respect for the uncle. He would have given anything for Railton to have missed that scene in the bike-shed.

It was too late to think of that now. Tom stood flushed and uncomfortable! Cleeve stood sullen and sulky. Mr. Railton eyed them both.

"I instructed you to play Cleeve in the cricket match, Merry," said the Housemaster quietly.

"Yes, sir," stammered Tom.

"Is this the way you carry out my instructions?"

Tom did not answer. It was not Tom's way to say that it was the other fellow's fault, and there was nothing else to be said.

"This is not what I expected of you, Merry," said the School Housemaster, coldly.

Tom did not speak; but Cleeve came very unexpectedly to the rescue.

"It was not Merry's fault, sir," he said.

"Indeed! Am I to understand that it was your fault, Victor?"

"Probably."

"What were you fighting about, Merry?"

"We—we—we—" stammered Tom.

Again Cleeve took up the tale.

"Merry gave me orders, and I did not choose to obey them. We were fighting it out."

"What orders?"

"To play in the House match."

"Those orders came from me, Victor."

Cleeve was silent. In the presence of his uncle, a good deal of his disdainful "cheek" seemed to desert him. It was as if something forced him to respect the School Housemaster in spite of himself.

"You may return to the cricket ground, Merry," said Mr. Railton, after a pause. "Cleeve will change immediately, and follow you."

"Very well, sir!" said Tom, breathing hard.

He was glad enough to get away. Uncle and nephew were left alone in the bike-shed. Roylance of the Fourth, coming in for his machine, glanced at them rather curiously. Mr. Railton made his nephew a sign to follow him, and walked away. Cleeve followed him to the House.

"I will not inquire too closely into this matter, Victor," said Mr. Railton, pausing outside the School House. "If you are on bad terms with Merry, I will not impute the fault to you; though I fear that your temper has suffered by what happened to you at Barcroft. But the terms you are upon with Tom Merry do not matter now. I have given orders for you to play in the House match to-day. Go in and get changed, and go down to Little Side at once."

"I'd rather not play," muttered Cleeve doggedly.

"That is a matter of no moment. I am not advising you as your uncle, but commanding you as your Housemaster. Go at once."

Cleeve's lips opened, and shut again. But he did not stir from the spot. The Housemaster gave him a searching look.

"I fail to understand you, Victor, since you have come to this school," he said. "What is the meaning of this? Do you wish to live the life of a hermit and an exile, because you were forced to leave Barcroft?"

"I never wanted to be here," muttered Cleeve. "What's the good? I may get a chance to get back to Barcroft—"

"It is not likely that the headmaster of Barcroft will allow a junior to return who was expelled on a charge of theft." Cleeve's face became deadly pale.

"I never did it! You know I never did it!" he panted.

"I know what you have told me," said Mr. Railton. "I believe you—in spite of all appearances. Dr. Holmes has taken my view of the matter, and given you a chance here. You cannot be so stupid as not to realise what a stroke of good fortune it is for you. Barcroft is closed to you for ever."

"Not if they find out who did it. Not if I should be cleared—some day," muttered Cleeve.

"I fear that that is a very delusive hope. In any case, you will do yourself no good by moping and sulking and making enemies of boys who would willingly be your friends."

"I don't want any friends here," said Cleeve stubbornly. "Nobody here would speak to me if they knew what was said of me at Barcroft—if they knew what I was accused of. Suppose it came out?"

"It cannot come out, as you term it, unless you should allude to the matter yourself," said Mr. Railton. "No one here even knows the name of your former school. You must try to forget Barcroft, Victor, and live a new life in your new surroundings."

"I can't," said Cleeve huskily. "I keep on thinkin' of

the fellows there and what they think of me. I keep on thinkin' what they'd think of me here if they knew. If it came out, I'd rather they were all my enemies to begin with. I couldn't stand being cut by fellows I'd made friends with. When I think of that, I feel that I hate them all."

The Housemaster's face softened with compassion as he looked at the white, miserable junior. The words had come from Cleeve in a torrent.

"I feel for you, Victor," said Mr. Railton kindly. "But this is morbid and unhealthy. You are too young to be a misanthrope. You must pull yourself together and make the best of it—save what you can from the wreck. Your secret is safe. Even at Barcroft it is not known. Your headmaster said nothing in public, for my sake. You left quietly, and the school never knew."

"They must wonder. They will guess, and—and—"

"Enough, Victor. You must take the advice of your elders," said the Housemaster. "You are an orphan, and you are fortunate, if you could but realise it, to possess two relatives, your Uncle Maurice and myself, who have faith in your honour, in spite of appearances."

"I—I know," muttered Cleeve wretchedly. "I'm not ungrateful, uncle. I know you've both been bricks to me. But—but I can't get on with the fellows here. I can't—I won't! If anything came out, they'd turn me down at once. Of course they would. So would I in their place. But it makes me hate them to think of it. I only want to be left alone, to keep to myself."

"The very worst thing you can think of," said Mr. Railton. "The most foolish step you could take would be to give up games. Do not argue with me further, Victor. If you will not heed my wishes I must command you, for your own good. Go down to the cricket at once!"

Cleeve turned slowly away.

Mr. Railton returned to his study. He knew that his orders would be obeyed now. There was a deep cloud on his brow. The misery of the hapless junior who had been driven from school under the shadow of shame wrung his heart. Cleeve was his only sister's son, and he had lost both parents in infancy. His two bachelor uncles had taken him to their hearts. To both of them he was as dear as a son. The shame that had fallen upon him had stricken them hard. They clung passionately to the belief that he was innocent, that somehow appearances had convicted him. And yet both Victor and Maurice Railton knew very well that they would not have clung to that belief had not Victor Cleeve been their nephew. Blood is thicker than water, and they simply could not believe one of their own blood capable of a paltry crime.

It had been a great chance for Cleeve, after his disaster, to enter at St. Jim's, his miserable secret unknown, the possibility of a new life of honour and respect before him. But perhaps it was not to be wondered at that his thoughts dwelt passionately on the past. Perhaps it was not surprising that, bearing the burden of his wretched secret, he did not desire to make friends with fellows who would have turned from him in contempt had they known the truth. If he was, as he said, innocent, the consciousness of innocence was not enough to support him. In every word, in every glance, he suspected an insult, a suspicion, a gibe. Perhaps it was not to be wondered at that a proud, headstrong fellow, feeling at any moment the finger of scorn might be pointed at him, chose to turn a face of sullen defiance to his House.

Mr. Railton sat down at his table to a pile of Latin papers. But he was slow to begin his work. He was thinking of his nephew and wondering whether, after all, it had been a wise step to bring to St. Jim's the schoolboy who had been expelled from Barcroft.

CHAPTER 6.

Ordered Off!

"H EAH he comes!"

Arthur Augustus made that remark as Cleeve of the Shell came in sight, in flannels, with his bat under his arm.

Cleeve's face was set and savage.

He came down to the cricket ground because he had no choice in the matter, but his look showed how unwillingly he came.

Tom Merry and Figgins had already tossed for innings, and it fell to the New House to bat first. The School House men were ready to go into the field; in fact, they were going in. Tom Merry did not see waiting any longer for Cleeve. But the unpopular new junior came up before the field had taken their places.

He threw his bat carelessly aside, and went into the field with the rest. The look on his face, to the other fellows, seemed only like sulky anger and resentment, and the glances they gave him were black enough. Had they heard

his passionate outburst to Mr. Railton, they might have judged him a little differently.

"Where am I to field?" he called out to Tom Merry. Tom was tempted to reply: "Wherever you like, so long as you keep out of the way." But that was not cricket. Without answering, he indicated Cleeve's position with a wave of the hand, and the new junior went to cover-point. Figgins and Fatty Wynn, going out together to the wickets, grinned at one another.

"We're really getting going at last!" Figgy remarked.

"Put that bike up!" said Tom Merry sharply. "I won't!" growled Cleeve. "Then I'll take it from you!" snapped the junior captain, and he grasped Cleeve's bicycle and wrenched it away. The machine went clattering across the shed. (See Chapter 4.)

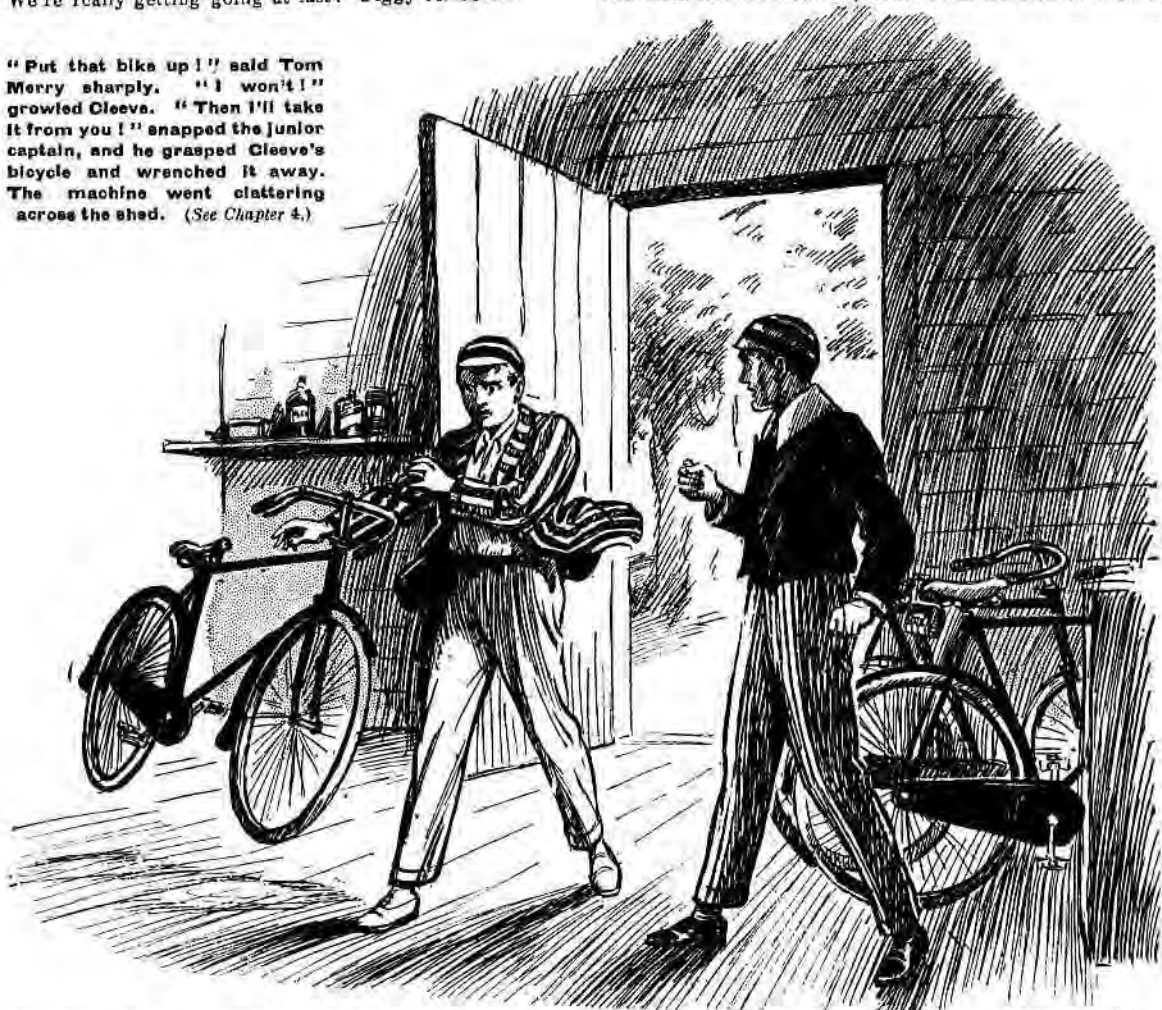
intend to do either. Fellows who were standing about the field, looking on, yelled to Cleeve:

"Get a move on!"

"Slacker!"

Another fieldsman ran in for the ball and returned it, though not till Figgins and Fatty Wynn had covered the ground twice and made good. The ball was tossed back to Levison of the Fourth, who gave Tom Merry a very expressive look.

But Tom did not need any hints from Levison or anyone



"Wonders will never cease!" grinned Fatty. "Tain't fair play to put that man Cleeve where I can see him. His face puts me off my game!"

And Figgy chuckled and tramped on to his wicket.

Levison of the Fourth was put on to bowl. When Ernest Levison began to deliver, Figgins, who had the bowling, had to forget all about Cleeve and everything else but the bowling. Levison was a deadly man with the round, red ball, and he gave the junior captain of the New House plenty to think about.

Tom Merry's face began to clear of its thunderclouds at the merry click of bat and ball. The game was going at last, at all events, and when a game was on, Tom Merry could not help bucking up and getting bright. Moreover, on Mr. Railton's statement that Cleeve was as good a cricketer as Talbot, it was on the cards that he might find that he had got a good recruit, which would be some compensation for all the worry and trouble that Cleeve had caused him.

But the troubles of that afternoon were by no means over. According to the proverb, a horse may be taken to the water, but cannot be made to drink. Victor Cleeve was demonstrating the truth of that ancient piece of wisdom. Figgins drove the ball past point, and cover-point stood and watched it soar and did not move till it dropped, and then walked after it.

Tom Merry viewed that proceeding with feelings that could not have been expressed in any known language.

The man could play if he liked. He knew that. Whether he could play or not, he could run. Evidently he did not

else. If this was the kind of cricket that Cleeve was going to play, there was no room for him on Little Side, Housemaster or no Housemaster.

In the innocence of his heart, Tom had taken it for granted that a fellow, once landed on the cricket field, whether he wanted to be there or not, would play the game as a matter of course. That any fellow would or could deliberately play a rotten game because his back was up had not even entered Tom's thoughts. He made a sign to Levison to hold the ball, and crossed over to Cleeve, his eyes gleaming and his lips quivering.

"Cleeve!"

The new fellow had strolled carelessly back to his place. He looked at Tom Merry with sulky coolness.

"Why didn't you send in that ball?" asked Tom in a low, concentrated voice.

"Another man bagged it," said Cleeve.

"You didn't try to get it. You could have got it and saved a run."

"Think so?"

"Do you deny it?" exclaimed Tom. "Do you deny that you're letting the game go on purpose?"

Cleeve gave him a bitter look.

"No!" he answered deliberately. "You've got me here against my will. If you don't like my style of play, you've got your remedy in your hands."

Tom breathed hard.

"You mean that I'm to take the responsibility for refusing to let you play, after Railton has sent you here and ordered me to play you?"

"I mean that I don't care a straw."

"You worm!" said Tom. "You cur! If you had a rag of decency you'd play up for your House!"

Cleeve flushed. But the dogged look deepened on his face, and he did not answer. It was clear that his mind was made up.

"You're going to stand there like a stuffed dummy, and let the ball pass you," went on Tom, his voice thick with anger. "When we come to batting, you're going to lose your wicket for a duck's egg—is that it?"

Cleeve shrugged his shoulders.

Tom raised his hand and pointed.

"Get off!" he said.

Cleeve laughed.

"You're ordering me off the field?" he asked.

"Yes—get off, before I kick you off!"

"Only too gladly."

Cleeve walked off the field. A hiss from the fielding side followed him, and his colour deepened. Fifty fellows had gathered to watch the game, and they gave Cleeve a sort of reception as he came off. Hisses and jeers rang in his ears as he picked up his bat and walked away. Wally of the Third—the fortunate possessor of an apple—hurled it after Cleeve, and the missile landed on the back of the new fellow's head.

Cleeve turned round, his face blazing with rage.

"Yah! Slacker!" yelled D'Arcy minor.

Cleeve made a furious stride towards Wally of the Third. The three minors closed up to meet him. Talbot of the Shell interposed.

"You'd better get off the ground, Cleeve," he said quietly.

"I'll please myself about that!" hissed Cleeve.

"You'd better go. You've acted rottenly, and you'll get a ragging if you hang about here."

"Collar that cad!" Grundy of the Shell was bawling. "Giving the game away to the New House, by gum! Collar him! Rag him!"

Cleeve realised that he had better go. He hurried off the cricket ground, followed by hisses and hoots.

The House match proceeded without the Housemaster's nephew, and there was no one to miss him. All were glad that he was gone.

It was an hour or more later, that Mr. Railton came down to Little Side to see how the game was going on, and no doubt to see how his nephew was making history in House cricket. The New House innings had ended, and the School House were beginning to bat, with Kangaroo and Jack Blake at the wickets. The School Housemaster glanced over the waiting batsmen, and was surprised to see that Cleeve was not present.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is Cleeve?"

"I don't know," answered Tom shortly, and with all his respect for Victor Railton, he very nearly added: "And I don't care."

"When does he bat?" asked Mr. Railton. Being aware of Tom's frame of mind, he was prepared to hear that his nephew was down for last man in.

"He doesn't bat at all, sir!"

"I don't understand you, Merry."

"He's out of the team."

"Merry!"

"I had no choice, sir," said Tom. "I had to turn him out because he was no good. I can't play a man who refuses to play. I'm willing to resign the junior captaincy here and now, if you wish me to do so, Mr. Railton; but I can't and won't play a man who won't join in the game."

"Yaas, wathah," chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly. "A fellow who gives the game away is wathah too much of a good thing, sir."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips hard.

He let the subject drop with that; it was hardly necessary to ask any more questions. He remained watching the game for some little time, and apparently he had forgotten the incident; his voice was heard joining heartily in the cheers that greeted Tom Merry, when he went to the wickets, and began to make mighty hits.

But when he walked off the cricket ground, the Housemaster's face was very thoughtful, and very sad. He looked for Cleeve; but his nephew was not to be seen, and Mr. Railton returned to his study at last, and his Latin papers—not in a happy mood.

CHAPTER 7.

Cardew Makes a Discovery!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW, of the St. Jim's Fourth, yawned dolorously.

Cardew was bored—a state in which he often found himself, or fancied that he found himself.

In this instance, Cardew's boredom was entirely due to

his own wilful waywardness; a fact of which he was well aware, for the faults of Cardew's character were clearer to no eyes than his own.

He was resting, after a ramble in the summer woods, on the stile in Rylcombe Lane, his hands in his pockets, and a cigarette in his mouth. The cigarette was not lighted; Cardew did not really want to smoke. He wanted to be playing cricket; and but for his waywardness, he would have been in the House match that afternoon, with the practical certainty of being picked for the big match with Greyfriars—a match in which Cardew was very keen to figure.

Now he had no more chance of playing in the St. Jim's junior team than in an England, eleven. Having refused to toe the line in the matter of games practice, Ralph Reckness Cardew had been unceremoniously dropped. Possibly he had supposed that Tom Merry would come round, and ask him to play—after having dropped him, for Cardew, who had shown wonderful form of late, was well aware of his value to the team. Tom Merry had done nothing of the sort—if Cardew had known him better, he would never have dreamed of Tom doing so. But he understood Tom's direct, straightforward nature as little as Tom understood the volatile waywardness of the dandy of the Fourth.

Cardew, sitting on the stile and chewing a cigarette—deriving from it nothing but a nasty taste in the mouth, which was not much in the way of comfort—realised that he had made a fool of himself. That was not by any means new knowledge to him; often enough he had done the same thing before, and realised it clearly. That season he had determined to shine at cricket, and he had started well—only to spoil the whole thing by thoughtless inconsistency. He was out of the House match, out of the Greyfriars match, and if he wanted to get into later House matches and School matches, he had to take the initiative—without being asked—to toe the line, and play up like any other fellow—which was very disagreeable to contemplate. Feeling inclined to kick himself, and still more inclined to kick Tom Merry, Cardew sat on the stile, chewed the cigarette, and yawned.

His lazy attention was attracted at last to a gipsy caravan that was trundling slowly up the road from the village. A man with a dark face walked beside the horse, smoking a cigar. A whiff of that cigar reached Cardew, and he raised his eyebrows a little. A tramping gipsy who smoked Havana cigars was rather a novelty. Cardew looked at the man with idle interest, and read the sly features, the shifty eyes, the cunning mouth. The man with the caravan did not buy half-crown cigars out of the profits of peddling the wares that could be seen in his van, that was certain. Some sort of a sneak-thief, with the caravan as cover for his real occupation—that was Cardew's conclusion.

The gipsy looked at him as the caravan came abreast of the stile, and grunted to the horse. The van came to a halt, and the gipsy touched his hat civilly to the well-dressed schoolboy on the stile.

Cardew gave him a nod. In his present state of boredom, he was ready to exchange talk with anybody, even that shifty-looking gipsy. It even occurred to him that, the lane being a lonely one, the gipsy might have some idea of relieving him of his watch and chain. That thought did not alarm Cardew in the least; he would rather have welcomed a scrap, as a relief from the monotony.

"Nice afternoon, sir," said the gipsy.

"Very!" agreed Cardew.

"I dessay you could tell me if I'm anywhere near the big school, sir?"

"Which?" asked Cardew lazily. "There are several about here. Rylcombe Grammar School is back there by the village—"

"It's called St. Jim's, sir," said the gipsy.

Cardew raised his eyebrows again. What interest this strolling vagabond could have in St. Jim's was beyond him.

"Right up the road," he answered. "Less than a mile to go, if you want to see St. Jim's."

"Thank you, sir!"

The gipsy, having gained the information he desired, did not, however, pass on. He stood smoking his cigar, and eyeing Cardew.

"I dessay you belong to St. Jim's, sir," he remarked at last.

"Right on the wicket," assented Cardew.

"Know a bloke there named Railton?"

Cardew started.

"My Housemaster's named Railton," he answered.

"That's it; he was a Housemaster, as they call it," assented the man. "Big bloke, fair hair, and something gammy about his arm, from a wound he got in the War."

"That's Railton," assented Cardew.

The man was silent again, smoking, but it was evident that he had more questions to ask. Cardew waited, with growing curiosity.

"Is your name Isaac Ives?" he asked suddenly.

It was the gipsy's turn to start.

"Yes, that's my name," he answered. "How did you know it, sir? I ain't seed you before that I know of."

Cardew laughed.

"A St. Jim's man took your photograph the other day with your van, on the Wayland road. Another chap destroyed the negative by accident, and Manners—that's the photographic chap—made a song and a dance about it that was heard all over the House. We haven't heard the end of it yet. Too bad that Manners is playing cricket to-day. He would be after you like a shot with his camera if he knew you were about."

"I remember that young gent," said the gipsy. "He stood me a bob to have my picture took. I didn't know he was a St. Jim's lad. So the picture was spoiled, was it?"

"Yes. Another chap trod on it in the printing-frame."

"Accident like?"

"Of course."

"What was the other bloke's name, sir, the one what trod on the photograph and spoiled it?"

Cardew stared at the man. "What does his name matter?" he answered.

"Only jest asking, sir."

Cardew did not reply. On a closer inspection of the gipsy he did not like his company, and wished to see him pass along on the road. But the gipsy showed no sign of intending to pass on.

"Was his name Cleeve, sir?" asked the man, as Cardew did not speak.

"How the thump did you know?" exclaimed Cardew, in astonishment.

The gipsy grinned.

"I thought as it might be," he answered. "I knowed that Mr. Railton was the uncle of a young gent named Cleeve, what was at a school in Norfolk. Jest 'appened to know it, sir, accidental-like. I thought Master Cleeve might have come to his uncle's school, when he left his own." Isaacs Ives grinned again. "So he trod on the picture, did he? Dear, dear!"

"Do you know Cleeve?" demanded Cardew, staring at the man.

"I've spoken to the young gentleman, sir," said Isaac Ives. "He was a civil-spoken young gent he was, and treated a man civilly, when he was at school in Norfolk, and I 'appened to be camping thereabouts."

Cardew eyed the man. Like many of the School House fellows, he was rather curious about Cleeve, and thought the worst of him for his secretiveness about his former school.

It was news to him that that school was in Norfolk. Cleeve had never even mentioned its locality. It was a far cry from Norfolk to Sussex; and St. Jim's men were not likely to come into contact with Cleeve's old schoolfellows, or to learn what had happened to him there, and why he had left. Cardew was tempted to gratify his curiosity by questioning the man; but he did not do so. He was incapable of such a shabby trick as worming out another fellow's secret unknown to him; and Cleeve, who was on bad terms with the whole House, had not particularly irritated Cardew. The dandy of the Fourth was quite indifferent to him.

"I'd like to speak to that young gentleman again, I would," went on Isaac Ives. "Course, you young gentlemen know all about his old school?"

"We know nothin' about his old school, and don't want to know," said Cardew curtly. "I hardly know the fellow, except by sight, and take no interest in him at all. Good-afternoon!"

That was a hint for Isaac Ives to be gone, but Isaac did not take the hint. He had finished his cigar now, and lo

lighted another from the glowing stump—a proceeding that made Cardew stare. Half-crown cigars apparently came cheaply to Mr. Ives, and his constitution must have been fairly tough to stand cigar-smoking to such an extent.

"I'd like to speak to that young gent," he said again.

"I've told you the way to the school, if you want to call on any St. Jim's man," said Cardew.

Isaac Ives grinned again.

"Am I the sort of bloke to butt in at a big school?" he asked. "No, sir, I ain't the cheek to do it."

"You look as if you've got cheek enough for anything."

"Well, I ain't, sir," said the gipsy. "I'm a modest bloke, I am, and wouldn't think of butting into Master Cleeve's noo school, among all the young gents, sir. And if I wrote him a letter, it might get into other 'ands instead of his'n."

How's a bloke to get in touch with 'im?"

"Ask me another."

"P'r'aps, sir, you'd be so kind as to give him a message from an old friend?" suggested Isaac Ives.

"And perhaps not," agreed Cardew. "You look such a nice man, Mr. Ives, that I'm sure my headmaster would be glad to know that you're a friend of a St. Jim's man. Still, I'd rather not act as go-between. If you want to see Cleeve, you'd better walk up to the gates and ask for him."

"That wouldn't do him any good, sir," argued Isaac Ives. "I shouldn't like to do the young gent any 'arm, sir, in his noo school. S'pose, when you see him agin, as no doubt you will this afternoon, you jest mention that his old gipsy acquaintances is camping in Ryelcombe Lane, and would be glad of a word when he can spare the time to walk along. No 'arm in that, sir."

"No," said Cardew slowly. "And it would be a good thing for Master Cleeve, sir, if you're a friend of his. It wouldn't do him any good for me to call at the school."

"I'm not a friend of his."

"Well, a schoolfeller, anyhow, sir. You wouldn't like a St. Jim's bloke to be took all aback, sir, afore a lot of fellers, by a bloke of my heft walking in and claiming him as an old friend."

Cardew looked fixedly at the man. There was a veiled threat in the man's words, though it was not directed towards Cardew. It was clear as noonday that this

man knew something of Victor Cleeve—knew the circumstances in which he had left his school in Norfolk. What did the fellow want with Cleeve? Obviously he had tracked him to St. Jim's, knowing that his uncle was a Housemaster there, and guessing that that would be Cleeve's refuge after being—as was fairly clear—turned out of his old school. The man could have only one motive—blackmail.

A glint came into Cardew's eyes.

"You'll do it, sir," said Isaac Ives persuasively. "Jest that little message, sir—no 'arm in that! Better for Master Cleeve than for me to butt into the school and see him there."

"No doubt," agreed Cardew.

"Then you'll tip him the wink—"

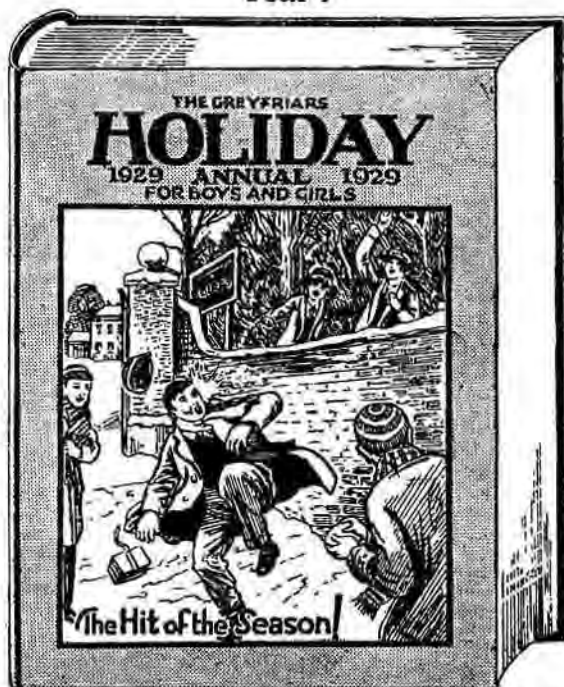
Cardew slid from the stile.

"No," he answered coolly. "I won't! I'll give no St. Jim's man any message from a man of your sort, Mr. Ives. Go and eat coke!"

And with that Ralph Reckness Cardew walked away towards the school, leaving the gipsy staring after him.

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surlily. Cardew had found an occupation for that boring afternoon at last. He was going back to St. Jim's to seek Cleeve—certainly not to deliver Isaac Ives' message, but to warn the new junior that the gipsy was in the neighbourhood. That good turn Cardew felt called upon to do Mr. Railton's nephew. Little as he liked Cleeve, he could see that Isaac Ives was a rascal, and a dangerous rascal, and he felt impelled to put the Housemaster's nephew on his guard.

But he did not need to go so far as the school to find Cleeve. A quarter of a mile from the spot where he had left the gipsy, he came on a moody, sulky junior loafing along the lane, with his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the ground. It was Cleeve of the Shell, and Cardew stopped and called to him.

CHAPTER 3.

Cardew's Tip!

VICTOR CLEEVE, that afternoon, was probably the most miserable fellow in the school or out of it.

He knew what the other fellows thought of him, and outwardly he opposed a cool disdain to their resentment and dislike. Inwardly, he was by no means at ease with himself.

If there was disdain in his face, there was shame in his heart, when he tramped off the cricket field, followed by hisses and boos. He had quarrelled with Tom Merry, he had fought with him; he had played him a scurvy trick in the cricket; yet at the bottom of his heart he liked him—as few fellows failed to do when they came in contact with Tom Merry.

In other circumstances, Cleeve would have welcomed Tom's friendship gladly; he would have entered heart and soul with him into his pursuits, which were his own at a happier period of his life. The Terrible Three, of the Shell, in whose study he had been placed, were the very fellows he would have picked out for his friends—he was as keen a cricketer as Tom, he made a hobby of photography like Manners, and he liked Monty Lowther's cheery, jesting ways. But between him and his study-mates there was a great gulf fixed.

It was not only that he was a Barcroft, and longed to be back at Barcroft. It was not only that at Barcroft he had been House captain, while at St. Jim's he was nobody in particular. These things counted; but not to the extent of making him act as he did. It was the fear of exposure—the haunting fear that St. Jim's might discover why he had left Barcroft, that placed him in an attitude of contemptuous defiance to his House.

If they knew—

His uncles had believed, without a doubt, that it was a great chance for the junior, whose prospects had been utterly ruined, to find a new opening at a school like St. Jim's; which, in spite of all Cleeve's half-affected swank, ranked at least equally with Barcroft.

His uncles had kept faith in him and stood by him; and Cleeve—in his reflective moments—realised that it was no light thing for a Housemaster to take into the school a relative who had been expelled from another school on a charge of theft. He knew that Mr. Railton must have used all his influence with the Head—he knew that Dr. Holmes must have hesitated long, before he acceded to the wishes of even so valued a colleague as Mr. Railton. He knew that the Head might have had a very uncomfortable interview with the Board of Governors, had they been aware of the circumstances. He was grateful; but the torments of his own thoughts gave him little leisure for indulging feelings of gratitude.

More than once, under the kindly influence of Study No. 10 in the Shell, he had been tempted to throw aside his attitude of reserve and disdain, to enter into the cheery life of the study, and of the House. But the thought always came—if the fellows knew! If they found that they had received, upon terms of friendship, a fellow who had been "bunked" from his school on a charge of dishonesty!

They would turn him down, as a matter of course—the study, the House, the school, would turn him down, and send him to Coventry. That danger impended over his head like the sword of Damocles of old—it might fall at any moment, or in his morbid brooding he fancied that it might. To be dropped like a hot coal was a prospect he could not tolerate. Better to make himself an outcast than to make friendships on such a precarious footing—a footing that might sink under his feet at any moment!

His own attitude had earned him dislike and contempt—and dislike and contempt provoked his resentment—so matters naturally went from bad to worse. But he would not have it otherwise.

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His Uncle Victor did not quite understand.

Nothing had been said publicly at Barcroft; but some knew. To Mr. Railton's mind, the danger of the facts coming to light at his new school was very remote. Cleeve, no doubt, exaggerated the danger.

Yet it was real, he knew that. The sight of Isaac Ives' evil face, in the photograph taken by Manners of the Shell, had given him a terrible shock. The man who had known him at Barcroft was near St. Jim's. Within a few miles of the school was the man who could have told St. Jim's everything. Cleeve had destroyed the photograph—instinctively. If the gipsy was simply passing by chance, if he had gone on his wandering way, no reminder of him would remain at the school now—no one there would know him by sight if he was seen about the lanes.

But had he gone on his way? Was it chance that had brought the man into Sussex? If he hung about the school, what then? It was a danger of which the Housemaster knew nothing, but which was very real to the mind of the unfortunate Shell fellow.

He was thinking of it, with a black and moody brow, when Cardew of the Fourth hailed him in the lane.

Cardew called to him cheerily enough; but Cleeve was in no mood for cordiality with any fellow. He stared blankly at the dandy of the Fourth in response to his hail.

Cardew did not heed his manner. Indeed, he was rather amused by Cleeve's sulky looks. Cardew himself had no doubt whatever that the fellow had been sacked from his former school, and that that was why he kept the name of the place a secret. But Ralph Reckness Cardew had a wide tolerance; and he was not forgetful of the fact that he had, himself, come dangerously near the "sack" at St. Jim's, more than once. If Cleeve had played the "giddy ox," and had come a cropper, Cardew was not the fellow to give him another shove.

"Takin' a little walk, what?" asked Cardew amicably.

"Yes."

"Not thrilled by the jolly old House match?" smiled Cardew. "Not rollin' up to Little Side to cheer the terrific Thomas?"

Cleeve did not answer.

"Not interested in Gussy's duck's eggs, or Figgy's mighty swipes, what?" asked Cardew.

"No."

"Same here," said Cardew genially. "I can see you're bored, old bean. I'm bored, too. What about borin' one another for a little while?"

"Rot!"

"Quite!" agreed Cardew. "I've heard that opinion of my conversation expressed before. Might be old Levison speakin'."

Cleeve moved on. He did not want Cardew's company, and he made that clear. Cardew coolly dropped into pace beside him.

"Like me to sheer off and let you alone?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Cleeve bluntly.

"Nothin' like puttin' it plain," said Cardew. "I like a fellow who hits out from the shoulder. I wonder if I should take it in the same way if I were bunked from school?" he added reflectively.

Cleeve stopped dead in the lane, and stared at Cardew.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked between his teeth.

"Just wonderin'," answered Cardew calmly. "It may interest you, or not, to learn that I've been jolly near the chopper once or twice. But for my worthy and rather borin' pal, Levison, buttin' in at the giddy psychological moment, I should have been sacked last term. I hardly think I should have got a second chance—Railton ain't my jolly old uncle, you know. I've got several uncles, and they love me dearly—more or less. But I can't see them standin' by me if I got the boot. Some fellows have all the luck, though they don't seem over-bucked by it."

Cleeve gave him a furious look.

"If you mean—"

"I mean what I say, old bean. I'm not girdin' at you," explained Cardew. "When I spotted the fact that you'd been bunked in your time, I said to myself, like the gent in the story—'There, but for jolly good luck, goes little me!' I've been near the edge. You've been over it. That's the only difference. Believe me, I don't think any the worse of you."

"How dare you hint—"

"Bless your little heart, I'm not hintin'—I'm talkin' right out!" drawled Cardew. "If ever I'm sacked, and I get another chance at another school, I shall take a tip from you. I shall do exactly the reverse of everythin' you're doin' at St. Jim's. See? Then I may get away with it all right."

Cleeve looked at him in silence. He understood well

enough that there was sound counsel conveyed under Cardew's bantering manner.

"But that isn't really why I stopped you," yawned Cardew. "I've another tip to give you, Cleeve."

"Keep it."

"Never could mind my own business," sighed Cardew. "Weakness of mine. Always like it. My present tip to you is this—take the first turnin' on the left if you're continuin' this pleasant little stroll."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. The first turnin' on the left leads towards the ancient, charmin', and picturesque village of Greenwood. There's an old church where Cromwell's troopers stabled their horses in days long gone by—in the Wars of the Roses—nunno, not the Wars of the Roses—some other jolly old war that amused our ancestors in their idle moments. There's a village green where they play cricket—what they call cricket—"

"Are you only a babbling fool, or do you mean anything?" asked Cleeve savagely.

"Both!" answered Cardew cheerfully. "I'm a babblin'

Cleeve's lips were quivering.

"No reason why I shouldn't pass the gipsy!" he muttered, "Why the deuce do you think—"

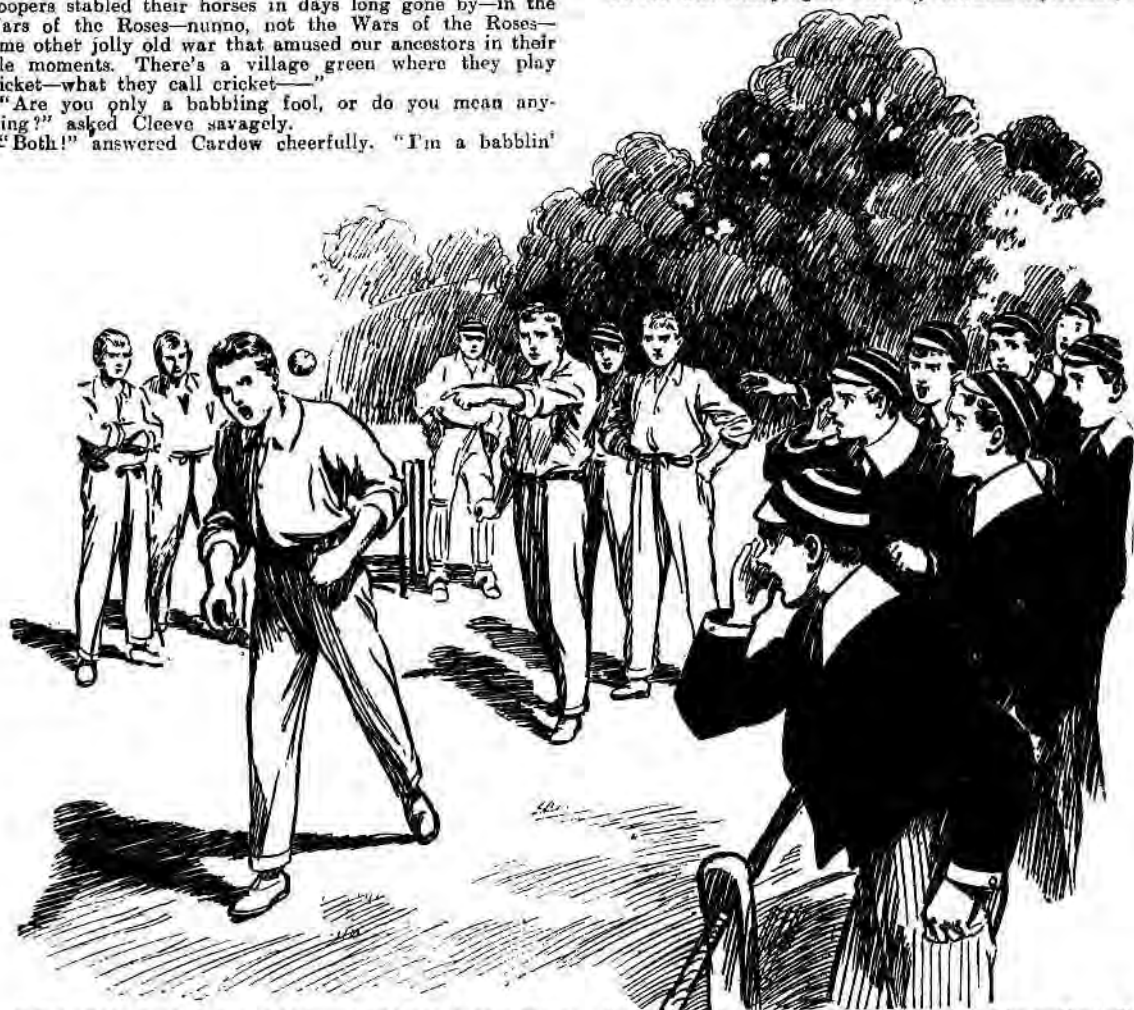
"Only my natural desire to keep a nice boy out of bad company!" said Cardew gravely. "But I see I'm borin' you, and I fear I must admit that you're beginnin' to bore me! Ta-ta!"

Cardew swung round and walked towards the school again.

Cleeve stared after him for a moment, and then resumed his way.

At a little distance Cardew glanced back.

Cleeve was tramping on steadily towards Rylcombe, but



"Get off the field—before I kick you off!" said Tom Merry. Hisses and jeers rang in his ears as he went, and Wally of the Third hurled an apple at the new boy. It caught him fairly on the back of his head. "Yah! Slacker! Rotter!" yelled D'Aroy minor. (See Chapter 6.)

fool, an' I mean somethin'. If you keep on by this road, you'll run into a shockin', shifty, disreputable, gipsy character, whom I wouldn't recommend any innocent lad to meet on a half-holiday."

Cleeve's face became deadly pale.

"A gipsy!" he repeated.

"Yes; not one of those nice gipsies you meet sometimes, but a very nasty-lookin' man, travellin' all on his own—which looks as if the other gipsies have found him bad company and turned him down. He rejoices in the uncommon name of Isaac Ives."

"Oh!" breathed Cleeve.

"* Came this way from Norfolk," drawled Cardew. "Seems to know a lot about old Railton and his relations. Talks too much, in my opinion. May bore you as he did me, if you keep on the way you're goin'. The only thing I can recommend about him is his taste in cigars; they're quite good, though rather hefty. If you enjoy a chat with disreputable characters, keep on! I like it myself sometimes. I talked to this man Ives, and now I'm talking to you! But if you'd rather keep clear, the first turnin' on the left leads to Greenwood, a jolly old Sussex village with lots of interestin' historical associations! Thought I'd mention it!"

as he neared the corner where the Greenwood lane branched off his steps became slower.

At the corner he stopped, hesitated, and then turned.

Cardew winked at the shady boughs over his head, as Cleeve turned into the lane to Greenwood and disappeared from sight.

Then he sauntered on lazily towards St. Jim's. He had done a good-natured thing, though he had done it in his own mocking manner, which was likely to evoke more resentment than gratitude. But to Cleeve's feelings on the subject Cardew was supremely indifferent, and he had almost forgotten the existence of the Housemaster's nephew when he strolled lazily in at the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

Tribulations of a Cricket Captain I.

TOM MERRY wondered whether he would hear anything more from his Housemaster on the subject of cricket and Cleeve.

He was relieved when he found that he did not. During the next two or three days Tom had plenty to

think of, and he most assuredly did not want to be bothered about Cleeve.

The Greyfriars match was close at hand now, and Tom was experiencing unusual difficulties in the matter of his team.

In the first place, Talbot of the Shell was gone from the school for the week, and he was lost to the eleven. In itself that was serious enough, for Talbot was a tower of strength to his side. Tom did not bless Colonel Lyndon for wanting his nephew's company just then. But it could not be helped, and there was, after all, plenty of good material in the Lower School at St. Jim's, with both Houses to choose from.

But Shakespeare has told us that when sorrows come, they come not as single spies, but in battalions.

Cardew was out of the eleven, and Tom, who had dropped him for good reasons, could not even think of asking him to come back again. Cardew at his best was a very good man indeed, and, especially in Talbot's absence, he would have been of great value. But his name had been taken out of the list, and Tom did not think of replacing it there.

In the House match on Saturday there had been good play on both sides. But Fatty Wynn, the mighty bowler, had had ill-luck. In a cricket match any fellow might get an accidental knock from a ball, but in the present circumstances it was simply frightful ill-luck for David Llewellyn Wynn to be crocked. He was the best junior bowler in either House at St. Jim's; even the most fervently patriotic School House man admitted that freely. Fatty Wynn had got a severe knock on his wrist, but there was not the remotest possibility that he would be able to bowl for St. Jim's against Greyfriars. Fatty had hopefully declared that, if Tom liked, he would do his best with his left; but the best that Fatty could do with his left was not exactly what was wanted for dealing with cricketers like Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars.

Talbot was one of the best junior bats and a good change bowler; Fatty Wynn was far and away the best bowler in the team or the school. The loss of both of them together was serious, added to the loss of Cardew. But even that was not all. Redfern of the New House had gone off colour—a thing that happens sometimes to the best of players. Even Figgins admitted that that particular New House man had better be given a rest so far as school matches were concerned.

Tom had hoped a good deal of Julian of the Fourth—a School House man—but Julian had not come on as expected. Manners of the Shell had been given a chance in the House match; Tom was keen and eager to play his chum in a school match if he could. But Manners, though he played a good, steady game, was not the stuff required to win school matches. He could have played the heads off the Greyfriars men at photography; at cricket they were more likely to play Manners' head off. Unless he was driven to it to fill up a place, he could not play Manners.

Tom Merry had a problem before him to solve, and his patience would have been strained to breaking-point had there been any more worry about Cleeve and his uncle's desire to see him figure in the school games.

Fortunately, Mr. Railton had dropped that subject.

He had dropped it quite suddenly. Doubtless the unfortunate incident in the House match had opened his eyes a good deal, and he had decided to let his precious nephew go his own way.

Tom Merry went over his list again and again, and shook his head over it.

It consisted of himself, Lowther, Kangaroo, Levison, Figgins, Kerr, Owen, Wilkins, Julian, D'Arcy, Blake.

It was a good team enough, and the best he could do in the circumstances. But Julian and Owen were weak spots, and Lowther and Wilkins were not of the form that Tom wanted. Julian and Owen in the places of Talbot and Fatty Wynn made a tremendous difference. And Cardew was worth as much as three of Wilkins of the Shell. Tom Merry's brow clouded with anger when he thought of that, but he did not think of asking Cardew. Indeed, as Cardew, apparently to display his lofty independence, had deliberately cut games practice except on compulsory days, when he yawned through it, it was probable that he was very far from being at his best now, and it was only when he was at his best that he was wanted to play for school.

No good cricket captain ever envisages defeat; but Tom Merry could not help thinking that if Harry Wharton & Co. did not win that match, it was time they took thought at Greyfriars on the subject.

In Study No. 10 there was much "cricket jaw" these days. Cleeve, when he was in his study, heard it all without joining in it.

Undoubtedly he knew how matters stood, and was aware of the difficulties that beset the junior cricket captain. But he seemed to take not the slightest interest in the matter, and Tom never thought of speaking to him on the subject.

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Tom's chums were as helpful as they could be. Monty Lowther promised to play the game of his life, but Tom feared that the game of Lowther's life would not make much impression on Greyfriars. Manners could only suggest that he—Manners—should be played instead of some New House dud—which really was not very helpful.

When Levison of the Fourth dropped in, as the four Shell fellows were finishing prep one evening, with a grave look on his face, Tom Merry almost glared at him.

"Don't tell me anything's happened to you, Levison!" he said. "I can't spare another man from the team!"

Ernest Levison smiled faintly.

"I'm all right," he answered. "Nothing's happened to me that I know of."

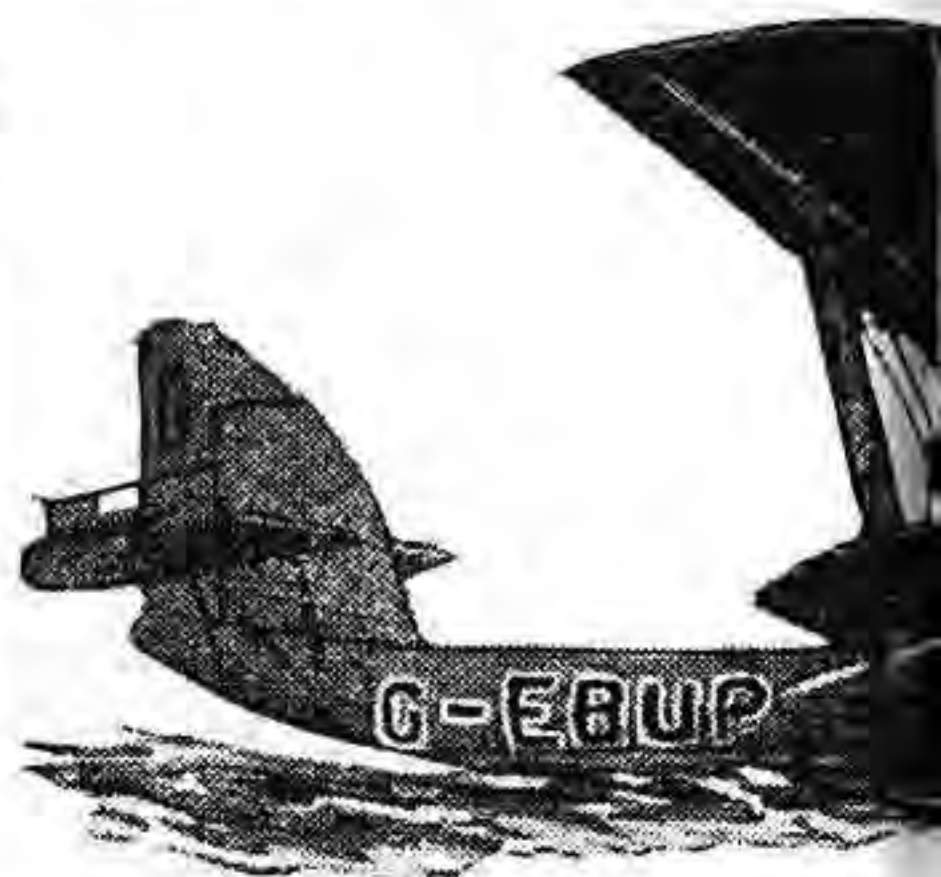
"Good! What's the trouble, then?"

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"There isn't any trouble—"

"You look as if there was. But never mind—so long as it's nothing to do with the cricket."

"The fact is, I came in to speak to you about the cricket," said Levison. "What about Cardew?"

Tom Merry frowned.

"Nothing about Cardew!" he answered briefly.

"He's keen enough to play."

"I shouldn't have thought so, by his cutting games practice!" answered Tom dryly. "He was told plainly that if he cut Little Side, he would be chucked! He's chucked, and that's that!"

"We want to beat Greyfriars!" said Levison, rather unpleasantly.

"Cardew couldn't help us do that! He's hardly touched a bat for more than a week!"

"I believe he's in very good form."

"Your believing so isn't quite enough, old bean," answered Tom. "Cardew had his chance and chucked it away. Let it drop."

"We're going to bag a licking, at this rate," muttered Levison. "The team is weak enough, without leaving out a good man who's willing to play."

"We're leaving out a bad man who may not be willing to play," said Tom. "I'm more than fed up with Cardew"

and his cheek. If he wanted to play for the school, he knew the terms. I've got trouble enough getting a team together, without arguing with fellows who refuse to turn up at the nets."

Levison looked obstinate. Generally he was in agreement with his captain; but the claims of his wayward chum seemed to influence him now.

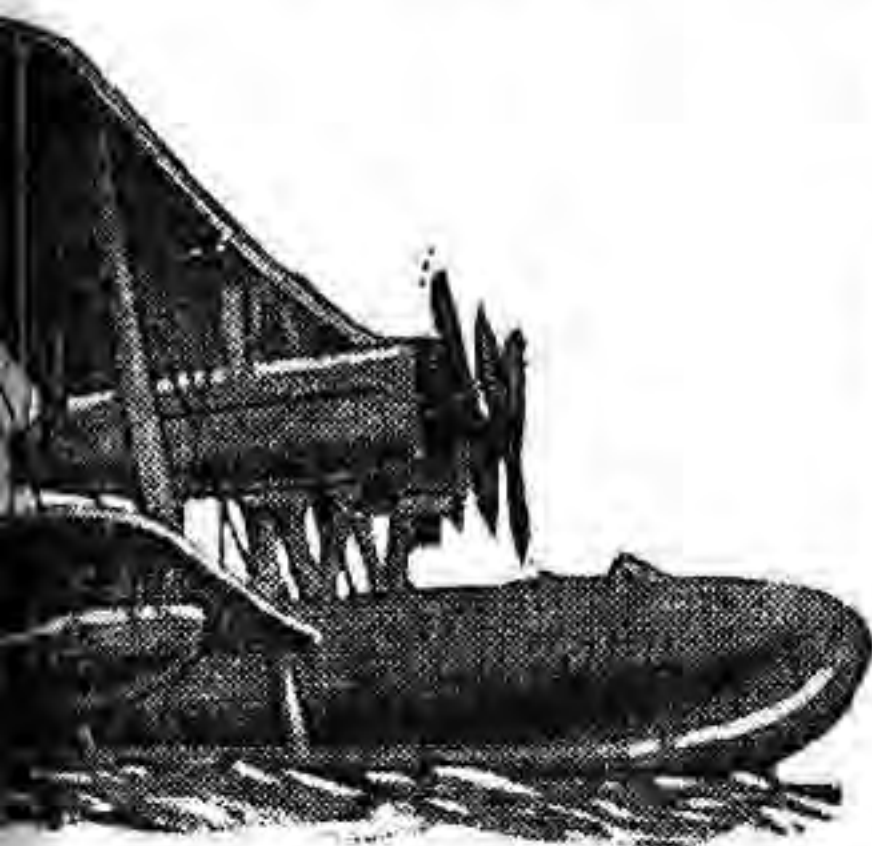
"Well, you're chucking the match away," he said. "I suppose it's rather unlucky for Cardew that he's not a House-master's nephew. Then he could play in matches without putting in any practice."

"That's not fair, Levison," said Tom quietly. "You know how I was fixed when I put Cleeve in the House match."

Cleeve looked up from his prep, and looked down again at once, without making any remark.

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"Cardew feels this," said Levison. "He's not keen on butting in, but he would like to help the school win."

"He can't help the school win, after letting himself get rusty. Let it drop," said Tom impatiently.

Levison left the study without another word. Cleeve glanced rather curiously across the table at Tom Merry, and seemed about to speak. But he did not speak, and prep was resumed in Study No. 10 in silence.

When prep was over, Tom Merry had a word to say to Mr. Railton's nephew.

"Games practice at three-thirty to-morrow, Cleeve," he said.

Cleeve looked at him.

"What's the good of games practice to a fellow who doesn't play?" he answered.

"That's got nothing to do with it. It's a compulsory practice for all juniors in the House," said Tom. "Kildare of the Sixth will be in charge."

"He won't want me."

"Understand me, Cleeve," said Tom. "I've been ragged by Railton once for letting you off. I'm not taking another jawing from old Railton on that subject. You'll turn up to-morrow or take the consequences."

"Thanks—I'll take them," said Cleeve.

"It will mean a prefects' beating."

"I hope I may survive it."

Tom Merry left the study with Manners and Lowther, without replying. He felt that if he had many more words with Victor Cleeve, he would punch the fellow's head; and as that would serve no useful purpose, Tom left the sulky and obstinate fellow to himself.

CHAPTER 10.

Man Missing!

KILDARE of the Sixth looked over the swarm of juniors on Little Side, the following afternoon. The School House men had turned up almost to the last man. Even Baggy Trimble of the Fourth, and Racke of the Shell, had not ventured to attempt to dodge a practice which was under the official charge of the captain of the school. Probably, among so many fellows, Kildare did not miss the one absentee; Cleeve of the Shell. Possibly, however, he did. At all events, he called to Tom Merry.

"All here, Merry?"

"All but one," answered Tom.

"Well!"

"It's Cleeve."

"Is he excused?"

"No."

Kildare frowned.

"Why hasn't he turned up, then?"

"I don't know."

"As he's new here, Merry, you might as well have given him the tip on the subject."

"I did," said or rather snapped, Tom Merry. He was getting tired of raggings on the subject of Victor Cleeve.

Kildare's frown deepened. He concluded that Cleeve supposed that he could do as he liked, because he was a relative of the Housemaster. If that was Victor Cleeve's view, Kildare did not intend to leave him to it.

"Well, go and fetch him, Merry," he said. "I shall take charge here—you can cut off and bring Cleeve."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I had a scrap with him about the same thing, on Saturday, Kildare," he said. "I don't want to scrap with Railton's nephew if I can help it."

"You're not to scrap with him, you young ass. Tell him that if he doesn't come to Little Side with you, he will be up for a prefects' beating."

"I told him that yesterday."

Kildare's eyes glinted.

"And he's cut practice all the same? Well, go and find him, and take a couple of fellows with you. If he won't come, yank him along by the ears."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"Don't come back without him," added Kildare.

And he turned away, leaving it at that.

Tom Merry stood red and uncomfortable. But there was no help for it, and he called to Manners and Lowther.

"You fellows come?"

"Like a bird!" said Lowther.

"I'll take one of his cheeky ears with pleasure," said Manners.

The Terrible Three left the cricket field, and went back to the House. Cleeve was not to be seen in the House.

They rooted in the study, in the games room, up and down the passages, but there was no sign of Cleeve of the Shell.

"He must have gone out of gates," remarked Manners.

"Just what he would do, to get clear."

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"What the thump are we going to do?" he demanded.

"If he's gone out of gates, he may be anywhere."

"Kildare told you not to come back without him," said Manners.

"I know he did; but I suppose I'm not going to track the fellow up and down the lanes all the afternoon!" exclaimed Tom savagely.

The three juniors looked at one another. Kildare, the captain of the school, had to be obeyed, and he had said distinctly that Tom Merry was not to return to Little Side without the truant.

"By Jove!" said Tom, drawing a deep breath. "I'm more than fed up with Cleeve. I suppose I've got to go after him, after what Kildare said."

"Let's!" said Lowther.

"I might take my camera!" remarked Manners thoughtfully.

"What?" roared Tom.

"I heard Trimble of the Fourth say that he'd seen a gipsy hanging about the lanes," said Manners. "Most likely it's that fellow Ives, that I photographed last week. You remember that idiot Cleeve ruined the negative, shoving his clumsy hoof in it in the printing-frame. Well, if we're going rooting about the lanes after Cleeve, we may

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happen on the chap, and it won't take me long to get another picture. I'd really like one. See?"

Monty Lowther grinned. He found the expression on Tom Merry's face quite entertaining at that moment.

"Blow your camera!" exclaimed Tom, at last. "For goodness' sake, Manners, give us a rest from that camera."

"Look here, you ass—"

"Come on, fathead; we're going after that rotter Cleeve, not after rotten photographs."

"Oh, rats!" said Manners crossly.

But he followed his chum without taking his beloved camera. The chums of the Shell stopped at the gates to speak to Taggles, and from the porter they learned that Cleeve had gone out a quarter of an hour ago. Taggles thought he had gone towards Rylcombe; so the Shell fellows followed the lane to the village.

"It's really too bad!" exclaimed Manners, suddenly.

"What is?" grunted Tom.

"Look!"

Manners pointed to a gipsy caravan, camped in the field belonging to Mr. Pepper, just off the lane. The gipsy was not to be seen; but the caravan was there, the horse grazing near it.

"What about that?" asked Tom. "Only a gipsy van."

"It's Ives' van. If I'd brought my camera, I could have got my picture after all," said Manners reproachfully. "The man will be somewhere about, as his van's there."

"Blow the man, blow his van, and blow your picture!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Let's root after that cad Cleeve, and drag him along to St. Jim's."

"Look here, Tom—"

"Can't you think of anything but cameras?" demanded Tom, in exasperation.

"Can't you think of anything but cricket?" grunted Manners.

"Fathead!"

"Same to you, and many of them!"

"Peace, my infants, peace!" said Monty Lowther soothingly. "Let's get on—save your breath for the hunt."

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

The Shell fellows tramped on up the lane; and the expression on Tom Merry's face told quite plainly what Victor Cleeve had to expect, when he was found. But it was in rather unexpected circumstances that the Terrible Three found Victor Cleeve.

CHAPTER 11.

Face to Face!

"GLAD to see you, sir!" Victor Cleeve started violently.

There was a mocking tone in the gipsy's voice; mockery in his salute as he touched his ragged hat.

Cleeve came to a dead stop.

He had not been thinking of the gipsy just then. Since he had received the warning from Cardew, Cleeve had not been out of gates again, until this day. He had feared to receive some message from the gipsy; but no message had come, and he had concluded at last that it was by chance that Isaac Ives' wandering footsteps had led him through Sussex into the neighbourhood of St. Jim's. He believed, or tried hard to believe, that the man's presence near the school had no connection with himself, and that Ives had gone on his way.

This meeting undeceived him.

The colour deserted his face as he looked at the gipsy.

"You!" he muttered.

"Ain't you glad to see an old friend, Master Cleeve?" grinned Isaac. "All the pleasure on my side, what?"

"What are you doing here?" asked Cleeve hoarsely.

"Peddling with my van, sir, earning an honest living," answered Ives, with a grin. "Jest the same that I used to do when you knew me in Norfolk."

"You knew I was here?"

Isaac Ives grinned broadly. "I knowed your uncle was Housemaster in a school here," he answered. "I put two and two together, sir, and thought I'd look you up."

Cleeve clenched his hands.

"You knew I never wanted to see you again?" he muttered. "You knew that? What have you followed me for?"

"Never wanted to see an old pal?" asked Mr. Ives reproachfully. "That's 'ard 'earing, sir. You was very friendly at Barcroft."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,071.

"Righted At Last!"

By
Martin Clifford.

This is the title of next week's grand long complete story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's. Victor Cleeve, the School Housemaster's nephew, has been causing more than a sensation at the school since his arrival, and in this story he surprises the natives still more.

See that you do not miss this corking long school story next Wednesday!

"Nothing of the kind," said Cleeve fiercely. "I was a fool ever to have spoken to you. But for you I might never have had to leave Barcroft. If I hadn't come down to speak to you that night they would never have connected me with what happened—never have suspected me—" He broke off sharply.

"Of what, sir?" asked Ives.

"Nothing," muttered Cleeve.

"You was caught out of your dormitory that night, was you, sir?" asked the gipsy, eyeing Cleeve curiously.

"Yes," muttered Cleeve.

"And you left the next day, sir, as I learned from some of the other young gentlemen," said Isaac. "It was very sudden, sir."

"No business of yours."

"I wondered why you left, sir," said Isaac coolly. "I thought that p'raps you'd done something that night, as well as speak to a gipsy bloke at a winder with a message from another bloke. What did you do?"

"Nothing!" hissed Cleeve.

"You was expelled for doing nothing?" asked Isaac derisively.

"How dare you say I was expelled?"

"Oh, come off!" said Isaac. "Fellers don't leave Barcroft so suddenly and go to another school for nothing. Some of the young gents knew, too. It was said all through the school that you was expelled, though they didn't know why. I jest wondered to myself, sir, whether you'd 'elped yourself to something that didn't rightly belong to you when you was down that night." And the shifty rascal grinned in Cleeve's face.

Cleeve's face was as white as chalk.

"You—you thought that?" he muttered.

"I did, sir."

"You must have got some hint from some of the fellows—some of the fools who consorted with you," hissed Cleeve. "You could never have guessed such a thing for yourself."

"Then that was the way of it, sir, was it?"

"No, you fool! But they thought—" Cleeve broke off again. It was clear that the gipsy knew much; but Cleeve did not intend to tell him more than he knew. "Look here, Isaac Ives. I want nothing to do with you. I never had anything to do with you on my own account, and you know it. What have you followed me here for?"

"Jest for the pleasure of seeing you agin, sir," grinned Isaac. "And I own up I thought you might 'elp a bloke on his way."

"Blackmail!" muttered Cleeve.

"That's a 'ard word, sir."

"Do you think I will give you money?" said Cleeve between his teeth. "Why should I? Whatever you know of what happened at Barcroft, you can do me no harm there—I've left for good. I'm not afraid of you!"

His looks belied his words as he spoke.

"If you ain't 'feared of a bloke, sir, no 'arm done," said Isaac coolly. "But if you ain't told your new school why you left your old school, mebbe you ain't told them because you don't want them to know. Not that I'd think of giving a gentleman away, sir, so long as he treated me like a gentleman."

Cleeve panted for breath.

"They know at St. Jim's that I've left another school. They know nothing else. What else can you tell them—what else do you dare to tell them?"

"Oh, cut it out, sir!" said Isaac. "Cut it out! You don't want your new school to know that you was expelled from Barcroft for stealing. You wouldn't stay at St. Jim's long if they knew that."

Cleeve stared at him almost wildly.

He had feared the gipsy, feared him, because the man had known him at school in Norfolk, and might guess or surmise why he had left Barcroft. But it was not guessing or surmising on Isaac's part—he knew! It was worse than Cleeve had feared—worse than he had dreamed! This shifty, cunning-eyed rascal knew that he had been expelled for theft; knew enough to expose him to the scorn and contempt of his new school. He knew enough to drive Cleeve from St. Jim's, as he had been driven from Barcroft.

For if the facts came out, the Housemaster's faith in his nephew, the Head's regard for the Housemaster would not

serve. If the school knew why he had left Barcroft, he could not remain at St. Jim's.

He did not want to remain—if there had been any other refuge for him. But there was no other. He was dissatisfied, discontented, rebellious; but his chance at St. Jim's was all he had left. If they knew—

He had made no friend; no friend to turn from him with averted looks. But he had made many enemies—enemies whose contempt would sting him to the very soul—when they knew.

The torment in the unhappy boy's face might have moved the heart of a savage. Even Isaac seemed to feel a little compunction.

"Don't you be afeared, sir," he said. "I ain't giving an old friend away. I'm glad you've 'ad good luck, sir, getting another chance like this. I know 'ow to keep my mouth shut, sir. Don't you be afeared."

"Will you go?" muttered Cleeve hoarsely.

"This 'ere neighbourhood suits me," answered Isaac. "I can make something at Abbottsford now the racing's on. I can pick up a little 'ere and there. I dessay you could manage a quid occasional for an old friend. You never was short of money. If you was, I'm the man to sell anything in the way of a gold watch or a tie-pin to the best advantage. What about a fiver to-day, sir, to go on with?"

Isaac had come out into the open at last.

Cleeve's answer was unexpected.

Perhaps the very desperation of his position gave him courage, or roused him to uncontrollable rage. Instead of replying, he made a spring at the gipsy, and his clenched fist was planted full in Isaac's evil face.

Crash!

Isaac Ives went down on his back in the dusty lane, with a yell.

"That for you, you cur!" panted Cleeve.

The gipsy was on his feet with a spring like a tiger, his shifty eyes ablaze with rage. Blood was streaming from his mouth, where Cleeve's fierce blow had landed. He sprang furiously at the schoolboy, and Cleeve struggled wildly in the gipsy's grip, under a shower of blows.

It was at that moment that three Shell fellows of St. Jim's came round a bend in the lane.

They stared blankly at the startling scene.

Tom Merry & Co. had found Cleeve!

But at the sight of the junior struggling in the grasp of the ruffianly gipsy, they quite forgot their intentions towards him.

"Pile in!" shouted Tom.

And the Terrible Three came up with a rush, and Isaac Ives, grasped in three pairs of hands, went to the ground with a terrific crash, and Victor Cleeve staggered against a tree, panting for breath.

CHAPTER 12.

Mysterious!

TOM MERRY & CO. released the gipsy, leaving him sprawling breathlessly in the dust of the lane. They turned to Cleeve.

He was staggering against the tree by the roadside, breathless and bewildered.

"We seem to have come along just in time," remarked Tom.

Cleeve did not speak. The gipsy was sitting up in the dusk, his dark face convulsed with rage.

The fear of what he might say struck the Housemaster's nephew with a chill like ice. The ruffian had been handling him severely; but he wished that the St. Jim's fellows had not come up.

"It—it's all right!" he panted, almost wildly. "You—you needn't stop. I'm not afraid of the man!"

Tom stared at him.

"We're not likely to leave you alone with that ruffian!" he answered.

"Trying to rob you?" asked Monty Lowther. "If that was it, we'll collar him and run him along to the police station."

"No, no!" panted Cleeve.

"It's the man I photographed the other day," said Manners. "I told you he looked rather a bandit. Footpad, I suppose."

The gipsy, gasping for breath, gave Cleeve a deadly look. He staggered to his feet, still gasping.

"Ands off!" he said. "I ain't touching 'im again! You young fellers belong to his school, I s'pose?"

"Yes, you rascal!" snapped Tom.

"Then you'll be interested to 'ear something about him!" said Isaac Ives, with a snarl.

Cleeve made a movement.

"Hold your tongue!" he panted.

"I ain't 'olding my tongue!" retorted Isaac. "You 'it

a bloke in the face, you young 'ound, and then ask him to 'old his tongue! Not likely!"

"What on earth does this mean?" asked Lowther, staring from one to the other. "What's the game, Cleeve?"

"You fellows get out!" said Cleeve harshly. "I never asked you to interfere here! Leave me alone!"

"With that footpad?" exclaimed Manners.

"He's not a footpad! You don't understand!"

"I certainly don't!" said Manners dryly.

Isaac Ives sneered.

"The young gent's asked you to clear out," he said. "Can't you take 'im at his word? Leave him alone, and mind your own business!"

Tom Merry looked at him and looked at Cleeve. He remembered the episode of the negative Cleeve had destroyed—apparently by an accident, which Tom and Lowther knew was no accident. This was the man whose shifty, sly face had been in the photograph. The captain of the Shell realised that there must be something between Cleeve and the outcast gipsy, though he did not know what it was, and did not want to know what it was.

"Will you go?" breathed Cleeve. "Let me alone! I know the man, if you want to know; we had a row. No business of yours! Leave me alone!"

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"We'll leave you alone fast enough," he said. "We chipped in because that ruffian was knocking you about. But you've got to come back to the school. Kildare sent us to fetch you in."

"I—I can't come now!"

"You must!"

"I won't!" shouted Cleeve.

"You will!" answered Tom Merry. "If you don't come back quietly you'll be taken by force, and you can make your choice about that. And we've got no time to waste, either."

"This young gent is having a talk with me," said Isaac.

Tom turned on him fiercely.

"You shut up!" he snapped.

"Look 'ere—"

"Hold your tongue, you rascal, or we'll pitch you into the ditch!" exclaimed Tom, his eyes flashing.

And Isaac backed away and was silent, though his eyes gleamed like a rat's.

"Now come, Cleeve," said Tom. "If you know this shady rotter, that's your business, and not mine; but you're coming back to the school now."

Cleeve caught Isaac's threatening look. The colour had died out of his face, and he was almost haggard. In his rage and resentment he had struck the blackmailer, but he had already repented that hasty blow. He could not afford to quarrel with Isaac Ives.

"I must speak to this man before I go!" he muttered hoarsely.

"Rubbish!"

"I must, I tell you!" panted Cleeve.

"Well, get it over, then—sharp!"

"The dear boy doesn't want us to hear," remarked Monty Lowther sarcastically. "I, for one, don't want to know anything about his little secrets."

"We've wasted enough time," said Manners.

"Cleeve, you've got to come!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Give me a couple of minutes!" said Cleeve huskily. "I—I tell you I must speak to him!"

"Something we're not to hear?" snapped Tom.

"Yes!" breathed Cleeve.

"Two minutes, then!" said Tom curtly. "Come away, you fellows, this fellow makes me sick!"

The Terrible Three moved away a little distance and waited there impatiently.

(Continued on next page.)



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What secret there might be between the gipsy and the Housemaster's nephew they did not know or care; but the whole scene filled them with disgust. Cleeve was a St. Jim's man, and he was almost cringing in fear of that disreputable outcast. And this was the nephew of their Housemaster—the fellow with whom Mr. Railton had desired them to make friends.

Tom bit his lip as he waited. Cleeve had approached the gipsy, and was speaking in a low voice, of which not a murmur reached the Terrible Three.

They were not actually watching him, but they had more than an impression that money passed—Cleeve was giving the man money! He was giving money to the man under whose savage blows he had been struggling when the Shell fellows had rushed to the rescue.

Isaac touched his hat with a mocking leer, and slouched away, and Cleeve was left alone in the lano.

Tom Merry called to him:

"Time's up!"

Cleeve started and nodded, and slowly joined the Terrible Three. They walked towards St. Jim's together.

Mystified and disgusted as they were, the Shell fellows could not help feeling a little touched by the white misery in Cleeve's face. Never had they seen any fellow look so utterly down on his luck. All his swank, all his lofty pride, seemed to have deserted him now.

In uncomfortable silence the juniors reached the school. There Cleeve broke his silence at last.

"You fellows are not going to talk about this, I suppose?" he muttered.

"Of course not!" said Tom curtly.

"It's not as you may suppose—"

"We're not supposing anything, except that you're disgracing the school you belong to!" answered Tom.

Cleeve winced.

"Look here, Cleeve," said Tom, with some compunction. "I don't want to know anything about your affairs, but you're getting yourself into trouble, that's quite plain. You're afraid of that man—that disreputable vagrant and rogue. If he's got some hold on you, your uncle is the man to help you. Go straight to Railton and tell him!"

"That's jolly good advice," said Manners.

Cleeve shook his head.

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"My uncle couldn't help me. It would only be landing the trouble on him, and he's had enough trouble on my account already," muttered Cleeve. "You don't understand. Railton couldn't do anything. I've been a fool, and I've got to suffer for it. What's the good of shoving it on my uncle, too?"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"So long as you fellows don't jaw—"

"We shan't jaw. Come on! We've got to get back to the cricket! You've got to change!"

"Pull yourself together," added Lowther. "Every man on Little Side will see that something's up if you go there looking like that."

Cleeve nodded. He went in with the Terrible Three, and they waited while he changed.

It was all very well for Monty to tell him to pull himself together; but that was beyond the power of the Housemaster's nephew. He was looking white and almost ill when he came down to the cricket ground with the Shell fellows. Kildare strode across to them at once.

"Cleeve!" He fixed his eyes on the Housemaster's nephew. "Why, what's the matter with you? Aren't you well?"

"I don't feel well!" muttered Cleeve.

The anger faded out of Kildare's face.

"You certainly don't look well," he said. "If you'd told Merry you were seedy, you'd have been let off games practice. Go back to the House at once. You're not fit to be here."

And games practice on Little Side, after all, went on without Cleeve.

CHAPTER 13.

A Surprise for Tom Merry!

TOM MERRY ran his fingers through his curly hair, and almost glared at the paper on the table before him.

Dusk was falling on the old quad of St. Jim's.

Manners and Lowther had gone down after tea, and Tom Merry was left alone in the study. Cleeve had not "tea'd" with the Terrible Three; they had not seen him since Kildare had sent him away from Little Side. Tom Merry, in point of fact, had forgotten his existence. Tom was having a final wrestle with the problem of the eleven that

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was to face Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars on the morrow.

He was not looking happy over it.

He was not satisfied with his team, and was not likely to be satisfied with it. With his best batsman and his best bowler gone, and other difficulties to contend with, the junior captain of St. Jim's felt that he was up against it. He had watched all the fellows keenly at games practice, in the hope of discovering new talent for the junior eleven, and he had been disappointed.

Levison had once more asked him to give Cardew a chance; but even if Tom had thought of it, it was futile now, for at games practice Cardew had been obviously off his form. Tom had to make the best of the eleven as it stood, and it was not a team that he could reasonably expect to beat Greyfriars—unless the glorious uncertainty of the great game of cricket came to the rescue. And Tom very much wanted to win that match.

The study door opened, and Tom glanced up rather impatiently. It was Victor Cleeve who came in.

Tom dropped his glance again at once. He had nothing to say to Cleeve.

The new junior moved about the study in a rather restless way. Had Tom been less occupied with his thoughts he would probably have noticed that the Housemaster's nephew desired to speak, and was uncertain about how to begin. But Tom was thinking of anything but Cleeve, and he almost forgot that the fellow was in the room at all.

Cleeve came to a stop at last, and stood facing the captain of the Shell across the table. His cheeks were flushed.

"I wanted to speak to you, Merry," he said awkwardly.

"Another time," said Tom.

"Another time won't do."

"Must do!" said Tom shortly.

"Oh, very well!" said Cleeve, in a low voice—a voice so full of despondency that Tom glanced at him quickly.

The change from Cleeve's usual manner of sneering arrogance was very marked. Tom's heart smote him at once. The fellow was in deep waters, he knew; and if a fellow was in trouble, Tom was the man to be as considerate as he could.

"Hold on, Cleeve," he said, as the Housemaster's nephew was moving to the door. "It's all right. I'm a bit bothered about the cricket to-morrow, that's all. What did you want to say?"

Cleeve turned back to him.

"Only a few words!" he muttered.

"Go ahead."

"About what happened to-day," said Cleeve. "I'm not going to tell you anything. You don't want to hear it. Only—I'd like to tell you this much—that man you saw has got a hold over me, but it's not my fault. I've never done anything in my life to be ashamed of—nothing that I'd be afraid to let all St. Jim's know. But you know—I suppose all the place knows—that I was in trouble at my last school?"

Tom smiled faintly.

"I fancy all St. Jim's knows that, one way or another," he said. "You seem to have done your best to give that impression yourself."

"Well, I was in trouble," said Cleeve, in a low voice. "I had to leave. It was not my fault."

Tom made no reply to that.

"You don't believe me?" asked Cleeve.

"I suppose it doesn't matter much to you whether I believe you or not?" answered Tom.

"Well, it does," said Cleeve. "I can see that I went the wrong way to work when I came here—a fellow gave me that tip, and, thinkin' it over, I could see that he was right! Only—if you'd suffered for something you never did, Tom Merry, I dare say you'd get nerry and savage, and—take offence more easily than you do now."

"Very likely," agreed Tom. "But that's rather thick, Cleeve. A fellow doesn't have to get out of his school for nothing!"

"I know!"

"Well, then—" said Tom.

"I admit I was a fool—acted like a fool!" said Cleeve. "Then something unexpected happened—something I knew nothing at all about—and it was landed on me. I suppose you can't swallow it?"

Tom made a little grimace.

"It wants some swallowing," he remarked.

"I know it does. But my uncle, Railton, believes me. Otherwise he would never have had me here."

"Something in that," said Tom, "only uncles mayn't see the matter as clearly as fellows who aren't related. On your own showing, your headmaster turned you out."

"Yes," said Cleeve.

There was a long pause.

"Well, I wanted to tell you that," said Cleeve at last. "I've got nothing more to tell you. Only I'd like you to believe that much. I shan't mention the matter again."



"St. Jim's wins!" "Well bowled, Cleeve!" "Bravo!" The juniors surged round Cleeve and thumped him on the back and jabbed him in the ribs. Nobody at that moment would have supposed that Victor Cleeve was the most unpopular fellow in the school. (See Chapter 15.)

But—"he paused. "You're hard up for a man for your eleven to-morrow."

"Yes," said Tom.

"I'll play if you like."

Tom Merry gave him a stare.

"Thanks!" he said dryly. "I'm not asking for offers from men that I've never seen handle a bat or a ball."

"I played cricket for my school—I was junior captain of cricket. I've done no practice since I've been here, I know; but I'm in good form. I got some games at Abbotsford, while I was staying there with my Uncle Maurice. But I'm not asking you to take me at my own valuation. You can consult Railton."

Tom Merry whistled softly. He remembered what the Housemaster had told him—that Cleeve was as good a man as Talbot of the Shell. Railton knew what he was talking about. The fellow had been exasperating enough, and Tom had become more than fed-up with him. But that did not alter the fact that he was, according to the games-master of St. Jim's, a first-class man at the game—and Railton knew! Cleeve stood waiting.

"I'm not claiming to play, of course," he said. "I don't mean that at all. You've got a weak team for a big match. I think I could help you out. I'll do it if you say the word. That's all."

Tom wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Railton says you're a fit nuan to play for School," he said. "He knows, of course. It's rather unfortunate that I've never seen you play."

"I'm sorry. I know I've made mistakes here."

"Well, that's all right if you can see it," said Tom. "But, dash it all, what will the fellows say if I play you after what you did in the House match?"

Cleeve's face crimsoned.

"I did a rotten thing," he said. "I know it. You needn't rub it in."

"I don't want to rub it in. But there it is," said Tom.

"You had to be shoved off the ground on Saturday, and if I play you to-morrow—"

"I suppose it's not easy," said Cleeve.

"You've made it hard," answered Tom.

"I know."

Tom Merry looked very curiously at the Housemaster's nephew. It was obvious that a change had come over Victor Cleeve, and Tom could not quite understand it. He was quite perplexed. But if the fellow realised that he had started badly at St. Jim's and wanted to take a new line, Tom was the man to give him a chance.

His own anger and resentment had faded away. And he could not help thinking what this would mean for the St. Jim's junior eleven if Cleeve really was a first-class man at the game, as Railton believed.

Tom would be justified in playing Cleeve on the Housemaster's judgment. But, he knew that there would be trouble with the other fellows. Cleeve had made himself thoroughly unpopular in both Houses at St. Jim's, and in cricket especially he had provoked condemnation and contempt. A storm was likely to burst upon Tom's head if Victor Cleeve's name was posted in the list for the Greyfriars match.

Tom thought it over slowly and carefully, while Cleeve stood in silence, watching him.

"It's a go," said Tom at last. "I'll speak to Railton and ask him, and if he says yes, your name goes down. But"—he paused uneasily—"I can rely upon you, I suppose! You're not going to let me down?"

"I suppose I deserve that," said Cleeve. "I give you my word, if that's any good to you, that you can rely on me and that I'm not going to let you down."

"Done!" said Tom.

And ten minutes later Tom Merry tapped at the door of Mr. Railton's study. His interview with the School House master, apparently, was satisfactory, for when the cricket

list was posted up in the games-room that evening the name of Julian was absent from it, and in the place of that name appeared one that took the whole House by surprise—"V. Cleeve."

CHAPTER 14.

Tom Merry Means Business!

"WOTTEN!"

"Rotten!" repeated Jack Blake, with a deep breath of wrath. "Rotten, isn't the word?"

"Not the word D'Arcy used," remarked Cardew. "He said 'wotten.'"

But nobody laughed.

It was no time for laughing. Every fellow who stared at that list in Tom Merry's hand, posted in the games-room, was astonished, angry—indeed, enraged. Even Manners and Lowther, for once, were out of patience with their chum.

If Cardew chose to be humorous, nobody else felt humorous. Everybody wanted wrathfully to know what it meant.

"That cheeky cad!"

"The sneering ass!"

"The fellow that's been bunked from his last school!"

"The slacker that's never turned up to games practice since he's been here!"

"That toad!"

"That worm!"

Had Mr. Railton been passing the games-room just then, he would have learned beyond the shadow of a doubt in what estimation his nephew was held in his House.

It might not have surprised him. The Housemaster of the School House was an observant man, and no doubt he had observed the progress of his nephew at St. Jim's. Still, it was fortunate for Mr. Railton's feelings that he did not pass the door of the games-room just then.

There were always comments—some of them sarcastic—on the selections for a big match. Grundy of the Shell never could see why his name was not there. Other fellows, much better men than Grundy, could not realise that still others were better still. Herries of the Fourth had felt rather sore when Julian was put in instead of himself, though to Dick Julian this showed that Tom Merry possessed unusual judgment. But, generally speaking, the fellows agreed that Tom knew what he was about, and nobody ever suggested that he ought to be called to order. But now—

Men in the eleven and men out of the eleven were equally indignant. Blake breathed wrath. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was deeply pained. Kangaroo of the Shell fairly snorted. As the list was also posted in the New House, no doubt there was a similar scene across the quad. Even Tom's best chums had nothing to say in his defence.

"That utiah wottah!" said D'Arcy. "That fearful outsidah! I don't believe he can play cricket!"

"Railton says he can," remarked Cardew.

"I should be sowwy to chawactewise my Housemastah as an ass, but in this case I wathah think that Wailton is an ass!"

"That worm!" said Herries savagely. "I'm chucked out to make room for Julian. But at least Julian turns up at games practice and plays cricket. That rotten outsider doesn't!"

"It's too thick!" exclaimed Levison of the Fourth. "Too thick altogether! Why, he was throwing away the House match the other day. Tom Merry ordered him off the field because of it!"

"Tom Merry's going off his rocker!" said Digby. "I'm not shoving myself forward, but you men know I stick to the game. Does that man Cleeve stick to it?"

"Wathah not."

"He hasn't touched a bat since he's been here!" roared Blake. "He hasn't touched a ball. He threw away a catch last week!"

"A sneaking worm!" said Julian. "I can't understand what's the matter with Tom Merry. He knows the fellow is no good."

"Cardew's left out because he cut games practice!" exclaimed Levison, his eyes gleaming with indignation.

"Never mind little me," yawned Cardew. "I'm not ambitious. Possibly Tom Merry knows what he's up to."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! You are talkin' utiah wot, Cardew!" Cardew was left out for slacking, and serve him right," said Monty Lowther. "But this cad Cleeve has slacked more than Cardew."

"That's what I mean," said Levison. "There's such a thing as fair play, I suppose? Is one man to be turned out and another taken on for precisely the same thing?"

"Yaas, wathah! It's wotten!"

"I suppose Tom has done this on Railton's judgment,"

said Manners. "After all, he's bound to take notice of what Railton says."

"Rats!" roared Blake.

"My hat!" exclaimed Herries. "If Railton has ordered him to play Cleeve in this match, as he did in the House match, the thing is getting altogether too thick. It's rank favouritism!"

"If that's it," said Blake savagely, "it's got to stop. If this is an order from Railton, he can make Tom play Cleeve if he likes, but he won't play me in the same game. I shall stand out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Same here," said Ernest Levison. "Let's go and see Tom Merry about it. We can't get it settled too soon."

"Here he comes!" drawled Cardew.

Tom Merry was rather late down from prep. He came into the games-room, where he had posted the notice just before prep. Doubtless the buzz of voices apprised him that there was an excited meeting in the room, and undoubtedly he knew that the selection of Cleeve to play against Greyfriars would evoke a storm among the cricketing fraternity. But he hardly expected the storm that burst upon his devoted head as he entered the games-room.

"Tom Merry, you footling ass—"

"Tom Mewwy, you chump—"

"Look here, you dummy—"

"Look at this, you fathead! Is this a rotten joke?"

"What do you mean by it?"

"Got anything to say, you duffer?"

It was a roar of voices. If Tom Merry had anything to say, it could not be heard in the uproar.

Tom stood silent, waiting for a chance to speak. Excitement and wrath reigned round him, all the fellows speaking at once. That ebullition of feeling was a measure of the unpopularity the Housemaster's nephew had gathered to himself in the short space of time that he had been at St. Jim's. Only a week before, all the House had been interested in Railton's nephew—keen to see him and welcome him to the House on his uncle's account—keen to see him join in the school games. Never had a new fellow had a better chance than Railton's nephew had had.

But all that was over now. Even fellows like Racke of the Shell were nothing like so unpopular as Victor Cleeve. Even the respect and admiration the fellows felt for old Railton could not lessen their dislike and contempt for his nephew.

What had happened in the House match had been the last straw. The most tolerant fellows, who had been prepared to put up with a great deal from a relative of old Railton, had been fed-up with that. The fellow was an outcast in the school, and it was this outcast, this fellow who had given runs to the other side in a cricket match, that Tom Merry had picked out to play for St. Jim's! Tom Merry's popularity—indeed, his captaincy—trembled in the balance now. Grundy of the Shell was yelling for a meeting of the junior games committee, to call the cricket captain to order, and for once Grundy had a following.

There was a pause at last.

"Let the silly idiot speak!" said Blake. "If you've got anything to say about this, Tom Merry, cough it up."

"Tom, old man—" murmured Lowther.

"I'll speak when you give me a chance," said Tom quietly.

"I don't see any use joining in a shouting match."

"Look here—" bawled Grundy.

"Oh, shut up, Grundy!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

Grundy was no cricketer, but his voice was the loudest in the games-room.

"Yaas, wathah! Dwy up, Gwunday!"

"Is this a rotten joke, Tom Merry?" roared Blake.

Tom shook his head.

"You mean to play that rank outsider—that fellow who gives games away for his side?" yelled Herries.

"Give him a chance to speak," suggested Cardew.

"I'm waiting," said Tom.

"Look here," said Levison of the Fourth. "Answer this, Tom Merry. Has Railton ordered you to play Cleeve, as he did before? If so, and you obey the order, I resign from the team!"

"Same here!" shouted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You can play Greyfriars on your own, with Cleeve to chuck the game away," said Levison bitterly. "Railton has no right to give such an order, after what the cad has done, and I won't submit to it, for one."

"Wathah not!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Will you let me speak?" asked Tom. "Railton has not ordered me to play Cleeve; and if he had given me such an order I should have resigned the junior captaincy on the spot, after what happened in the House match. Is that clear?"

"Clear as far as it goes," said Blake. "But if Railton hasn't butted in, what are you doing it for?"

"You've picked out Cleeve on his merits?" snorted Herries.

"Yes," said Tom.

"You've never seen him play!" roared Blake.

"I know. But—"

"But what?" howled Herries.

"I take Railton's word for it. He knows more about the game than any man here," said Tom.

"He's prejudiced. He thinks his precious nephew is the goods!" jeered Blake.

"He's an ass!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, if you think Railton an ass, I don't agree, that's all," answered Tom Merry. "I'm acting on his judgment. This man Cleeve was junior House captain, and captain of cricket, at his last school. He couldn't have got that without being able to play a jolly good game."

"His last school!" sneered several fellows. "Where was that?"

"What school?" jeered Herries. "The school he was bunked from, as all St. Jim's knows."

"I don't know, and I don't care," said Tom. "I'm trusting to Railton's judgment, also to my own. I've got an impression that Cleeve is a good man at the games, if he likes."

"And you'd play him on that, without having seen him handle a bat?" exclaimed Lovison.

"Not wholly on that, of course; but on Railton's judgment, too, and what I know he's done at his last school."

"Well, I think it's rot!"

"You're welcome to think what you like," said Tom. "The same to all of you. But I'll tell you this much more. If I've made a mistake—"

"No if about it!" said Blake. "You have!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If I've made a mistake, I shall resign the captaincy, and shall not stand for re-election," said Tom quietly. "You can pick out a man with a better judgment than mine—Grundy, if you like!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You don't mean that, Tom?" exclaimed Manners.

"I mean every word of it," said Tom Merry. "If Cleeve plays a good, straight game to-morrow, I'm justified in picking him out. If he doesn't, I've made such a mistake as proves that I'm not fit for my job. I shall resign it at once, in that case."

"The sooner the better!" roared Grundy.

"Shut up, Grundy!"

"For goodness' sake shut up, Grundy!"

Tom Merry's declaration had a calming effect on the excited crowd in the games-room. Every man present believed that Tom had made a mistake, but few of them wanted to lose their captain, all the same. Fellows who had talked of resigning from the team talked on that topic no more. Tom Merry was to stand or fall by his judgment in this matter, and few expected him to survive the ordeal. And wrath turned from Tom to Cleeve, who had, somehow, in the opinion of the juniors, pulled Tom's leg to this amazing extent. Had the Housemaster's nephew entered the games-room just then, he would probably have had the raging of his life.

Tom Merry left the games-room with a grave face. At the end of the passage he found Cleeve waiting for him.

The Housemaster's nephew touched him on the arm.

THIS IS THE COVER TO LOOK OUT FOR ON ALL THE BOOKSTALLS NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Would you like another Grand Coloured Metal Model? Of course you would! Then don't forget to order next week's issue of the GEM, for it contains the fourth Topping Free Gift of a Model of Sir Alan Cobham's "Round-Africa" Seaplane! In addition to this the programme of next week's Special Free Gift Issue is a bumper one. There will be an extra-long story of St. Jim's, featuring Victor Cleeve, the School Housemaster's strange nephew—and another instalment of "Skid' Kennedy—Speed King."

from swank, in the general opinion, and he was not a good man at the game, he was not even a trier—he was a slacking rotter who would let the side down.

With that belief in their minds, the cricketers were not likely to look forward to the match with much confidence—and, in point of fact, they had no confidence at all. In that mood, no team was likely to prove a winning team—and Tom Merry, though he held to his faith in Cleeve, wondered whether he had done wisely, after all, to play a man who was utterly unpopular, in view of the demoralisation of the side. Even if Cleeve turned out as his Uncle Railton believed he would turn out, that might not compensate for the "rot" setting in, in the team as a whole.

Faces were glum and grim on Little Side that day—Figgins & Co. of the New House, taking precisely the same view as the School House members of the eleven. Black looks were directed at Victor Cleeve—though it was not to be denied that he looked thoroughly fit in his flannels, and had all the cut of a cricketer. Only Tom Merry spoke to him on the ground—the other fellows gave him the cut direct—and even the Greyfriars men could see that there was something amiss in the home team.

"I've heard the row," he said.

Tom smiled faintly.

"I imagine most of the House has heard it," he said.

"I never meant to land you in such a shindy. I'll stand out of the match with pleasure, if you like."

Tom shook his head.

"Well," said Cleeve, in a low voice, "I'll tell you one thing, I'll play the game of my life to-morrow, and try my very hardest to do you credit. If I fail you, it won't be my fault."

"All serene," said Tom.

The storm in the games-room blew itself out, but most of the cricketers let the sun go down on their wrath. On the following morning many of them hoped to see that Cleeve's name had been removed from the list—on second thoughts, proverbially the best. But Tom Merry, apparently, had no second thoughts on the subject. Victor Cleeve was still a member of the St. Jim's junior eleven when the Greyfriars men arrived for the match.

CHAPTER 14.

King Cricket I

"THIS way to the execution!"

That was Blake's remark.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy dismally.

Never had the St. Jim's men prepared for a match with such gloomy anticipations. The team had not been strong enough to meet Greyfriars with equal chances. All had known that, but it had been generally agreed that Tom Merry had done the best possible in the circumstances—until he put Victor Cleeve's name into the list.

That tore it, so to speak. The team, weak before, was now further weakened by leaving out a fairly good man, and putting a dud, a slacker, a rotter, in his place. Nobody expected Cleeve to play a good game—or even to try to play a good game. He had shoved himself into the eleven

Harry Wharton & Co. had come over from Greyfriars in great form, but they were expecting a tussle at St. Jim's. Looking over the home players, however, Wharton judged that St. Jim's were not by any means up to their usual form; and Vernon-Smith remarked that they would be catching an early train back. There was obviously trouble in the team, and trouble in the team did not spell victory.

"Looks to me as if this is going to be a walk-over," remarked Bob Cherry of Greyfriars. And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked that the walkfulness-over would be terrific.

The two captains tossed for innings, and luck came to Tom Merry. He chose to bat first; and Blake touched him on the arm.

"It's not too late now," whispered Blake, in a beseeching whisper. "For goodness' sake, old man, don't play the goat with this match. Turn that dud out."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"At least, leave him to the tail of the innings," muttered Levison.

Another shake of the head.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"'Nuff said!" interrupted Tom Merry.

The St. Jim's innings opened with Cleeve and Figgins. It was the last straw, in the view of the cricketers. They were going to open the game with a lost wicket.

Tom's judgment, however, was good. He was pinning his faith to Cleeve; and if Cleeve justified his faith, obviously it was better for him to do so at the start. A good innings by Cleeve would bring about a wonderful change of spirit in the team, and that was the chief thing wanted. But in view of the universal hostility and dissatisfaction, Tom was sorely assailed by doubts of his own judgment. However, he was for it now, and he sent out the Housemaster's nephew to open the game with Figgins of the New House.

Figgins had the bowling; but that feeling of impending defeat, fatal to any team, affected even the mighty Figgins. He did not lose his wicket, but he scored no runs, contenting himself with saving his sticks. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the demon bowler of Greyfriars, went on for the second over, against Victor Cleeve. The waiting batsmen, and a swarm of St. Jim's fellows round the ground, looked on to see Cleeve's wicket wrecked by the first ball of the over.

The ball came down hot and strong; but it did not wreck Cleeve's wicket. The willow met the leather, Cleeve step-

ping out to it, and the round red ball flew faster than the eye could follow. Cleeve was running; and Figgins, taken utterly by surprise by a happening so contrary to all his expectations, was for once slow to leave his wicket. Cleeve was halfway before the astounded Figgins stirred, so astonished was the New House man; but when Figgy woke up to it, as it were, he made up for lost time. Figgy's long legs fairly twinkled as he flew along the pitch. And he was like lightning on the second run.

Two—and the batsmen made good before the ball came whizzing in. The St. Jim's men almost rubbed their eyes as they stared.

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

He had been sure before—but he knew now! Cleeve was the man he wanted in the team!

"What price that?" asked Tom.

Grunt—from Blake.

"Two runs isn't much to write home about," he remarked.

"Wathah not!"

"None so blind as those who won't see," said Tom cheerily. "You watch that man's form! He's some cricketer!"

"We shall see what we shall see!" grunted Blake.

That being undeniable, Tom laughed, and did not seek to controvert it. He glanced inquiringly at Levison. Levison was watching the new man keenly.

"Well?" smiled Tom.

"A good man," admitted Levison. "He can play if he likes! The question is, will he like?"

"Yaas, wathah! If he lets us down as he did in the House match—"

"He won't!" said Tom.

"Well, how do you know he won't, if you come to that?" demanded Blake.

"Well, I do know!" said Tom.

"Rats!"

But Blake's angry criticism was silenced, as the innings went on. The ball had come to Cleeve again—one of the best that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh could send down—and it flew hot from the bat; and Cleeve did not stir, save to wave Figgy back as he was about to race. There was no need to run for a boundary.

"Bai Jove! He can bat!" said D'Arcy.

"Just a few!" grinned Tom joyously. The St. Jim's captain was elated now.

The innings went on—and to the further astonishment of the St. Jim's crowd, Figgy's wicket was the first to fall. Blake went in, and did quite well for his side; but when his sticks went down, Cleeve was still going strong. D'Arcy was next man in, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's bowling proved too strong for him. Tom Merry took his place, and partnered Cleeve in an innings that made the St. Jim's crowd forget all their misgivings, and cheer, and yell, and clap, and howl, like a crowd demented. Tom was at the top of his form.

Cleeve was out at last for forty-six of his own; and Kangaroo of the Sheil, passing him on his way in, gave him a cheery grin. Cleeve smiled back—all his sulkiness, all his sullen reserve, had melted away under the genial influence of King Cricket. His handsome, dark face was flushed, smiling, and happy, when he came back to the pavilion, and the fellows assembled there gave him rather uncertain looks. This was the outcast—this was the dud—this was the man they had ragged Tom Merry for putting in the eleven—and he had knocked up forty-six for St. Jim's—and Figgins, the mighty man with the willow, had knocked up only fifteen. Mr. Railton had come down to Little Side, and leaning on the pavilion a little way off, he glanced at his nephew and smiled, a smile of pride and satisfaction. At long last, the Housemaster's nephew was taking the place that Mr. Railton had desired to see him take—and he was taking it with flying colours.

"Bai Jove! Cleeve you're a good man at the game," confessed Arthur

(Continued on page 28.)

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BRITAIN'S ENGINEERING TRIUMPH—A FLYING HOTEL!

KING OF THE AIR!

A graphic description of the R100, which forms the subject of this week's Topping Free Gift!

WHILE the Americans shout "We'll show the world!" people in Britain are working steadily, unhurriedly, and skilfully on the construction of a simply tremendous dirigible—an aerial charabanc which, when it is completed—as it almost is now—will be able to carry one hundred passengers and all their luggage, a crew of fifty and all their kit, and a few tons of mails, from London to New York in something like forty-eight hours!

The R100 falls just short of being 710 feet long, and she is 133 feet wide! But the marvels do not stop short at mere size—if you can call a size like that "mere." For any one of the three hundred and fifty or so craftsmen who for many months have been working on her will tell you that she can knock many a hotel sideways in the matter of sumptuous accommodation for the folk who will journey in her through the skies.

So far as the internal arrangements for passengers are concerned, the R100—remember she bulks as large as the *Mauretania*!—will resemble a three-storied hotel built on very generous lines. On the lower floor within her envelope are the crew's quarters, mess-rooms, cabins, and so on.

On the two floors, or decks above, are the passengers' dining saloons, cabins, promenade decks, lounges, and so on, view windows being let into the sides of the envelope wherever possible. Staircases lead from deck to deck, and because the builders of R100 believe there will be no such thing as air-sickness aboard, and that therefore appetites will be good and well-sharpened by the air, the restaurant is designed to seat fifty diners at a time!

Air-sickness is not likely to be experienced by even the most unsettled of air-travellers in R100 because there will be no vibration felt, or any other disturbing motion such as is inseparable from travel in a liner. Neither will there be any engine noises to upset one's nerves.

The great outer envelope consists of 225,000 cubic feet of fabric, which is non-inflammable. Thus one of the most serious dangers hitherto attached to this type of aircraft has been completely cut out. Not a nice thing to anticipate, a fire in mid-air, however much one craves for a little excitement!

Enormous fuel tanks, specially designed, have been built into the ship, each holding fifty tons of fuel to feed the engines. Lighting, heating, and cooking will be done entirely by electricity.

More than a thousand pounds a week has been spent in wages on the building of this record-breaking dirigible since her "keel" was laid in that gigantic shed at Howden, in Yorkshire—from which R100 is expected any day now to push her nose to take to the air in that exciting first trial-flight.

If you find it difficult to visualise the real size of the aerial monster from cold figures, try to picture that shed, then map out a full-sized football pitch on its floor. Then map out twenty-four more pitches like it, side by side, and you will just about have covered the floor space where the R100 has gradually reared her gargantuan bulk!

Perhaps you are wondering how you would get aboard in the event of being one of the fortunate passengers? That's easy. You see, the R100 will be hitched up by the "nose" to the top of a towering steel mast when she starts on her trips, and the way in will be through her nose—or rather through a door in the envelope a little way below the nosing by which she is anchored to the great mast.

You will shoot up inside the steel mast, aboard a lift, to the platform at the top. Then you will step across a gangway connecting the platform with the entrance in the envelope, and you will be aboard.

It won't do to peer over the side of that gangway, or to look over the circular platform at the tower-top, if you cannot bear that sort of thing. But then if you are as squeamish as all that you won't want to try your luck on the R100 at all!

What holds this outsize in "sausages" together? A bewildering maze of strong girders, all made of duralumin, an amazingly strong and light metal. There is nothing wobbly or flimsy about it, for the engineers have followed on the broad lines of construction which are incorporated in the great Forth bridge—and that's strong enough, as all the world knows.

The airship is not just one vast envelope, for she is divided inside into a number of separate "balloons": another safety device which not only increases the buoyancy of the R100 but also makes things rather more secure in the event of the R100 springing a leak.

She is inflated with hydrogen gas, which is not so good as helium. Hydrogen is inflammable, while helium is not. But helium costs a lot, something like £20 for a thousand cubic feet. It would cost a fortune to "blow out" the R100 with the non-inflammable helium.

REWARD FOR VALOUR!

Fortune, it is said, favours the brave. And Fortune certainly favours Jack Kennedy and his pal Fred, those two dare-devil boys who have displayed such amazing pluck in the famous Tourist Trophy Race!



'SKID' KENNEDY-SPEED KING!

THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF A
BRILLIANT NEW SERIAL OF
MOTOR-RACING ADVENTURE,
STARRING JACK KENNEDY, A
YOUNG SPEED MERCHANT.

WRITTEN SPECIALLY
FOR THE "GEM" BY

ALFRED EDGAR.

(The Motor-Racing Author.)

INTRODUCTORY OPENING.

THRASHING his great Saxon car to the limit of its speed, Jack Kennedy flung the machine round the Tourist Trophy circuit in a fierce effort to gain the lead and beat his rival, Philip Slade, who was driving a Falcon Six.

At every corner the watching crowds cheered the hurtling, skidding machine on, and most of them knew that the daring boy rider had taken the place of his brother Ben, behind the wheel. Jack and Ben had been sacked from the Falcon Works through Slade's cunning, and Ben had been injured during practice by a dirty trick that the rival driver had played.

Jack was out to beat Slade, if he did nothing else. At his side, Fred Bishop—his chum, who was acting as his mechanic—urged him on. The Saxon machine was playing a lone hand; Ben had spent every penny he had on the car in the hope that, if it did well, the Saxon firm would offer himself and the boys a job on their racing staff.

Round the course hurtled the roaring machine, the watching crowds wild with excitement, Jack duelling with the world's most famous drivers all the way. Slade was leading, and they caught him up at famous Ballyoran Corner—caught him up and passed him after a mad mile of desperate speed-fighting, with the rival driver straining his car to its uttermost limit.

Suddenly the Falcon Six dropped behind.

"He's conked out! Something's given way—he's whipped, Jack!" Fred yelled the words above the thunder of their car, and with unchecked speed the Saxon rocked on, now leading the race.

For another lap they stormed round, then, as they neared Dundonald hairpin bend they saw Slade ahead of them. He had got his car going again. The two machines ran level as they ripped down at the deadly bend.

Jack saw Slade glance across at him, his eyes blazing venomously behind his goggles. Into the turn they went, the Saxon skidding madly—and Slade, dragging the Falcon across the front of Jack's car, forcing him towards the fence.

Jack tried to pull out, and his machine skidded completely round—tail crashing full against the side of the fouling Falcon!

The two machines heaved across the turn, into the fence! There was a mad smother of flying woodwork, and Jack felt the car leap as it tilted over.

Then everything was blotted out by a wild fury of heaving debris and cataclysmic sound as the two machines alighted to destruction!

ONE mad glimpse Jack Kennedy had of broken fencing skating on the air in a cloud of dust, and the bucking, twisting shape of the Falcon Six hurtling ahead of him—then the Saxon was tilting over.

Faintly, he heard Fred Bishop shout. There came a
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juddering shock through the whole length of the car as it struck the end of a safety sand-bank, and Jack felt himself flung from the machine.

He landed with a crash which shook him all through, then he was sliding and spinning on, sand stinging his face below his goggles, while something thudded with a dull, ugly sound against his crash-helmet.

He came to a stop, then slowly sat up. Everything was spinning wildly around him, but he could hear shouting and the thudding of debris still falling down.

Bits of wood dropped near him. He glimpsed a broken wheel sliding slowly on its side, with burst tyre whipping at the buckled rim, then he dragged himself to his feet.

The two cars lay half a dozen yards away, locked together. Clouds of steam were rising from their shattered radiators; oil smoke was lofting in a huge, blue-black cloud. Jack had a view of dented body-work, smashed engine-covers, wheels bent on their axles to mad angles—and fire!

It came in a sudden blaze, rising from the Falcon Six and shooting high in a great sheet of flame which enveloped the wreckage the moment that the fire was born.

Jack staggered forward. The Saxon was on its side, with its steering-wheel smashed down into the cockpit. He could feel the heat of flames, and the swelling smoke all but choked him as he peered anxiously into the car for some sign of Fred.

"It's all right—I'm here!" He heard his chum's voice behind him. Fred was grinning dazedly through the blood on his face; his goggles and his crash-helmet were missing.

"Where's Slade?" Jack gasped.

"They were chucked out of their car!" Fred told him. "Both of 'em. They're all right!"

A moment later and the two were surrounded by ambulance men, who half carried them past the wrecked and burning machines, while fire extinguishers slewed streams of chemicals on to the blaze.

The boys were taken through the great gap which the cars had torn in the fencing, to a grassy patch at the back of the grand-stand which had been built on the corner. Here was a first-aid tent.

Both Jack and Fred protested that they were not hurt. Nobody would believe them. The ambulance men laid them down on blankets, and went over them from head to feet before they would allow either of them to stand again.

"Jolly decent of 'em to worry like that," Fred grunted, when at last the astonished group released them, "but I said I was all right. Bit groggy inside, but that's nothing!" And he grinned in his cheerful way, then added suddenly: "Gosh, look at your helmet, Jack! That caught a packet!"

The top of Jack's crash helmet carried an enormous gash where a flying piece of metal had struck it.

"Somethin' tried to part your hair!" Fred exclaimed. "You'd have had a nasty headache if you hadn't been wearing that helmet!"

Jack stared at the edges of the slit as he realised what a narrow escape he had had, then he remembered Slade and

his mechanic, and he asked one of the ambulance men how they had fared.

"We're all right—no thanks to you!" It was Slade himself who answered. His dark eyes were blazing in his pallid face as he snarled: "That smash was your fault—sheer bad driving! A boy like you ought not to have been allowed in the race! You don't know how to handle a car, and you—"

"You blamed well skidded into us!" Fred jumped forward, his oil-smudged fists bunched. "You did it deliberately! You crowded us into the fence because we were winning!"

The boys could see that Slade was beside himself with baffled rage. He had meant to crash the Saxon, but he hadn't intended that his machine should smash as well. He glared at Fred, and all his hatred of Jack's chum welled up.

The speedman's lips twitched off his gritted teeth, and he leaped towards the boy—to feel an arm that was as strong as an iron bar whip across his chest and send him staggering backwards. Ben had come up; his left arm was still in its sling, but his right had been good enough to stop Slade!

"That'll be enough o' that!" he growled, and he half turned to where the boys were standing with their fists up, waiting for Slade to come on. "Simmer down, you two! We don't want a fight here!"

"He drove right into us!" Fred blazed. "It was his fault, and he—"

"Never mind whose fault it was, it's over and done with now!" Ben told him, and as he spoke a bunch of the Saxon mechanics came rushing up, crowding Slade back, while they gathered round the two boys.

Nobody seemed able to believe that they hadn't been killed. Or, if not killed, at least seriously hurt. Everyone wanted to do something for them, and every man in the crowd that gathered round was saying what hard luck it was that they should have crashed when they were leading, and had the race in their pockets, so to speak.

All Jack and Fred wanted to do was to get out of it, and soon a car was brought up. They crowded into it, with Ben and some of the mechanics. A little later it set them down outside the shed which had formed the Saxon racing camp, and from which the great car had been driven with such hope a little earlier.

The Saxon mechanics remained in the entrance of the shed, talking about the race. Jack and Fred and Ben moved to a quiet corner, where the big fellow gave them long draughts of cooling lemonade. They could hear cars roaring over the course, and suddenly the thudding boom of a maroon sounded.

"That'll be the winner crossing the line," commented Ben. "Good luck to him, whoever it is!"

"It's a rotten shame it ain't us!" Fred grunted. "It might have been but for that perisher Slade!"

Jack glanced at his brother. He could see that Ben was frowning thoughtfully, and Jack said quietly:

"What happens next, Ben? I suppose the car's done in, and we're about broke!"

"You're right, we're broke to the wide!" Ben assured him, and he smiled grimly. "I can just scratch up enough to get us back home again, and that's all!"

The three were silent for a moment or so, then Fred said tensely:

"All through Slade! We were leading—we'd ha' won! That would have meant a thousand pounds for first prize, and goodness knows what else; but that—that foxy-faced rotter—" He broke off abruptly.

Coming towards them from the door was a tall, grey-haired man, whom they recognised as one of the directors of the Saxon firm. His name was Lloyd, and he had been in charge of the Saxon racing team. The whole team had dropped out of the race, and at the time of the crash the boys' Saxon had been the only one running.

Mr. Lloyd nodded to Ben, then he came across to Jack and offered his hand.

"I'm very glad to hear that you're not hurt," he said. "You drove magnificently—and your last lap was the fastest in the race!"

Jobs for Three!

THE fastest lap in the race!" Jack jerked to his feet as he stared at the Saxon director. "Are you sure, sir?"

"Absolutely certain!" came the answer. "It has just been announced!"

"Then we win something!" Fred yelled the words. "There's a fat prize for the car that does the fastest lap! Put it there, Jack!"

The chums shook hands, and from the doorway the mechanics came charging forward.

"What was that, sir? He did the fastest lap? Good on you, young 'un! Shake hands!"

"The fastest lap? Beat all them crack drivers? Gimme your fist, Jack!"

"Finest little driver I ever set eyes on! An' can't he skid!"

The Saxon mechanics crowded round, slapping Jack's bruised shoulders and grabbing at his oil-grimed hands. They all knew what doing the fastest lap in the race meant, and they realised how desperately Jack must have driven. His quality as a driver had been proved in the race itself, but this news set the seal on his ability.

When some of the excitement had died down, Mr. Lloyd turned to Jack again.

"I don't know how you are placed," he said, "but if you care to take it, I could give you a job on the Saxon staff. Would that appeal to you?"

Jack's heart jumped a little as he glanced at Ben. He hesitated a moment, then he said:

"Look here, sir, it isn't my fault that the Saxon went fast; that was due to what Ben did. If anybody deserves a job on your firm, it's him—it's what we've been working for."

The director stared at him for a moment, and then Jack let rip with the whole story—how they'd all three been sacked from the Falcon Six works, how Ben had bought a Saxon car, working on it day and night to fit it for the great race. Jack told some of the things Ben had done to increase the car's speed, and how Ben's one aim had been to show his quality and get a job with the Saxon racing staff.

Mr. Lloyd listened without speaking, while the mechanics drifted away as they realised that the conversation was more or less private. When Jack stopped, Mr. Lloyd stood quietly looking at the trio, then he nodded his head slowly.

"I think I understand," he said. "Ben, when I hear that you were entering a Saxon car, I looked up your record. I know quite a bit about you. Now, tell me just what improvements you made over the standard Saxon machine."

In a conversation that bristled with technicalities, Ben told him, and all the time Mr. Lloyd kept nodding his head, while his eyes took on a keenly interested expression. Again he was silent for a space. Presently he said:

"Ben, I can't give you a job as a racing driver, but I'll take you on to our racing staff. I'll give you every possible facility for experimenting on our cars and improving them. You can have a corner of the racing shed all to yourself, and nobody will interfere with you, and I'll pay you a pretty good salary. Would that suit you?"

"I'd like nothing better," said Ben. "What about Jack?"

"Um!" Mr. Lloyd rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "You know, you're a bit young for speed work," he said to Jack at last, "but you've got the right stuff in you! I couldn't put you on the racing staff straight off, but I can give you a job in our London show-rooms. You'd have a footing in the firm."

"Any job would suit me," Jack said eagerly, and as he spoke he glanced towards Fred; "but I can't come without my mechanic!" And he grinned as he spoke.

"Certainly. We shall want him as well," agreed Mr. Lloyd. "Well, you'll go into the show-rooms as a car salesman, Jack, and your—er—your mechanic will go on the same job as your assistant. You'll understand what that means when you start work, and you can begin work just as soon as you like."

He stood smiling at the two boys as they glanced at one another.

"Car salesman!" That didn't sound particularly attractive to Jack. A "salesman" was a fellow who hung about the show-rooms, demonstrating the cars to customers who came in to look at them. It was a lot different from handling a high-powered racing machine, as he wanted to do.

At the same time, he realised that a big firm like Saxon's wouldn't dare put him on the racing staff right off. He would be wise to take anything that was offered him, because he needed a job anyway.

"What about it, Fred?" he asked.

"Anything'll do me," Fred answered cheerfully. "Now we've busted up Ben's old bus we've got to do somethin' to earn a living!"

£6,000 at Stake!

AT ten o'clock on a sunny morning, four days later, Jack and Fred walked into the palatial Saxon show-rooms in Great Portland Street, a London thoroughfare occupied almost exclusively by car firms. Fred just saved himself a headlong fall when his feet came into

contact with the polished parquet floor, then he stood looking around him with his mouth open.

Ranged about the great show-room were Saxon cars, polished and speckless, their nickel-work shining and their tyres black with fresh tyre-paint. Stately palms grew in gold-painted tubs near the walls, and in a far corner four elegantly-dressed men were chatting together.

One of them, as he saw the two boys standing there, detached himself from the group and strolled towards them. His fair hair was brushed flat as a board on his narrow head, and his aquiline nose was tilted to a supercilious angle as he eyed them. He wore white spats, and his clothes fitted as though he had been poured into them.

"Well?" he inquired, as he came up.

"My name's Kennedy," Jack informed him. "This is Fred Bishop. Mr. Lloyd told us to report here."

The man started slightly, and his eyes widened incredulously as he looked the two up and down. Ken was wearing the same suit as he had worn under his overalls during the big race. It was a bit baggy at the knees, and it had one or two spots of oil on it, but there was nothing about it to create the expression of horror which slowly dawned on the man's features.

Fred's suit was distinctly oily, and so were the grubby overalls which he carried rolled up under his arm. He didn't like the look on the man's face, and he said so.

"What's up with you?" he demanded. "Somethin' just bit you?"

"You're Kennedy—'Skid' Kennedy?" the man gasped, as he eyed Jack. "You're the new salesman?"

"That's so," said Jack. "And Fred's to be my assistant."

"But—but you can't interview customers in those clothes!" the man told them. "I'm chief salesman here, and one of my strictest rules is that all my helpers shall be decently dressed."

"Well, Jack ain't your helper!" Fred chipped in. "We had a talk with Mr. Lloyd before we came away from the T.T. course, and he said all we'd got to do was to sell cars! We wasn't to take any notice of anybody else; we'd just got to sell 'em in our own way. And if we did all right he'd shove us on the racing staff with Ben, so you can let our clothes alone!"

The man stared at them for what seemed an age, then abruptly he spun round and strode to a table a little way away, where stood a telephone. He lifted the receiver, and they heard him call into the instrument:

"Mr. Lloyd, please—thank you. Hallo! Is Mr. Lloyd in yet? Good! Put me through to him—show-room speaking. Is that you, Mr. Lloyd? This is Carnby—show-room

chief, sir. Er—two boys have just arrived here, and— Yes, that's their names, sir. It's their appearance that I want to complain about. It can't— Pardon? Eh! Never mind what they look like? Let them work in their own way? But—but it will make a bad impression on customers who— Beg pardon, sir? I wouldn't presume to argue with you about it, sir! Very good, sir, if you wish it! I'll explain everything to them, sir! Certainly, sir! Good-bye, sir!"

"That's got his tail between his legs!" Fred chuckled. "Sir-ing right an' left, ain't he?"

And he grinned as Carnaby hung up the receiver and came towards them again. He glared as he said abruptly:

"You, Bishop, will stand by while Kennedy is interviewing a customer, and be ready to assist him in demonstrating the car. If he takes the customer out for a trial run, you will go with him." He was very red in the face as he spoke, and his expression grew vicious as he went on: "And no poaching, understand! If you try pinching any of my customers, I'll knock your heads off!"

The chums blinked at him as he turned and strode back to the other three, who had been watching, all of them looking as startled as himself.

"Proper little gent, ain't he?" commented Fred. "I like his way of explaining everything to us! Well, we'd better make ourselves comfortable, an' then get ready for the customers."

They hunted round on their own and found a sort of lobby where they dumped their hats, then Fred slipped into his overalls, and walked across the show-room with Jack. Both knew all there was to know about Saxon cars, but they didn't know a lot about the luxurious saloons which stood in the show-room, and they spent some time in examining them. Besides the saloons there were touring machines, and sports cars, and Jack was quick to learn the prices of them.

It seemed impossible to him that anybody could walk into the place prepared to hand out nearly a thousand pounds for a car, but that was round about the price of most of them.

Not until they had finished their examination of the machines did Jack look out of the show-room window to the traffic rolling along the street. It was then that he sighted a massive sign directly opposite: "FALCON SIX."

"Fred, look at that!" he gasped. "The Falcon Six show-rooms are bang opposite ours!"

"So they are! Well, I'm dashed! And blessed if that isn't Slade standing there in the doorway!"

Jack pointed to where the rival speedman was talking with a thick-set, keen-featured man who was just leaving the Falcon show-rooms. Behind him were two important-looking fellows who appeared to be high officials in the Falcon organisation.

The boys saw Slade shake hands warmly with the man, and there was something persuasive in his smile, then the stranger came straight across the road.

"He's coming in here!" Jack exclaimed.

"Bet you it's a customer!" Fred grunted. "He's had a look round the Falcon machines, an' now he wants to see ours. This is where we put it across Slade!"

Jack had a glimpse of the rival speedman staring after the man as he made for the entrance to the Saxon show-rooms, and his affable smile had faded. Fred whipped open the door as the stranger approached, and Jack stepped forward as he entered.

"Good-morning! My name is Fletcher, and I want to see somebody who'll show me round one of your sports-touring machines."

"I can do that, sir," Fred told him; and from the tail of his eye he saw that Carnaby had stopped in his hurried walk towards the door, and was muttering under his breath. "This is the sports-tourer." And Jack waved a hand to the speedy-looking machine which stood nearest them.

"Ah, that is—" Mr. Fletcher checked and stared at Jack. "Your face is familiar!" he exclaimed. "Aren't you the boy they're calling 'Skid' Kennedy? I recognise you now! I watched the T.T. Shake hands!"

He gripped Jack's fist in a warm clasp, then went on:

"I like firms who put into their sale-rooms fellows who actually drive their cars. I've met Slade over the road, when I was looking at the Falcons. Now, the car I want must be very fast and very reliable. What's the price of this model?"

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Jack told him. He showed him all over the car, with Fred lifting the engine cover, opening the doors, showing off all the little gadgets as Jack referred to them. Fred didn't interfere or speak. He just anticipated everything that Jack was going to do, and did it for him.

The result was that the pair worked like a trained team. They knew so much about the car, and Jack was so enthusiastic about its speed and power, that he hardly noticed Carnaby standing fuming in the background. A dozen times the fellow looked as though he was going to butt in. At last he seized a chance to clutch Fred by the arm and hiss in his ear:

"Tell Kennedy to turn that customer over to me! He's Fletcher, of the Central Transport Company—in the market for a team of six cars, so that his managers can convoy the transport columns. If Kennedy makes a mess of this order I'll sack him!"

"Hop it! We're doing all right!" Fred grunted, and jammed his elbow in Carnaby's ribs as Jack and the customer came round the back of the car.

"Well, I must admit that I'm interested," Mr. Fletcher

they could do; both were anxious to make good at their new job, and Jack's jaw set as he resolved to beat any trick that Slade might play on them. The Saxon went rolling easily through the London traffic, with Jack handling the machine as though it was no bigger than a pram, nipping in and out between other vehicles with an ease which made Mr. Fletcher exclaim:

"You know, you're a pretty good driver, Kennedy!"

"It's not me, sir; it's the car," Jack smiled. "Of course, I can't show you what she'll do here in traffic, so we'll run



"If Kennedy makes a mess of this big order I'll sack him!" hissed Carnaby. "Hop it! We're doing all right!" grunted Fred, and he jammed his elbow in the chief salesman's ribs as Jack and the customer came round the back of the car. (See this page.)

was saying. "I've just had a demonstration run on a Falcon Six, and I liked the car, but I should like to try a run on one of these Saxons before I make my decision."

"I'll take you out straightaway, sir," Jack told him.

"Thank you! I'd like you to demonstrate the car's ease of handling, speed on the gears, and braking power," said Mr. Fletcher. "Is it possible for me to ride in this particular car?"

"Yes, sir," Jack answered. "Fred, put four gallons of juice in the tank, see she's got oil, and then help me to push the machine out to the road."

"Right you are!" grinned Fred; and while Mr. Fletcher was examining the controls of the machine Fred seized the chance to tell his chum who the customer really was.

"He'll buy six cars like this—eh?" Jack gasped. "No wonder Slade was all over him just now! It'll be a jolly good start if we can sell six cars in one go, Fred!"

Two minutes later the big car was at the kerb, with the engine running. Fred slipped into the rear seats, and it was as Jack sent the machine rolling away that both saw the big doors of the Falcon Six show-room open. Out came one of their super-sports tourers, with Slade at the wheel!

Both boys guessed what he was going to do. He'd follow up, and then, while they were showing Mr. Fletcher the paces of the Saxon, he would shoot past them. The transport magnate would see him go by, and he'd think the Falcon was a better car.

Jack exchanged a glance with Fred. There was nothing

out past Edgeware to Brockley Hill and you'll see how she goes up that!"

"Yes, I know that hill well," Mr. Fletcher answered.

Out on to the Edgeware road ran the Saxon, always with the Falcon Six not far behind, Slade waiting his chance to show them up. Jack increased his speed as they cleared Edgeware, then came in sight of the cross-roads which marked the beginning of the famous hill.

"This is it, sir!" he called to Mr. Fletcher. "I'll let her go now!"

The A.A. scout at the cross-roads waved them on, and the car shot at the hill with a roar. The slope was easy at first, and the Saxon took it at gathering speed. The car was doing nearly seventy miles an hour when they leaped at the steepest part, and it was then that Jack heard the raucous, triumphant blast of the Falcon Six's horn behind them.

An instant later and the rival machine sailed past them.

"What's that—a Falcon Six?" the magnate exclaimed. "By thunder, if he can leave us standing like that, then Falcon Sixes are the cars I shall buy!"

Huddled in the rear seats, Fred groaned as he caught his words. It looked as though they had failed on their first big job.

(But have they? Grit and the will to win have pulled Jack and Fred through so far! Look out for another thrilling instalment of this powerful motor-racing serial in next week's BUMPER FREE GIFT number of the GEM).

A SCHOOLBOY'S SECRET!

(Continued from page 22.)

Augustus D'Arcy. "I certainly regarded you as a dud and a wank wotah, if you don't mind my mentionin' it, old bean."

Cleeve smiled.

"My own fault!" he said.

"Oh! You can see that, can you?" asked Blake.

"Yes," answered Cleeve quietly.

"Probably the chap is not such a wotah as we supposed, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus reflectively, and there was a laugh.

The spirit of the St. Jim's team was very changed now. Cleeve's innings had made all the difference. Confidence in their captain, confidence in his new recruit, worked a wondrous alteration. Instead of a sense of impending defeat, the St. Jim's men had the feeling of a winning team—which alone was worth wickets to them. And Harry Wharton & Co., instead of a walk-over, found themselves committed to the fight of their lives.

But the Greyfriars men were good stuff. St. Jim's were all down for ninety; and when the Greyfriars innings opened, and Cleeve was put on to bowl, the St. Jim's crowd eyed him with expectation, prepared for anything now from the Housemaster's nephew. And when Harry Wharton's wicket went down to a fast ball from Cleeve, there was a roar of cheering.

"Well bowled! Well bowled, sir!"

Cleeve, catching his uncle's deep voice among the cheers, glanced towards the pavilion, a cheery smile on his face.

Through the sunny day, with varying fortune, the game went on; and the sun was sloping in the west, and the old elms of St. Jim's casting long shadows, when last man in was called in the Greyfriars second innings. Fellows looked

anxiously at the figures. St. Jim's had a total of a hundred and sixty; Greyfriars ran them close with a hundred and fifty-six, and it was, as Blake remarked, anybody's game. But, at least, it had not been a walk-over; and Tom Merry's men had put up as good a fight as they had ever put up on the cricket ground at St. Jim's. Bob Cherry and Vernon-Smith were at the wickets—both good men and true, and Greyfriars wanted four to tie, and five to win, and all the crowd felt that this over would be the last, win or lose. And Tom Merry tossed the ball to the Housemaster's nephew.

"Feel fit for another over, Cleeve?"

Cleeve grinned.

"Fit for a dozen overs!" he answered.

"Good!"

Bob Cherry stood up to the bowling, with his eyes very alert. He had learned what this new man's bowling was like, and he was taking no risks with it. There was a breathless hush on the crowded ground when the ball went down, and the click of the click of the willow followed, and the leather flew for two.

"—and fifty-eight!" said Blake. "Another like that—!"

But the next was not like that. The next gave Bob a single, and brought the Greyfriars total to a hundred and fifty-nine, and Vernon-Smith to the batting-end. And the Bounder of Greyfriars watched like a cat for the next ball, and stopped it dead—and the next one he stopped—and the next—!

Clatter!

There was a roar.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"St. Jim's wins!"

"Well bowled, Cleeve!"

"Well done, sir!"

"Bravo!"

The field was black with a cheering crowd. Nobody, at that moment, would have supposed that Victor Cleeve was the most unpopular fellow in his House, and in the school. Tom Merry clapped him on the shoulder—Monty Lowther jabbed him in the ribs—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy almost hugged him. Fellows threw up their caps, careless where they came down, or whether they ever came down at all. Cleeve's handsome face showed flushed and cheery and happy in the midst of a cheering crowd.

But Victor Cleeve was missing from the celebration afterwards in the games-room. Under the shadows of the old elms, the Housemaster's nephew walked by himself, with a pale troubled face, thinking—thinking. He had played up like a man that day, and won golden opinions; but the sword of Damocles was still suspended over his head, and might fall at any moment. And when the hour came of disgrace and shame, it would come all the more bitterly now.

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