

LACY OF THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



GRUNDY RETURNS!

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A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY
OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

LACY OF THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Cardew Does Not Go!

TOM MERRY put a cheery face into the doorway of Study No. 9 in the Fourth Form passage in the School House.

"You fellows coming?" he asked. The captain of the Shell was in Norfolk, evidently ready for a bike spin.

Through the open study window there sounded a clatter of machines from the quad.

Levison, Clive, and Cardew were in the study discussing what to do with the afternoon, which was a Wednesday, and a half-holiday.

"Whither bound?" asked Clive, as the captain of the Shell looked in.

"We're going over to the Grammar School," said Tom Merry.

"What for?" asked Levison. "The match isn't till Saturday."

"Gay has been swanking about a new bowler he's got," Tom explained. "A rod in pickle for us on Saturday. They're playing a match with somebody to-day, so we're going to drop in and see the marvel. There are a dozen of us going, so if you fellows would like to come along."

"Not a bad idea," said Clive, looking at his study-mate.

"Good, in fact!" said Levison. Cardew looked dissatisfied.

"What about the cinema at Wayland?" he asked.

"Oh, blow the cinema!" said Clive. "What's the good of being stuck indoors on a day like this?"

"Blessed if I feel inclined to go over to Rylecombe to see those Grammar bouncers playin' at cricket!"

"Well, we might do a longer spin after a look in," said Tom Merry. "It's a ripping afternoon for a ride!"

"Who is this wonderful new bowler?" asked Levison. "I haven't heard of him before. Somebody we know?"

"No, a new chap at the Grammar School," said Tom. "He's only been there a few weeks. I think he came from a school in the north of England. Gay says he is a corker, and as good as Fatty Wynn, or better. He's promised us a whole set of hat tricks next Saturday."

"Swank!" said Clive, laughing. "Oh, yes; but I'm curious to see the chap bowl, all the same. If he's anything like as good as our Fatty, he must be a corker."

Cardew was looking attentive now. "A ripping bowler," he said, "from a school in the north. What's the name of the school?"

Tom Merry shook his head. "Blessed if I know! I've not heard."

"What's the chap's name, then?" Cardew seemed very interested, somehow, in the new Grammarian. "You've heard that?"

"Yes, his name's Lacy."

"Oh!"

Cardew strolled to the window, and stood looking out into the quadrangle, with his hands in his pockets.

"Well, are you fellows coming?" said

Tom. "We're starting in a few minutes. Come along, if you feel that way."

And, with a nod, he left the study, and walked cheerily down the passage. Manners and Lowther were already shouting to him from the stairs.

"Come on, slow-coach!"

"Back up, fathhead!"

"Here you are," said Tom Merry, as he joined his chums. "I think the fellows in No. 9 are coming along. Got the bikes out?"

"Yes. Come on!"

The Terrible Three went downstairs. In Study No. 9 Levison and Clive hesitated.

"Well, are you coming, Cardew?" asked Levison at last.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't care to."

"Oh, what rot!" said Clive. "I'd like to go."

"Well, I'm not stoppin' you."

Cardew's face had grown moody as he stared from the window. The Terrible Three were wheeling their machines down to the gates. Blake and Herrice and Digby and D'Arcy of Study No. 6, had joined them; and Figgins & Co. were coming over from the New House. Kangaroo and Talbot of the Shell, Julian and Reilly of the Fourth had also joined the party. Cardew watched them idly as they went down to the gates in a cheery crowd.

Levison looked puzzled, and Clive a little irritated. They did not feel inclined to desert their study-mate on the half-holiday. But they wanted to join Tom Merry & Co., and there seemed no reason against it.

"Look here, Cardew; why don't you want to come?" asked Levison.

"I'm not interested in Gordon Gay's wonderful new man. I'm not in the St. Jim's eleven, you know."

"You might be, if you didn't slack about so much."

"Thanks!"

"Well, I'm going," said Clive.

"Best of luck," said Cardew. "Ta-ta!"

The South African junior quitted the study and hurried away for his machine. He did not see any reason for wasting the afternoon on account of Cardew's whims.

Levison made a movement to follow him, but turned back.

"Look here, Cardew, I wish you'd come!" he said.

"Can't be did."

"What are you going to do, then?" Cardew laughed.

"There's a dark gentleman who finds somethin' for the hands to do," he remarked. "You buzz off! I shall find somethin' amusin', I dare say."

"That means Racke & Co. and banker in the study, I suppose?" growled Levison.

"Which used not to shock you, dear boy."

"Why don't you want to come over to the Grammar School?" asked Levison

abruptly. "You've got a reason, Cardew."

"Perhaps."

"Is it anything to do with the new fellow there?"

Cardew turned quickly from the window.

"Why should it be?" he asked, eyeing Levison.

"Well, you seemed interested in him, and you seemed to make up your mind not to go as soon as you heard his name."

"You ought to be a detective, Levison!"

"Oh, rats! Do you know this chap Lacy, and have you been on bad terms with him?"

"Why on earth should you think so?"

"Well, I know you were at a school in the north before you came here. You've never mentioned the name of the school, either."

"Haven't I?" yawned Cardew. "And what do you make out of that?"

"Nothing," said Levison calmly. "It's not my business; but I'm not a fool, and I've noticed that you keep your old school dark. If this fellow Lacy is some chap you've known and disliked, why—"

"What rot!"

"Well, will you come?"

"No, I won't!"

And with that Cardew walked out of the study. Levison shrugged his shoulders, and went for his machine. He was very patient with his study-mate's uncertain temper, but there was a limit to his good-nature. Leaving Ralph Racke's Cardew to his own devices, Levison major pedalled rapidly after the St. Jim's party, and overtook them in the lane, and rode on to the Grammar School with them.

Cardew did not tap at Racke's door, however. He was not feeling inclined for banker in the study just then.

After Levison had gone he went out into the quadrangle, and sauntered under the elms, his hands in his pockets, a wrinkle in his forehead. He was thinking deeply, and he did not look as if his thoughts were pleasant ones. It was probable that Levison's keen surmise was near the truth, and that the coming of the new boy to Rylecombe Grammar School meant something to Cardew of the Fourth—though what, Levison would have been puzzled to guess.

CHAPTER 2.

Lacy of Wodehouse.

"**W**ELL bowled, Lacy!"

"Hurrah!"

Loud shouts from the cricket-field reached the ears of Tom Merry & Co. as they jumped off their machines at the Grammar School ground.

"They're gain' it already!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am weally cautious to see this chap Lacy."

"You'll have to pull up your socks, Fatty!" grinned Figgins, giving his plump cham a playful dig in the ribs.

"We can't have our merry champion beaten by a Grammar School bouncer!"

Fatty Wynn sniffed.

"He won't beat me!" he said.

Leaving their machines, the St. Jim's crowd strolled to the cricket-field. There was a crowd of Grammarians round the ropes, looking on with keen interest at the match that was in progress.

The Grammar School Junior. Eleven were playing a visiting team from Wayland. The visitors were batting, and Gordon Gay & Co. were in the field.

Tom Merry & Co. joined the crowd near the pavilion, exchanging nods with the Grammarians, and looked on.

"Where's your new man?" asked Tom Merry, addressing Tadpole, a Fourth Form fellow.

"Bowling now," said Tadpole.

The visitors watched the bowler.

He was an athletic fellow, with a cheery and fairly good-looking face. And he certainly was a good bowler. He had just taken a wicket when the St. Jim's fellows arrived, and as they looked on another fell.

The Grammar School crowd cheered and clapped.

Evidently they were pleased with the latest acquisition to Gordon Gay's eleven.

"Good man!" said Fatty Wynn, who had an eye to a bowler's form. "Did you see that, you fellows? The batsman was clean diddled by the break, you bet your hat! That chap's class!"

"Not up to your form, Fatty," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn looked thoughtful.

"Well, I don't know. Anyway, he's something up against us on Saturday. There will be ducks' eggs going!"

"Waits!" said D'Arcy. "I should refuse to sash a duck's egg, Wynn!"

"You mayn't have any choice," grinned Fatty Wynn. "That fellow's hot stuff, I can tell you. He's going to get that chap, Frinshaw."

Fatty Wynn was right there. The wicket went down. The Grammar School crowd roared applause for the hat-trick.

The Wayland innings was soon over, and Gordon Gay & Co. came off the field. Gay gave Tom Merry & Co. a cheery smile and nod.

"Come over to see our new bowler?" he asked.

"Exactly," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "He seems to be regular mustard!"

"Look out for him on Saturday!"

"Where did he spring from?" asked Monty Lowther.

"New chap here," said Gay. "He used to be at Wodehouse—a school up in the north somewhere. His people moved south, and they brought him with 'em, and set him here. Jolly good they did! I spotted his form at once. Hallo, Lacy! Come here, old scout! Here's some chaps want to know you."

Lacy came up smiling, and was made known to Tom Merry & Co. His manner was agreeable, but he had a trace of swank that the visitors could not help noticing. Perhaps the unstinted applause had got into Lacy's head a little.

"Oh, that's nothing," he remarked, in answer to a remark from Tom Merry on the subject of his bowling. "The batting isn't up to much—not like what I was used to at Wodehouse."

"The Waylanders generally bat pretty well," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I thought the battin' was pweety good."

"Not up to our form," said Lacy. Gordon Gay chuckled.

They did everything in tiptop style at Wodehouse, you know," he explained.

"There never was such a place, and never such fellows, as you found at



Arthur Augustus in a Hurry!
(See Chapter 6.)

Wodehouse. Half of them titled, weren't they, Lacy?"

"There were some rather decent chaps there," said Lacy calmly.

"And it was rather a shock to Lacy to come here," said Gordon Gay. "He came with his nose turned up—didn't you, Lacy? And he never turned it down till somebody rubbed it in the doormat for him—did you, old scout?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lacy reddened a little.

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know," he remarked.

"Time we got going," remarked Wootton major.

Gordon Gay and Lacy went in to open the innings for the Grammar School. The St. Jim's fellows smiled a little as Lacy took his stand. An excellent opinion of himself was expressed in his very attitude.

"Not a bad sort," said Blake, "but windy in the head, that's all. I suppose this—what was it?—Woodhouse was a swagger sort of place? Never heard of it myself."

"Bai Jove!"

"Hallo! What's bitin' you, Gussy?"

"Nothin' 's bitin' me, Blake, and I regard the question as wicidulous," said Arthur Augustus. "I was goin' to remark that I have heard of Wodehouse School. It is in Yorkshire."

"My county," said Blake. "What do you know about it, Gussy?"

"Not now, Blake."

"Oh, you've had somebody there?" said Clive.

"Yaas, Clive. You are awaah that Cardew of the Fourth is a very distant relative of mine—very distant." It was not a source of pride to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that Ralph Reckless Cardew was his relative at all. "I wembah now that Cardew was at Wodehouse."

"Cardew!" exclaimed Levison.

"Yaas."

"Cardew never seems to have mentioned where he came from," said Digby.

"I heard that he was at school in the north, and I spoke to him about it once, but he didn't mention the name of it."

"Some chaps have a notion that he was keeping it dark!" grunted Herries. "What wot, Hewwies! Why should he kept it dark?"

"Blessed if I know! He's a queer fish."

"And you knew all the time, Gustavus?" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"I had forgotten all about it, Lowthah. But I wembah, now it is mentioned, that my patah referred to it when he spoke to me about Cardew. The patah wanted me to make friends with him, as he is a sort of welfation."

"Why did he leave Wodehouse, then?" said Manners. "Have his people moved south, like Lacy's?"

"I don't think Cardew has any neah welfations, Mannahs, exceptin' his gwand-fathah, Lord Weakness, and his uncles. I suppose he was taken away from Wodehouse for some weason. I nevah thought of askin'."

"Hallo! There goes Lacy's wicket!" chortled Kangaroo.

The Grammarian bowler was evidently not quite so good a batsman as he was a bowler. He had been clean bowled, his middle stump knocked fairly out of the ground, without a single run to his credit.

"Bai Jove! That chap weecives ducks' eggs as well as handin' them out!" smiled Arthur Augustus.

There was silence on the field as Lacy walked out. Remarks on the subject of ducks' eggs might have been made by the Grammarian fellows, but they remembered Lacy's great services as a bowler, and forbore. But Algernon Lacy's cheeks were pink as he went back to the pavilion, and there was a glint in his eyes. It was easy enough to see that

he was inwardly irritated and annoyed by his failure at the wicket.

Wootton major went in to bat, and Lacy joined the St. Jim's fellows and the waiting batsmen before the pavilion.

"Hard cheese, dear boy!" Arthur Augustus remarked, by way of solace.

"A Duke, of course!" said Lacy.

"You played a bit too far forward," said Figgins, in his honest, unthinking way. "You didn't quite spot the bowler—what?"

Lacy gave him a stare.

"Do you think so?" he said, with a sarcastic infection in his voice, which hinted that he did not think much of Figgins' opinion, anyway.

Figgins gave him one look, and said nothing further. A fellow who could not take a mishap like a sportsman was not a fellow George Figgins cared to talk to. There was about Lacy a touch of superciliousness that reminded the St. Jim's fellows of Ralph Reckness' Cardew. Possibly the Wodehouse fellows were all tarred with the same brush.

"I hear that you come from Wodehouse," said Arthur Augustus. "There is an old Wodehouse chap at St. Jim's now, Lacy."

"By gad! Is there?" said Lacy. "Perhaps I know him. What's his name?"

"Cardew."

"Not Ralph Reckness Cardew?" exclaimed Lacy.

"Yaas, that's the name."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Penpaws you are acquainted with him?"

"Oh, I knew him at Wodehouse right enough," said Lacy, with a peculiar shrug of the shoulders. "Yes, I knew him."

"He's a distant relative of mine," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh! Then you know all about him?"

No. As a matter of fact, I never met him before he came to St. Jim's, and hardly heard his name mentioned.

"Oh!"

"I will tell him there is a Wodehouse chap here," said Arthur Augustus. "I dare say he would like to win ovals and have a talk about his old school."

Lacy raised his eyebrows.

"Pray don't!" he said.

"Eh?"

"Cardew isn't the kind of fellow I want to know, thanks!"

With that reply Algernon Lacy gave the St. Jim's fellows a cool nod, and walked away. Arthur Augustus stood rooted to the ground. Lacy's reply had taken his breath away. As he had mentioned that Cardew was his relative, the Grammar School fellow's words could not be called polite.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, at last. "Blake, dear boy, I washeth think I will go for my bike. I am afraid that they remain here. I shall not be able to resist the temptation to pull that fellow's nose!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away, his cheeks flushed.

Tom Merry & Co. followed him. They had seen the wonderful new bowler; and, apart from his bowling, they did not think much of him. They did not care to see the match out, and they went for their machines, leaving Gordon Gay and Wootton major still chatting. Some of them exchanged curious glances as they went.

What did Lacy's remark mean? It may be only a particularly offensive variety of swank. Had he been personally on bad terms with Cardew at his old school? Or—? More than one of the fellows had noticed that Cardew was silent on the subject of his former school.

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He had never even mentioned its name. But for the chance that there was a relative of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's, the St. Jim's fellows would never have known that Cardew had been at Wodehouse at all.

Levison and Clive looked, as they felt, uneasy. They could not help being aware of their study-mate's secretiveness on the subject of his old school. Was there a reason for it, something Cardew did not care to admit? In spite of themselves, that thought forced itself into their minds. And they could see that Tom Merry & Co. were thinking the same.

CHAPTER 3.

The Black Sheep.

"ALL on your own—what?"

Cardew halted his pacing under the elms as Rucke of the Shell addressed him.

Rucke was coming from the tuckshop when he spotted the Fourth-Former under the elms. He joined him at once.

"Yes," said Cardew shortly.

"Your pals gone out?"

"Yes!" snapped Cardew.

He did not like the Shell fellow assuming that he was deserted, and left with his time on his hands. The grandson of Lord Reckness deemed it more in accordance with the fitness of things that he should be a much-sought-after person.

"Gone with Merry and that gang, I suppose?" said Rucke.

"Queer how Levison gets on with Merry now. They used not even to speak."

"That was when Levison was a pal of yours, wasn't it?" said Cardew sarcastically.

"The leopard has changed his spots since then."

Rucke affected not to notice Cardew's far from friendly manner. It suited the upstart, the heir of Messrs. Rucke and Rucke, the two professors, to put up with a good deal of insolence from Lord Reckness' grandson.

"There's somethin' goin' on in my study," he said. "Like to come?"

"Thanks, no."

Cardew did not speak very decidedly, however. As a matter of fact, he was getting tired of his own society, and feeling a vague resentment against Clive and Levison for leaving him alone.

Rucke noted it, and smiled.

"We're going to have rather a decent tea," he said. "I've been talkin' to Dame Taggles at the tuckshop. She won't let me have anythin' extra, though I've offered double prices."

"The Head would be down on her if she did."

"Oh, it's all rot, this food regulatin'," growled Rucke. "All very well for the poor; but I don't see applyin' it to us. What's the good of havin' money if you can't spend it? Pretty state of things I've offered double prices."

"Yes. If this keeps on, it won't be worth while making profits out of the war at all, will it?" grinned Cardew.

Rucke affected not to notice that remark.

"Still, we've got somethin'," he said. "Chow, if you want it one way or another. Money talks. What do you say to comin' along to my study, and joinin' us? Crooke and Scrope will be there. Banker or nap or bridge, as you like."

"I'm your man."

"Good! Come on."

Cardew followed Rucke into the School House. Most of the fellows were out of doors on that sunny half-holiday. Certainly only a fellow of Rucke's peculiar tastes would have cared to shut himself up indoors to play cards, while the spring sun was shining, and the fresh breeze blowing. But the black sheep of the

School House had tastes that were all their own.

Crooke and Scrope of the Shell were in Rucke's study, smoking cigarettes. They greeted Cardew civilly enough.

Neither of them liked the cool, supercilious fellow, and when Cardew joined in their shady pursuits, they always had an uncomfortable feeling that he was mocking them. But they were glad enough to welcome him into their select circle. Fellows whose tastes resembled their own were rare at St. Jim's, and they would have liked to count in Lord Reckness' grandson as a recruit.

Cardew was in a reckless and disagreeable mood. He joined the circle at the table, and Rucke, after locking the door, produced the cards from their hiding-place.

"Bobs?" asked Crooke.

"Oh, make it worth while," said Cardew at once.

"Quids, then."

"Oh!"

Rucke and Crooke and Scrope exchanged rather queer glances. They knew that Cardew had plenty of money, and they had a good deal themselves. But nap for sovereign points had never been played in No. 7 before.

There was a short pause, and Cardew's smile grew mocking.

"Well?" he said.

"Oh, go it!" said Rucke. "I'm your man, anyway!"

"Same here," said Crooke at last.

"What about you, Scrope?"

"I'll smoke a bit," said Scrope drily.

"Never mind me."

Scrope was not quite so well provided with money to burn as his pals.

Rucke dealt the cards.

Cardew called nap, and there was a pause before the vanquished paid up.

Wealthy as Rucke and Crooke were, a fever in lump sum was a serious matter. They paid, with somewhat bitter expressions. They did not want to play for such heavy stakes, and they could not afford to keep it up. Cardew's swank in fixing such stakes awoke bitter rancour in their breasts.

Cardew, as a matter of fact, was irritated and dissatisfied with himself for being there at all, and it was like him to make his new associates irritated and dissatisfied, too.

They had invited him to gamble, and he had grimly resolved to give them gambling on a scale that would make them open their eyes.

Even Aubrey Rucke, with his liberal share of the paternal war-profits, could not afford to hand out fivers.

The game went on, Crooke and Rucke in an irritated and nervous mood, yet not caring to show the white feather by reducing the stakes. Scrope locked on with a grin. He was glad to be out of that game, and he charitably enjoyed the discomfiture of the bold blades who were being forced to more boldness than was to their liking.

The next win was to Crooke, but it was only two. The next to Cardew again, four. The Fourth-Former smiled.

"You're in luck, Cardew!" said Crooke savagely.

"Yes, it seems so."

"You're an old hand at the game, I should say."

"Oh, I've played sometimes! Pass the cigarettes!"

Cardew lighted a fresh cigarette, while Rucke was still studying the cards. He did not appear to notice a quick glance that was exchanged between the two Shell fellows. Rucke closed one eye, and Crooke gave a slight nod. Cardew, blowing out a cloud of smoke, appeared to see nothing.

Crooke cut, and Rucke dealt.

Cardew smiled genially as Racke called him up.

"He rose from the table.

"Hallo, what's the game?" asked Racke, in surprise.

"I think it's about time I was getting along," yawned Cardew.

The Shell fellows gave him furious looks.

"Without playin' the game out?" exclaimed Racke.

"Yes."

"Do you call that sportin'?" asked Crooke.

"That depends," said Cardew coolly.

"Do you call it sportin', Frinistance, to manipulate the merry cards?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"You heard what I said," said Cardew, with deadly coolness.

"You—you dare to say——" panted Racke.

"Quite so. You stocked the cards, my dear fellow, in shufflin', and Crooke only pretended to cut," said Cardew calmly.

"A little joke—what? Of course, I wouldn't accuse you of cheatin'." I'm sure you're incapable of it. A little joke on an innocent youth—eh—"

Racke stared at him, with concentrated rage in his look. It was true enough.

The high stakes, coupled with Cardew's luck, had been a little too much for Racke, and he had wangled the cards in that round. He had never dreamed for a moment, however, that Cardew had noted it.

Serape grinned over his cigarette. The situation was quite entertaining—to the looker-on.

"I suppose you're jokin', Cardew?" said Crooke at last. "I certainly cut the cards fair and square."

"And Racke put the top half back on top of the back," smiled Cardew.

"You lyn' rotter!" shouted Racke.

"Shush! Don't lose your temper, you know."

"You saw me, Serape——"

"I didn't see anything," said Serape promptly. "I was lightin' a fag. No good askin' me."

Racke rose to his feet.

"You can leave the game, if you like, Cardew—in fact, after this, I'll ask you to get out of my study at once! But what you've said is a lie, and if you don't play the round out you'll hand back what you've won!"

"I'll see you hanged first!" said Cardew coolly. "You asked me here, and I won fair and square. I chuck the game when you begin cheatin'. That's all. I don't want your rotten money, if it comes to that; but it's the principle of the thing, you see."

"It's a sneakin' excuse to leave off a winner!" sneered Crooke. "Just what we might have expected of the fellow!"

"That's a!" said Cardew.

Racke and Crooke exchanged a look. The loss of their money in such a sum, the exposure of their rascality, enraged them beyond words. Cardew was not to escape with his winnings if they could help it. All consideration for appearances was thrown to the winds now.

They made a simultaneous rush at Cardew as he unlocked the door.

"Now, you cad——"

Cardew spun round.

His hands went up like lightning. The junior who had stood up to Cutts of the Fifth in combat was not afraid of a couple of slackers like Racke and Crooke.

"Thump!" said Cardew.

Racke reeled against the table with a yell, and Crooke, gasping, went down on the floor with a heavy bump.

Cardew smiled icily at them for a moment, and stepped out of the study, closing the door after him.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Crooke, sitting

up and rubbing his chin. "Oh, crumbs! The—the rotten hooligan!"

"Hang him!" snarled Racke. "I'll—I'll——" He dabbed at his nose, panting with rage.

"All as you fellows later," yawned Serape, going to the door. "I must say that you're not very entertainin' this afternoon." And he left the study.

Racke ground his teeth.

"Cheery afternoon—what?" growled Crooke. "Why did you bring that blackguard Cardew here at all, Racke? He's not our sort."

"I'll make him sorry for this!" said Racke, between his teeth. "To collar all our money, and then walk off!"

"Well, he spotted you, you know!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Look here——"

"Go and eat cake!"

It looked as if the two precious pals would finish by coming to blows; but Crooke left the study instead, scowling.

Racke remained, dabbing his nose, his breast seething with anger and bitter hatred towards Ralph Cardew. Certainly that merry afternoon in Racke's study could not be called a success.

CHAPTER 4.

Cardew Puzzles His Chums.

TOM MERRY & CO. found Cardew of the Fourth lounging in the gateway when they came back from their spin.

The juniors looked at him rather curiously as they passed in, wheeling their machines.

They had not forgotten Algernon Lacy's words at the Grammar School.

But it was no business of theirs, and nobody thought of questioning Cardew about Wodehouse.

Cardew joined Levison and Clive when they came back from the bike-shed. He seemed in a very agreeable temper now.

"Hada good time?" he asked. "Did you see the wonderful new bowler?"

"Yes. He's a corker with the ball," said Clive.

"I suppose Gay'll be bringin' him over here on Saturday?"

"Sorry I'm not in the eleven," remarked Cardew. "I suppose I sha'n't have the pleasure of seein' him?"

"You can watch the match, if you like," suggested Levison.

"Catch me spendin' an afternoon watchin' a match! You'll be playin' for St. Jim's, Levison, I suppose!"

"Yes, rather!"

"You won't, Clive?"

"Not unless somebody crooks up, and they want a reserve," said Clive, smiling.

"I'm living in hopes."

"Might have an afternoon out on Saturday," remarked Cardew, in a reflective sort of way. "What do you say to visitin' Abbotsford Camp, and seein' the soldiers?"

"All serene, if I'm not wanted for the match," said Clive, reddening a little. Levison looked uncomfortable.

Cardew's eyes dwelt on them scrutinisingly.

"What's up?" he asked suddenly.

"Nothing!"

"Out with it, you know!" said Cardew pleasantly. "I'm not exactly blind. What's happened at the Grammar School this afternoon?"

Levison and Clive exchanged glances.

"Perhaps we'd better tell you, Cardew," said Sidney Clive abruptly.

"There's a fellow there who used to be at your old school."

"The new bowler?"

"Yes—Lacy."

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"How do you know he used to be at my old school, dear boy? I don't re-

member ever mentionin' my old school to you by name."

"You've kept it dark," said Clive.

"It wasn't my bizney to ask you anything. But D'Arcy knew."

"Oh! D'Arcy knew?" I suppose he would," said Cardew, with a nod. "I hadn't thought of it; but I suppose he would know."

"He happened to mention it because we heard from Gay that Lacy was an old Wodehouse chap," said Levison. "It seems that Lacy knew you there, Cardew."

"So you've been talkin' about me?"

"Why not?" said Clive sharply. "It was natural enough for you to be mentioned. I suppose, as you used to be at Lacy's school."

"Oh, quite! Did Lacy express a lot of friendly feelin's towards me?" asked Cardew, with a smile.

"Well, I judged that you hadn't been very friendly at Wodehouse," said Clive.

"But never mind that. What I was going to say is this. It looks as if you didn't go over to the Grammar School to-day because you wanted to avoid this chap, Lacy. It looks like it all the more now."

"Why?"

"I mean your proposing to go over to Abbotsford on Saturday, when Lacy is coming here with Gay's team."

"You are getting quite keen, Clive. old scout!" said Cardew admiringly.

"If you keep on like this, our study will be growing no end distinguished for its mental brilliance."

"Oh, rats! What I was going to say is this—if you're trying to keep it dark about Wodehouse, and about knowing Lacy there, it's no use, because it's all out already. If that's your reason for scooting off to Abbotsford on Saturday, you needn't take the trouble."

Cardew's eyes glistened for a moment.

"Thanks," he said, after a pause. "On second thoughts, I won't scoot off to Abbotsford on Saturday. As you say, it isn't worth the trouble."

"Then you were going out to avoid Lacy?"

"Exactly."

"And that's why you didn't go over to Rylcombe to-day?"

"Quite so."

Clive seemed nonplussed. Levison grinned. Cardew's perfectly cool admission struck them in different ways. But both felt uneasy.

"Well, I must say you're candid," said Clive at last.

"My wrong point," smiled Cardew.

"Should advise you not to be quite so candid to everybody. Fellows will begin to wonder why you left Wodehouse."

"My dear chap, they're wonderin' already," said Cardew unmoved.

"I could see there was somethin' in their faces when they came in. I know now what it was. You two have been wonderin', too. You've been debatin' in your minds whether I was sacked from my old school—what?"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Levison.

"I don't see why you should make secrets out of nothing," said Clive tartly.

"If a chap hides things, it looks as if he has somethin' to hide."

"Well, perhaps I have somethin' to hide," said Cardew calmly.

"Oh!" said Clive, taken quite aback.

"And you needn't ask me what it is, because I'm not goin' to tell you," added Cardew.

"I don't want to know. It's not my business."

"I don't suppose the other fellows will be so accommodatin'. They will want to know," grinned Cardew. "I can fancy Trimble when he gets on the track."

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of it, an' knows there's a secret. And Mellish—and merry old Racke! I can foresee a high old time."

"You don't seem to mind," said Levison.

"Why should I mind? You know how I enjoy the limelight, don't you?" said Cardew, laughing. "I'm goin' to have tons of it. Some of the chaps will go over specially to see Lacy an' drag the yarn out of him. If they can't do that, they'll figure it out for themselves—whether I was sacked for bein' drunk an' disorderly or whether I was caught robbin' the Heals safe! Ha, ha!"

Cardew laughed heartily.

"Well, I suppose there will be some piffing gossip; but, as you seem to like the idea, that won't matter," said Levison. "My tip would be to tell the fellows plainly about it, before there's a big jaw on the subject."

"Thanks for the tip. You fellows feel inclined for a walk down to the post-office?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Come on, then!"

The chums of Study No. 9 strolled out at the gates. Cardew seemed in great spirits. It was as if he were looking forward with enjoyment to the curiosity and tattle that were now inevitable, on the subject of his old school and his reason for leaving it.

Levison and Clive hardly knew what to make of him. But it was not the first time their study-mate had puzzled them.

At the village post-office, Cardew had a further surprise for them. He brought a registered envelope, placed fourteen pounds in notes in it, and addressed it to the Wayland Cottage Hospital. His chums watched him dumbly as he posted it, and slipped the receipt into his pocket.

"Well, my hat!" said Clive, as they left the post-office. "What did you do that for, Cardew?"

"Isn't the Cottage Hospital a deservin' institution?" said Cardew. "They've got wounded Tommies there, you know."

"Yes. But fourteen quid! Do you mean to say your allowance is big enough for you to give away fourteen quid in a lump?"

"Oh, ha! Not exactly! I've been stealin' it."

"Are you dotty?" exclaimed the South African junior, in amazement.

"Not at all. Didn't you tell me once that gambin' was next door to stealin'?"

"I dare say I did. I think so, anyway!"

"Well, then, to be quite correct, I next door stole it," said Cardew.

"While you fellows were makin' the acquaintance of my merry old school-mate, I was improvin' the shinin' hour in Racke's study. Savvy?"

"Oh!"

"You won fourteen pounds from them?" exclaimed Levison.

"Yes. You should have seen their faces! Racke started cheatin'."

"We had a row. I left," said Cardew. "I don't want their dirty money, though. Racke and Crooke have had the pleasure of contributin' to the funds of the Cottage Hospital without knowin' it. Rather a joke on them—what? Cardew laughed.

"Don't tell me what you think about my dashed blackguardly robbin' on, Clive, old scout. I know it all in advance. This way."

The three juniors had reached the turning in the lane that led to the Grammar School. Clive and Levison halted.

"You're going there?" exclaimed Levison.

"I'm goin' to call on my old friend, Lacy!"

And Cardew strode up the lane to the big gates of the Grammar School.

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Clive and Levison, in helpless bewilderment, followed him.

CHAPTER 5.

A Strange Interview.

LEVISON caught Ralph Cardew by the arms as they came up to the big bronze gates.

"Hold on!" he said quietly. "Look here, you'd better not."

"Why not?"

"I may as well tell you that Lacy isn't first friendly towards you," said Levison. "If you're going there to row with him, you'd better chuck it! It would be bad taste, at least, when the fellows are coming over to St. Jim's on Saturday."

"How do you know he isn't friendly?" asked Cardew, unmoved.

"He said as much."

"Oh, so! So even old Algy is turnin' his back on an old pal! I suppose you two fellows will do the same, when you know all that Algy can tell you."

"Do you mean to say you did anything disgraceful at Wodehouse, and had to leave because of that?" demanded Clive. "I don't mean to say anything." Come on!"

Cardew jerked his arm away from Levison, and walked in at the gates. The other two juniors followed him in. Gordon, Gay, and Wootton major and Frank Monk were chatting near the gates, and they looked inquiringly at the new-comers. They were meditating whether to rag the St. Jim's trio or not, when Cardew addressed them, with a friendly nod.

"How did the match go, dear boys?"

"Oh, we won," said Gay carelessly.

"Your wonderful bowler—what's that?"

"Well, he did a good bit towards it," said Gordon Gay. "He's a corker!"

"Hat trick—eh?"

"Yes, in each innings."

"Good old Algy! There'd be no holdin' him after that," remarked Cardew. "I suppose he needs a larger size in hats already?"

The Grammarian juniors grinned.

"I see you know him," said Frank Monk.

"Oh, yes. Quite an old friend. Is he still on view? I've called to see him, an' have a pleasant talk about old times at Wodehouse," explained Cardew.

"Oh!" said Gay, with a somewhat peculiar expression. "You—you want to see Lacy?"

"Yes. Quite an old pal, you know."

"I'll take you to his study if you like."

"You're awfully good!"

Gordon Gay led the way in, looking, as he felt, puzzled. He knew that Lacy of Wodehouse did not want to see his former school-fellow, and that he had no friendly feelings towards him. Lacy had said as much since he had learned that Cardew was at St. Jim's. Still, it was good for St. Jim's, and he obligingly guided the St. Jim's trio to Lacy's study in the Fourth Form quarters.

Gay tapped at the door and opened it.

"Chap to see you, Lacy!"

"Oh, trot in!"

Lacy had changed after the match, and he was looking very elegant as he rose from the sofa in his study. He was easy to see that the Wodehouse fellow was a good deal of a dandy.

He gave a violent start at the sight of Cardew.

"You!" he ejaculated.

Gordon Gay heard that astonished ejaculation as he went down the passage. He wondered all the more what Cardew had come for.

"You must excuse me for not callin' before, Lacy. I never heard you were here till to-day."

Lacy stared at him blankly, and sat down again.

Levison and Clive looked at one another in great discomfort. Never had visitors been less welcome anywhere, it was easy to see that. But Ralph Cardew did not appear to observe that.

He looked into the study carelessly.

"Quite like old times to see you again, Algy!" he remarked.

"By gad!" said Lacy.

"You know my pals, I think? They had the pleasure of seein' you bowl this afternoon—a pleasure I missed."

"Look here, what do you want, Cardew?" demanded Lacy abruptly.

"The pleasure of seein' an old acquaintance. I haven't heard anything from Wodehouse since I left, you know."

"Don't talk rot!" said Lacy. "Tell me what you've come for. If you're afraid I've given you away, you can be easy about that. Haven't I?"

"That's jolly good of you, Algy!"

"I simply don't want to have anything to do with you," said Lacy stiffly. "You can't quite expect it, under the circumstances."

"Such an old pal, too!" sighed Cardew.

Lacy made an uneasy movement.

"Well, we were pals, in a way," he said. "But—but after what happened—"

"After I got bowled out and you didn't, you mean?" suggested Cardew.

Lacy reddened.

"Look here, I've said plainly enough that I don't want your acquaintance!"

he said. "You need not be so jolly thick-skinned, Cardew. Haven't I spoken plainly enough for you?"

"Oh, quite. If you come to that, I don't want yours," smiled Cardew.

"To tell the honest, frozen truth, I didn't come here merely for the pleasure of contemplatin' your aristocratic features, Lacy, and admirin' the beauty of your part your hair. It's a pleasure, of course, but I didn't really come for that. Just the same nutty old nut you used to be! Algy! Do you smoke now?"

"No, I don't," snapped Lacy.

"Right! It's a bad habit," agreed Cardew. "No good offerin' you a cigarette, then?"

"Oh, get out!"

Levison and Clive stepped quietly out of the doorway. They had had enough of this scene, if Cardew had not.

"Oh, don't go," said Cardew, glancing at them. "I'm just comin'. I'm goin' to tear myself away in a minute, in spite of Algy's hearty welcome. To come to business, Algy, have you let your mouth run away with you since you found out that I was at St. Jim's?"

"I've said nothing about you."

"And you're not goin' to?" said Cardew, eyeing him.

Lacy sneered.

"So that's what you've come about? You're afraid of it gettin' out?"

"My dear ass, I'm afraid of nothing on this merry earth! I only want to know what your game is. Are you goin' to babble about old times at Wodehouse, or are you not?"

"No," said Lacy, after a pause. "If you've started fresh at a new school, I don't see why I should give you away. So long as you keep your distance from me personally, you needn't be afraid."

"I think I've mentioned once that I'm not afraid, Algy. Don't keep harpin' on that, my dear fellow. But you were always rather given to babblin', you know. You remember?"

"Look here, Cardew—" began the Wodehouse fellow furiously.

"You remember the time you got Horseley of the Sixth into hot water by your babblin', old scout—"

By the

way, is Horseley the same merry old sport he was in my time?"

"He hasn't changed that I know of."

"Dear old Wodehouse!" smiled Cardew. "What merry times we had there. Blessed if I didn't take St. Jim's for a giddy Sunday-school, the change was so big! But to come back to our muttons. Can I rely on your holdin' your tongue, Lacy?"

The fact that Clive and Levison heard every word, and could not help drawing their own conclusions, did not seem to affect Cardew in the least.

He could easily have paid the visit without his friends, and it was evidently his intention to brave their opinion.

"I've said that I've not given you away, and I'm not intendin' to," said Lacy. "That's all I've got to say. But I don't want anything to do with you, if you persist in speakin' to me you can look out for yourself. You're not the kind of fellow I want to know."

"How you do delight in rubbin' it in!" said Cardew, with the same smiling calmness. "To hear you, a fellow would hardly think that you used to toady to me at Wodehouse, and were willin' to get dirt to any extent for the sake of gettin' my acquaintance an' keepin' it! Remember how you used to hang about my study, dear boy, fishin' for an invitation to step inside? Must be a pleasure to you now to find the boot on the other leg—what?"

Lacy's face was pale with rage. "Will you clear out?" he cried. "A swankin' deal—that's what you always were. You had the upper hand of me long enough, and it would serve you right if I told all St. Jim's about you! You've come here to ask for mercy—that's what it amounts to."

"And you'll grant it, in your generous way, if I'm sufficiently civil an' humble?" smiled Cardew. "Did you ever find me civil an' humble at Wodehouse, Algy?" His manner changed suddenly. "You sneakin', mean-spirited, cowardly worm! You're not fit for me to wipe my boots on, an' you talk about my keepin' my distance! You know I wouldn't touch you with a barge-pole, after the mean an' dirty way you served me at Wodehouse, you rotten worm! As for askin' mercy of you, an' that's how much I'm afraid of you an' what you choose to say!"

Cardew made a swift step forward, and his finger and thumb closed upon Algenon Lacy's nose.

There was a muffled howl of anguish from the Wodehouse fellow.

"Gurr!"

He struggled furiously to release his nose. With one hand Clive guarded off his savage blows. He was still smiling as he released Lacy, who sank gasping on the sofa.

"Ta-ta, dear boy!"

Cardew walked out of the study, and joined Levison and Clive in the passage.

"Time we were off," he remarked.

Lacy did not emerge from the study. The three St. Jim's juniors, who guarded the school, and walked home in silence. What to think of the scene in Lacy's study, Levison and Clive hardly knew, and it was pretty plain that Ralph Redness Cardew did not care a pin what they thought of it.

CHAPTER 6. Up to Grundy.

TOM MERRY & CO. had said nothing of the incident at the Grammar School, and Levison and Clive were silent as to what had happened during the visit to Lacy. But it was not long before the St. Jim's juniors knew a good deal of the matter.

Cardew could not help observing next day that he was an object of considerable interest, and curiosity.

As he had expressed it, he was getting the limelight.

Some of the fellows had met some Grammarians in Rycombe, and there had been talk. It came out that Cardew had roared with the new fellow at the Grammar School, in his own study. It was understood that his former school-mate had something against him—that he knew something to Cardew's discredit if he chose to utter it. Exactly what it might be was not clear, but the rumour brought into prominence the fact that Cardew had never talked about his old school.

Fellows who questioned Cardew about the matter got no satisfaction.

He coolly told them to mind their own business, or if they were thirsting for information, to go over and see Lacy.

In Study No. 9 not a word had been said.

Levison and Clive could not help drawing their own conclusions from what Algenon Lacy had said. Of Algenon himself they had no great opinion; but it was evident that he knew Cardew's secret, and that it was a secret that would hardly bear the light.

Cardew gave them looks almost of defiance now and then, as if challenging them to question him. But they refrained.

Unless he chose to explain, they did not mean to bother about explanation.

Cardew did not appear in the least perturbed by the curiosity of which he was the object. His manner was quite as cool and nonchalant as ever, and it did not seem to strike him that he was lowered in any way in the opinion of the St. Jim's fellows. And probably he would not have cared.

There was one fellow who heard the whispers of scandal with keen satisfaction. That was Racke of the Shell.

The heir of Messrs. Racke & Hacke burned with animosity against the dandy of the Fourth. The accusation of cheating, though true—perhaps because it was true—had struck Racke to the quick.

That day, after lessons, Aubrey Racke wheeled out his bicycle and pedalled away down Rycombe Lane. Cardew was standing at the doorway of the School House, and he saw him go, and smiled satirically.

"Dear old Racke!" he remarked. "He's gone for news."

"Eh? Where has Racke gone?" said Clive, who had not observed the cad of the Shell.

"He's gone to the Grammar School for details," said Cardew, laughing.

"To see Lacy, you mean?" asked Levison.

"I fancy so."

"Then you can expect to find the story, what ever it is, all over the school," said Levison, drily. "Lacy isn't likely to show you much consideration after you have pulled his nose."

"He asked for it," said Cardew, shrugging his shoulders. "I had to let him know what I thought of his confounded cheek. It will be quite entertaining when Racke comes back."

Levison looked at him seriously.

"It won't be very entertaining for you, Cardew, if you were sacked from Wodehouse," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because if you've been expelled from your own school, you must have kept it dark from the Head, or you'd never have been admitted here."

"Possibly."

"And if it comes out, you'll be requested to clear," said Levison. "You can't expect anything else."

Cardew laughed.

"You seem to have made up your mind that I was sacked from Wodehouse," he remarked.

"I don't say so; but I don't see what Lacy could be holding over your head."

"It looks like it, anyway," said Sidney Clive bluntly. "Otherwise, I don't see why you can't explain the whole matter."

"Suppose I told you I left Wodehouse under a cloud—"

"Well, you can guess that much."

"Because I played the game straight in rather difficult circumstances, and was shockingly misunderstood," said Cardew, with a smile. "You'd think I was pulling your leg—what?"

"I don't know," said Clive, after a pause. "You're such a queer beggar that a fellow doesn't know what to think. But I must say it would sound rather steep."

"Exactly."

"Is that the yarn you're going to tell?" asked Levison.

"My dear man, I'm not goin' to tell any yarn at all! If the fellows are interested in my affairs, that's their lookout. I'm not going to satisfy them."

Grundy of the Shell came up to the trio, with a frowning brow.

"I hear you were sacked from your last school, Cardew!" he exclaimed.

"Really?" asked Cardew.

"Well, Trimble says so."

"Entertainin' chap, Trimble," said Cardew affably.

Grundy did not puzzle.

"Well, is it true?" he demanded.

"Better consult Trimble again. I'm sure he could give you all the details."

"If you've been sacked from your old school, it's like your blessed cheek to come to St. Jim's!" said Grundy warmly. "Sacked cheeks are not wanted here. I can tell you that!"

"Thanks for the tip!"

"What were you sacked for?" demanded Grundy. "Of course, I know a fellow may have the beaks down on him for nothing. I was asked to leave Redclyffe simply for whopping a prefect. I explained to the Head that he checked me; but he was rather an ass of a head-master. Was it something of that sort?"

"Not at all. If you specially want to know—"

"Well, I think I ought to know!" said Grundy, who never could see when his leg was being pulled. "You'd better be frank about it!"

It was for getting Zeppelins into the school, said Cardew calmly.

"B-b-but how could you have let Zeppelins into the school?" exclaimed Grundy, in bewilderment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Levison and Clive.

Grundy glared at them.

"What are you cackling at? Oh! So you were pulling my leg, were you, you cheeky young rotter?" he roared. "I don't stand any rot from Fourth Form fags, Grundy! I'll jolly well—"

Grundy made a jump at the smiling Cardew.

In a moment Study No. 9 fastened on the burly Shell fellow as one man, and George Alfred Grundy's legs flew in the air, and he was rolled down the steps.

Cardew & Co. strolled away laughing, leaving Grundy to sort himself out. He sat up dazedly.

"Mum-mum-my hat! I—I—I—"

"Bai Jove! Yawooh!"

Arthur Augustus ran down the steps of the School House, but in a hurry to get to the cricket field. He did not see Grundy till he fell over him.

Grundy gave a roar as the swell of St. Jim's plumped upon him, knocking him

over, and falling on him. The bat came into contact with Grundy's head, and the Shell fellow roared again.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus sat up breathlessly. He sat up on Grundy's neck, but he did not notice that for a moment. "Gwooh!" I have been thrown into quite a flutiah. Gwooh!"

"Geroff!" splattered Grundy. "I am too breathless to wise for a moment, Gwunday. What the mewvy dickens were you lyin' on the gwound for at the bottom of the steps? I wergard that as a vevy sillay and dangewous sort of pvaetical joke, Gwunday!"

"Will you get off, you silly idiot?" shrieked Grundy.

"I wufese to be called a silly idiot, Gwunday!"

Wilkins and Gunn of the Shell came up, and yanked Arthur Augustus off the gasping and furious Grundy. D'Arcy, with a disdainful sniff, went on his way to the cricket-field, and Wilkins and Gunn picked up their chum.

"My hat!" gasped Grundy. "The cheeky yow rotters! It's about time those Fourth Form kids were sat on, I think! Groogh!"

"Well, it was the other way round just then," grinned Wilkins. "What's the trouble, old school?"

"Those yow rotters of No. 9 bumped me over!" said Grundy, in indignant wrath. "I simply asked Cardew whether he had been sacked from his old school—a civil question—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at. It strikes me that this wasn't looking into it," said Grundy darkly. "St. Jim's doesn't want fellows who have been sacked from other schools."

"Eh? I understood that you got the boot from Redclyffe," said Gunn innocently. "Somebody been chipping you about it?"

"I'd be a silly ass, Gunny! I don't allow anybody to chip me," said Grundy. "I was asked to leave Redclyffe because I whopped a prefect. That's quite a different matter. This chap Cardew seems to have been sacked. If he was, he's not fit to belong to this school, and something's got to be done!"

"Blessed if I see what it matters to us," yawned Wilkins.

"It's up to me," explained Grundy. "Considering my position in the Lower School—"

"Your whatter?"

"My position in the Lower School!" roared Grundy.

"Oh! Go ahead! Considering your position in the Lower School!" said Wilkins, with due solemnity.

"Something's got to be done. The fellows will naturally look to me to take the lead."

"Will they?" asked Gunn, in astonishment.

"Yes, they will. Why shouldn't they?"

"Well, they might look to Tom Merry, as he's junior captain," said Gunn. "Only an idea of mine, of course."

"Tom Merry's a back number," said Grundy disdainfully. "Naturally, they will look to me to take the matter up. If Cardew was sacked from his old school, it's a disgrace to St. Jim's for him to be here, and I'm not going to stand it!"

"Going to expel him?" asked Wilkins blandly.

"I can't do that," said Grundy un-enthusiastically. "Only the Head can sack a fellow. You ought to know that, Wilkins."

"Oh!" murmured Wilkins.

"I'm going to take the matter up, however. You fellows are going to back me up. I say, where are you going?"

"Cricket!" called back Gunn.

"Never mind cricket now! Look here—"

But Wilkins and Gunn were gone.

CHAPTER 7.

In Luck.

TOM MERRY & CO. were chatting in the Common-room after prep, when Racke of the Shell came in, looking very surly. Cardew glanced across at him with an amused smile. It was easy to see that Racke's visit to the Grammar School had not prospered.

Crooke and Serope and Mellish and Trimble surrounded Racke at once. They knew what he had gone out for, and they were anxious for news.

"Did you see Lacy?" asked Crooke.

"Yes."

"And he told you—"

"You fellows would be interested to know what Lacy of Rycombe could tell you about Cardew," said Racke, looking round.

"I shouldn't be interested," said Tom Merry shortly. "I don't want to hear any tattle."

"Yaas, wathah! I should wufese to listen."

"That's all rot!" exclaimed Grundy of the Shell emphatically. "I believe in having the truth out. If that chap was sacked from his old school, the sooner he gets out of St. Jim's the better. That's my opinion, for what it's worth."

"But how much is it worth?" asked Cardew placidly. "Not much, I should say."

"You go ahead, Racke, and tell us what Lacy says!" exclaimed Grundy.

"Better shut up!" growled Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, dry up!" said Kangaroo of the Shell. "This isn't the place for rotten tittle-tattle."

"I don't agree with you," said Grundy, in a tone that implied that that ended all possible discussion.

"Oh, you're an ass, you know!" said the Cornstalk.

"Go ahead, Racke!"

Racke gave Tom Merry & Co. a vaulting look. The fact that they were down upon him gave an added zest to his satisfaction in dishing Cardew. He had never before found himself in sympathy with George Alfred Grundy. Grundy, in fact, regarded Racke as what he called a smoky rotter, and he had been known to jam Racke's cigarettes down his back, a very high-handed proceeding on Grundy's part.

But the burly Shell fellow was a powerful ally, and Racke was glad to see him ranged upon his side.

"Now, we're going to have this all out," said Grundy firmly. "We don't want fellows with shady secrets here. What did Lacy tell you, Racke?"

"He told me that Cardew had to leave Wodehouse," said Racke, with a venomous glance at the cool, nonchalant dandy of the Fourth. "He wouldn't give me any particulars. He said he didn't want to talk about the fellow."

"Awfully good of him, considerin' that I pulled his nose," remarked Cardew.

"Bai Jove! Did you pull his nose, Cardew?"

"Yes. He fairly asked for it."

"And did he take it lying down?" exclaimed Lowther.

"No. Standin' up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He must be a rather miserable worm, to let you pull his nose," said Manners.

"Lucky for you it wasn't Gay's nose!"

"Well, he is rather a worm," said Cardew placidly. "He always was. I'm sorry you've been disappointed, Racke."

Lacy could have told you quite an entertaining story if he'd liked. Perhaps he thought I might pull his nose again. Hard cheese for you, after you took the trouble of goin' over to pump him!"

"You had to get out of Wodehouse, anyway," said Racke spitefully. "The Head couldn't have known that when he admitted you here."

"The Head don't know everythin'," said Cardew reflectively. "He couldn't have known that you were a smoky, gambolin' rotter, when he admitted you, Racke."

"Ha, ha! That is vevy true!"

"Right on the wicket!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "You'd better let it drop, Racke. The fact is, nobody here thinks much of that fellow Lacy, and anything he might say would have to be proved."

"Hear, hear!" said Levison.

"Anyway, he says that Cardew had to get out of Wodehouse, and that no Wodehouse fellow would think of speaking to him," said Racke, with a sneer. "He's surprised that any fellow here speaks to him."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uneasily. "All that is only tittle-tattle. Wacke and Lacy ought to be ashamed of sayin' anythin' of the kind. I really consider that he deserved to have his nose pulled."

"I'll jolly well ask him about it when he comes over on Saturday," said Trimble.

"Oh, for goodness' sake let it drop," said Tom Merry. "What does it matter to us, anyway?"

"It matters a good deal," said Grundy loftily. "There's going to be an inquiry."

"What?"

"Sacked rotters aren't wanted here. I'm going to take the matter up! As junior captain, you ought to take the lead certainly. I'm willing. Only it's got to be thrashed out."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom.

"It's the business of the whole school for that matter," said Grundy. "I give you the chance of taking the lead in the matter. That's fair. What do you say?"

"I say—rats!"

"Then it's up to me," said Grundy. "Cardew, I shall want you to answer me."

"You can want!" said Cardew pleasantly.

"I shall see what Lacy has to say," continued Grundy. "I'm going over to see him to-morrow. He will explain the whole matter to me, or else I shall whop him till he does."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "If you start whopping at the Grammar School you will wake up a hornets'-nest Grundy!"

"If the other fellows interfere, I shall whop them, too," said Grundy calmly. "I shall let the matter drop till to-morrow, Cardew."

"You're awfully good," yawned Cardew. "Would you mind doin' at other little thing to oblige me, Grundy?"

"What is it?" asked Grundy.

"Take you-face away. It worries me."

Grundy bestowed a wrathful glare upon Cardew and another upon the grinning juniors, and strode away. He left the Common-room.

The next day there was keen interest in George Alfred's proceedings. After morning lessons, he wheeled out his bike, and started for the Grammar School.

"Grundy's off!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I wonder how many pieces he'll come home in."

"H. ha, ha!"

Quite a little army of fellows waited at the gates for Grundy to return. It was close upon dinner-time when he appeared.

There was a roar as he was sighted down the road.

"There's Gwunday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Grundy?" murmured Wilkins, almost weeping. "Always looking for trouble, and always finding it!"

Grundy presented a remarkable appearance.

He was not riding. He was wheeling his bike in a very clumsy way. The reason was apparent when he came nearer, and the juniors could see that his wrists were tied to his handle-bars. His cap was put on backwards, and several feathers were stuck in it. His face was jet-black as far down as the nose, and below that it was chalky white. Soot and chalk had been used in equal proportions. The result was striking in the extreme.

Grundy's amazing aspect made the juniors yell as he came gasping up. He halted, panting, outside the gates.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Gwunday, you feahful as I!"

"There's a picture for you!"

"Grough! There's nothing to cackle at!" gasped Grundy. "I've been treated with rotten cheek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was simply whooping that fellow Lacy in the quad when they collared me—me, you know!" spluttered Grundy. "They actually rushed me out into the road, and fixed me up like this—like this—you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let me loose, some of you, you cackling chumps!" roared Grundy. "I don't see what you're chortling at?"

Wilkins dried his tears, and cut Grundy's hands loose. Grundy pitched his bike against the gate, and dashed away to get a wash before dinner. He needed one badly. He left the School House juniors in hysterics.

CHAPTER 8.

Racke Plays His Cards Well.

TOM MERRY & CO. chuckled over Grundy's adventure at the Grammar School. George Alfred himself was the only fellow who did not see anything funny in it. It had the effect, however, of putting an end to Grundy's intended inquiry into the facts concerning Cardew and Lacy of Wodehouse. George Alfred decided to let the matter drop. He was fed-up with the subject.

Racke did not let it drop. He kept the subject very much alive. That day Ralph Cardew was certainly the most talked of fellow in the School House.

He did not seem to mind.

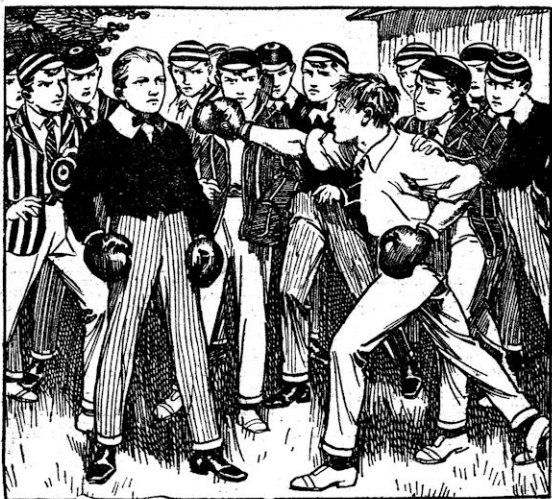
If he had been sacked from his old school, it did not appear to affect him much. He had certainly sought in the first place to avoid an encounter with Lacy, and his object could only have been to prevent the Wodehouse fellows talking about him. But now that it was out, he took it with his accustomed nonchalance. His study-mates were perplexed, but it made no difference in their manner to wards him. Some of the fellows avoided him, and some gave him cool stares; but Levison and Clive were sticking to him—as yet, at all events.

On the following day Lacy was to come over with the Grammar School cricket team, and quite a number of fellows were looking forward to seeing him.

It was certain that he would be very closely questioned about Cardew, and that the exact facts would be extracted from him, if possible.

That those facts would be to Cardew's discredit, few of the fellows doubted.

On the other hand, it was admitted that Algernon Lacy was not a fellow entitled to much respect. If he made



"I tell you Cardew was sacked for theft!"

(See Chapter 12.)

any allegation against Cardew, it would want proving, as Tom Merry said.

Tom Merry had been thinking the matter over, and after lessons that day he stopped Racke in the quad and spoke to him.

"I understand that you've got some scheme on for bringing Cardew and Lacy together to-morrow, when the Grammar School chaps are here," he said.

"Possibly," said Racke coolly. "Why shouldn't I, if I choose?"

"We don't want a scene at a cricket match," said Tom mildly. "It may end in a row, and that would be a bit out of place. Don't you think so?"

"No, I don't."

"Look here, Racke, it's no business of yours why Cardew left Wodehouse, and it's an unpleasant matter to stir up. We don't want a scene on the occasion of a friendly match."

Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"I fancy Gay must be feeling rather sore about it already," added Tom. "It can't be pleasant for him—a member of his team letting a St. Jim's chap pull his nose, without a row afterwards."

"Lacy seems to be a bit of a funk," said Racke. "I suppose that's why he won't speak out about Cardew." He's afraid of the rotter!"

"Well, least said, soonest mended. A fight when they're over here for crickets would be bad all round."

"Thanks for your opinion!" sneered Racke.

"Look here, Racke. I want you to let the matter drop."

"You can want!"

"If you're up against Cardew, and want to give him trouble, I don't care a twopenny rap; but you can find some other occasion—not when Lacy is over here with the Grammar School team."

"Rate!"

"Well, I've given you a warning," said Tom. "If there's an unpleasant scene while the Grammarians are here,

somebody else's nose will get pulled, as well as Lacy's Racke. That's a tip!"

With that, the captain of the Shell walked away. Racke's nose had had a very narrow escape at that moment, as a matter of fact.

Racke looked after him, with a sneer.

"Wait and see!" he muttered.

His intention had not been in the least changed. Racke had no objection whatever to an unpleasant scene. In fact, trouble between Tom Merry & Co. and the Grammarians would have been a distinct pleasure to him. Unless Cardew cleared off for the afternoon to avoid the Wodehouse fellow, Racke's plans were to be carried out.

And Racke took his measures against that. He understood Cardew's nature well enough to know how to go to work. He tackled Cardew in the Common-room in the evening, when Study No. 9 came in together.

"I suppose you won't be within gates to-morrow afternoon, Cardew?"

"I don't see why you should suppose anything about me, Racke."

"Cardew won't be watching the match, anyway," grinned Crooke, following his chum's lead.

"Why not?" asked Cardew.

"Because Lacy will be there," said Racke, with a laugh. "You don't want to meet your old pal—what?" grinned Trimble of the Fourth. "Can't look him in the face—eh?"

Cardew made a gesture, and Trimble backed away promptly.

"As a matter of fact, I shall be watching the match, as Levison's playin'," said Cardew.

"Two to one you don't, in quids!" said Racke, with a sneer.

"Done!"

"I'll hold the stakes, if you like!" said Baggy Trimble eagerly.

Baggy's offer was not accepted. Scrope of the Shell held the stakes. The proceeding was watched very severely

by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who felt called upon to speak a word in season.

"Cardew, I must remark that this is wotten! You have no right to make your wotten boots heh! I regard it as blackguardly!"

"Really?"

"And, as a matter of fact, Cardew, it would be in bettah taste for you to be off the scene when Lacy comes ovah here. Anythin' approachin' a scene on such an occasion would be vevy unpleasant."

"There won't be any scene, dear boy. Lacy isn't lookin' for trouble with me—quite the reverse."

"However, I considah—"

Cardew strolled on, without waiting to hear Arthur Augustus' considerations. His friends looked vevy grave.

"It would be better for you to keep away from Lacy," said Levison. "We don't want any trouble to-morrow."

"But I'm goin' to watch you makin' your century," said Cardew, with a smile. "You wouldn't deprive me of that pleasure, would you? Besides, if I keep off the grass, the dear fellows will think that I funk facin' that fellow Lacy."

"What does it matter what they think?" growled Clive.

"Lota."

"I believe Racke has some scheme on for to-morrow," said Levison uneasily. "It would be better for you to keep off the grass, Cardew."

"Haag Racke!"

And the subject dropped.

Aubrey Racke was in a vevy satisfied mood. He doubted whether Cardew would venture to face the Wodehouse fellow, who could say so much about him if he liked. If he did not, Racke would win his bet. If he did face him, Racke had his plans laid. And the cad of the Shell would willingly have lost his bet for the sake of succeeding in his scheme of showing up Cardew to the whole school.

Cardew was too keen not to see that Racke & Co. had some scheme for proloking, or forcing, the Wodehouse fellow to speak out while he was at St. Jim's. Cardew knew best what he had to fear from a disclosure. Whatever it was, his nerve was equal to the strain. And the next morning he did not show a trace of perturbation.

Yet, if the facts were as most of the fellows suspected, the Wodehouse fellow's revelations could hardly fail to have this effect—that Cardew would have to go! A fellow who had been expelled from school for a grave offence could only have gained admittance at St. Jim's by concealing the truth. When the truth came out, he would have to go.

But though that might be the prospect before Cardew of the Fourth, he certainly had the nerve to face it without turning a hair.

CHAPTER 9.

The Grammarian Match.

"WIPPIN' weathah for cwicket, deah boys!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when the cricketers came out after dinner.

"Topping!" said Blake. "None of your duck's eggs to-day, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"We've got to look out for their blessed bowler," remarked Figgins of the New House. "I really think the Food Controller ought to be told about Gussy."

Arthur Augustus turned his celebrated monople upon George Figgins, with wrath in his glance.

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"The Food Contwollah, Figgins? And pway why?"

"Because of your reckless indulgence in duck's eggs in war time."

"You uttah ass, Figgins!"

"Gussy has promised me a century," said Talbot, laughing. "We are going to keep you up to that, Gussy."

"As a matter of fact, Talbot, I do not think vevy much of their new bowlah. He wears a wathah loud necktie," said Arthur Augustus, "and his mannahs leave vevy much to be desired. I don't think I admit that he can bowl. Pew-waps, undah the cires," added Arthur Augustus thoughtfully, "pewwaps that is the most important point just now."

"Perhaps it is," grinned Blake.

Stumps were pitched early, and Tom Merry & Co. were ready before the visiting team put in an appearance.

Clive was in the eleven; and Clive and Cardew were among the earliest of the spectators to gather on the field.

Cardew received a good many glances as he stood there with the South African junior, cheery and smiling.

Racke & Co. turned up in full force; and they were fellows who seldom honoured a match with their presence unless they had bets on the result.

Other fellows, too, turned up in numbers, interested less in the game than in Cardew and Lacy. The possibility of a scene drew more spectators than the match itself.

It was generally considered that Cardew would have acted more gracefully in Cardew and Lacy. The possibility of a scene drew more spectators than the match itself.

Racke & Co. turned up in full force; and they were fellows who seldom honoured a match with their presence unless they had bets on the result.

"Heah they come!" said D'Arcy at last.

Gordon Gay's team, with a good number of Grammarian fellows, had arrived, Tom Merry greeted the Grammarian skipper cordially. His eyes rested for a moment upon Algernon Lacy.

Lacy came in for a good deal of attention, and fellows who had seen him before pointed him out to fellows who hadn't.

The Wodehouse fellow looked the most elegant of the Grammarian School crowd; he evidently bestowed a great deal of attention upon his appearance. But identified as he was, there was no doubt that he was a first-class bowler; and there were some grounds, at least, for his evident satisfaction with his noble self.

"Swanking ass!" remarked Crooke to his friends. "Looks as if the ground isn't quite good enough for him to walk on."

"Not unlike our dear Cardew," grinned Racke. "I dare say Wodehouse fellows are all tarred with the same brush."

"And he lets a fellow pull his nose, for all his swank!" chuckled Mellish. "Any other chap in that crowd would have mopped up the ground with Cardew!"

"Swank and funk often go together," said Racke.

"You ought to know!" murmured Mellish. But he did not let Racke hear that remark.

It was not difficult to observe that Gordon Gay and his friends were not exactly on chummy terms with the new recruit in the eleven. Gay played him because he was a good bowler; but probably he did not like him.

Lacy met Cardew's glance as he glanced over the thickening crowd round the field. Cardew smiled mockingly.

The Wodehouse fellow coloured a little, and turned his back on Cardew in a bid to die the die way.

Clive bit his lip.

"You'd have been better away, Cardew," he muttered.

"Because Algy cuts me!" smiled Car-

dew. "My dear chap, I find Algy amusin'." He used to suck up to me no end at Wodehouse, before I came a cropper. He turned his back on me fast enough then, bless him!"

"Well, it depends on what kind of a cropper it was," said Clive, in his open, direct fashion. "If it was anything shady, he was right to turn his back on you."

"You'd do the same—what?"

"Certainly I should!"

"Thank I."

"I don't believe it, though," said Clive. "I never met a fellow who had more faults than you have; but I can't quite believe that you've really done anything rotten."

"Thanks, again."

Clive made an impatient gesture, and dried up.

Tom Merry won the toss, and elected to bat. The innings opened with Tom and Blake, and Gordon Gay put on Lacy at once. The Wodehouse fellow lounged elegantly to the bowler's end, and some of the St. Jim's fellows smiled as they watched him. But Lacy worked up on the crease. He struck the ball twice; but the third found his middle stump. Jack Blake looked rather blue as he went out without breaking his duck.

Arthur Augustus walked elegantly to the vacated wicket. He looked out for the bowler vevy carefully; but that did not prevent his stumps going down to the ball of the over. And the swell of St. Jim's was quite pink as he returned to the pavilion.

"You were quite wight, deah boy," he remarked. "He is a vevy corkah, and no mistake!"

"Where's that century?" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, wats!"

Figgins was next man in, but Tom Merry was getting the bowling. Gordon Gay bowled, but he found the St. Jim's junior skipper all there. St. Jim's began to score.

Tom Merry bagged seven, and the odd run brought him to the batting end again, to face Lacy.

There was keen interest now in the contest between the Grammar School champion bowler and the best junior bat at St. Jim's.

Lacy's manner as he lounged up indicated sufficiently that he looked upon himself as a Caesar of cricket, who had only to "come, see, and conquer."

But he looked a surprise in Tom Merry. The ball was played back twice while Tom was taking his measure. The third ball was cut for two, and the St. Jim's crowd breathed again.

"Not all duck's eggs, at any rate," remarked Dick Julian. "Tommy will give him as good as he sends."

"Bravo! Well hit!" shouted the St. Jim's crowd as the ball went on its journey again, and the batsmen ran.

It was entertaining to watch the change in Algernon Lacy's face. Instead of swaggering confidence there was a vevy visible annoyance.

He had not come, seen, and conquered, after all. And evidently it did not please the youth.

Figgins, too, faced the bowling with coolness and success. And when Figgins was caught by Gay, and Talbot came in, Lacy exerted himself in vain against the Shell fellow's wicket.

There was no hat trick in that innings! Still, there was no doubt that Lacy was a goodly man, and had done well for his side, and it was largely due to him that St. Jim's finished for the small total of 55. The sweeping success he had anticipated, however, had not come off, and there was a cloud on his face when the innings closed.

And when the Grammarians went in, and Lacy stood up to Fatty Wynn's bowling, the result was most inglorious for the Wodehouse swanker. The first ball of the first over sent his balls flying, and Fatty Wynn gave a fat chuckle.

Algernon Lacy's eyes glinted with rage as he departed.

CHAPTER 10.

Brought Up to the Scratches.

"ALL down for sixty," said Clive, when the Grammarian innings ended. "They're five ahead on the first innings."

"That chap never could bat," remarked Cardew. "He was played at Wodehouse simply for his bowling."

"Well, he can bowl!" said Clive.

"Yes. About the only thing he can do."

"Hallo, what's Racker up to?"

The players were refreshing themselves with ginger-pop after the innings. Algernon Lacy stood by himself, with a clouded brow. Racker of the Shell joined him, with an insinuating smile. Lacy regarded him very coolly at first, but a few flattering remarks brought a good-humoured smile to his face. Racker had sized up his character pretty accurately, and it cost him nothing to butter-up the conceited fellow.

Tom Merry's eyes were on Racker, however, and he frowned as he saw him in talk with Lacy. What Racker's scheme was, Tom did not know; but he knew there was something on, and he was prompt to put his foot down.

"Buzz off, dear boy!" he said. "This isn't your place, you know!"

"I'm talkin' to Lacy."

"Would you mind clearing off, Racker?"

Tom had his bat under his arm, and he let it slip into his hand. It was so clear that if Racker didn't move off the bat would come into play that the cad of the Shell decided to go. He gave Lacy a nod, and Tom Merry a savage look, and rejoined his friends by the ropes.

The St. Jim's team were soon batting again, and Lacy went into the field with Gordon Gay & Co.

This time neither Blake nor Arthur Augustus fell so easily to the new Grammarian bowler.

Blake took 10, and D'Arcy 15, before they were out to catches.

"I say, this is gettin' a fearful bore!" yawned Crocke. "Aro you stickin' it out to the end, Racker?"

"Yes!" growled Racker.

"Nothing's come of it so far."

"That fellow Merry chipped in—you saw him."

"He'll chip in again, I fancy," grinned Mellish. "He doesn't mean to have trouble on the cricket-ground, if he can help it."

"I'm waiting for my chance," said Racker coolly. "Merry can't stop me. Cardew pulled that fellow's nose at the Grammar School. He's taken no notice of it. But he's got to. And if there's a light, and Cardew licks him—"

"He's sure to!"

"Exactly—absolutely sure to. And then, I fancy, Lacy will open his mouth wide! I've sized him up. He's as conceited as a silly ass can be. Look at his face when he don't take wickets! He wants to be cheered all the time. He don't want to fight Cardew, or anybody. But he can't back down in public—too swanky for that. And he's as full of spite as a badger. He will open his mouth wide enough when the time comes."

St. Jim's were going ahead in their second innings. Lacy accounted for Kangaroo's wicket, and then Fatty

Wynn's. But Tom Merry and Talbot were on top of him, and Levison proved to be a nut beyond his cracking. Clive and Cardew joined loudly in the cheering that greeted Levison's innings. Levison had knocked up 25—the biggest score of the second innings.

"Hundred and five!" said Clive, with great satisfaction, when the St. Jim's wickets were all down. "Old Talbot not out! That's a bit more like the thing! Gay will find it hard to beat that."

Gordon Gay & Co. realised that fact, and they were quite serious now. Gay sent in Wootton major, and minor to open the innings. Algernon Lacy tapped him on the arm, with a disinterested expression.

"Where do I come in?" he asked.

"Number eleven this time!" said Gay shortly.

"I don't see why I should be left to the tail of the innings, Gay!"

"I do! You can't bat for fool! You're played for your bowling, you know that!" said Gay impatiently.

"Wait till their bowlers are a bit tired, and then you may keep your wicket for an over or two."

"I had had luck—"

"You'll have it again, and all the time, till you learn how to bat, Lacy!"

Lacy eyed away, and stood leaning against the pavilion, with a dark face. He was in a sulky temper.

The bowling, in the hands of Talbot, Kangaroo, and Fatty Wynn, was very good. The Grammarians had all their work out. Gay's eyes were on the game, and he had no attention to bestow on Lacy. Racker of the Shell joined the waiting batsmen. Tom Merry was in the field with his team, and had no eyes for him, and no time for him.

"Wonderful bowler, your new man," Racker remarked to Frank Monk, who was waiting his turn to go in.

"Yes, I wish he could bat as well as he bowls."

"That's the Wodehouse chap, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You know there's an old Wodehouse fellow here?"

"Yes; I've heard so!"

"Is it true he came over to your show and pulled Lacy's nose in his own style?"

"Frank Monk stared at him.

"Better ask Lacy!" he said curtly.

"Well, all the fellows are talking about it," said Racker, not very truthfully.

"Cardew was swanking about it in the Common-room. I shouldn't think Lacy would let him pull his nose without a fight."

"You can think what you like!" growled Monk.

But all the Grammarians had heard Racker's remarks, and they looked restive. Scraps between the fellows of the two schools were common enough, but it was very uncommon for the white feather to be shown. The incident in Lacy's study was known to his schoolfellows, and Gay had offered to take over a challenge to Cardew. Lacy had declined the offer—for reasons the Grammarians could guess easily enough.

The hint that the incident was common talk at St. Jim's, that the fellows there boasted over the fact that a Grammarian had allowed his nose to be pulled without resenting it, made the juniors feel sore enough.

Lacy was within easy hearing of Racker's voice, and his face crimsoned as he caught the glances his fellow-cricketers turned on him.

"Going in next?" he asked, as a wicket went down to Fatty Wynn's bowling.

"No!" growled Lacy.

Monk went in to take Wootton minor's

place. Lacy watched him with knitted brows.

"Cardew's here," remarked Racker carelessly.

"I don't care a rap whether Cardew's here or not!"

"Of course, it's not true about the fellow pullin' your nose in your own study?" said Racker agreeably.

Lacy gave him a fierce look.

"Mind your own business!" he snapped.

"I shaka!" said Racker laughing. "I'm really speakin' to you as a friend. If you let a thing like that pass, you will get no end chipped. There's Cardew grinnin' at you now."

"Hang Cardew!"

"Well, I know what I'd do if a fellow pulled my nose," said Racker contemptuously. "Perhaps you Grammar School chaps like it, though?"

Racker lounged away, after making that remark in a voice loud enough for a dozen Grammarians to hear it.

Lacy's crimson face turned quite pale.

He made a movement as if to stride after Racker, but he paused. His glance wandered round, and rested upon Cardew's face.

Cardew happened to look at Lacy at the same moment, and their eyes met. Cardew smiled mockingly.

The Wodehouse fellow's eyes burned. His hand went up to his nose, as if he felt there anew the iron compression of Cardew's finger and nail for some minutes.

He stood very still for some minutes.

He knew what Gordon Gay & Co. thought of his pusillanimity. Now he had been openly taunted with cowardice, on the St. Jim's ground and in the hearing of a score of fellows. A more pusillanimous fellow than Lacy would have found that hard to bear. He came over to Gordon Gay at last.

"You heard what that fellow said?" he muttered.

"Confound the fellow!" said Gay. "I don't care what he said."

"Do you want somebody to punch his head for you, Lacy?" asked Carboy, with a sneer. "You won't do it yourself, I know that."

Lacy bit his lip.

"I—I was taken by surprise that time—in my study," he said unsteadily, "otherwise, I—I should—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Carboy. "We know what you can do with your month already. You have made the St. Jim's fellows enigger at us. It reflects on the lot of us, and you don't care. I suppose Kangaroo wouldn't slap your ear if you did have a scrap with him."

"I'm not afraid of him!" said Lacy, his face flaming.

"Oh, rats!"

"I'll show you, then!"

Lacy strode off, pushing a way through the crowd towards where Cardew was standing.

He stood a little as he saw Lacy's face dark and passionate, close to his own. But he smiled coolly.

"Hallo! Do you want your nose pulled again, dear boy?" he asked.

A chortle came from the fellows standing near.

It died away as Lacy raised his hand and struck Cardew full in the face. The Fourth Former staggered back from the sudden blow, and would have gone down had not Clive caught him.

"That's for you, you cad!" said Lacy, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 486.

between his teeth. "Now, if you want any more, I'm ready!"

Cardew straightened up, a deadly gleam in his eyes.

"I'm your man!" he said. Gordon Gay came hurrying up, and strode between them.

"Chuk that!" he said. "If you want to scrap, you can have it out after the innings. I'm not having any of my men knocked out!"

"Oh, quite so!" assented Cardew coolly. "After the innings will do. I'm at your service after the game, Lacy."

Gordon Gay took Lacy's arm, and forced him back to the pavilion. The call came for Gay at the wickets, and he left him there. Carboy patted him on the shoulder, with quite an agreeable look.

"Good man, Lacy!" he said. "We'll all stay and see fair play. Give the cheeky cad a hiding."

Lacy nodded without speaking. He was in for it now, but he had very serious doubts about whether it was Cardew who would get the hiding.

CHAPTER 11.

Lacy is Ready.

THE fracas between Ralph Cardew and the Grammarian had not by any means passed unnoticed.

Many of the fellows had been expecting something of the kind; and it had come now, with a vengeance.

A dozen fellows had seen it, and in a few minutes more, every fellow on the cricket-ground knew of it. Even Tom Merry & Co. in the field were soon aware of the row.

The innings went on, the Grammarians putting up a good fight. Gordon Gay defied the bowling for a long time, but Fatty Wynn was too much for him at last. After Gay was out the wickets fell faster, and the score stood at 92 when last man in was called.

Gay tapped Lacy on the arm as he was going in.

"Put your beef into it," he said. "We only want 9 to win, and there's a chance yet, if you stick it out."

"I suppose I'm good for those few," said Lacy loftily.

"I hope so," said Gay rather doubtfully.

Algernon Lacy went to the wickets with a swagger. Carboy was at the other end, still getting the bowling. He added 2, and then another 2 from the remainder of the over. It was going to be a close finish, and the Grammarian hopes rose again.

The Grammarian School now wanted 5 to win, and from Lacy's manner it might have been supposed that he was good for 50.

Talbot was bowling, and Lacy played the first ball, but there was no run. He hit the second ball hard and ran 2, and an excited cheer came from the Grammar School end.

"Three to win!" muttered Gordon Gay. "Will the diffier do it?"

The ball came down again, and Lacy drove it away, and ran. Unfortunately for the Grammarians, he drove it fairly into Figgins' ready palms.

"Well caught!"

Up went the ball from Figgys' hands, to come down into them again.

"Good old Figgys!"

"St. Jim's wins!"

Lacy gave Figgins an unfriendly look as he stopped half-way along the pitch. The innings was over, Carboy not out. Rylebone Grammar School had been beaten by 2 runs.

"Rotton fluke, that catch," said Lacy, as he came off.

And Gordon Gay snorted.

"You hit it fairly into his paws!" he THE HIT LIBRARY.—No. 436.

said. "Didn't you know there was anybody in the field, Lacy? Were you batting with your eyes shut?"

"Look here—"

"Well, it can't be helped! We're done."

"Better luck next time, Gay, old scout," said Tom Merry cheerily.

And Gordon Gay smiled and nodded.

St. Jim's had won the closely-contested match, to their very considerable satisfaction. But the proceedings of that afternoon were not yet over.

Carboy tapped Lacy on the shoulder. The Wodehouse fellow's face was the reverse of cheerful.

He had screwed up his courage to the sticking-point in his defiance of Cardew; but probably his courage had not remained at the sticking-point. He looked irritably at Carboy.

"Like me to be your second?" asked Carboy agreeably.

"Oh, yes, if you like."

"I think Cardew's ready."

"Is there any hurry?" growled Lacy.

"Not at all, if you're tired. Take a rest first," said Carboy. "Here, sit down! Still, I don't see why you should be tired. You didn't have much to do in the second innings."

"And less in the first!" grinned Lane.

"Clive came over to the group of Grammarians. His face was somewhat moody. The scene on the cricket-field had not pleased him; but Cardew had asked him to be his second, and he could not very well refuse.

"My man's ready when you are," he said.

"Right-ho!" said Carboy. "I'm Lacy's second. Where shall we go—hide the gym? I suppose you don't want your Housemaster to look on?"

"Is there any need for this to go on?" asked Tom Merry, with a clouded brow. "It's rather a rotten way to end up an afternoon's cricket."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, that depends on the principals," said Carboy. "My principal's simply thirsting for battle, ain't you, Lacy?"

Lacy granted.

"I'm afraid Cardew won't let it drop," said Clive reluctantly. "You see, Lacy slapped his face."

"Well, he pulled Lacy's nose," said Frank Monk. "I suppose a St. Jim's chivvy isn't any more sacred than a Grammar School nose, is it?"

The card went taking down a peg, too," said Wootton major. "In fact, all these cheeky bouncers here want taking down a peg."

"Hear, hear!" said several of the Grammarians.

"No nuff said!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "No rags on a match-day. Don't forget the rule."

"Yaas, wathah! Pwaw don't make any cheeky remarks," said Arthur Augustus. "I should be sowwy to have to wash you fellows this afternoon."

"You'd be sorry if you started," remarked Wootton major pleasantly.

"Weally, you boundah—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry. It began to look as if Lacy's affair with Cardew would not be the only scrap that afternoon. "For goodness' sake don't begin to rag! Dry up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You fellows dry up, too!" said Gordon Gay. "All serene, Pommy; there's not going to be any row. Let's get somewhere and let those two swanking duffers have it out, and get off to tea."

"You ready, Lacy?"

"Yea!" snapped Lacy.

CHAPTER 12.

Denounced.

GRAMMARIANS and St. Jim's fellows moved off the field together. Jack Blake dodged into the gym for two pairs of gloves. A numerous crowd gathered behind the gym, where they were well screened from general observation.

Racke & Co. were well to the fore. Racke had lost his bet with Cardew, but he was very well pleased. He could see plainly enough that Lacy was in a mood of sulky vindictiveness. There was no doubt at all in Racke's mind that when the Wodehouse fellow had been licked he would not need urging to tell all he knew about Ralph Reckness, Cardew. The malice and hatred visible in his face as he looked at Cardew bore witness to that.

Cardew was cool and smiling. He did not remove his jacket, and he nodded cheerfully to Jack Blake as he accepted the gloves.

"Who's keeping time?" asked Gordon Gay.

"You're the man," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

Gay took out his watch.

"Two-minute rounds, and one-minute rests," he said. "Is that agreeable?"

"All the same to me," smiled Cardew.

"Anything you like!" growled Lacy.

Cardew sought to encourage his principal as he helped him off with his jacket and on with his gloves.

"Stick to him and hit him hard," he whispered. "You've got a good chance if you put your beef into it."

Lacy nodded without speaking.

"Ready?" asked Gay.

The two combatants stepped into the ring made of the thick crowd of mingled St. Jim's fellows and Grammarians.

"Shake hands," said Gay.

Lacy sneered.

"I'm not shakin' hands with a thief!" he said, with slow distinctness.

"Wha-a-at?"

A thrill ran through the crowd.

Racke's face lighted up.

He had judged well. Lacy, his breast simmering with anger, spite, malice, and all uncharitableness, had not waited for the licking before speaking out. He knew that he was going to be licked, and he took his vengeance beforehand.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, aghast. "Wha-at did he say?"

Cardew's face had turned deadly pale for a moment.

Gay frowned blackly.

"What do you mean, Lacy, you fool?" he snapped.

The Wodehouse fellow's lip curled.

"I mean what I say," he said bitterly.

"That fellow's a thief, and I'm not shakin' hands with him!"

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Clive.

Lacy shrugged his shoulders.

"Would you mind calling time, Gay?" asked Cardew, with quiet calmness. "I'm waitin' for you, you know."

Gordon Gay stepped back.

"Time."

The fight began. It was easy to see from Cardew's face that his opponent was booked for a very rough time. Cardew was still pale, and his eyes were burning. His attack was cool, steady, and almost resistless.

"A thief!" muttered Racke to his chums. "It's out now! A thief! That's why he was sacked from Wodehouse! A bit richer than I thought."

"By gad!" said Croke. "Is it true, though? That fellow would say anything."

Racke chuckled.

"It's true enough. Look at Cardew's face. Besides, it could be proved one

way or the other. They know at Wodehouse."

"By gad, Cardew will have to come down off his perch after this! He can't stay at St. Jim's when that gets out!"

"No fear?"

"Time!" rapped out Gordon Gay. "Lacy sank breathless on Carboy's knees. His second fanned him with his cap, with a grim look. All the

Grammarians were aware that Lacy knew something of Carboy's past—of reason why he had left Wodehouse. But it was the first time that Lacy had said out plainly what he knew. And that taunt, hurled at his opponent at such a moment, whether true or false, only earned him the contempt of the Grammar School fellows.

"Time!"

Cardew stepped up coolly. "Lacy came forward, with obvious reluctance. Cardew's fists were hard to face. But he faced them, and the second round was fought out.

It was clear enough by that time that Lacy had no chance. He devoted most of his attention to defending, but his defence did not serve him well. He was knocked right and left, and Cardew hit with bitter, determined force. Lacy had disclosed the secret at last, and he had to pay for it. The end of the round saw Algernon Lacy on his back.

Cardew picked him up.

"Going on?" he asked.

"No—I can't."

"Does the funk want to sneak out now?" asked Cardew contemptuously.

Lacy's face flamed.

"You swainkin' cad, I'll fight you as long as I can stand!" he exclaimed.

"Time!"

Lacy came on furiously in the third round, and for the first time Cardew really received some punishment. But he rallied, and drove the Wodehouse fellow round the ring under a shower of blows. Lacy reeled right and left, till a final terrific drive, fairly on the jaw, sent him spinning. He crashed on the ground, and lay there.

Gordon Gay counted ten.

He might have counted a hundred. Lacy did not move.

The Grammarian skipper put his watch back into his pocket.

"No more sponge!" he said.

Cardew bent a cold, contemptuous look upon his breathless, dazed enemy gasping at his feet.

Then he stepped back and drew off the gloves.

Lacy sat up dizzily.

"Here, up with you!" said Carboy, not very gently. "No Grammarian there was proud of the fight Lacy had put up against the St. Jim's junior. But Carboy helped the Wodehouse fellow to his feet.

Algernon Lacy stood unsteadily, leaning upon Carboy.

One of his eyes was half closed, his face was puffed and bruised, and his nose streamed red. His glance as it fell on Cardew, who showed scarce a mark, burned with rage.

"Hang you," he muttered—"hang you! You rotter! You thief!"

"Sht up!" said Gordon Gay savagely.

Cardew pulled at Lacy's arm. But the Wodehouse fellow would not go.

"Why shouldn't they know it?" he sneered. "Why should I keep his secrets? What does he mean by showing himself into a decent school, among fellows who don't know what he is? I tell you—his glance swept over the silent St. Jim's fellows—"

"I tell you that chap, Ralph Cardew, was sacked from Wodehouse for theft! I tell you he was found with stolen money on him, and kicked out of the school, and any Wodehouse chap would tell you the same! I tell you—"

"You've jawed quite enough," said Cardew, dragging him away. "Come on!"

Gordon Gay & Co. followed.

The Grammarian cricketers departed in silence. It was a glum enough ending to the cheery afternoon.

The St. Jim's fellows were all looking at Cardew. He set his tie straight with a steady hand.

They waited for him to speak. He did not speak. But his coolness was unshaken.

"Cardew," broke out Tom Merry at last, "have you anything to say?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"That cad has called you a thief!"

"I've licked him! Do you want me to lick him again?" said Cardew.

"Don't play the fool, now, Cardew," exclaimed Sidney Clive. "Lacy says you were sacked from Wodehouse for theft. Unless you want to be cut by every fellow in the school, you've got to deny it—sharp!"

Cardew looked at him.

There was a breathless silence. Cardew seemed to be reflecting.

"We shall take your word, Cardew," said Levison quietly.

"Yas, wathah!"

Cardew smiled.

"Sorry to disappoint you!" he said. "As it happens, I've nothin' to say!"

"Nothing?" said Tom Merry.

The junior nodded.

"Then we shall know what to think!" said Tom, and he turned away.

"Cardew, are you mad?" exclaimed Clive, his voice husky.

"Not at all, dear boy! By gad, I think I'd better go and get a wash."

Cardew turned away. There was an irrepressible chuckle from Racke of the Shell. Racke's vengeance was glutted to the full now. Tom Merry swung round, and his hand shot out, and Racke of the Shell went sprawling on the ground.

Cardew sauntered away from the spot, with all eyes upon him. His head was still erect, his manner cool and careless. From that moment he was an outcast in the school, but he would be game to the last!

THE END.

Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—

"THE FINGER OF SCORN!"

by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

The Editor's Chat.

For next Wednesday:

"THE FINGER OF SCORN!"

By Martin Clifford.

Of next week's story tells how Grundy took strong measures in the matter of Cardew. Grundy feels it a stain upon St. Jim's that a fellow expelled from another school for theft should stay on there, and as Tom Merry will not move in the matter, Grundy does. He acts as judge in a dormitory trial, and Cardew is convicted, in spite of the able defence put up for him by Levison major. Cardew takes it all very coolly. The finger of scorn may be pointed at him, but he goes on his way cool and untroubled. And he turns the tables on Grundy, with results that remain upon himself. This is a really fine story, with humour in it as well as more serious matter—altogether quite one of the best!

"AFTER LIGHTS OUT!"

Martin Clifford's latest threepenny book will be out on Friday—No. 283 of the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library. A great yarn; don't miss it. You will be sorry if you do.

FROM A CHINESE READER.

All the way from Singapore comes a letter from "A Loyal Chinese Reader," to point out the absurdity of the people who accuse us of not paying out the prizes formerly offered for jokes. The questioner was hardly worth noticing; but I am glad to hear from my Celestial friend in the Straits Settlements, who sends a very neatly typewritten and excellently worded letter to say that he himself won—and, of course, received—a prize in the competition a year or so ago. Everyone,

he is sure, had a fair chance to win, and he thinks "Mr. Water Wagtail" might have been more sportsmanlike. So do!

SAVING PAPER.

This week we are down to sixteen pages—a further reduction which has been made unwillingly, and only because it had become absolutely necessary. Paper is scarcer than need be the old big pennyworths are things of the past. I doubt whether, even for some long time after the war is over, pennyworths of anything will be quite so big as they used to be. Peace cannot mean an immediate return to old standards.

You will see, I think, that all possible has been done to avoid cutting out more than need be cut out. The advertisements disappear entirely, and I have had all the short matter printed in smaller type, which means practically half as much again on a page. But think it would be too big a strain on my reader's eyes to print the long story, which is usually read at a sitting, in the same type.

"I'm grumble!" I am as sorry about the necessity of reduction as any of you are. It simply cannot be helped, and I know I can trust my loyal readers to continue their support.

BOOKS TO LOOK OUT FOR!

In an earlier paragraph reference has been made to what is the most important number of the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library this month—that is, the most important from your point of view and from mine. But there are three other numbers, of course, and all are ripping good stories. Moreover, owing to

the paper shortage, they are likely soon to be out of print, so don't delay in getting them. No. 281 is "The Land of Terror," by Duncan Storm, one of the best writers of adventure yarns living. No. 282 is "Clums of the River," by Henry T. Johnson, an old and tried favourite. No. 283 is—well, if you don't know that you really ought to Geoffrey Murray is the author of No. 284, and its title is "The Ivory Box."

Then, again, there are the two new numbers of the "Sixteen Bells"—treasures not to be missed by the lover of first-class detective yarns.

No. 23 has the alluring title of "The House with the Double Moat," or "The Tattooed Man"—which suggests thrills in plenty. No. 24 is "The Blockade Runners; or, The Case of the Mexican Mystery"—hang up-to-date, and exciting enough for anything!

Constant inquiries for back numbers of these two series reach us; but the answer is the same in every case—O.P. That means "out of print"; and, of course, when a thing is out of print the publishers cannot help you. Their stock has gone like last winter's snow, and your only chance of getting a copy of the book you want is rather than the one of picking up one second-hand somewhere.

Your Editor

EXTRACTS FROM

"Tom Merry's Weekly" & "The Greyfriars Herald."

THE LAST OF THE POTATOES!

An Adventure of Herlock Sholmes. :: By Peter Todd.

HERLOCK SHOLMES was looking very thoughtful. I did not venture to interrupt his reflections, but I watched him with keen interest, wondering what great thoughts were stirring in that mighty brain.

He looked up at last, and knocked out his pipe in the sugar-basin. Since the Government assumed control of the sugar supply, we have used the sugar-basin as an ash-tray, having no other use for it.

"Another case, Sholmes?" I ventured to inquire.

He nodded.

"Yes, my dear Jotson—a case that will interest you, as you are of an antiquarian taste. Do you remember, Jotson, that before the war there was a vegetable well known in this country called the potato?"

"I have some remembrance of it, Sholmes. I have, however, almost forgotten its appearance," I confessed.

"A succulent vegetable," said Sholmes. "It was introduced into this country in the sixteenth century, and flourished here till quite a late period. In earlier, happier days I have feasted upon it. Ah, Jotson, those were great times! It seems scarcely credible to the present day that few short years ago one could stroll carelessly down to the greengrocer's, and order potatoes by the pound, or even the stone, without even being requested to purchase also a tinful of swedes, radishes, turnips, parsnips, and brussels sprouts. Yet such was the case!"

I sighed.

Sholmes' words recalled memories of my own wild youth, when I had feasted without restraint upon fried fish and chips in the genteel neighbourhood of the Mile End Road. Fried fish, indeed, I still know; but where were the chips of other days?

Sholmes echoed my sigh.

"The poet asks, Jotson, where are the roses of yester-year?" he said. "A modern poet should rather ask, where are the potatoes of yester-year? Gone, Jotson—gone from our gaze like a beautiful dream! Since the maximum price was fixed at seven-tenths of a penny for a pound and three-quarters, they have vanished. However, to come to business. You have heard of Messrs. Slipton's, the London firm who have become famous as the possessors of the last potato on the market?"

I nodded.

"Messrs. Slipton's naturally refused to sell the potato," resumed Sholmes. "It drew vast crowds to their establishment, and made their name celebrated throughout the country. War-profiteers, bulging with wealth, drove up in their gilt-edged motor-cars, and offered fabulous sums; but Messrs. Slipton's stood firm. Fair women begged on their knees, society beauties used all the arts of persuasion, but the potato remained in sight. Messrs. Slipton's establishment, guarded night and day by a corps of commissionaires. It was suspected that Messrs. Slipton were waiting for the official to remove the potato at maximum price, when the potato would undoubtedly fetch a larger sum than was raised in the last War Loan."

"Very probable," Sholmes. "It would have been a more patriotic act, however, to present the potato to the British Museum," I remarked.

Sholmes smiled.

"Messrs. Slipton are not likely to part with the prospect of becoming rich beyond the dreams of avarice, Jotson. However, they have now been deprived of this prospect. The potato has been stolen!"

"Good heavens, Sholmes!"

"Naturally, I have been called in," said Sholmes. "The official police were not likely to be entrusted with a matter of so much

importance. Jotson, it is up to us to track down that potato!"

"A quite unique case, Sholmes. If you succeed—"

"If!" interjected Sholmes drily.

"I mean, when you succeed, Sholmes, your fame will ring throughout the land! The name of Herlock Sholmes will be associated for ever with that of the last potato existing in this kingdom!" My dear Sholmes—

"Moderate your enthusiasm, my dear fellow," said Sholmes. "The potato is not yet found. Even in case of success, Jotson, I doubt whether I shall allow my mastery of the conduct of the case to become generally known. In fact, I rather think that in this

"It seems clear, Sholmes. The duchess is the thief!"

"The difficulty in this case, Jotson, is not to find the thief, but to find the potato," explained Sholmes. "That is the crux of the matter. The question arises, did the duchess devour the potato immediately upon her return to her ducal mansion, or is she hoarding it? Ah, there is the taxi!" Sholmes rose.

"Come, Jotson!"

I followed Sholmes to the taxi.

"Peckham Rise!" commanded Sholmes. "Is the potato still in existence?" said Sholmes dreamily. "As Shakespeare remarked of old Jotson, that is the question! On the one hand, it would be difficult for her



case I shall hide my light under a bushel!"

"Sholmes!" I protested.

"Enough, Jotson! I have my reasons. Now for the facts of the case," continued Sholmes. "The person under suspicion is the Duchess of Peckham Rise. It appears that her Grace visited Messrs. Slipton's, and entreated with tears to be allowed to purchase the potato. She offered her diamonds, her ducal coronet, and a 'bus-load of War Loan' in exchange; but Messrs. Slipton were adamant. They might have been tempted to accede to the prayers of the beautiful duchess, but they dared not disregard the ukase of the Vegetable Controller. The duchess wept and pleaded in vain; but after she had departed the potato was missed!"

Sholmes paused.

"Apparently the attention of the guards had strayed, Jotson, and the duchess had boldly purloined the potato. Hardly had the sound of her car died away when the potato was missed; and Messrs. Slipton, in absolute consternation, called me up on the telephone."

Grace to resist the temptation to indulge in an immediate feast. On the other hand, there is the question of the cooking of the potato. Dared she confide it into the hands of her servants? Impossible! Yet to make arrangements for cooking the potato with her own hands, in deep secret, must take time, Jotson. That her plans were not laid beforehand is evidenced by her desperate attempt to purchase the potato—in which case it would have been sent to the kitchen staff for treatment in the usual way. No, Jotson! The duchess yielded to the sudden temptation. She purloined the potato; she hurried home with the prize; and at this moment, Jotson, she is scheming to find an opportunity of cooking it unknown to her servants who would immediately betray her if they learned of the theft. Jotson, I trust we shall be in time!"

I felt my heart throbb with excitement as the taxi rushed on through the busy streets.

Success or failure might depend upon minutes!

II.

THE taxi stopped at last outside a mansion in the most aristocratic quarter of Peckham Rise.

We were admitted, and waited in an antechamber while Sholmes' name was taken to the duchess.

I gazed at my amazing friend inquiringly.

That Sholmes had formed a plan for regaining possession of the purloined potato was certain. But the secret was hidden behind that inscrutable smile.

"Jotson," he whispered, "listen to my instructions!"

"When I am shown in to the duchess, you will remain outside the door—"

"Oh?"

"You will allow one minute to elapse, and then you will rush in—"

"Sholmes!"

"And shout—"

"My dear Sholmes!"

I had no time to say more. The footman returned, and we were conducted to the duchess's drawing-room.

Amazed as I was by Sholmes' instructions, I did not dream of disregarding them. Sholmes was shown in, and I remained outside, some-what to the surprise of the footman, who what to my astonishment. Possibly he suspected me of designs upon the umbrellas in the hall.

I saw the duchess rise to greet Sholmes. From the fact that she was deadly pale, and trembled in every limb, Sholmes deduced—as he afterwards explained to me—that she was ill at ease.

I guessed the name of Herlock Sholmes had roused forebodings in the guilty woman's heart.

"Pray excuse this intrusion, duchess," said Sholmes, seating himself upon the corner of a table, and resting his feet upon the piano, with the easy, well-bred elegance so natural to him when in high society. "I have called."

The minute had elapsed.

Faithful to my instructions, I threw the door wide open and rushed in.

"Fire! Fire!"

The duchess started to her feet with a cry of fright.

She dashed to the piano, wrenched open the top, and groped down among the wires with a hurried hand.

As she withdrew her hand, Sholmes' grasp closed upon her wrist in a grip of iron.

"I will trouble you for that potato, madam!" drawled Sholmes.

With a despairing cry the duchess fainted.

III.

"SHOLMES!" I exclaimed, as the taxi bore us away, "explain—"

"Perfectly simple, my dear Jotson," smiled Sholmes. "It was certain, of course, that the duchess would have concealed the purloined potato in some safe recess, secure from search."

"I calculated," said Sholmes, "that when the cry of 'Fire!' was raised she would rush to the hiding-place, to save at least the one article that was dearer to her than diamonds, coronets, or War Bonds. My anticipations were realised. The potato was concealed in the wires of the piano, as it proved. She drew it forth to flee into safety with it, and the most moment it was in my hands!"

I gazed at Sholmes in breathless admiration.

"Wonderful!" I ejaculated.

"Not at all, my dear fellow," drawled Sholmes. "Deflection, Jotson, that is all!"

"And we are now going to Messrs. Slipton?" I asked.

"Wrong again, Jotson. We are going to Shaker Street."

"But the potato—"

"Have you never heard the proverb, Jotson, that little boys should not ask questions?" said Sholmes.

"True!" I exclaimed.

I said no more.

Of the ultimate fate of the potato I can give no further particulars. That evening, however, we had potato with our supper—an unlooked-for treat, which reminded us vividly of the dear dead days beyond recall. Sholmes had provided this addition to our frugal board; but when I inquired whence he had obtained this supply of the almost forgotten vegetable, he only smiled his inscrutable smile.

TOM MERRY'S CENTURY.

By DIK BROOKE.

High overhead the bright sun
Shines from an azure sky.
Troubles you may have a ton!
Cast all your troubles by!
The reign of King Willow's begun—
Welcome that monarch high!

His palace the open air,
Roofed with the sky's blue arch;
His rule, it is free and fair.
White-clad his warriors march,
Jolly and easy and debonaire—
His realm's no place for starch!

Straight stand the stumps, and white
Stretches the well-marked cross,
You couldnt ask for a better light,
Or a smoother, truer piece
Of turf a batsman to delight:
Take guard, and start your lease!

Long lease or short it may be—
A century or a blob—
Who knows? Not you, and not he—
The bowler who's on the job
To see that you don't get taking tea
With the swift ball or the lob!

My bat! That first ball stick
You up a bit, old chap!
But the next flies far; your duck
Is broken. Whatever hap,
Not for you to be the wit of luck,
You couldnt see the flings all!

Now the bowlers try their best,
Medium, fast, and slow;
Your skill is equal to any test,
Hitting hard, you keep 'em low;
They'll have some scouting ere you go west,
Our very good friends, the foe!

Sixteen of that over you take;
It's time they made a change
Of bowling. Oh, wide awake
Is their skipper. You on the range
And brains can your form derange.
Fresh guard, and 'ware of the man
Who sends down the gooly ball.

That doesn't break on the orthodox plan—
At times does it break all—
It's up to you now to do all you can,
Or surely your stumps will fall!
His measure you've got—hooray!
You're top in the battle of wits,
Let him goop in his best. You play
Like Jack Hobbs. Now your partner hits
The first four he's scored to-day;
But with the next ball he quits.

Blake goes, and Piggins arrives—
And he goes, too; but you
Are set. Three, four, and even five
Flow fast from your bat. A true,
Sweet cut and a couple of humming drives
Yield twelve to Kangaroo!

But down go the Cornstalk's stumps,
And Talbot takes his place,
And never did we see more lusty clumps.
You're surely making the pace!
And Gordon's as any as a chap with mumps;
And Monk—just watch his face!

A slashing drive for four
To the century mark, one more,
And your hundred's left in the rear.
Smack! Oh, see the leather soar
Fast over the roof! Ho, ho, the roar
Of St. Jim's, cheer following cheer!

COKERISMS.

(The following gems purport to be authentic extracts from a paper on the subject of English history, lately perpetrated by Coker of the Fifth. Well, they read Cokerish. But the spelling makes one suspicious. It is correct—H. W.)

Henry the Eighth had sixteen wives, if not more, and when the last one died he never smiled again.

While King John was having his wash, all his jewels got drowned.

Sir Francis Drake discovered potatoes, and also iron pens. He went all round the world to make these discoveries.

John Wycliff was a reformer. A reformer is a man who used to drink, but has stopped it.

King Alfred inflicted a crushing defeat on the Spaniards at Hastings—A. D. 1432. It is thought that the battle owes its name to the disorderly retreat of the enemy, or perhaps because it was fought near Hastings town.

My Comic Column.

By MONTY LOWTHER.

The potato shortage appears to have led to something like cannibalism in Norway and Sweden. According to the latest reports, the Norwegians are now eating weeds.

"Sic transit gloria mundi!" Thus passes the glory of the world, as the classical Johnny exclaimed.

But when Fatty Wynn heard that the second day of the week was to be a meatless day, he sadly remarked, "Sic transit gloria Tuesday!"

The Germans are still in financial difficulties, in spite of the fact that they have received a very considerable check on the bank of the Somme.

Hun papers state that the Germans are "retreating according to plan." They do not state whose plan—Hindenburg's or Haig's.

"Arma virgum cano! Arms and the man I sing!" tooted the wail of did. But a German Virgil, singing of Hindenburg's recent exploits, would probably tootle, "Crura virgum cano!"

A German chap once made a pun to me in English. He said, "There's a German watch that never stops. It's the 'Watch on the Rhine.'"

But watches were made to go!

All accounts agree that despatchery is spreading over the greater part of the German Empire. But Berlin is still on the Spree.

Why did the Russian revolutionists pop on the scene so suddenly? Because they saw Protopotoff.

Pacifists are increasing in number in Hunland. The Germans used to boast of the terrific night of the "German fist." But it has now become a passive fist.

German school children, we are informed, get so hungry that they have eaten acorns, further than this, Hunland they have not begun to eat their clothes, while at St. Jim's we have Eton jackets.

Why is the letter "R" like a British Tommy? Naturally, because it makes the Hun run.

D'Arcy rather swanks about his vegetable patch, and the fact that he grew some cabbages. But Gussy is quite right—they were gruesome cabbages.

It is reported that a German company has been formed for utilising the German dead for producing fats, etc. The company should do well, for there will be no lack of raw material. It is very flattering to the German soldier, who can realise now, with pride, that his usefulness does not end with his life. We understand, however, that Hun troops are not very keen upon serving the Fatherland in the form of candle-grease or train-oil. (H. W.) The company's success seems assured, we suppose that the shareholders' certificates may be described as dead certs.

A Hun professor declares that the German race is ahead of the British race in every respect. Judging by what is happening in Flanders, we should say that there is something in this; but the Germans will probably be overtaken!

On the Western Front, a position hard-pressed by the enemy was relieved by the timely arrival of some of the modern Juggernauts. As Shakespeare very nearly said, "For this shak, what tanks!"

TOMPKINS' MONKEY.

By PATRICK MULVANEY (Mulvanev Minor).

YOU know what Tompkins is. He doesn't get any better. Nobody but a silly chump would have spent ten shillings on a monkey, and say he did it because he was fond of natural history. I had seen that something was wrong with Tompkins. He told me he had met a chap who dealt in monkeys. He said the chap had offered him a monkey awfully cheap, and that he meant to buy it and learn the monkey language and all about the habits of the creature.

As for the monkey's habits—well, the less said the better. The thought of buying the monkey made Tompkins quite dreary. He had fixed up with the merchant who had the monkey, and he made me go with him. The chap who was selling the monkey was one of those sort of job-lot dealers who sell anything. My idea is that he sold Tompkins, but it is no use telling Tompkins that, though he must know it's a fact.

The chap was very polite. We met him just outside the village. He was carrying a basket, and he lifted off the lid and let the monkey hop out. It sat down on the edge of the basket, scratched itself, and winked at Tompkins.

"Well, I tried hard to persuade Tompkins not to buy it. I knew jolly well that he could not keep a monkey in the school. But Tompkins told me to go off it. He said it was in the interests of science he was getting it. I dried up then. Since Tompkins was up French he has taken to science.

He looked at me, and the monkey, rarer as if he were comparing us. I considered that a trifle off.

"It is a very rare specimen of the genus simia, and its occipital foramen is precious curious," he said.

I knew jolly well he was merely gassing something he had learned in the natural history book, but I didn't say anything. Tompkins took the monkey in his arms, and the chap grinned. The monkey was wearing a red flannel coat. He seemed to like Tompkins at once.

"He thinks you are his brother," I said. Tompkins paid the man. It seemed to me jolly well chucking cash away. Then we started back.

"You are the outside edge," I said. "Oh, look out! There's Lathom coming straight for us. If he catches sight of that brother of yours there will be trouble." He said it was too late. Mr. Lathom had seen us in the lane.

Tompkins stowed the monkey away under his coat. That might have been all right for him, but the monkey had a different opinion. I could see he was giving Tompkins no end of trouble. A big like the Spartan boy and the fox, you know. But I jolly well wouldn't have let either a fox or a monkey serve me that way!

"Now you're in for it!" I said. "Can't you keep the little beggar quiet? It serves you right for buying the thing, you ass!"

"I'd give you a thick ear if it wasn't for this monkey!" said Tompkins. "Well, I'd rather have a thick ear than that beast," I answered.

Tompkins did not have time to reply. For Mr. Lathom was close upon us, and he looked at Tompkins in a curious sort of way.

"Ah, my boys!" he said. "Out enjoying this beautiful spring day, I see!"

Just then Tompkins gave a funny squirm, and the monkey seized with sudden pain.

"Are you ill?" Mr. Lathom asked.

"Me, sir?" replied Tompkins. "Oh, no, sir!"

"Then why do you contort your face like that? You seem uneasy in your mind, Tompkins. I trust you have nothing on your conscience?"

"What, sir?" beated Tompkins, as he clasped about under his coat.

Mr. Lathom coughed.

"Your language is not very refined, Tompkins," he said. "You should have said, 'I am not uneasy at all, thank you, sir,' or 'I am ill,' just as the case may be. 'What, me?' is very ugly. Besides, whom could you possibly have supposed I was addressing? It takes this occasion to remark on the needlessness of many of our vulgar colloquialisms, with their irritating result of causing repetition in conversation. Tompkins gave all this while."

"But I feel sure you are indispensed, Tompkins. You had better see the matron when you go in, and explain your symptoms. Tompkins was acting now as if he had plenty of them.

"I am all right, sir, thank you," he said.

"Then, if that be so, whence is this restlessness, Tompkins? Why twist your features into grimaces? I will not believe that you intend to be impertinent. You must surely be in pain."

"The monkey was pinching and biting him hard, as Tompkins told me afterwards. It was jolly well fed up with being buried under Tompkins' coat."

Mr. Lathom put his stick behind his back, and leaned on it. I thought he was wound up to jaw for the rest of the day.

"I have had occasion to speak to you before, but not very much, Tompkins," he said.

"Repose of manner is essential. A feverish, lidgety manner is a cause of distress to oneself and to the beholder. You should cultivate a manner more in keeping with your essentially harmless, though not too intelligent personality. By so doing you will inspire confidence and earn the respect of those with whom you are brought into contact. Now, don't wriggle in that absurd manner. Remember, the world judges a boy or a man in a great measure by his attitude. You should never carry yourself as if you were desirous of hiding something. As I trust you have nothing to conceal from me, Tompkins?"

"Nun-no, sir," said Tompkins faintly.

"You have no secrets of which you are ashamed?"

"Nun-no, sir," said Tompkins again.

"Then take example from Mulvanev here. There you need to blush and stammer because you happen to be in my presence. I endeavour to stand in loco parentis to my pupils. So long as they try to do their duty I have nothing to fear from them."

He nodded pleasantly to both of us, and passed on.

"I wish Caesar was up his coat biting him!" fumed Tompkins. "That would have taught him something! The little beast has been making a jiffy meal of me!"

"Tompkins is a perfect chump."

Just as we reached the school Caesar—what

a name for a monkey!—bit him again and escaped. Tompkins had only himself to blame. There was ten shillings thrown away.

He thought the monkey had gone for good, but that was not so. After a mousing up Latin Tompkins felt something scratching his neck. There was Caesar squatting on his shoulder. Quite happy and satisfied he looked. Tompkins didn't look particularly so, I must say. Caesar seemed to have taken a fancy to Tompkins—or, perhaps, he had popped in to say good-bye. He started round the room, and then started off down the form.

The next moment Mr. Lathom looked up.

"Goodness gracious! Catch that animal!" he thundered.

"Well, we did our best. Nobody objects to a monkey-chase in class hours."

But Caesar was too smart for us. He made for Mr. Lathom, and grabbed at his mortar-board. Tompkins grabbed at Caesar, but overbalanced. Lathom was in Tompkins' way, I suppose. They came down together, anyhow. Caesar grinned. I could swear I saw him wink.

"Boy, get up at once!" roared Mr. Lathom.

"I am trying to, sir," said Tompkins, "but you have put your foot through my pocket."

By the time we had got sorted out the monkey had settled himself in a vacant space on the top shelf of the bookcase. Then he started to read books. Mr. Lathom.

Mr. Lathom was very angry, which wasn't altogether surprising.

We really did try to catch the monkey, but Caesar was too smart. I had him by the tail once, but Tompkins barged into me. Next moment the monkey shinned out of the window. Tompkins never saw him again.

It is in his heart to get the old dead chap who sold Caesar to Tompkins had trained the beast—I mean Caesar, not Tompkins—to cut off back to him after he's sold. Crafty dodge, too. And serve old Tompkins right for being such a very underdone chump.

Tompkins is giving a miss to natural history now.

THE END.

"T. M. W."

CORRESPONDENCE COLUMN.

G. O. M. Plainer.—You say that my replies are too long-winded. Here goes for improvement!

S. O. M. E. One.—Yes.

A. N. Y. One.—No.

G. Rumble.—I've seen the last two replies.

O. N. More.—Rats!

Yetan Other.—See reply to O. N. E. More—and more of them!

G. Rumble.—I regard you with the most utter despatch.

G. Rowl.—You, too!

Gussy.—After all this, answering your letter is like balm in Gilead—whether you really wrote it or not. I don't think there is any sufficient reason for your giving up starched cuffs and collars during the war. Why should the daughter of a hundred ears!—both Terenyon! It was he who got wrong in the genders, not I—risk being taken for nobody in particular? And what would you give me without your cuffs and collars, dear boy?

G. G. C.—I am not an authority on the intricacies of relationships, but I should say it is quite possible that though you & Talbot are cousins, your uncle does not stand in the same relationship to him. Which uncle of yours is it—the one whose coat-of-arms is three golden balls?

S. (Sh)—I fear that your article on "The Psychology of the Absent-Minded" is really too much of the kindergarten type of thing to please our readers. They like something better worth breathing upon.

Try some subject more recondite, of less puerile simplicity—such, for instance, as "Why Does a Chicken Cross the Road?"

"Lintonian"—You say it has been decided that for food ration purposes jam-tarts are cakes. I will take your word for it. Cakes are part of the bread ration, you add. That is so, but why? Jam-tarts are not bread. A stick is a staff—or, anyway, a staff is a stick. Well, yes! Therefore a cane, which is certainly a stick, is a kind of staff. Un-yes! But why? Two on unpleasant subjects I part company with you entirely when you say that it is only logical to consider three on each hand from Linton as a part of the week's bread ration. Indeed, it seems to me an underbred suggestion.

To Mr. _____, Newsagent.

Please keep for me a copy of the
GEM LIBRARY each week until further
notice.

(Signed),