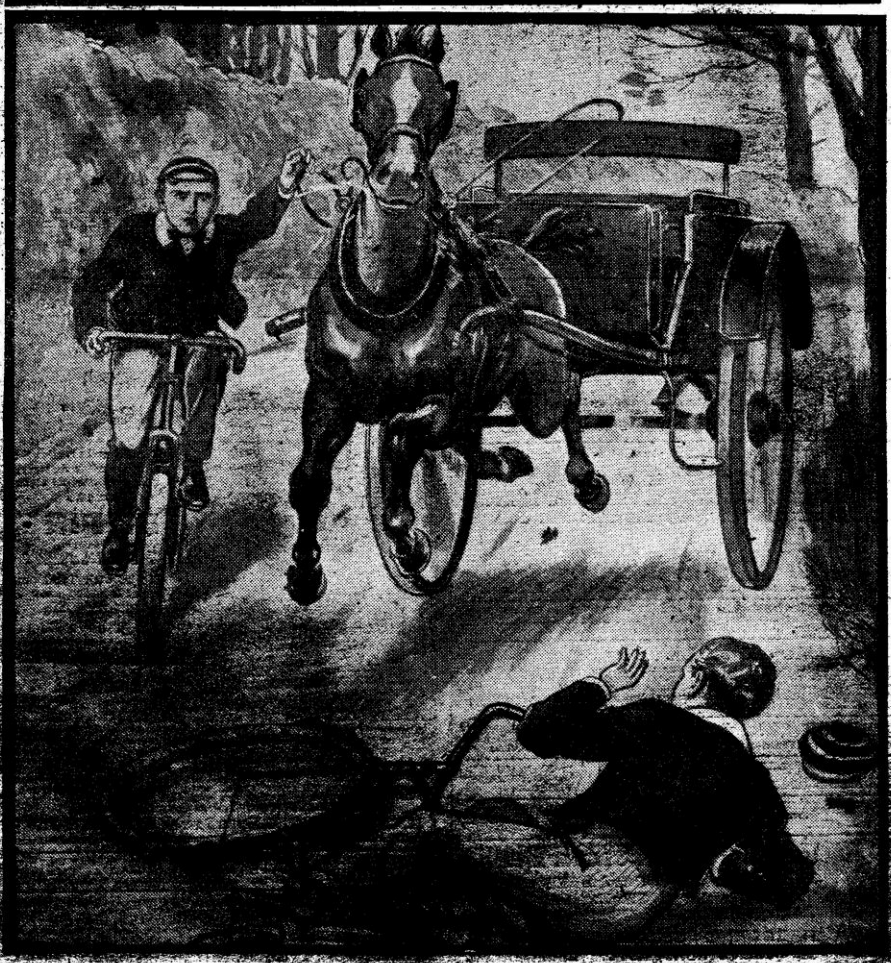
SPECIAL CARDEW NUMBER!

THE GEM LIBRARY

No. 682. Vol. XIX. March 9th, 1921. 20 Pages. 1d. 1/2



THE BEST OF PALS!

A Long Complete School Story of the [illegible] Boys featuring Tarrant & Co.

MY READERS' OWN CORNER.

Half-a-crown awarded for each paragraph printed on this page.

WHITE MICE.

White mice are capital pets to keep, and they can be very profitable. Their staple food consists of oats and bread and milk. White mice are delicate little creatures. There must be great cleanliness, all vessels being carefully washed. The price of the mice ranges from a shilling to eighteenpence apiece, but that is from a dealer. I have sold them at fourpence each.

Money prize sent to *John H. Carpher*, 3, Dalton Road, Liscard, Cheshire.

VERY SMART.

A small boy entered a provision shop. "What do you want, sonny?" asked the shopman. The boy took out a small green book from his satchel and gave the beaming shopman a large order. A few minutes elapsed, and the order was finished. "Three pounds two shillings and twopence halfpenny!" said the shopman. The boy, on hearing this, said: "Thank you very much, sir; that's my hardest sum." With that he bounced out of the shop, leaving the man gasping.

Money prize sent to William Ive, Gas-Meter Testing Office, Avonmouth Street, Newington Causeway, S.E. 1.

SURNAMES.

A man may get his name from the Christian name of his father, such as Johnson, son of John; Williamson, son of William; or Davidson, son of David. Place names are common. Wood and Field are frequent enough. The original Waters lived by a lake or river. Oliphant comes from a former member of the family being nicknamed Elephant, because of his size. Whitehead and Longshanks have similar beginnings. Then there are trade names—Cooper, Smith, Wheelwright, Baker, Cook, etc. The Normans put "Fitz" at the commencement of a name to denote "son."

Money prize sent to A. Ashton, 60, Birley Street, Sheffield.

THE USEFUL COMMA.

Punctuate the following with two commas only, so as to make it readable: Question: "That that is is that that is not is not is not that so?" Answer: "That that is is, that that is not is not, is not that so?"

Money prize sent to J. C. E. Mears, c.o. The British Empire Directory, 2, Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, E.C.

TOKIO'S "FROST PILGRIMS."

Amongst the strangest things one sees in Tokio, Japan, during the winter months are the "frost pilgrims." There are in Tokio a number of Buddhist shrines dedicated to a Buddha named Fudo Sama, a special giver of health and strength to his worshippers. At each of these temples there is a deep well of ice-cold water, and the temples are some distance from each other. When the weather is at its coldest, in the "darkest" or "great forest," one may see, at any hour of the night, a figure almost naked running at full speed through the streets, and ringing a bell as he goes. He is a "frost pilgrim." He has performed his devotions at one of the shrines of Fudo Sama, with showers of cold water from the well poured over his shivering body. He has then put on one thin summer garment and, thus scantily clad, is running as fast as he can to a shrine or two, where he will repeat the operation. He visits every Fudo shrine in the city before he stops. Possibly, he may die, but, according to his superstitious belief, he thinks he will obtain health for some loved invalid.

Money prize sent to James B. Horan, 2, Upper Rowe Street, Wexford, Ireland.

FACTORY TO RIDER

Packed Free. Carriage Paid. *Fifteen Days' Free Trial.* LOWEST CASH PRICES. EASY PAYMENT TERMS. Prompt delivery. Save Dealers' Profits. Big Bargains in Shop Soiled and Second-hand Cycles. Satisfaction guaranteed or Money Refunded. Write for Monster Size Free Lists and *Special Offer* of Sample Bicycle.

Est. 33 Yrs.

MEAD CYCLE COMPANY, Limited. Dept. B 607, BIRMINGHAM.

BECOME BIG NOW. The plums of business and social life go to the man who has height, and physique to match it. You can easily increase your height from 2 to 5 inches, and improve your health, figure, and carriage, by the Girvan Scientific Treatment. 9 ozs. unblemished record. £100 guarantee of genuineness. Particulars for postcard.—ENQUIRY DEPT., A.M.P., 17, STROUD GREEN ROAD, LONDON, N. 4.

STAMPS HAUTE VOLTA (New Issue, Pictorial), Egypt, FREE! LEVANT, Victoria, PERSIA, China, Cape, REUNION, Ceylon, LEFTLAND, Malmedy, Travancore, ILE ROUAD, Hyderabad, GUYANE, Bulgaria, CZECHO SLOVAKIA, and Fortuna Islands, My "GENUINE PACKET," containing all these stamps, will be sent free to all applicants who enclose 2d. for postage and packing. Best Mounts, 7d. per 1,000 post free. 50 Portuguese Colonials, 1/6 post free.—Victor Bancroft, Matlock.

HOME CINEMATOGRAPHS from £1.—Real Value. Films Galore. A Boon for Winter Evenings. Lists Free.—Desk E., DEAN CINEMA CO., 94, Drayton Avenue, West Ealing, LONDON.

DO YOU LACK SELF-CONFIDENCE? Do you suffer from nervous indigestion, constipation, lack of energy, or will power? You can acquire a nerve, which will give you absolute self-confidence, if you use the Mento-Nerve Strengthening Treatment. Used by Vice-Admiral to Seaman. Colonel to Private, D.S.O., M.C., M.M.'s, and D.C.M.'s. Merely send 3 penny stamps for particulars.—GODFREY ELLIOTT-SMITH, Ltd., 527, Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, London, E.C.4.

FUN FOR ALL!—Ventriloquist's Voice Instrument, Invisible. Astonishing, mystifies. Imitate Birds, Beasts, etc. 1/- P.O. (Ventriloquism Treatise included).—IDEAL CO., Clevedon.

PHOTO POSTCARDS OF YOURSELF 1/4 doz., 12 by 10 EN. LARGEMENTS, 8d. Also CHEAP PRICE LIST. CATALOGUE AND SAMPLES FREE.—HACKETTS, JULY ROAD, LIVERPOOL.

TOBACCO HABIT POSITIVELY CURES IN THREE DAYS.—Patent Special Prescription. 1/6.—H. RUGBEN (Box S.P.), HULME, MANCHESTER.

WORKING MODEL STEAM ENGINE

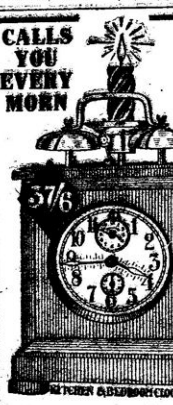
Model 7/6 and 10/6. Complete Electric Light Outfits 6/- and 9/3. Shocking Coil Parts or Telegraph 1/10. Electric Motor Parts 3/4 and 6/3.

HARBORNE SMALL POWER CO., 35, QUEEN'S ROAD, ASTON, BIRMINGHAM.

Above prices include Postage and Packing.

STOP! ENORMOUS SUCCESS at our SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS. Your own Ghost appears and disappears at will. Secure yours NOW. 1/3 only.—MILLET & CO., 3, Windmere Road, Tottenham, N. 17.

CALLS YOU EVERY MORN



BUY ONE TO-DAY FOR 5/-

Deposit and promise 5/- monthly after delivery, and own one of these famous

EMPIRE ALARM

Clocks with Luminous hands which show

TIME IN THE DARK.

Masters' "EMPIRE" Alarm Clock.

Masters' "Empire" is the ideal clock for a workman's bedside. Fitted with a loud Alarm, rising on two bells, calls you every Sunday. Mounted with a silvered Candelabra for candle or night-light. Luminous hands shew time nights and days. Dark Colour Case and Lever Movement. A true timekeeper, with fast 10 years' Guarantee. CARRIAGE PAID. 5/- DEPOSIT and promise 5/- monthly after delivery. Send 5/- now and ask for the "Empire" Clock, satisfaction or Deposit refunded. Delivery by return of post if 7/6 send cash price 35/6.

CATALOGUE FREE. Foreign applications invited.

MASTERS, Ltd., 6, Hope Stores, RYE. (Estd. 1860.)

"BONNY HAIR!" Wonderful results by Child Nurse. "WAVOLA" Waves and keeps straight hair. Restores grey hair. Prevents falling. 1/3 and 2/6 (or stamps).—ROSE (Dept. G.), 175, New North Road, London, N.1.

FREE FUN! The Latest Sensationally Funny Juggling Novelty. Astonishes and mystifies. Great fun to sit and watch. 1/- for 10 Extra Quality Coloured Balloons, 12 Jolly Joke Cricket & Cricket Ball Cards, 12 Magic Tricks & Conjuring Secrets, 1 Pair Magic Trick Dice, 1 Pair Magic Trick Cards, 1 Pair Magic Trick Coins, 1 Pair Magic Trick Dominoes, 1 Pair Magic Trick Counters, 1 Pair Magic Trick Spectacles, 1 Pair Magic Trick Eyeglasses, 1 Pair Magic Trick Monocles, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Knives, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Combs, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Mirrors, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Rules, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Scissors, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Thermometers, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Watches, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Wallets, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Purses, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Handkerchiefs, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Gloves, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Hats, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Caps, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Shoes, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Boots, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Socks, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Stockings, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Garters, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Braces, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Belts, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Ties, 1 Pair Magic Trick Pocket Scarves

The Best of Pals!

Leviton.

Cardew.

A Grand Long Complete School Story of Ralph Reckness Cardew and the Chums of :: :: St. Jim's. :: ::

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Special articles dealing with Cardew appear on pages 13 and 18.

This is a story that will live in your memory.—Editor.

CHAPTER 1.
Help from the Enemy.

"OH, dash it all!"

It was from Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, that that exclamation came.

And there was really quite a lot of excuse for the vigour of it.

A moment earlier Cardew had been travelling along the road over Wayland Moor on his new motor-bike at a good, though not an excessive, pace. Coming towards him he had seen two figures on bicycles, and had just recognised them as those of Aubrey Racke and George Gerald Crooke—fellows who were by no means friends of his—when the spill occurred.

Now he lay on his back on the wet grass, with the machine pinning him down, unknowing how much damage had been done either to him or it; not even sure how it all happened, and only certain that the enemy had witnessed his downfall.

If the thing had chanced to Racke or Crooke there would have been no chortling by Cardew. He might have pretended afterwards that it had gratified him, but no one who knew him well would have believed it. Most assuredly he would have given Racke or Crooke such aid as was needed.

He did not expect aid of them. He would not have been surprised had they merely grinned as they rode past. Between Cardew and the two black sheep there had been plenty of trouble in the past. He would not have pretended that he had forgiven and forgotten it all, and he was very sure that they had not.

But they jumped off their bikes, laid them down, and went to his help at once. Moreover, neither gave even the ghost of a grin.

As the machine was lifted off him, Cardew realised that he was pretty badly shaken up, if not seriously damaged. The faces above him suddenly grew blurred and faded out altogether. For the space of perhaps half a minute he knew nothing.

He would not have admitted that he had fainted. But he knew, as he looked up again into those faces, that there had been something like a lapse of consciousness, and he saw that it had frightened Racke and Crooke.

"That's better, by gad!" said Racke. "Are you badly hurt, Cardew?"

"How did it happen?" inquired Crooke.

"I don't know whether I'm hurt, an' I don't know how it happened," replied Cardew, trying not to speak snappishly.

"But I'm much obliged to you fellows, I'm sure."

"Well, you needn't speak as if you were more surprised than obliged," answered Crooke sourly.

"I am, by gad!"

It was not a pleasant thing to say, but Crooke's tone was not pleasant.

"Dash it all, Cardew, you'd have done as much for either of us like a shot!" said Racke.

"Would I? It's kind of you to say so, Racke, but I'm afraid you're doin' me more than justice."

"Can you get up?" growled Crooke.

"I think I shall be able to in a minute or two. Don't let me keep you fellows waitin'."

"Oh, by gad, you don't suppose we're goin' on, leavin' you there completely crocked, for all we can tell?" said Racke.

"I shouldn't hold it against you if you did. I might do just that if you were on your back, y'know."

"No, you wouldn't," said Crooke.

That speech may have been prompted by the nudge Racke gave him; but, nevertheless, it did express what Crooke knew to be the truth.

Racke was quicker of brain than his pal. Already he had seen possible advantage in this accident to Cardew. Now Crooke also began to see it.

In spite of all that had passed, the two black sheep would have been glad to chum up with Cardew for the sake of what they might get out of him. It was anything but a high-minded attitude. But no one could accuse Racke and Crooke of being high-minded.

They helped Cardew to his feet. He had sustained no damage that a few hours—at most a day or two—would not put right, it seemed. Certainly nothing was broken. But it was all he could do to keep his feet without aid, and he knew that he could not ride his machine to St. Jim's, though it seemed to be in rideable condition.

"This is what you hit," said Crooke, pointing to a big log, evidently dropped from some passing cart, which lay in the road.

"Couldn't have been lookin' where you were goin', by gad!" remarked Racke.

"I suppose not. Point of fact, I'd just caught sight of you two," replied Cardew.

"Sorry if we contributed to your spill," Racke said. "The least we can do is to see that you get back safely after that, y'know."

"Oh, I'm not blamin' you in the least, an' I'm much obliged for the offer. But you were off to Wayland, weren't you?"

"Not for anythin' that can't very well be given up," said Racke. "The pictures, an' tea afterwards—that's all."

"Quite an innocent programme, dear boy," Cardew answered. "I'm sure it won't grieve either of you much to chuck anythin' so school-missish. Well, I'm not proud—never was—an' I accept your help in the spirit in which it's offered, by Jove!"

That speech was very like Cardew—two gibes and a mis-statement. For if anyone at St. Jim's was proud, that fellow was Ralph Reckness Cardew. His pride often manifested itself in queer ways; but it was there always, and it was always strong.

Racke and Crooke did not mind the gibes. They were vain of their reputation as gay dogs.

"That thing ought to be moved out of the road," Cardew said, nodding towards the log that had sent him flying.

"Oh, what's the giddy odds?" returned Crooke. "It's up to chaps to keep their dashed eyes open—what!"

"As a chap who failed to keep his dashed eyes open, or to direct them rightly, I feel a sneakin' sort of sympathy with other dashed fools; so I'll move it myself," replied Cardew.

But they would not let him attempt that, and he could hardly have done it had he attempted it. His head was swimming still, and his knees were as weak as water.

They shifted the log on to the grass, making their hands muddy, which did not suit them. Racke and Crooke were more particular about clean hands in the bodily sense than in the other.

"I'll ride your jigger if you like, Cardew," volunteered Crooke. "You can have mine. Then Aubrey can give you a hand if you feel queer."

So it was agreed. Cardew really was not fit to ride the motor-bike. It was discovered before long that he was hardly fit to ride the other. Tom Merry or Jack Blake might have got him along on it, riding by his side, but it was more than Racke could do.

Crooke was well ahead by the time they discovered this, out of earshot, and, in spite of Cardew's feeble protests, Racke left his own bike inside a gate, and pushed the other with the injured junior upon it for the best part of a mile. It could hardly have been easy work, for Cardew could do little more than sit the bike, clinging to the handles, deadly faint at times, and at no time able to help himself much.

A quarter of a mile from St. Jim's, Crooke, having stabled the motor-bike and started on the back trail, met them.

Then he took over Cardew, and Racke went back for his own machine.

Before they reached the gates Racke had caught up again, for Crooke found the going slow. Taggles, the porter, stared when he saw those two helping Cardew. It was a long time since Taggles had seen the three together.

"He's hurt, Taggy," said Racke. "No harm in our runnin' him over the quad like this, is there?"

Bicycles were not allowed to be ridden in the quad at St. Jim's. They had to be pushed to and from the gates.

"Which what I says is this 'ere Master Racke," returned Taggles. "Which it's clean contrairy to all rules an' reggylations. But, bein' as there ain't no one to see, an' Master Cardew's 'ad a spill or somethink—well, thankee, Master Racke, an' I reelly don't see no 'arm in it."

"Needn't have tipped the dashed old humbug, Aubrey!" growled Crooke.

That speech got through to Cardew's dulled consciousness, and he said:

"Racke won't be out of pocket, y'know, Crooke."

"Dash it all, Cardew, I thought you said you weren't pround!" snapped Racke.

"Sorry, dear boy," muttered Cardew. "No offence meant, 'pon honour."

But when he found himself in the bathroom, with Racke and Crooke still ministering to him, it struck him that he had not been too gracious to them, in that speech or otherwise.

"I'm no end obliged to you fellows," he said, really desirous of making amends. "My best pals couldn't have done more for me than you have."

Crooke had opened his mouth to make some remark, not likely to have been pleasant, about Levison major and Clive, whom Cardew meant. But over Cardew's head Racke shot him a warning glance, and Crooke choked down the words.

He was missing a minute later. By this time Racke had done all that he could do for Cardew, and he was drying his own hands when Crooke came back, with a cup of strong tea.

"Here, drink this, Cardew!" he said. "Nothin' stronger than tea—what!" asked Cardew, sniffing it.

"Oh, I dare say I could find you a drop of cognac if you'd care for it," replied Crooke. "But I didn't think you would, though I believe it would do you good."

"It might. But I'd rather not have it, as I'm not actually faintin'." Cardew said. "I'm glad of the tea—thank you, Crooke."

He drained the cup, and felt much better at once. His head cleared and grew more steady, though his body still ached.

Levison and Clive were away for the afternoon. The junior eleven had a match on at some distance, and nearly everyone left at home was on Big Side, where the school team was meeting redoubtable opponents.

"Come an' have some tea with us, Cardew," suggested Racke. "It's hardly worth while for us to start for Wayland again as late as this, an' you won't get a lot of change out of sittin' in No. 9 all by your lonesome."

Cardew was not at all sure that he wanted to go. But he was not nearly so sure as he would have been two hours before that he did not want to.

And they really had behaved decently. If they wanted his company they were welcome to it. If they wanted to play nap or banker he would take a hand out of gratitude, and would not mind losing his money as long as it was lost fairly.

So he went.

CHAPTER 2.
Cardew's Bet.

THEY did not ask him to take a hand. Cards were not even mentioned. He was treated as an honoured guest, pressed to the best on the table, and talked to at first very much as a visitor from outside might have been.

No St. Jim's topic was raised until tea was over.

Cardew had not eaten much. It was rather early for tea, and he had no appetite after his shaking-up. But he drank three or four cups of tea, and felt the better for it.

They would not let him help to clear away. The table was left to be dealt with later.

Racke produced Egyptian cigarettes, and Cardew took one unthinkingly. But he soon let it go out, and threw what was left of it into the fire. Either he had lost his taste for tobacco, or the state of his head after the shaking-up made it nauseous to him.

"Did you see about the silent man in the papers, Cardew?" asked Crooke.

The subject was introduced without any special intention. Several other topics more or less of public interest had been aired, and Cardew had expressed his views upon them freely enough. It had struck both Racke and Crooke more forcibly than ever before that Cardew's views were generally quite unlike those of the majority. He had a way of looking at things from a different angle—a way of seeing aspects of them that were new to these two.

"Yaas," he answered now. "Silly ass, but I don't see why there should be so dashed much fuss about it. Didn't want to gas, I suppose. Mother an' wife an' sister needn't have cut up rough about it, I consider. 'Pon my word, with three women in the dashed house, I wonder that his silence was ever noticed! I should say, by gad, that the poor bounder had got so fed-up with never bein' able to get in a word, that he'd chucked it in despair. Then, bein' female women, they'd hate him for it, of course."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Racke. "Put yourself in their place, Cardew. It must be annoy a chap not to get an answer when he speaks. Not so pleasant havin' a sulky bounder about."

"Might not be sulks," said Cardew.

"I should reckon it was if Gerry here did it," Racke returned.

"Dare say you'd be right, too," said Cardew. "Crooke can be sulky."

But he did not say it offensively, and Crooke grinned as he said:

"I should dashed well say the same about Aubrey!"

"Well, Racke can be sulky, too," answered Cardew, smiling.

"You can't, I suppose?" retorted Racke.

"Don't know. I don't fancy I sulk exactly. Now, I could suspect Levison of it, though I might be wrong. But I don't think I could suspect Clive. If he wouldn't speak, I should be dashed well sure that there was something wrong, but I shouldn't think he was sulkin' with us."

"There is a difference between Clive an' Levison," said Racke.

Cardew knew that Racke hated both his chums. But he could not resent that speech, and he did not want to.

There certainly was a difference between Clive and Levison. They were utterly unlike in many ways. And neither of them was at all like Cardew in most. Yet Cardew's nature touched Levison's on one side, Clive's on the other, and made a bond between them that would not have been so strong without him. The three were the best of pals. Levison thought a heap of Clive, and Clive would have done anything for Levison. But wayward, reckless Cardew, who had got them into so many scrapes, was possibly dearer to both than they were to each other.

"But they'd both be dashed certain you were in your tantrums if you tried the silence dodge on them," remarked Crooke.

It was said idly enough, though with a tang of sourness in it that had not been evident in what Racke had said. Crooke did not guess in the least what was to come of this discussion.

"I don't believe it," replied Cardew. "They would be on their ears a bit, no doubt. They might try to promote conversation by chuckin' odd articles at my napper. They'd wonder why I was doin' it. But they would not think I was sulky."

"Wouldn't they, though?" Racke said, warming up. "I bet they would! I bet there would be the biggest sort of a row in No. 9 within twelve hours of your startin' it! I bet that if you kept it up for twenty-four hours you three would no longer be the best of pals, as you reckon you are now! Patience has its dashed limits, y'know, Cardew, old top, an' I'm not so sure that either Clive or Levison is quite as patient as Jonah."

"Don't you mean Job?" asked Cardew.

"I think it was Job. Let's see, Moses was the meek gentleman, wasn't he? It was Jonah who was too fond of the society of whales, if I remember rightly. Yaas, dear boy, it's Job you mean."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Crooke. "Of course it was Job, Aubrey! Don't you go makin' that dashed bloomer in Divinity class, or Linton will sit on you hard."

"Taken to writin' for the papers, Racke?" gibed Cardew. "There was a fellow spreadin' himself about boxers or somethin' in one of them a few weeks ago who said that two of the punchers were like Goliath an' Daniel. Could that have been you, by any chance?"

"It wasn't, not by any chance," replied Racke, quite unruffled. "I don't pretend to be a dab at Divinity; but, Jonahs or Jobs, there ain't any in No. 9, I'll wager!"

"Not so sure. I've sometimes thought there was a dashed Jonah there," Cardew said, suddenly thoughtful.

And Racke, as well as Crooke, understood that he meant himself. There had been times, as they were well aware, when Levison and Clive might have lightened the ship and got rid of trouble by chucking Cardew overboard.

But Racke had scented now a possibility that Crooke still did not see. Nothing would suit Racke's book better than to cause division between Cardew and his chums, and he saw a chance of that.

"Well, they haven't chucked you over the side yet. But there's no tellin' what may happen, an' I shouldn't advise you to try them too hard, old fellow. You'd better not spring this dashed silence dodge on them, anyway."

"You say you'll bet on it. What will you bet?" demanded Cardew.

The old recklessness of consequences had got hold of him. There was the old betting mania, too. It would lie dormant for a time; but it was pretty sure to wake again.

Moreover, Cardew now scented a sneer at his chums on the part of Racke, and that put his back up at once. He forgot that the very last thing those best of pals would desire was that he should get gambling or betting with these fellows again.

"Depends upon conditions," replied

Racke. "Anythin' you like, if those suit."

"Suggest your own," said Cardew.

"What do you think, Gerry?" asked Racke, turning to Crooke. "You're in this with me, aren't you?"

"Oh, rather, old gun!" answered Crooke. "Let's think a minute!"

Silence fell. Cardew absent-mindedly helped himself to a cigarette from Racke's flashy gold case, which lay open on the table. He lighted it, and took a single whiff, then threw it into the fire. Racke was minded to say a word or two about making free with other fellows' property, and wasting it at that; but the look on Cardew's face kept him from it.

Cardew was thinking—hard! He thought of the many times Ernest Levison and Sidney Clive had stood by him when his folly might have alienated them.

Levison, as he well knew, had been among the black sheep once, and that might account in part for his sympathy.

But no fellow at St. Jim's had a cleaner record than Clive. It was a curious thing—or, perhaps, it was not so curious, after all, if one looked deeply enough—that Clive's reputation for straightness was far more a matter for pride to the other two than it was to the South African junior himself.

He never thought about it. He just went straight, because he was the kind of fellow who does that. But it would hurt either Levison or Cardew badly to have seen him slip up, more than it would have hurt Levison to see Cardew, or Cardew to see Levison.

Clive's straightforwardness had helped them. Clive would hate this bet. Cardew knew that. Levison would say, when he knew about it, that it was silly rot; but he would not dislike it as much as Clive would. Yet it was on Clive's good temper and patience that Cardew was counting to keep Levison from an outbreak.

"Hardly fair to dear Sidney," thought Cardew. "But—dash it all!—I'm in for it now, unless they make the conditions hopelessly imposs. I can't climb down to these two!"

Then Crooke spoke.

"To-day's Wednesday," he said. "I should say that it would be a fair thing if you kept silence in No. 9 an' to those fellows anywhere else till after prep on Saturday evenin'."

It was a longer space of time than Cardew had thought likely to be named. But he raised no objection.

"I'm at liberty to speak to anyone else, but not to them—is that the idea?" he said.

"That's it, by gad!" said Crooke.

Racke nodded, to signify his agreement. He was glad he had let Crooke speak first, for he had been going to suggest twenty-four hours.

"May I shake my head or nod?" inquired Cardew.

"I think he might do that, as long as it's not to any question as to why he's keepin' mum—don't you, Gerry?" Racke said.

"Yaas—oh, yaas!" answered Crooke.

Both of the black sheep were doing their best to make Cardew think this a mere friendly bet. But already he had some suspicion of what was behind it.

"But you mustn't give it away in writin' to them," said Racke.

"Oh, that surely goes without sayin'," replied Cardew. "There would be nothin' in it if they knew."

"An', so that it shouldn't get round to them, you mustn't explain it to anyone else at St. Jim's," Crooke said.

"I shan't want to," Cardew returned. "What does anyone else at St. Jim's matter to me?"

"You're to turn up to the usual meals in No. 9," said Racke.

"Agreed! I wasn't peckish just now, but I'm not in the habit of missin' my feed," Cardew answered.

"An' for prep," added Crooke. "No doin' your prep in another study, old top!"

"Hadn't thought of anythin' so dashed weak!" said Cardew.

They were tying him up pretty tightly, though. There was to be the maximum opportunity of unpleasantness.

Would Levison stand it? Could even Clive be expected to keep his temper?

It would be provoking from the outset, worse than that before the end came. Cardew saw that.

"In fact," said Racke, "I think you ought to agree to a certain stated number of hours per day in your study."

"Well, then, I don't!" answered Cardew, kicking at last. "Sometimes I'm there most of my time, an' sometimes I'm not there an hour beyond the time I have to be. Meals an' prep tie me down quite enough, I consider."

"Right-ho! I'll waive that!" Racke said, with an air of doing the generous thing. "What odds do you offer me?"

"Oh, by gad! That was the very question I was goin' to ask you!"

"But we can't give odds!" protested Crooke. "We're helpless once the test begins! It all rests with you."

"An' my pals," added Cardew quietly.

"But you're so dashed sure of them!" returned Racke, sneering openly for the first time.

That sneer nettled Cardew. It was directed against his chums. Racke thought the tie that bound those three was no stronger than the bond of blackguardism between him and Crooke.

Cardew would show him that he was wrong!

"Very well. What odds do you want?" he said.

Racke and Crooke looked at one another. They were greedy rascals, and they knew Cardew well enough to be sure that he would not weigh a matter like this carefully.

"Fi——" began Racke.

"Ten to one!" spoke Crooke hurriedly.

"Were you going to say five or five hundred to one, Racke?" asked Cardew sarcastically. "I must say you fellows know how to open your mouths widely enough!"

"I was goin' to say five," replied Racke. "I didn't suppose you'd risk ten!"

That sneer told.

"There's no real risk for me!" snapped Cardew. "But ten to one is fairly long odds. In quids, I suppose?"

"In fivers," said Crooke.

And, without a moment's hesitation, Cardew answered:

"Done with you!"

CHAPTER 3.
Tension in Study No. 9.

CARDEW went after that. He had forgotten for a few minutes all about his hurts; but he remembered them again when he entered Study No. 9, on the Fourth Form passage, where the fire had gone out, and everything seemed strangely cheerless in the absence of his chums. He felt sick and sorry, wished he had never made that rotten bet, and thought hard things—though not harder than they deserved—of Racke and Crooke for luring him into it.

He relaid and relighted the fire. He set the table for tea, and went across to the tuckshop to fetch in something rather special, though it hurt him to walk.

Getting tea ready was not greatly in Cardew's line. He did not do his share of the work of the study. But Clive was generally willing to do more than his, so that made amends. It was hardly with a notion of propitiating his chums

Levison and Clive looked in. "My hat, Ralph, you've turned up trumps for once!" said Levison, glancing at the table. Cardew never said a word. He got up and collared the teapot, to cover his silence somewhat. *(See page 6.)*

that Cardew did what he did now—rather from a feeling that he owed them something.

Besides, he was glad to have something to do. He did not want to sit down and think of the unpleasant fact that if he lost that bet he would be in Racke's and Crooke's debt to the tune of fifty pounds, and that he had nothing like that sum, and did not see much prospect of having it before the next term.

Cardew's grandfather, Lord Reckness, spoiled him, but he did not always give the wayward, erratic boy, all that he asked for, and he sometimes put awkward questions to him. And just now Cardew had special reasons for not getting the old peer's back up. He was in better odour with Lord Reckness than he had been, and he wanted to stay so.

But he could not lose! He would not!

The junior team had had to set out directly after morning classes, for the scene of their match was awkward to get at by rail. They were to lunch after getting there; but Cardew remembered Levison's saying that they would have no time for tea when the game was over, and that they must go easy on the lunch, because they would have to play directly after it.

They would be peckish when they came in, of course. Cardew provided generously against that certainty. A big steak-and-kidney pie and a tin of lobster balanced a large dish of tarts and buns on the table.

The fire burned up as twilight fell, and Cardew was sitting in the armchair, with his hands at the back of his head, feeling more cheerful in mind and more comfortable in body, when Frank Levison—Levison minor—looked in.

When Cardew had asked who mattered to him at St. Jim's besides his two study-mates, he had implied more indifference than he felt to the rest. There were at least a dozen other fellows for whom he had more regard than he had ever admitted—the Terrible Three; Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was a distant relative of his; Durrance, who was his first cousin; Kerr, Talbot, and others. But his liking for Frank Levison was the strongest of all.

"Hallo, Franky!" he said now.

"Hallo, Cardew! Thought you'd snoozed off. My hat, this is some tea!"

"You approve of it, Franky?"

"Don't I just? Wish I was comin' to it! I say, Cardew, I think I'll invite myself. You won't mind, I know. Clive won't. I don't think Ernie will, though he may say it's like my cheek."

But it would not do.

Cardew did not want Frank there with his surprised face—the face that fitted his name so well, that had kept its looks of innocence and openness through all the youngster's ups and downs at St. Jim's—when this trouble began.

Frank would only add to the trouble, without in the least meaning to. He would be completely puzzled by Cardew's silence when his major or Clive spoke to him. He might even ask leading questions as to the wherefore of it. More likely he would sit there looking surprised and worried, at a loss to understand, and not enjoying his tea a bit.

"Wouldn't you rather stand a spread to Wally & Co.?" asked Cardew diplomatically.

"Of course, I should like that. But you can't stand a spread out of threepence-halfpenny, and that is all I've got," replied Frank ingenuously. "It won't run even to bloaters!"

"A ten-bob note would do it, though—what?" returned Cardew.

"Yes. But where's it coming from?"

"From your affectionate uncle," said Cardew, taking out his wallet.

"Oh, I say, Cardew, I can't, you know!"

"Then you're the only kid in the Third who couldn't!" replied Cardew. "What would Walter Adolphus say if Arthur Augustus offered him a tip? He might say 'Thank you!' or he might not; but he'd freeze on to it, by gad!"

That was true, and Frank knew it. Cardew was not Frank's brother, of course. But—well, it came to pretty much the same thing. It really did. Cardew called himself Frank's uncle, and in his curious, whimsical way, really did behave like a particularly decent kind of uncle to him. There was not much more than a couple of years between their ages, but Cardew felt at least twenty years older than the fag.

And Wally and the rest could share. They couldn't share in the tea in No. 9. Ernie would draw the line quite decidedly at that, Frank was sure.

"All right, Cardew! It's jolly good of you!" said Frank.

"I'm only payin' to be relieved of juvenile company at a moment when I have the misfortune to feel a centenarian," replied Cardew.

"Rats!" said Frank, with a cheery grin, as he withdrew.

Cardew got up to fill the kettle and put it on the hob.

It was singing away nicely, when there came from the passage the trampling of feet and the sound of voices.

Levison and Clive looked in.

"My hat, Ralph, you've turned up trumps for once!" said Levison, glancing at the table. "We only want time to wash, and we're on to that little lot like the hungriest hunter that ever hunted and hungered, you bet!"

"We won, Ralph—four to two!" Clive said. "Nobby idea of yours, getting in lobster. I'm nuts on lobster. But you'll say we deserve it when you hear all about the game."

Cardew never said a word. He got up and collared the teapot, to cover his silence somewhat.

But the two had not even noticed that he failed to answer.

They went, but within five minutes they were back. They pulled their chairs up to the table, and Clive, finding the lobster in front of him, set to its equal division.

Cardew was just about to say that he did not want any. But he must not speak, he knew. That meant losing the bet at the very start.

So he reached over, took one of the plates, transferred all but a scrap of the lobster to the other two, and placed that scrap in front of himself.

"Well, I suppose you know best," said Clive, somewhat surprised, for this proceeding was unlike Cardew's usual table manners. "Not peckish—eh?"

"How can the bounder get peckish when he slacks and frowsts all the giddy time?" Levison said. "Haven't even tried your new motor-bike yet, I suppose, old born-tired?"

"You ought to have been along this afternoon," said Clive, as Cardew passed him a cup of tea. "My hat, it was a game worth watching!"

"He ought to have been playing!" growled Levison. "It's the silly chump's own fault that he isn't in the team!"

Cardew said nothing to that. But he often let remarks of that kind pass in silence. He had told Levison long ago that all this jaw about what he ought to do in the way of athletics merely bored him.

"They were all over us in the first half," Clive said. "I should say they averaged above a stone heavier all round, and they used their weight, too."

"Fairly enough," put in Levison.

"Oh, I'm not grumbling, though their centre-forward did give me a bit of a doing!" returned Clive.

"Boot was on the other leg later on," said Levison.

"Yes, I think I had the measure of him in the second half. He seemed to tire."

"They all did," Levison said. "They were two—nil at half-time, Ralph, but we got fairly going after the interval, and at the end we were making rings round them."

Cardew nodded and smiled. It was all that was necessary for him to do thus far.

But somehow the keenness of his pals struck him in a new way. He wished he had been with them that afternoon. If he had cared to try for it he might have won a place in Tom Merry's team before this. Then he would not have made that silly bet with Racke and Crooke.

Those two had had a glorious time, and they looked wonderfully fit and well. Cardew himself seldom appeared weedy or washed out, but he knew that he was no such picture of health and strength as Clive or Levison was. And there had been a time, not so very long ago, when Ernest Levison had been a mere weedy slacker.

Now the lobster had been cleared up, except that the scrap that Cardew had taken still lay untouched before him. Levison stuck a knife and fork into the pie.

"This is something like a tea!" he said. "You're a good sort, Ralph, though a slack bounder!"

Again Cardew nodded and smiled.

"Have a bit?" asked Levison.

Cardew shook his head.

"Can't you speak, dummy?" snorted Levison.

A shake of the head was the only answer he got.

"I say, Ralph, is your throat bad?" inquired Clive anxiously.

Cardew was tempted to nod. But he could hardly carry off the fiction of a bad throat for three days. Clive would be worrying him incessantly to see the doctor or go into sanny.

So he shook his head again.

Levison passed his cup to be refilled, looking hard at Cardew as he did so. Cardew avoided his gaze by giving all his attention to pouring out, and across the table the eyes of the other two met.

Clive's spoke plainly. What they said was:

"Leave him alone. He'll come round."

But Levison was not content to leave Cardew alone.

"Why, you silly ass, you haven't eaten anything!" he said.

"I could eat some pie, if I could get any, Ernest," said Clive pointedly.

That made a moment's diversion. But when Levison took his cup from Cardew he said bluntly:

"What's wrong? If we've done anything that doesn't suit you, say so, you graven image!"

Cardew shook his head.

"Can't you speak, you absurd idiot?"

"Leave him alone, Ernest!" snapped Clive. "He needn't gas if he doesn't feel inclined to, need he?"

Levison glared at Clive. Cardew found himself feeling quite uneasy about those two. He had never taken into account the possibility of his silence making trouble between them.

"Don't you feel well, Ralph?" Clive asked.

"Why don't you leave him alone?" snorted Levison. "What's good enough for me ought to be good enough for you, I should think!"

Clive reddened, and dropped his eyes to his plate. He was nettled, but he tried hard not to show it.

Levison put a couple of tarts on a plate, and handed it to Cardew.

"I won't eat another mouthful unless you wipe those up!" he said.

And there was no doubt that he meant it.

Feeling surprisingly meek, Cardew wiped them up. Then he took Clive's cup and refilled it. But for fully five minutes not another word was spoken by any of the three, and even the pie somehow lacked savour to Clive and Levison.

The meal over, Levison got up.

"Going to speak to Tom Merry," he said to Cardew, ignoring Clive.

Cardew nodded.

He helped Clive to clear the table and wash up. But neither of them spoke a word.

They had just finished when Frank Levison popped his head in.

"Ernie isn't here, then?" he said.

"I think you'll find him in No. 10, kid," replied Cardew.

He spoke quite in his usual manner; and perhaps it was that which made Clive stare at him.

Frank trotted off.

Then Clive made another attempt.

"Ralph," he said, "what on earth can be the matter with you? You won't say a word to either of us, but you spoke to Franky. I don't know of anything that I've done, or that Levison has done, to upset you—and, anyway, it's not like you to play this game. If you keep it up, things in this study won't be any too pleasant. Levison can't stand much of it, and I don't know that I can, either."

He waited a few seconds for Cardew to answer him. But Cardew did not speak.

Then Clive, with a very troubled face, went out.

Five minutes later, Levison came in.

"Ralph, you utter idiot, why didn't you tell us you'd had a spill this afternoon, and were feeling rocky?" he said.

No answer.

Levison went out again, and slammed the door hard.

He and Clive both came in to prep; but they did not say a word to one another the whole time, and neither of them spoke to Cardew.

Levison never looked at him. But Levison glared at Clive now and then, as if he suspected the South African to be at the bottom of the mystery; and once in a way Clive looked at Cardew appealingly.

Clive might stand the test, Cardew thought. But he doubted whether Levison would. Levison's temper was not as good as Clive's. It was more like Cardew's own.

"An' I'm dashed if I could stand it in their place!" muttered Cardew to himself, when they had both cleared out.

CHAPTER 4.
Dumb to Them Only!

LEVISON stopped Clive as the Fourth were going up to bed.

"I was a silly ass to get on my ear with you, old fellow!" he said shamefacedly.

"Don't say another word about it!" answered Clive. "That doesn't matter. I knew you'd come round, so I didn't worry about you. But—— Well, it fairly licks me what Ralph's at!"

"Did you hear what happened to him this afternoon, while we were away?"

"No. Haven't heard a thing."

"He had a spill from his motor-bike. Racke and Crooke brought him in, looking pretty queer, Taggles says."

"Have you seen Taggles? Was it from him you heard?"

"I've seen him, and asked him about it. But it was from Scrope I heard of it," replied Levison.

"Well, I don't see that it explains anything. If he was feeling ill, he might have said so, you'd think. He didn't seem ill or damaged, I must say. And he spoke to Frank. There was that ripping tea, too; he must have got that in after his spill. That shows he wasn't mad with us then. But if those two cads had been stuffing him up with some yarn about us——"

"I thought of that, too. But it wouldn't have made him go on like this. He'd have told us straight. There's another queer thing. Frank looked in before we got back, and said he'd like to come to tea. You know how Cardew is about the kid: in an ordinary way, he'd never have thought of choking him off. Frank might come to tea every day, and he wouldn't kick. But he kind of bribed the kid to keep away—gave him ten bob to treat Wally & Co. to a spread."

"It beats all I ever heard of!" said Clive. "But the only thing to do is to have patience with him—and with each other, Ernest!"

Levison put out his hand.

"A fellow would have to be a rotter to quarrel with you, old chap!" he said. "You don't meet him half-way when he gets out of temper. But—— Well, I can be a rotter sometimes, and I won't promise even not to do that, though I'll try my best. As for Ralph, he's asking for trouble, and I'm afraid he'll get it from me before he's finished! There's a limit, you know!"

Clive knew that—knew, too, that Levison's limit would be reached before his own was. But he did not feel too sure that his own would not be reached eventually.

He lay awake that night, trying to imagine how Racke and Crooke could possibly have worked on Cardew's mind to this extent.

And Cardew lay awake, trying to remember the exact terms of the paper which Racke had drawn up, making clear the conditions of the bet. He had a copy in his wallet, but he would not get out of bed and strike a match to look at it.

There would have to be a row in No. 9 to lose him his bet. Would a quarrel between Clive and Levison, directly due to his silence, constitute such a row? He thought not. It ought not to, anyway.

But Racke and Crooke were sharpers. They would catch at anything that gave them half a chance to claim victory. And Cardew, dumb by reason of the bet, as far as his chums were concerned, could do nothing to avert a break between them—nothing but admit that he had lost, and tell them the whole foolish story, that is.

And his pride rebelled at that notion. Moreover, he really could not afford to lose fifty pounds. There were times when he had that sum, and spent it recklessly; but this was not one of the times, and pride came in again when he thought of having to ask Racke and Crooke to wait.

He might have felt somewhat easier in mind if he had been able to read the thoughts of Levison, also lying awake in the bed on his left.

For Levison was thinking what a good fellow Clive was, and feeling sorry that he had so nearly quarrelled with Clive. He would not do that again, if he could possibly avoid it. But Cardew really was difficult to bear with!

Cardew was a good pal, though—as good a pal as Sidney Clive, in his different way. The best of pals, both of them! With that thought in his mind, Ernest Levison fell asleep, some time before Clive or Cardew dropped off.

But Cardew was awake before him, and up before him, which was very unusual. His bed was empty when the rising-bell woke Levison.

Cardew had been thinking things out. The most likely event to make acute

Levison tore open the envelope. As he read the letter his face lengthened. Clive, watching him, felt afraid that there was serious trouble. "Come along to the study, Sidney," said Levison, his voice thick and troubled. "I must tell you all about this." (See page 8.)

trouble between him and his chums was his refusal to answer them when other fellows were present. That would be enough to make the best-tempered fellow feel ugly.

So Cardew had made up his mind to keep out of their way, except in Study No. 9, as much as he could till Saturday evening. It was in the study that Racke and Crooke counted on trouble; and if he did not avoid Study No. 9 he might fairly avoid Clive and Levison elsewhere.

In the quad, while most of the juniors were still in the dormitories, he ran against the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther.

"Hallo, Cardew!" said Tom cheerily. "Up early, aren't you?"

"No earlier than you are, Thomas," answered Cardew.

"But it's a habit of ours," Manners said.

"Well, it's no habit of mine. One of the few bad ones I haven't. You can call this a slip of mine, if you like, by gad!"

"'Tired Nature's sweet restorer' seems rather to have failed you, old top," remarked Lowther. "You hardly look your bright and beaming best."

"If I wanted to be personal," replied Cardew, "I could say heaps of things about what you look an' don't look."

"As how? Do let me have a sample or two, dear boy!"

"Chuck it, Monty!" said Tom. "I say, Cardew, what's this yarn about your having a spill from your jigger?"

"That is the yarn, I should say," Cardew answered. "Briefly told, but given about all the space it's worth as a news item. If I'd been smashed up it might have been value for a line or two more, perhaps."

"Rip—R.I.P. How would that do as an epitaph for you, Cardew?" asked Lowther, grinning.

"Put it in writin', old gun, an' I'll give it my considered opinion, though I never heard any wheeze of yours that was worth that yet. I might get on to this one if I had it in black an' white, by gad!"

"They say Racke and Crooke helped you home," Tom said.

"They say truly."

"Rather more than you expected of them, wasn't it?" inquired Manners.

"I don't mind admittin' that it was. My mistake, for it must also be admitted that they did it quite nicely. As nicely as you an' Thomas, here, would have done, Manners, an' more so than the three of you would, for neither of 'em made a single joke, an' I know Lowther would have done."

"A good joke tends to cheer a fellow up," said Lowther.

"You must have heard someone else makin' them to know that, old chap, for yours aren't that kind."

"Well, I'm glad those two were decent about it, anyway," said Tom.

Cardew passed on then. From the dormitory window Levison and Clive had seen the group.

"He can talk to those fellows, it seems," said Levison, towelling himself vigorously.

"It seems so," replied Clive, rather gloomily.

They went down together, and Levison found a letter awaiting him.

"Post's in early this morning," he remarked. "Why, this is from the pater! That's rummy, it's always the mater who writes, unless there's something up."

He tore open the envelope. As he read the letter his face lengthened. Clive, watching him, felt afraid that there was serious trouble.

"Come along to the study, Sidney,"

said Levison, his voice thick and troubled. "I must tell you all about this; but I can't talk here. There's that Paul Pry of a Trimble hanging round."

Baggy Trimble, the grampus of the Fourth, lumbered up with an insinuating smile on his fat face. Baggy did not recognise the signs of distress on Levison's countenance. It could not be claimed for Baggy that he had the ready sympathy that sees such things.

"Had a remittance, Levison?" he asked. "I expected one, but I've been disappointed of mine. I suppose you couldn't——"

"Scat!" ejaculated Clive.

"Get away, or I'll play football with you!" snorted Levison.

Baggy gave them a reproachful glance, and went. It was evident that Levison was in no mood to grant a loan. When Baggy came to think of it, he realised that he had never known Levison in that mood.

But, as Monty Lowther might have said, "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," and, as Lowther would certainly have added, Baggy was almost human, though not quite.

Arrived in Study No. 9, Levison handed over the letter.

"You'd better read it yourself," he said gruffly. "I don't feel like explaining. You know my pater's had rotten luck in business lately, and his temper suffers when that kind of thing happens. But I never thought it would go as far as this!"

Clive read, and as he read he wondered whether Levison's father was quite sane. This letter was so unlike the quiet, rather stern man he knew.

Its whole tone was wild and incoherent. It hinted at approaching ruin, and a likelihood that Ernest and Frank might have to leave St. Jim's. But that was not all, nor was it the worst.

There had been a terrible row between the boys' father and mother. What had caused it Clive could not gather; but, knowing Mrs. Levison as he did, he was sure that the blame was not hers.

To such lengths had the quarrel gone that Mr. Levison had told his wife to clear out, and she had taken him at his word. Doris, the boys' sister, had gone with her. The head of the family was left alone with one old servant.

Mrs. Levison must have suffered greatly before she could have brought herself to leave her husband, Clive was sure. It was not the shadow of coming ruin that had sent her away; she would only have clung the closer to him for that.

Whither they had gone Mr. Levison said he did not know. He had tried to imply that he did not care; but if Ernest could believe that, Clive could not.

The South African junior had several times stayed with the Levisons, and had been made to feel like one of the family. He felt now that this trouble was his as well as his chum's.

"He knew that I should be on her side!" said Levison, clenching his hands and speaking through gritted teeth. "I'll never forgive him for this! He's been rough on me, often, but I know I've deserved it, though I have felt sometimes that if he'd been a little more of a father and less of a judge it would have helped. But the mater—why, it will break her heart, old man!"

"It's hard for her. But don't be too harsh in your thoughts of him, Ernest! I think his is nearly broken," replied Clive gently.

"Serve him right! To drive her out like that when—— Oh, I can't talk about it!"

"Shall you tell Frank?"

"Not till I have to. It will be worse for him than for me. He's such a loving little chap. He cares about the mater as much as I do, and ten times more about the pater."

"It might be best to keep it dark. Perhaps Franky need never know. Doris wouldn't talk after things had come right again. I'm glad she's with your mater, old fellow."

"Things never will come right again!" answered Levison gloomily.

"They will; I'm sure they will! Look here, Ernest, what about Ralph? Are you going to tell him?"

"No, I'm dashed well not; and you sha'n't, either!"

"I shouldn't without your leave, of course. But——"

"He sha'n't know! What sort of a pal is he? Dumb to us, just because it suits his mood, but ready enough to talk to Tom Merry and those chaps! I've about done with Cardew! But I'm not going to make a row with him, so don't be afraid of that. After all, we've been good pals, and it looks as though my time here was about up now. I won't quarrel with him if I can help it."

"I don't think he wants to quarrel," said Clive gravely. "I can't make out what his game is, but it's not that."

He moved towards the door, and Baggy Trimble stole on tiptoe away from its outer side.

CHAPTER 5.
A Friend in Need!

"WHY, Doris!"

"Oh, Ralph!"

It was a fair question whether the boy or the girl was most surprised at that meeting, though Cardew had certainly more reason for surprise than Doris Levison. For she knew that in Wayland High Street she was only a few miles from St. Jim's, while he had believed her to be many miles away.

He jumped from his bike—it was not the motor-bike to-day—and held out his hand. As the girl took it she said hurriedly:

"I do hope Ernest isn't anywhere near!"

"You mean you hope he is, don't you?"

"No! We—mother and I—don't want either him or Frank to know that we are at Wayland."

"I'm sorry if I've butted in," said Cardew, with a smile. "I couldn't have guessed that I should be guilty of that in comin' to Wayland, could I, Doris? If you don't want them to know, you probably would rather I shouldn't."

"Wrong, Ralph! I don't mind either you or Sidney knowing. But I felt sure Ernie would have told you both about the trouble at home. He doesn't often have secrets from you two, I know. Are you sure that he hasn't told you anything?"

Cardew's face changed colour and expression. He remembered now that both Levison and Clive had seemed badly under the weather in the few minutes the three of them had spent together in No. 9 that day. It was now about five o'clock, and he had intended to be back for tea, according to the terms of his agreement with Racke and Crooke. He had expected some badgering and possibly some trouble then; but it had not surprised him that they had left him alone for those few minutes.

But now he was sure that they both knew of this, and it hurt him to think that Levison had not told him.

He would not show that he was hurt. He tried to speak lightly.

"I fancy the excellent Sidney may know, Doris," he said. "But I have not been told anythin', I assure you."

"But you're just as much his chum

as Sid is. I believe he's fonder of you, if anything. I can't understand it."

"It's not Ernie's fault, Doris," Cardew answered, and he spoke with a gentleness that would have amazed some who thought they knew him. "It's entirely mine—or mine an' circumstances, shall we say? Best put some of it on to circumstances, I think, on the whole. It's beginnin' to feel a bit too heavy a load for my shoulders."

"Do you mean that you've quarrelled with him, Ralph?" asked the girl tremulously.

Cardew patted her hand in a manner almost paternal. He might have been twice her age. He felt a good deal more than that. And he saw that she had borne just about as much as she knew how to bear.

"No, we haven't quarrelled," he said. "It's difficult to explain. But, 'pon honour, Doris, though we're not exactly on speakin' terms just now, I believe it will all come right before Sunday."

"Won't you tell me more than that?" pleaded Doris. "It sounds so mysterious and uncomfortable, you know."

"I would if I could. But, really, I can't. You won't let that prevent you from trustin' me, though, will you?"

"No. I'm going to tell you everything, because you know us all, and I think you'll understand. And mother's very fond of you."

"Is she, by gad?" murmured Cardew. "I fancied she thought me rather an outsider compared with the irreproachable Sidney, y'know."

The girl laughed, though her laugh was tremulous.

"Do you think we don't know—mother and I—how much better you are at heart than you like people to think you?"

"I'm not. That's all ro—I mean, you're mistaken, Doris. But I do care for your mother, an' you an' I have always been good pals. Anythin' in the world I can do for you two I'll do like a shot. Is your mother here?"

"Yes. We're staying with an old nurse of hers. We went to Aunt Catherine at Lexham—you know her. But she's father's sister, and she took his side. She did not absolutely refuse to take us in, but she said things that made us both feel it was impossible to stay there."

"Then there's been—I don't want to ask questions I shouldn't—but there's been a row between your mother an' father?"

"There's been terrible trouble! And mother wasn't the tiniest little bit in fault. She behaved like an angel. Dad's got bad business worries, and he isn't well. I think his mind must be affected. But even that couldn't excuse his telling her to clear out, could it?"

"I should say not," replied Cardew.

But, with that grown-up way of looking at things he had, he wondered whether Mrs. Levison might not have been just a trifle too angelic—whether it might not have been better if she had lost her temper, told her husband that he ought to be ashamed of himself, and refused to go. The boy's sympathies were chiefly with her; but he had more sympathy for Levison's father than Levison himself had.

"And Nurse Bright is poor. We can't live on her, even for a little while. I shall have to look for some work to do; but it isn't easy to find. We haven't ten shillings in the world; it was all swallowed up getting to Lexham and then on here."

"That's all right, Doris," said Cardew simply and unaffectedly, as though what he went on to say was the merest matter of course. "You must draw on me. I've a few quids, an' I can get more."

"Is it right, Ralph? We must see what mother says."

"Of course. But she'll be sensible. An' don't you get puttin' in your spoke with doubts about it, kid, or I shall be annoyed with you! Ernie's an' Franky's mother an' sister are just the same to me as if they were my own people, an' you've both got to see it that way."

"I do believe mother would mind less about borrowing from you than from anyone else in the world, Ralph. But if she says 'No,' you must accept her answer."

"She's not goin' to say 'No,' my dear—I sha'n't let her!"

And Mrs. Levison did not refuse the proffered loan.

"I think it's the way Frank has always talked of you that makes you seem so very much like a boy of my own, Ralph," she said. "I accept most thankfully. It may not be soon repaid, and I know that you would not care if it never was. But you must let us keep our pride, my boy. But Frank—it's the thought of him that troubles me most. Ernest is older, and less keen of feeling, perhaps. But my little son—he thinks so much of both his father and me! This will hurt him terribly!"

"Perhaps he need not know," replied Cardew. "But don't you get thinkin' there's any don't-care about old Ernie there, Mrs. Levison! I don't—now, then, Mrs. Levison! I don't know a fellow—not even Frank—who thinks more of his mater than Ernie does."

"Has he heard? He would have told you and Sidney, I know, Ralph."

Cardew saw that what he had said about Levison major had comforted her greatly, and he was not inclined to spoil his good work in that way by want of diplomacy.

"I assure you that he hasn't said a single word to me about it," he said.

And he held up a warning finger to Doris, taking care her mother should not see it.

Clive might have thought it wrong to deceive this grief-stricken woman, even for her own good. If he had done it he would have done it with a troubled conscience. Cardew had no scruples about it, or even about involving Doris in a conspiracy.

"What we've got to do, kid," he said, when the girl walked with him a short distance down the quiet side street in which Nurse Bright lived, "is to keep your mater off worryin' more than she's bound to worry. She'll worry about your pater, anyway; but let her think Frank an' Ernie don't know, an' are happy enough. Ernest won't tell Frank, I fancy. An' it's bound to come right in a few days. Your pater's a good sort, you know—hang on to that! He'll come round an' be no end sorry."

And he jumped on his bike, with no more than a word of farewell, and pedalled his hardest to be back in something like time for tea, hoping that he had managed to comfort Doris as well as her mother.

And he had done that. Somehow he had given her new faith in her father, and she had needed that badly.

CHAPTER 6.
Arthur Augustus Butts In.

"BEEN to Wayland, haven't you, Ralph?" said Clive, when Cardew walked into No. 9.

Cardew nodded.

"I knew by the mud on your bags," Clive said, smiling. "There's a spot or two of a colour that you don't find anywhere round here except on Wayland Moor."

Cardew took a clothes-brush and attended to the spot or two. But, of course, he did not speak. And Clive said no more.

Levison sat and glowered while Cardew got his tea. He resented Clive's speaking to "the sulky ass" at all, and yet he could not help but see that Cardew was not really sulky, and he knew that he himself was—not only sulky, but also full of bitterness against almost everyone.

"Hallo, deah boys!" came from the door, in the dulcet accents of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wathah wanted to see you, Cardew."

"You see me, Gussy. I trust you are gratified," replied Cardew urbanely.

Arthur Augustus put up his monocle, and surveyed his kinsman through it with severity.

"Weally, Cardew," he said, "I considah that you are behavin' extwemely badly!"

"Do you? But you surely don't expect me to value your opinion on that or any other subject, do you, D'Arcy?" returned Cardew.

"Get out, you cheap ass!" growled Levison.

"Are you addwessin' me, Levison, may I ask?" inquired the swell of the Fourth frigidly.

"What do you think? There are only two cheap asses here, and I'm not speaking to the other one!" snapped Levison.

"Bai Jove! But I am not surpwised that you should be vewy much annoyed with Cardew, because fwom all I can gathah he weally is tweatin' you vewy badly indeed."

"Not so badly as I shall jolly well treat you if you're not outside the door in about a jiffy and a half!" roared Levison.

"You misappwehend me entiahly, Levison, deah boy. I desiah——"

"Outside!" howled Levison.

"Cardew, deah boy, will you let me appeal to your bettah feelin's?" asked Gussy almost plaintively.

"Haven't any—never had any—don't expect ever to have any, by gad!" replied Cardew. "I rather fancy you must have boned my share. You shouldn't hog things that way, old gun."

"Are you goin' out, or must I put you out, D'Arcy?" bellowed Levison.

"Dig, old chap, it sounds as if our Gustavus were getting into trouble," remarked Jack Blake, passing the door of No. 9.

"Serve him jolly well right!" answered Digby. "Why can't he learn not to butt in?"

"Still, we ought to stand by to make sure that he isn't slain dead, I think," said Blake.

They stood by. George Herries, following them, also halted.

"I uttahly decline to be put out, Levison. You ought to be gwateful to me. Yawoooh! Yow! Ow! Wharrer doin', you silly idiots?"

Two of the trio who shared No. 9 had arisen at the same instant. It was Clive who kept his seat.

The door was pulled open by Cardew, and Arthur Augustus, with flushed face and rumpled collar, shot out. Herries might have caught him, but dodged him instead, and Gussy, hitting the opposite

wall, staggered, and came down on the linoleum.

The door of No. 9 slammed to.

"You might have caught the silly ass, Herries!" said Digby. "Hurt, Gussy?"

"Yaas, Dig, I am hurt in my body an' in my mind. There is no weal gwatitude in this world, I am afwaid. As for you, Hewwies——"

"If served you right, you cheap lunatic!" growled Herries. "What did you go hunting trouble in there for? It wasn't your funeral, anyway."

"Blake thought it might be, though. That's what we were waiting for," said Digby, with a grin. "I was thinking about the wreath when Gustavus came out in a hurry. It doesn't matter now, but I thought one among the three of us would be enough, seeing how jolly hard up we are. And a cheap one at that, because it would have been Gussy's own silly fault. 'Felo de se' would be the giddy verdict."

"Bai Jove! I decleah that Wacke an' Cwooke have more sympathy than you fellows," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, trying to put his collar straight. "I decline to speak anothah word to you until you have apologised for your gwoss wudeness!"

And he stalked away in great dudgeon.

"It's wicked when Cardew does it, but if Gussy sulks for a week or two it's all due to his giddy high principles," remarked Digby.

"He won't. He'll have forgotten all about it by bed-time," Blake said confidently. "But what did he mean by talking about Racke and Crooke? Do you know, you chaps, it looks to me rather as if those two rotters were mixed up in the trouble in there some way or other. If they put Gussy on to butting in it was to serve their own ends, you bet your shirt!"

"It's no affair of ours, anyway," said Herries. "Come along, or we sha'n't have five minutes in the gym before prep."

Blake had made a shrewd guess, however. Racke and Crooke had grown very much afraid that the fifty was not coming their way.

No row in No. 9 had yet occurred, it seemed. Casting about for means to precipitate one, the black sheep had thought of Gussy.

There was no more thoroughly well-meaning fellow in all St. Jim's than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But there was no more exasperating fellow than he could be when seized by a high moral purpose.

Racke and Crooke fancied that getting D'Arcy to expostulate with Cardew might put up the backs of all three of the fellows in No. 9. They never liked having outsiders interfere with them, and they might combine against Gussy. Cool as he was, Cardew might easily be betrayed into speech under such conditions. And he would own up if he spoke.

They had never doubted that. Cardew would play straight. But if he fancied that they would do likewise he had only himself to blame for being such a fool. Neither Racke nor Crooke said just that, but the thought was in the minds of both while they were working upon Gussy's sympathies.

The attempt had failed. Behind the slammed door of No. 9, Ernest Levison and Ralph Reckness Cardew faced each other. Cardew smiled, but Levison looked his grimmest.

"I never asked for your help, Cardew!" snapped Levison, his lower jaw protruding.

The smile faded from Cardew's face. He knew how heavily his chum was troubled, and he had made up his mind to resent nothing. For the moment he felt more than half inclined to confess the whole story of the silly bet, and put matters straight with those two. But he remembered that he must not tell Levison that his mother and sister were at Wayland, and he realised that his best chance of keeping that secret lay in keeping silence altogether.

So he turned away without a word.

"Why didn't you help me, Clive?" snorted Levison.

"Look here, old chap. Gussy meant well. He came out of sheer friendliness. Of course, he's an ass, but——"

"But! I should say 'butt'! If you can't stand a tailor's dummy butting in like D'Arcy does, I can't; so that's straight! Have you quite finished tea, Cardew, may I ask?"

Cardew nodded, and Levison glared at him again. Cardew cleared the table, Levison continuing to glare.

Clive had never been more puzzled in his life. Cardew's meekness — that seemed the only word to fit it—amazed him. Levison he could understand. It was not strange that he should be moody and disagreeable. But what could Cardew's failure to resent his manner mean?

Jack Blake spoke to Clive after prep.

"I don't want to ask more than I ought, and I wouldn't think of asking Levison, for he'd go for me, and I've no wish to quarrel with him," he said. "But may I ask whether Cardew's still keeping it up?"

"I don't mind your asking, Blake," replied Clive. "I know it's not mere rotten curiosity, any more than old Gussy's was. Yes, he's keeping it up."

"And you haven't a notion what it's about?"

"Not a blessed idea!"

"Well, I think I can give you a clue. I fancy that Racke and Crooke put our tame ass up to butting in. Do Racke and Crooke ever do anything without something behind it? 'Nuff said, Clive, old top!"

It was as much as Blake could well say without being too imaginative—which was not in Jack Blake's line. But it only added to Clive's bewilderment. What could Racke and Crooke possibly have to do with it?

Cardew was the first of the three to get to sleep that night. Clive lay puzzling his head over what Blake had told him. Levison could not sleep for thinking about the home trouble. But somehow Cardew felt sure that things would work out all right in the long run; and the fact that he was able to stand by Mrs. Levison and Doris in their plight comforted him for not being able to stand by Ernest Levison.

CHAPTER 7.
Trimble Takes a Hand.

LEVISON MAJOR kept out of Levison minor's way during the next twenty hours or so. If Frank had heard anything he would be certain to come along at once; and if the brothers met before Frank heard, Ernest was very much afraid that he might give the secret away by his manner.

And Cardew, as far as the terms of his bet permitted, kept out of the way of Clive and Levison. Levison's haggard face made him feel like a traitor, though he knew that he was not that; and Clive annoyed him by "lookin' beastly pathetic," as Cardew put it to himself.

But more than all did Cardew avoid Levison minor. With so much to conceal he could not bear the scrutiny of those clear, innocent eyes, keen enough for all their innocence.

It was after classes on the Friday afternoon that Baggy Trimble took a hand, and contrived to stir up things very considerably.

Frank Levison came across the quad with Wally D'Arcy, Hobbs, and Curly Gibson. Trimble sidled up to them.

"I say, young Levison, I've something to tell you," he said.

"Come along, Franky! What's the use of listening to that fat beast?" Wally said impatiently. "He never does tell anything but whoppers!"

"This ain't a whopper," said Trimble cunningly. "And I know jolly well young Levison's going to be sorry if he don't listen to me."

"Rats!" retorted Frank. "I don't see——"

"It's something about your people," Trimble broke in.

"My people? What do you know about them?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"Don't listen to him!" snapped Hobbs.

"I—I think I must," replied Frank.

He had turned pale. For over a week he had heard nothing from either his mother or Doris, and it had never happened to him before to wait so long for a home letter. It hardly seemed likely that Trimble should be able to explain it, and yet Frank felt that he must listen to the fat fellow.

"Right-ho! You'll have to catch us up!" Wally said. "We're not going to wait while you yarn with that porpoise!"

"What is it, Trimble? Are you trying to have me on?" asked Frank, as his chums went on their way.

"No, I'm not. You ought to be grateful to me, young Levison, for taking an interest in your people's troubles, I think," said Trimble importantly.

He had very little to gain in telling Frank the story. But Baggy was a leaky vessel. He could never keep a secret long.

"My people's troubles? Why, what do you mean? They haven't any particular troubles, that I know of. And, anyway, you wouldn't have heard when I haven't, that's a sure thing!"

Trimble's small, green eyes fairly goggled.

"Don't you know? Haven't you heard that your governor and your mater have had a most frightful row, and that he's turned her out?"

"It's a lie! You're making it up, Trimble, you rotter! Why, such a thing couldn't happen!" cried Frank passionately.

"All right, then!" answered Trimble, with well assumed indifference. "If you know better than I do, there you are! You don't want me to tell you anything, of course. But I had it straight from the horse's mouth—er—I mean, your sister Doris told me herself. We were always pals, you know, Doris and I."

And Trimble gave a hateful leer—a leer that would have made Frank feel like hitting him but that the youngster was too staggered.

Neither had either of the Levisons resented anything much more hotly than they had resented the cheek of Baggy in daring to imagine himself in love with their sister.

"Doris?" exclaimed Frank. "But she's at home. You can't have seen her. And she wouldn't have told you anything if you had. She couldn't stand you at any price!"

"At home, is she? Then it's a rummy thing I should have seen her in Wayland—your mother, too—only this morning! Better ask your major about it; he knows. Dunno why he's keeping it from you. But he always was sly. I dare say he's got something up his sleeve."

"You fat sweep! Ernie's worth ten

thousand of you, and if—— But it can't be true—it can't!"

And, forgetting all about Wally & Co., Frank rushed off to find his major and seek assurance from him.

Trimble gave a self-satisfied grunt. The fat junior did not like the Levisons, and he was not at all sorry to know that they were in trouble.

He had really seen Doris and her mother in Wayland, and that had enabled him to piece out certain rather disconnected scraps of information that had reached him through the keyhole of Study No. 9. He was surprised at himself now for not having got on to the whole story at once.

He had not spoken to Mrs. Levison and the girl. He had not had the chance.

"Oh, mums, there's that horrid Trimble!" Doris had said. "I don't think he's seen us. Let's go into this shop and dodge him!"

Levison major was not in Study No. 9, but Clive was. And Clive saw at a glance that Frank had heard something.

"Where's Ernie?" demanded the Third-Former.

"Out somewhere," answered Clive. "What is it, Franky? Anything wrong, kid?"

"Can't stop to talk to you; I want Ernie!" said Frank.

And he was half-way down the passage before Clive could reach the door.

Clive did not go after him. It was not for Clive to explain matters to Frank.

He sat down in the armchair and put his head in his hands, thinking hard.

There came a tap at the door.

"Oh, come in!" called Clive, though he had no wish to see anyone at that moment.

When he saw that the visitor was Baggy Trimble he made up his mind at once that that was enough to see of him.

"Get out!" he snapped.

"Really, Clive, I'm surprised that you should treat me like this when I've come to do you a good turn!" whined Baggy.

"Good turn be hanged! You——"

"I've got two things to tell you, and they'll both interest you, I know. You might listen, Clive!"

"I suppose you're wholly disinterested?" said Clive, with unusual sarcasm.

"Eh? Oh, yes, of course, Clive! But it ought to be worth something to me, you know," replied Trimble, with characteristic inconsistency.

"We'll see about that when you've told it. But as I don't propose to let you tell it, and as I'm only going to give you three seconds to get outside——"

"Then you don't want to know why Cardew's been refusing to speak to you chaps?" struck in Baggy desperately.

At that Clive's manner changed. He looked hard at the fat fellow, and arrived at the conclusion that he might not be lying as grossly as usual.

"What do you know about that?" he snapped.

"All about it!" replied Trimble, with swelling pride that was certainly not justified, seeing how he had come by his knowledge.

"Tell me in six words, and I'll see whether I can believe you!"

"But I can't tell you—— Yoocop! Leggo my ear, Clive!"

"In six words, you fat worm!"

"I can't! 'Tain't reasonable! Well, then, it was a bet!"

Baggy had actually accomplished the impossible with two words less than he had been allowed. But for what Blake had said to Clive, however, a good deal more might have been necessary.

But Sidney Clive, though he was no detective, could put two and two together pretty well.

A bet? That was just like Racke and Crooke! They had taken advantage of the accident of having given aid to Cardew to lure him into a bet that for some stated period of time he would speak to neither of his chums. And when they had persuaded Gussy to butt in they were trying to do Cardew down, to induce him to speak.

Clive would have taken it more coolly at another time. But, worried as he was, he saw red for the moment. He had no doubt that spite as well as greed was behind this plot. Those two sweeps meant to break up the brotherhood of three that had stood so many trials!

They should pay for it, hang them! And they should pay now! Clive would not wait for either Levison or Cardew.

"Here, hold hard, Clive!" puffed Baggy. "I've got something more to tell you. Don't rush off like that, Clive, you chump! Besides, it's worth something, surely? You said so yourself, you know!"

"Get out of my way!" snapped Clive, thrusting the fat fellow roughly aside.

But Trimble grabbed at him and stopped him.

Clive swung round, his face angrier than Baggy had ever seen it before, and gave Baggy such a push as sent him reeling out of the study and on to his back upon the linoleum.

"Yow! I didn't think you'd be such a brute as that, Clive!" burbled Baggy.

The South African junior made straight for the study of Racke and Crooke.

He did not tap at the door. He burst in upon them, his face aming, his eyes full of wrath.

"What do you mean by buttin' in here like that, Clive?" snarled Crooke.

"Put your fists up, you cads!" shouted Clive.

They put their fists up. Somehow, both knew that their plot was found out. They were two to one, and, though Clive was a far better fighting-man than either of them, they had no doubt that together they would be too much for him.

But he punched with such vim and power that they were soon in retreat.

Stamp, stamp, stamp!

Round the study the angry Fourth-Former fought the two black sheep of the Shell, they giving ground all the time, he pressing upon them, punching fiercely.

Racke caught up a chair and struck furiously at Clive's head. The Fourth-Former dodged, the chair smashed upon the table, Clive's right smashed into Crooke's face, and his left took Racke under the chin.

Both went down, and Clive was standing over them, panting and vengeful, when there came a rush of feet along the passage, and the Terrible Three, with Talbot, Noble, Dane, Glyn, and two or three more Shell fellows poured into the study.

"My hat! Have you slaughtered them both, Clive?" inquired Tom Merry.

Racke and Crooke sat up, and showed that they were not dead.

"Two to one!" remarked Lowther. "That's not fair, on general principles. But in this particular instance it really doesn't look as if the one needed aid or succour. You've finished, I suppose, Clive?"

"Not much, I haven't!" retorted the South African junior. "Let the sweeps get up, and I'll knock them down again!"

But Racke and Crooke did not appear to regard that invitation as attractive.

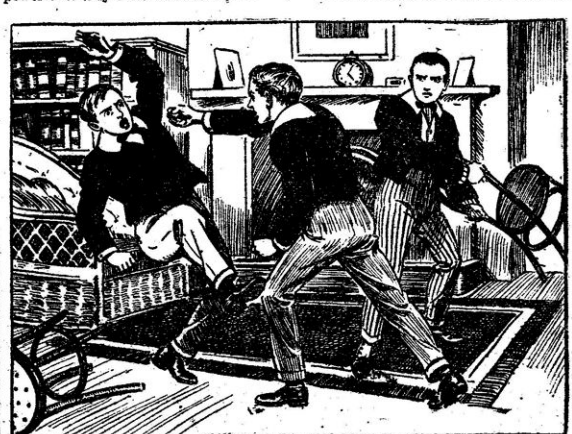
"What's it all about?" asked Kangaroo.

"That's more than we know!" snarled Crooke. "Clive burst in here, an' simply went for us like a madman, without rhyme or reason!"

"Reason enough!" snorted Clive. "They know what it was for, you fellows! Betting's not much of a game, anyway, but it's a beastly low game when—— Oh, hang it all, I'm not going to explain! They can't pretend they don't know now, if they didn't before."

Racke and Crooke did know now. Perhaps they had guessed before. But the rest were in the dark still.

"If Clive declines to give reason, I'll



Round the study the angry Fourth-Former fought the two black sheep of the Shell. They were giving ground all the time, and he was pressing upon them, punching fiercely. Racke caught up a chair to strike at Clive's head. *(See this page.)*

oblige with rhyme," gibed Lowther. "How will this do?:

"' Clive rushed in and made at Racke,
Smote him to ground with a mighty thwack;
Turned his attention next to Crooke,
And put him down with a hefty hook.
The why or the wherefore we may not guess,
But we're pleased about it, we all confess.
When next, dear boy, on the warpath you go
Book us for seats in the foremost row!' "

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everyone but the three combatants roared at Lowther's impromptu. Even Clive smiled. But Racke and Crooke did not think it funny at all.

"Come out of it, old chap!" said Tom. "They don't need any more. Come out and cool off!"

And Clive went.

CHAPTER 8.

Cardew Plays the Trump Ace!

FRANK LEVISON looked in vain for his major. When his search took him to the bike-shed, and he found that Ernest's machine was not there, he jumped to the conclusion that his brother had gone to Wayland.

He ran out his own bike, and pedalled his hardest along the road to the moor.

Ahead of him he sighted Cardew, alone, and riding slowly.

Even as he spotted the Fourth-Former Cardew circled in the road and came towards him, but without seeing him as yet.

Then, in rear of Cardew, there sounded the thunder of hoofs, and a big black horse with an empty trap swaying behind him came tearing down upon them.

"Oh, look out, Cardew!" yelled Frank.

Cardew swerved aside, and as he did so he saw the fag sideslip and come crashing down.

The runaway horse was within ten yards of him, and Cardew's heart stood still for the space of a second as he perceived that Frank, with the machine pinning him down, had no chance of getting up in time.

For a second only! Then that bold heart rose to the need, and Cardew acted.

He swung in towards the horse, and struck him hard across the nostrils. Then he clutched the reins, half in his saddle, half out, spurned his bike from him, hung on desperately, and threw all his weight into the effort to swerve the maddened horse clear of Frank.

It was touch and go! Possibly the horse himself might have avoided the prostrate youngster, for even a runaway horse will seldom trample anyone. But the wheels must have gone over him as he lay.

With the swerve aside due to Cardew the horse cleared boy and bike. But one wheel of the cart struck the machine, and even as Cardew, relinquishing his hold, dropped in a heap on the road, he saw that Frank lay as if dead, and that there was blood on his face where broken spokes of the bicycle-wheel had struck him.

It was with a heavy jolt that the Fourth-Former landed, and when he tried to get up he found that he could not. He crawled on hands and knees towards Frank, and now his heart, bold for action, was full of a terrible fear.

Down the road the runaway halted, and began to crop the grass as if nothing had happened.

Frank was not dead! Cardew's heart leaped in exultation when he had assured himself of that.

"Hallo, there!"

A voice that was vaguely familiar came to Cardew's ears as if from very far away, and he looked up, to see, as though through a haze, the red face of Binks, the Rylcombe butcher's assistant.

"Did the runaway do that?" asked Binks.

He was on his knees in the road by Cardew's side now. But Cardew had not seen him clamber down from the high seat of his cart, and found himself wondering stupidly how he had come there.

A nod was all the answer he could give. His tongue refused to work.

"I do believe you're hurt worse'n he is, Mr. Cardew," said Binks anxiously. "I saw somethin' of what happened—saw you go for the 'oss, an' thought you must be mad, for I couldn't see this kid. My word, you've pluck! Here, jest you let me get him up into my cart; I can handle him alone. Then I'll help you up!"

And Binks lifted Frank with gentle care. Everything was hazy to Cardew; afterwards he could not be sure that Binks had not lifted him bodily also. He know nothing more with any certainty until the cart was pulled up outside the house of Dr. Taylor, at Rylcombe.

"Better'n takin' you straight to the school," said Binks.

And now on a sudden Cardew's eyes cleared, and his brain grew active, and into it there flashed a great schemd.

"Help me down, Binks, an' across to the post-office," he said, as the little doctor bent over Frank. "I've a wire or two to send."

"You better let the doctor——"

"If you won't do as I tell you, I'm dashed if I'll let the doctor touch me or look at me!" snapped Cardew.

Then Binks did as he was told.

Cardew's hand shook so badly that he could hardly write those two wires—one to Frank's father, one to his mother. And Binks had to hold him up while he wrote.

Frank was the very apple of his father's eye—Cardew knew that. Mr. Levison would take the first train for Rylcombe after getting that wire, he was sure. But his wife and daughter would be there before him. And it was hardly in human nature that father and mother should meet at the bedside of that beloved youngster and not make up their quarrel.

Perhaps it was characteristic of Cardew that he should not wait to hear just how much or how little Frank was hurt. But he had seen the little chap lying like one dead, with blood on his face; and he himself, after his second spill within forty-eight hours, was in no case to ponder the question overmuch. He had to act at once, for he knew that if he waited he might not be able to act at all.

"I rather fancy this is the ace of trumps!" he muttered, as he put down the two telegraph forms and some silver on the counter.

"Eh? What's that?" said Binks.

But Cardew could not answer. If Binks had not been quick he would have fallen to the floor. Binks caught him, and Binks and the postmaster's son carried him across to Dr. Taylor.

Half an hour later Frank, badly shaken, but conscious, was driven by Binks to St. Jim's. But Dr. Taylor insisted upon keeping Cardew.

"The youngster must go to bed at once, and I will come over to see him again within an hour, you may tell them," he said to Binks. "But I must keep this boy here. He has suffered worse than little Levison, and to move him now might have serious consequences."

Ernest Levison and Clive were at the gates when Binks drove up with pale-faced Frank and the badly-damaged bike. Clive had told his chum that Frank, evidently badly upset, was searching for him, and they had learned from Taggles that the fag had gone out on his bike, though the porter could not tell him which way he had gone.

"Don't you worry; he's worth a lot of dead 'uns yet," said Binks cheerfully. "He ain't hurt not near so bad as Mr. Cardew."

"Cardew? What had he to do with it?" demanded Levison.

"Saved your little brother's life—that's all," answered Binks.

"Where is he? Is he very badly hurt?" gasped Clive.

"At the doctor's. Yes, I should say he's a goodish bit hurt. But he won't die—not him! Too much pluck for that, you bet!"

"Don't wire to mother, Ernie. I'm all right; shall be soon, anyway," said Frank.

"She couldn't get here to-night," replied Levison major. "I shall have to wire for her, Franky, I guess, but you

mustn't expect to see her to-night, you know."

"Oh, yes, she can! 'Tisn't far from Wayland, and Baggy told me she was there. You might have told me, Ernie!"

"At Wayland? What do you mean, kid? Here, help me with him, Binks—help me, Clive—he's fainting!"

They carried Frank to the sanatorium, and there Nurse Marie took charge of him. Within an hour, Dr. Taylor drove up to the gates. But he would not hear of either Levison or Clive seeing Cardew that night.

"Nor to-morrow, either," he said. "No; I should not say that he is in actual danger, provided that he is kept quiet for a couple of days or so. But he positively must not be moved, and he must not be excited. Don't argue with me, Levison—it's no use!"

Mrs. Levison and Doris arrived before prep was over. It was past eleven when Frank's father came, driving over from Wayland Junction. Clive had been packed off to bed before that, but Levison major had been allowed to stay up.

Ernest Levison drew back when his father took his wife in his arms and spoke brokenly to her of his penitence. Doris and Frank might forgive the pater. He never would, never in this world!

"Where's Ernest?" asked Mr. Levison.

Doris clutched her brother by the arm, and he saw that her eyes were streaming with tears. Her mother, down on her knees by Frank now, was crying softly. Frank, too—why did the silly kid want to go and blub? That did more than anything else to keep Ernest from feeling as hard as he wanted to feel. There was one thing certain—they wouldn't catch him crying!

His eyes were dry as he looked up into his father's face—forced to look, because Mr. Levison had put a hand on each of his shoulders, and if he had not looked up then his father might have thought that he was going to forgive as easily as the rest of them.

And then he saw that his father's eyes were wet—a thing he had never seen before, had never thought to see. And suddenly—he hardly knew why—the thought of his own hardness to Cardew and of all that Cardew had done smote him hard, and a great sob shook him, and his father's arms went round him.

Cardew had won his bet. It was not his fault that Dr. Taylor had detained him, and he refused to let Racke and Crooke off paying, hard as they tried to wriggle out. The fiver went to the local cottage hospital—in the names of Aubrey Racke and George Gerald Crooke. That was the real, authentic Cardew touch.

It was like him, too, that he would not listen to what Levison major wanted to say to him, and cut off Mr. Levison's thanks as short as politeness allowed, but let Frank—still in sanny when Cardew was back at St. Jim's—say what he liked, and suffered himself to be hugged by Frank's mother.

Mr. Levison's business affairs took a decided turn for the better within a week or two, and there was no more talk of the brothers leaving St. Jim's. Mrs. Levison and Doris went back home when Frank was allowed to get out of bed.

Levison major, Cardew, and Clive are of one mind as to one thing at least. Each is quite certain that the other two are the best pals that any fellow could have!

THE END

(Another grand long story of the chums of St. Jim's next week, entitled, "Wildrakes Knocks at Knox.")

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW

An interesting article dealing with some of the former stories which have centred around "The Puzzle of St. Jim's."

Some of the accomplishments of this fellow need special mention. Let us go back to the story entitled "Cardew of the Fourth," No. 475 of the GEM. Gussy and Digby went to meet him at the station, and had not been with him many minutes before they discovered what he was like. He began to swank. He said emphatically that he would not walk to the school, and the "ancient 'ack" he did not glance at. No, he must have a motor-cah! This was in the middle of the war, too, mind you! Gussy told him very plainly that a fellow who went to St. Jim's in a motor-car in war-time would make a most unfavourable impression. Cardew, certainly, was not desirous of that; but he would go to the school in a car, war or no war; and to further his selfish purpose he put Gussy to the trouble of getting some wounded Tommies out of a hospital to disguise his motive. Then, under the pretence of giving them an outing, he accomplished his object. Arriving at St. Jim's with the wounded heroes, whom Cardew intended to "dump" in to tea, knowing they could not be turned away, Mr. Railton recognised—one as an old pal of his. When things had fairly got going, Cardew surprised everybody by producing a cigarette-case from his pocket and passing it round to the soldiers. Gussy, in his innocence, thought Cardew had merely bought them out of thoughtfulness for the men from Flanders. But just imagine his feelings, and everybody else's, when Cardew, under Mr. Railton's very nose, took his case, extracted a cigarette, and lighted up himself!

Perhaps the most snobbish thing he has done at the school was described in his second story, "A Puzzle for St. Jim's." The "puzzle," of course, was Cardew; and never was a fellow more appropriately termed. His was a nature misunderstood. In this story Cardew gathered a great house-warming—a huge study-spread, most lavishly arranged, regardless of all expense. When he discovered that Owen, Lawrence, and Redfern were among the guests chosen by Levison, he most insultingly told the scholarship trio what he thought of them. It was quite unwarranted, for they had done nothing whatever to deserve it.

In the next story, "Facing the Music," the juniors of St. Jim's again had an example of his complex nature. In the next story, No. 479, under the title of "Brenkers of Bounds," the school had a glimpse of Cardew's obstinacy. Then, after this, came four of the finest stories Mr. Martin Clifford has ever written.

I mentioned elsewhere that it was a queer turn of Fate that brought Cardew to St. Jim's. I will now explain why. At a certain college in the North, the name of which was Wodehouse, a Sixth-Form fellow, Edwin Horseley, committed a theft. Expulsion through the crime was inevitable, but, as it happened, Ralph Reckness Cardew, then a junior at this college, had discovered the money, and was going to replace it. Horseley seized on this like a drowning man at a straw, and exacted a promise from Cardew not to tell. Cardew was accused of the theft, and, though it was a silly thing to do, one can but speak well for ever of Cardew's word of honour—he remained silent. He left the school, and later appeared at St. Jim's.

As it happened, there had been at Wodehouse a junior by the name of Algernon Lacy—a fellow fairly good at cricket, but a fearful swank. He had naturally believed Cardew quite guilty of the crime for which he was expelled. Cardew at St. Jim's had told no person where he had previously been before his arrival at the Sussex college; but when Algernon Lacy suddenly turned up as a new pupil for Rylcombe Grammar School, he promptly let the cat out of the bag. Racke, who was ever waiting for an opportunity to harm Cardew, spread the news far and wide.

The last story—a very fine yarn—described how Edward Horseley sinned again at Wodehouse, and this time was bowled out with nobody to throw the blame on. Seeing he was "booked," his conscience moved him to an act of tardy justice, and he told of Cardew's innocence of his previous crime.

The headmaster of Wodehouse, Dr. Tracy, immediately wrote to Lord Reckness, and also to Cardew himself. Now, unluckily for Cardew, Baggy Trimble, prying in the letter-rack for other people's letters containing postal-orders, took this letter addressed to Cardew, and opened it. Seeing what it was, and fearful of the consequences, he did not deliver up the letter, with his usual lying story. Thus was it that the story of his previous expulsion at last reached Dr. Holmes' ears. The unfortunate Cardew was standing in the Head's study, talking through the telephone to his grandfather, telling him of his future coming. Of course, old Lord Reckness, who had had Dr. Tracy's letter two or three days, and was waiting for Cardew to write, simply yelled back to Cardew to talk sense. After that the letter was discovered, and Cardew came through with flying colours. But he had had a very trying time. The names of these four stories are: "Lacy of the Grammar School," "The Finger of Scorn," "Sticking it Out," and, lastly, "The Outcast's Luck."

Do you remember him on the cricket-field, with that fine picture of him on the GEM cover, entitled "Cardew's Catch"? After that we have him in those stirring George Durrance stories. They made a great impression on the readers at the time, and I think we must have another story of Durrance soon. Cardew was genuinely sorry when he swore in front of Levison minor. He likes that loyal fag as much as his brother or study-mate, Clive. Then we had Mr. Martin Clifford's finest story of 1919 for the GEM, called "The Heart of a Hero." In that yarn all the good in Cardew was uppermost.

A final word about his abilities. As a wrestler, he is next to Jack Blake—and at times his equal. This is in the whole of the junior school, mind you! As a detective—well, it's sufficient to say that Cardew is one of the most wide-awake fellows at St. Jim's. As a cricketer he is very quick, and would not let his side down under ordinary circumstances. As a footballer he is quite nimble, and has a fair speed. But the game is very strenuous, and thus has little appeal for him. At indoor games and class work he is quite up to the average when not inclined to be lazy.

The INVISIBLE HAND

JOHN SHARPE. IRON HAND.

This wonderful story has also been filmed by the popular VITAGRAPH Film Company, and readers of the "GEM" should make a point of seeing the picture week by week at their favourite cinemas.

In a Tight Corner!

John Sharpe, the great analytical detective, is engaged by Chief Burnett, of the Secret Service of Chicago, to track down the band of organised criminals operating under the guidance of Iron Hand. Marna Black, one of the band of crooks, is captured. Burnett induces Anne Crawford, a woman agent of the Secret Service, to assume Marna's identity and get into the confidences of Iron Hand. She is not known to Sharpe.

The mountain den, Eagle's Nest, is run by Potsdam, Iron's Hand's lieutenant.

Sharpe spoils many of the plans of the gang. Later he discovers that the gang possess a submarine, and they plot to blow up the Oriental mail steamer. Sharpe sends word for the steamer not to sail, and communicates with a border patrol to have a bombing aeroplane ready for instant use. The submarine is destroyed.

Sharpe follows Iron Hand to Nest 2, another lair of the gang, and succeeds in gaining admittance to the house, after a fight with a savage dog. Iron Hand is warned of his presence, and Sharpe is made a prisoner. Anne arrives in time to see Sharpe escape. Sharpe follows Iron Hand to the latter's hotel. Anne also goes there. Iron Hand prepares to receive Sharpe. In the adjoining room, a gas machine is arranged so that a bag is to be dropped over Sharpe's head. Sharpe senses the plan, and adopts means to circumvent it.

Sharpe is enveloped in the folds of the gas-bag. Iron Hand and others secure the bag around Sharpe. Inside the bag Sharpe adjusts a gas-mask, and then pretends to grow weaker and weaker, until he apparently becomes lifeless. A trunk is brought in, unlocked, and Sharpe is thrown in.

Iron Hand orders his men to get a porter, and then dump the trunk in the river. Anne watches, helpless. With a sudden idea she slips out to the hall, lures Iron Hand from the room by a false message, and then returns and unlocks the trunk. She is frightened by a noise in the hall, and goes to her room. Sharpe rises, freed of the gas-bag, and quickly substitutes some rugs and logs from the fireplace, putting them in the trunk, so as to make up the difference in weight. He goes to the other room, and confronts Anne. Anne hides him in the cupboard as Iron Hand returns. Hartmann and others remove the trunk.

Hartmann drives truck past Captain West's troops on their way to rescue Sharpe. Hartmann warns Iron Hand, and he and Anne flee in a motor, heading for Eagle's Nest. The trunk is dropped overboard. Sharpe escapes from the cupboard, and joins West. They head for Eagle's Nest, Hartmann seeing this, and warning the Nest of West's approach. The band plans to meet them.

Sharpe and the troops run into an ambuscade, and take refuge in a small shack.

(Now read on.)

THE patrol were undoubtedly in a distance away there was a very tight corner. Some little wooden shack, probably the home of a rancher.

"It is our only hope!" announced Sharpe, as he pointed in the direction of the hut. "We must retreat, and try to hold that place."

Captain West ordered his men to follow out Sharpe's plan, and the whole party rushed towards the shack, keeping up a running fire as they retreated, in order to prevent the motor-car gang from advancing.

When they entered, they were pleased to see that the place was substantially built of stout logs.

While some of the troopers kept up a steady fire through the windows of the hut, other members busied themselves by barricading the doors and windows in an effort to withstand the siege.

By this time Potsdam's gang had arrived on the scene, and they did not hesitate to commence a hot fire directed towards the shack. They advanced cautiously, endeavouring to stick to the cover of the trees and undergrowth. They were soon joined by Iron Hand's force. Anne Crawford, who was also in the party, had necessarily but very reluctantly to play her part in the attack.

After a few minutes there was a lull in the firing, and the occupants of the shack saw that Iron Hand and Potsdam were conferring. Presently Potsdam, who was evidently outlining a scheme to the chief, pointed towards the hill at the back of the wooden building. Iron Hand nodded and smiled.

Potsdam then hurried off towards the horse which had been carrying the boxes of gunpowder, and while some of the gang resumed firing, others went off in various directions. Their intention soon became apparent to Sharpe and West—they were going to encircle the shack.

Potsdam, assisted by another man, unloaded the horse and commenced to carry the heavy boxes of powder towards the rear of the house. The troopers were effectually keeping the gang at bay with their crack shooting, but they were not prepared for this other move. The significance of those heavy boxes came to them. The cowardly gang intended to blow the shack to smithereens.

Potsdam and his assistant were now well to the rear of the building, and the second in command edged as near to the building as he possibly could without endangering himself too much. Then, he took a lasso from his belt, and, with unerring aim, sent it spinning towards the shack.

The loop settled on the chimney, and Potsdam pulled it tight. The other man had fixed a strong wire loop around the powder-box, and Potsdam pushed the free end of the lasso through the loop, and then tied the rope to a tree. It was indeed a well-thought-out scheme.

Their next move was to affix a fuse to the box, and when this was lit, they intended to let the powder slide down the rope towards the chimney.

Having completed his business, Potsdam walked back again in a wide circle to where Iron Hand was standing. He whispered a few hasty words to the chief, and Iron Hand immediately ordered his men to stop firing. The occupants of the hut were somewhat surprised at this, but they were even more astonished when Iron Hand produced a small white flag and waved it so that they could not fail to see it.

Although they suspected that there was some treachery ahead, West ordered the patrol to cease firing, at the same time warning them to keep their guns loaded in readiness for instant use.

Sharpe and West then unbarricaded the door, stepped outside, and looked towards Iron Hand, to see what he required. The leader signalled that he wanted someone to walk a short distance away from the house in order to speak to him alone.

Sharpe indicated that he understood Iron Hand's motions, and proceeded to carry out his request; but Captain West was not going to let his friend run into danger alone, and he waited by the door with his gun levelled ready to rush forward at the slightest sign of treachery upon the part of Iron Hand.

Anne Crawford's Trick.

IRON HAND raised his hand to his mouth, and bellowed out at the top of his voice:

"We'll light the fuse of this powder-box, and blow the whole gang of you to smithereens unless you surrender at once! If you do your lives will be spared." Then, as an afterthought, he added: "Thank Heaven we've got Sharpe and——"

Up to now Sharpe had been partly hidden from the view of the leader of the criminal gang, but when he emerged there was a broad smile on his face.

"So you have me—eh?" he shouted back defiantly, still keeping out of revolver range. "That's news to me!"

It was then that Iron Hand recognised the form and voice of the man he loathed so much. His face registered a look of amazement and rage, and he felt that if he could get at the young detective he would have torn him to shreds.

Anne was an interested spectator of

the scene. She wanted so much to help Sharpe, but did not know in the least what to do. Then an idea suddenly entered her head. She glanced down at the steep incline, and then shot a quick glance at Iron Hand, the man whom she was supposed to be assisting. He was not looking her way. Anne gave a startled shriek, and raised her arms in pretended alarm at the sight of sharpe.

The next minute she missed her footing, and clutched frantically at Iron Hand, under the pretence of merely trying to save herself. It was a dangerous thing which she had determined upon, but the plucky girl had no thought for her own safety when there was an opportunity of assisting Sharpe. She screamed again in horror, and Iron Hand, seeing that danger was threatening him, clutched at a near-by tree in an effort to save himself from falling down the steep incline.

It was too late, however, for Anne to recover, and she started to roll swiftly down the descent. Her object was to drag Iron Hand with her, so that he would then be within easy distance of the shack at the bottom, and John Sharpe could easily make him prisoner.

At length the girl reached the bottom of the descent, and although she was thoroughly shaken up she fortunately escaped without serious injury. She was considerably dazed from her fall, and Sharpe and West made a concerted dive towards the plucky girl.

Sharpe was quick to see the advantage which had come his way, for he believed the whole thing was an accident, and he still considered that Anne Crawford was an enemy and not a friend of his.

Shouting back at Iron Hand, the detective said:

"Now, if you blow us up, you involve also your respected lady friend. She will share our fate."

Sharpe then passed Anne to the care of Captain West, who took her into the shack, and closed the door.

Iron Hand and the rest of the gang also believed that the fall was accidental, and the leader was terribly enraged over the suddenness of the incident. It indeed gave Sharpe an advantage, and made his own dastardly plan more difficult.

He turned to his partner Potsdam, and said:

"I suppose we'll have to starve them out now. We cannot afford to blow up Marna Black, too. She is of great use to us!"

Potsdam, however, was jealous of the high esteem in which his leader held the girl, and he never did think so highly of her as his master.

"We've got Sharpe now," he growled, in his usual surly manner, "and may never get such another chance. He's always slipping out of your grip when you think you have him safe. We dare not take any more chances. Blow him to bits!" And an ugly, vindictive look passed over his countenance.

Iron Hand, who was wise in most matters, was very foolish where a pretty girl was concerned, and he was still head-over-heels in love with Anne Crawford.

"But the girl——" he muttered.

This was more than Potsdam could stand. He was far from being in a sentimental mood himself.

"Drat the woman!" he cried. "What's a woman more or less when our safety and success is at stake? Why trouble about her? We have Sharpe now at our mercy. It may never happen again. Remember your life as well as mine is in danger if we let him escape our clutches. Marna Black has been useful to us in the past, but it does not matter now what happens to her. She has served our purpose!"

Potsdam glanced around to see how the other members of the gang were taking the situation. And although they were afraid, in the presence of Iron Hand, to agree openly with Potsdam, it was obvious by their expressions they were thinking his way.

They had, personally, no interest in the girl whom they knew by the name of Marna Black.

Iron Hand was very thoughtful. There was a good deal of truth in what Potsdam said. Sharpe had continually evaded him, and he would give anything to get level with this clever young detective.

At length he gave the necessary order, and with eyes full of gloating Potsdam walked over to the fuse connected with the box of powder, and set light to it. Then he released it, and it slid down the rope until it reached the top of the shack, and rested against the chimney. The lighted fuse was spluttering away, and in a short time it would reach the box of high-powered explosive.

As soon as Sharpe saw what had happened he re-entered the shack.

"They've done it!" he announced to Captain West and the members of his patrol. Then, turning towards Anne, he said: "They don't seem to care a whole lot about your safety, do they?"

A look of horror passed over the girl's face. She was concerned not so much about her own safety, as that of the band of gallant men who stood around her.

She would have given anything at that moment to have been able to renounce Iron Hand and his gang, and to inform Sharpe and Captain West that she was not really connected with them, but she was in honour bound to keep her true mission a secret. And as she had not yet received Burnett's permission, she dare not reveal her true identity.

Presently one of the troopers, who was looking through a window, announced loudly that there was another white flag being waved by the enemy.

Sharpe went to the door and stood in the open doorway.

"Iron Hand says you've got thirty seconds to make up your mind whether you will surrender or not. What's your answer?" shouted one of the gang.

The detective looked round to see what the decision of the others was. He had already made up his own mind, but he was not the sort of man to force the others to remain in the doomed shack unless they were doing so of their own accord.

But as he searched the faces, first of Captain West, and then the members of the patrol, and lastly that of Anne Crawford, there was but one answer written on them. A determination to die rather than surrender to the foul band of desperadoes!

The girl was becoming more and more of a mystery to Sharpe!

On one occasion previously she had rendered him a good service, and got him out of a very tight corner. And now, although he offered her her freedom if she chose, as a reward, she would not accept it.

"It is very strange," he reflected.

John Sharpe strode from the shack once more, and looking in the direction of the man who held the white flag, he shouted back:

"Tell Iron Hand not to waste his breath!"

The detective then coolly entered the shack and closed the door.

Iron Hand was filled with vindictive rage when he received this last defiant message. It hurt him to think that he could not inspire fear into these men, and make them tremble at his power. He would still much rather have John Sharpe alive than dead, and as for Marna Black he could not help feeling mournful at the thought of her coming doom.

Inside the shack, Captain West and John Sharpe were silent and tense, realising that it was only a question of seconds before the whole party were blown to bits. This, then, was to be the end of the adventure which they all had set out upon with such high spirits!

The gang were also aware that the time for the explosion had almost arrived, and, like frightened rabbits, they rushed as far away from the shack as they could, seeking shelter behind rocks and trees, while others lay flat on the ground, watching and waiting for the explosion.

Iron Hand and Potsdam had planned many devilish schemes in their time, but to coolly hurl over a dozen human beings to their destruction was his greatest "triumph" of all. The fuse was now but a foot away from the box containing the powder, and the eyes of the gang were focused upon it. Soon it would be all over!

The party in the shack, although still and anxious, were brave in the face of coming death. Now and again one of them would glance somewhat uneasily towards the ceiling from which the great explosion would come.

Suddenly their hostage, Anne Crawford, had a sudden inspiration, and she began to explain it rapidly and eagerly. The party listened intently to what she had to say, and although they had not much hope of escaping their fate they were attracted by her enthusiasm.

The Explosion.

THERE was a resounding crash, and a mass of debris and smoke filled the air. Those members of the gang who had remained standing were swept completely off their feet, and branches of trees in the vicinity were cracked like twigs by the force of the explosion. Then, when the air cleared a little, the gang saw that a pile of timber was blazing and smoking where the shack had stood.

Iron Hand and Potsdam gazed at the result of their handiwork. Potsdam was the first to speak after the first effect of the shock had worn off, and he meekly pointed out to Iron Hand that the trouble, as far as John Sharpe was concerned, was completely over.

There was a certain look of regret in his eyes as he gazed at the blazing and smoking ruins, and it was evident that he was thinking of Anne.

Potsdam jeered.

"There are plenty of other women," he muttered; "the main thing is, we've put Sharpe out of business for good!"

Although the death of Anne was undoubtedly a blow to Iron Hand, he was not the type to worry himself over the inevitable too much.

"You're right," he growled, at length; "we must scatter, and meet in Los Angeles. Look for a code message in the personal column of the 'Morning News' on Friday. I've a big thing in view."

Iron Hand proceeded towards the pathway, and at varying distances the obedient members of the gang followed their leader. But the leader's judgment was once again too hasty.

As Anne outlined her scheme to the men in the shack, John Sharpe and Captain West were quick to act. She knew by experience that a hunter's shack such as this one was usually had a trapdoor in the floor where the fur-trappers hid their valuable prizes until they had

collected a sufficient number to send to headquarters.

Her brain had not been idle during the brief time she had been in the shack, and her quick powers of observation revealed the fact that there was a trap-door leading to a secret store-room in one corner of the room.

Sharpe and Captain West hastily pushed aside some boxes, and soon the trapdoor was disclosed. One of the troopers, using his rifle as a lever, forced it open, and Captain West immediately dropped through the opening in order to prepare the way.

Sharpe insisted that Anne should follow next. There was no time to be wasted, and although she was brave enough to wait until the last, she did not waste the precious moments arguing. When she had descended to the room beneath, the troopers followed one by one in the order in which they were standing, and Sharpe very gallantly remained till last.

It was a wonderful stroke of luck that the shack should have possessed this extra room, and, as it is a well-known fact that an explosion expends most of its force upwards, there was a very good chance of them escaping with nothing more serious than a severe shock.

To describe the place below the floor of the shack as a room is a generous description; it was really nothing more than a shaft dug out of earth, with its sides supported by timbers.

Sharpe instructed those in front to proceed along the tunnel, which sloped gradually downwards, and they hastened along, expecting to hear the full force of the explosion at any second. They had not long to wait. The terrific roar seemed to them to shake the earth for miles around.

Then suddenly a great mass of debris fell through the roof of the tunnel, narrowly missing those in the rear of this strange procession. The tunnel was filled with horrible, choking smoke and dust, and the heat from the burning wreck was intense.

Those in front had now reached the entrance of the short tunnel, and they had to keep well within in order to escape being seen by the gang, for they had no idea where its members were just then.

Now that all danger was over, Sharpe turned towards Anne, feeling very grateful towards her for having saved them, yet he was distinctly puzzled.

"We owe our lives to you," he said, "an enemy—one of that vicious gang! Why?"

It was on the tip of the girl's tongue to confess that she was really a Secret Service agent; she felt the spell of Sharpe's presence, and had an even greater admiration for him than ever before.

It was with great reluctance that she determined to adhere to her instructions from Burnett, and she replied with forced indifference:

"I couldn't bear to see you brave men murdered without a chance; I like a fair fight!"

In spite of his belief in her villainy, Sharpe felt that there was something very likeable in the character of this pretty girl. Then he peered out of the entrance of the tunnel, in order to investigate. Speaking to the man nearest to him, he said:

"Watch the girl, and keep under cover until you hear from me. This will be the signal."

The detective produced his revolver, and explained that he would fire two shots from it if all was well. Then, taking his life in his hands, as he had done in the interests of justice on so many occasions previously, he commenced to climb up the almost perpendicular side of the cliff.

It was difficult and dangerous work; on more than one occasion he almost lost his footing and balance, but finally he reached the top and peered over in the direction of the trail along which Iron Hand and his gang would have to proceed.

There was no one in sight, so he made his way to the trail along the side of the cliff, and once more scanned the surrounding district. He still caught no glimpse of Iron Hand or his villainous crew.

The detective's gaze next wandered towards the still burning shack, and he could not help smiling when he contemplated the smoking ruins, for he knew full well that Iron Hand had departed from the scene firmly believing that his ashes, together with those of Captain West and the troopers, were resting in that terrible spot.

Sharpe next turned his attention towards the edge of the cliff again, and he looked down at the country below him. There was evidently something of great interest to him there, for he produced his strong field-glasses and levelled them on the scene.

In the distance he saw a band of horsemen and a motor-car. The detective judged them to be the members of the gang. They had evidently fixed up the engine of the car again, and also sought out their horses which they had tethered some distance away from the scene of the recent gun-battle, which culminated in the blowing up of the shack.

The party had reached the cross-roads, and the motor-car headed down one road while the horsemen split up into various small groups, taking different routes, although their general direction appeared to be for the south.

Their plan soon became apparent to John Sharpe, who had had sufficient experience of them by now to know something of their ways.

"Scattering and heading south!" he muttered. "That means Los Angeles, of course."

He looked around, as though in doubt of his next move, and, remembering that they also had their own horses, he made off towards them. As Iron Hand had believed that their party had been exterminated, there would have been no sense or point in him brutally slaughtering the animals, and they no doubt remained where the troops had left them. His surmise proved correct.

He walked towards one of the animals, and secured the lasso from the saddle. His next move was to fire two shots into the air, as he had arranged to do, thus signalling the "all clear," and then tying one end of the lariat to the tree, he dropped the other end over the cliff and rapidly made his descent.

Captain West was waiting eagerly for his return, and when Sharpe gained the tunnel entrance and explained the position to West, he once more made his way to the top of the cliff. The captain followed, and then the men at the tunnel entrance tied the lariat securely to Anne's waist, and they speedily pulled her up.

It was not the most comfortable of journeys for her, and she several times got bumped against the cliff. When she reached the top, Sharpe untied the lariat and threw the end down to the men below.

Each man, in turn, by the aid of the rope, made his way up to the top of the cliff. Then they all went over to the horses. Sharpe counted the animals up.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "One of them has gone! Captain West, you take the squad down the trail, this lady and I will use the remaining horse."

When they had departed, Sharpe assisted Anne into the saddle, then he looked curiously at her and said:

"I'm afraid I can't understand you at all, Miss——"

Anne was enjoying the situation.

"Can any man understand a woman if she does not wish him to?" she asked.

This poser was too much for the clever detective; he shrugged his shoulders, and felt a little annoyed at her manner. Then he remembered that she was an enemy, and that he must treat her as such.

While this little scene had been going on, the motor-car containing Iron Hand and Potsdam had arrived at the ranch-house, near Eagle's Nest. They stopped, and the rancher's wife, who, of course, was an accomplice of the gang, came out to see what was wanted.

She recognised the criminal chief at once.

Iron Hand had not much time to spare, and did not get out of the car. He yelled a brief order to the woman, then instructed the man who was acting as his chauffeur to drive on quickly again.

The bad-tempered old woman was all smiles when talking to the chief, but when he had gone she went in and slammed the door.

An hour or so later Captain West and his troops also arrived at the ranch-house, where they dismounted.

The rancher's wife did not expect any more visitors, and as she came out of the house she glared at them somewhat angrily. When she saw the soldiers she paled. Soon Sharpe and Anne also joined the party.

Sharpe instructed the girl to remain where she was, then he alighted and joined the group. Turning to the rancher's wife he questioned her closely. "Everybody's left," she replied, in answer to his query. "Even my husband; and I'm glad of it, with all these goings on."

It was evident she had not yet got over being aroused from her sleep when Potsdam first broke the news to her of the expected arrival of Iron Hand, and she was far from being good-tempered. The troops laughed at her answer, then Sharpe spoke again.

"We are sorry to cause you any inconvenience," he remarked, with studied politeness, "but we are going to leave a couple of men here just to see that no harm comes to you. Your husband might come back, too."

The woman looked very sour.

Sharpe turned to Captain West.

"Will you instruct two of your men to stay," he said.

"Some of the ranchers in the background were good-humouredly joking and laughing together at the prospect before them.

"To think of anybody having to hang around with that woman," said one of them. "It's a tough outlook for somebody."

The sour-tempered woman overheard the remark, and gave them a freezing look. The other troopers pretended to be very sympathetic towards the two soldiers who had been selected for such an honour, and they were having a good laugh over the affair at their expense.

The unfortunate woman was getting more cross at every moment, and she looked very vindictive. She sized them up, and then very coolly remarked:

"I may not be able to do much with my old man, but I guess I'm equal to these two gents."

(Continued on page 19).

Dear Mr. GEM Editor,—There are so many things I have to talk about this week that I scarcely know where to begin. I have had a week in the country, down in Surrey, where my uncle has bought a farm. It is great fun. I like a farm. There is always so much going on. If you had seen me mounted on a bull you would have said—— But I hardly like to think what you would have said. Anyhow, I was there. The bull was supposed to have a nasty, treacherous temper. Tom, the boy—he is fat, but not so fat as Baggy Trimble—was afraid of Messidor (that's the bull's name, given it by the vicar's daughter, Miss Lake), and when it trotted out into the lane at the end of the village he stood and looked at it. He called it to come back. The bull was hard of hearing. It had been kept shut up in a muddy field for a long time, and it naturally wanted to see something of the world. You would yourself. Two little kiddies coming along, with a loaf of bread in a basket, ran for their lives. The bull never stirred. It stood there wagging its head to and fro like the pendulum of a clock.

Then a motor-car came "honking" down the road. Messidor hates motors. It frisked to the side of the road, glared at the car, then charged. Just then I biked up. The bull missed the car, but it did not miss me. I was knocked into a ditch amidst a lot of hemlock. The bike came after me. I scrambled up, and there was Messidor gazing at me, while the whole village seemed to have turned out.

I heard folks shouting that the bull was mad and ought to be shot. I knew it wasn't mad. When I stroked its face and said it need not have smashed my bike, it actually smiled. But a furious farmer tore up with a pitchfork, and the bull gave a jump, for it declined to be tickled with a pitchfork.

Well, I determined to show them all it was not mad, so I seized the bull's horns and scrambled on to its back. I have ridden bulls before, out in Australia. The farmer yelled at me. He said I would be killed. I was not so sure he might not be right when the animal swung round and set off at a canter towards the church. Everybody hallooed. That made the quadruped excited. Still, I hung on, and managed to laugh; and windows were thrown up, and some of the inhabitants cheered, while others said it was just like that mad girl Joy from Australia.

But I got to like it after a bit, though a bull is jumpy and bumpy, so far as that goes. It would have made a splendid picture for the cover of the GEM—with Gussy on the bull, and his best clothes being spoiled. It didn't hurt my farming-dress a bit. It seemed to me the bull was a sort of tossing brown sea in front of me. The church was going up and down—or so it seemed. Mrs. March's little sweetmeat-shop came to meet me. I actually saw the pink pear-drops in the diamond-framed window. Then on we went, this way and that. I did hold on tight! I am sure the St. Jim's fellows would have loved it; and I expect Kit Wildrake would have had a shot at taming it if he had been there. Then, after a bit, the bull got tired of prancing. He ambled quietly up to the white gate of the vicarage gardens. There was Miss Lake coming out with her bunch of club-tickets. She stopped and patted Messidor, and said: "What a brave girl you are, Joy!" Brave! I am not brave. I merely come from Australia.

Farmer Standish, who has a fifty-acre pocket-farm, as we should call it in the South, asked me to take a job on his farm. Uncle would not let me. He said I was in this country to be educated, not to ride frantic bulls.

I distributed the GEM and the "Boys' Herald" all over the village. They are all readers now. Aren't I good? But Mr. Grant, the schoolmaster, quite a nice man, with brown hair, says he would like a very serious story some time, with somebody acting like a hero. Heigh-ho! I am afraid there are not half enough heroes about this world. Perhaps I shocked them down at Medhurst, in Surrey, but they were all sorry—or said so—when I left. They did criticise me, though, for climbing trees, and for coasting the Rock Hill—it is a mile long, and lovely, but hardly anybody dare free-wheel it.

I have been back in London a week. I went to the cinema last night, and hoped to see Tom Merry turn up on the film; but there was no sign of him, though St. Jim's would make a perfectly scrumptious piece. Why not have it done, Mr. Editor? The film would travel round, and most likely it would reach Australia in time. They would dote on it there. I have seen diggers with beards gloat over school stories which reminded them of the old days, before they were diggers and grew beards. You would like a chat with some of those men. They seem to know everything, and there is something pretty tender and sympathetic in the way they speak, though they have lived out in the wilds for years and years.

What I cannot understand about London is the shortage of room. I travelled by the Underground Railway the other night. There were no seats, but a boy about the age of D'Arcy gave me his. The stations were packed with folks. It looked bonza, because everybody was amiable—I should hate to see anyone tempery in that crowd—but it is a pity there is not more space. Of course, we have our crowds in Melbourne and Sydney, and Brisbane is pretty tidy that way, but they are nowhere near London. Yet if you take the train out of London a few miles there is room enough for folks to spread and breathe. Seems a pity they could not be a bit more scattered, doesn't it?

There was a concert in the school the other night, and Mr. Grant gave that screaming recitation about the "shut-up bedstead" which turned into a table and a mangle when wanted. You remember it broke loose one night, and, as the key had been lost, it went on turning from a bed into a mangle, then into a table, all night long, so that nobody in the house could get a wink of sleep!

Yours,

JOY.

(Another chatty letter from Joy next week.)

CHAT ABOUT ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy has been heard lately to grumble at the shortage of change. We know of a good few people who would like to be subjected to the same annoyance.

News has leaked out to the fact that Aubrey Racke, the black sheep of the Shell, has visited the Green Man two nights "running." Have no fear, he'll "walk" into it ere long.

The kind and considerate Dr. Herbert Henry Locke has requested the various masters under his charge to put their "feet" down on sneaks. This is undoubtedly one of the many "feats" that carry weight.

Herbert Skimpole is trying to impress upon his Form-fellows that Socialism would be a "boom" to the country. Some agree with him. Others seem to be more of the opinion that it would prove a "boon."

Great interest surrounds the forthcoming cornet solo to be rendered by George Herries. It has often been proved that a fellow who blows his own trumpet has had to pay the piper!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is well read, we are informed. Yes; we have repeatedly stated that our readers know him like a book.

William Cuthbert Gunn is a poor footballer, we are told. We were well aware of the fact that he could not "shoot" for toffee.

William George Bunter, of the "Boys' Herald," has again been caught red-handed raiding his Form-fellows' tuck. His one plea seems to be: "Leave me a loan."

It has been unanimously announced that Lord Herbert Mauleverer would make a fine actor for the films. Surely one could hardly term any of the results as "moving" pictures? Mauly is far too slow!

EDITORIAL CHAT.

My Dear Chums,—

Just lately I have received a very large number of letters from my readers expressing the opinion that the "Gem" is better now than it has ever been before! I need hardly say how pleased I am to receive such enthusiastic letters, and I hope the "Gem" will continue to rank high in your esteem. This week you have our special Cardew number, and I feel confident that it will meet with your approval. Cardew is undoubtedly one of the most interesting characters at St. Jim's, and he is, without a doubt, greatly misunderstood by many of his chums. I am constantly receiving letters from readers full of questions concerning him, and the special information which I have published this week will no doubt clear up a great many points—or will Ralph Reckness still remain the puzzle of St. Jim's? In any case, I am sure that the splendid long complete story featuring him, will be appreciated by everyone. Our series of special portraits, as I anticipated, have proved immensely popular, and you will be glad to know that another will be presented in next week's number of your favourite paper. The next issue of the "Gem" will also contain another magnificent long story of St. Jim's, entitled: "Wildrake's Knock at Knox." It is a most interesting story, and I am sure it will create something like a sensation. "Wildrake's Knock at Knox" shows how the resourceful boy from the Wild West gets his own back on the bullying prefect. It will be advisable for all readers to order the "Gem" to-day, if they desire to read the most enthralling story of St. Jim's which has ever been written.

YOUR EDITOR.

THAT AMAZING BOY CARDEW!

A CHARACTER SKETCH BY ONE WHO KNOWS HIM.

Cardew is among the most fascinating characters at St. Jim's. It was a queer turn of Fate that brought him to the famous Sussex college some three and a half years ago. Yet from the great impression he has made, one would easily conclude that he had been a resident at St. Jim's ever since the stories commenced. We have never had mention of his mother or father, so we can take it that his old grandfather, Lord Reckness—from whom Cardew has derived his second name—is his immediate guardian. George Durrance is his first-cousin, Durrance's mother having been related to one of the parents of Cardew. He is also distantly related to the great Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. On some occasions, when Cardew's actions did not meet with the approval of the swell of St. Jim's, D'Arcy was very grateful that the relationship was distant, in fact, he more than once wished that the relationship did not exist at all.

ALWAYS THE UNEXPECTED.

Some of the things Cardew does one is just expecting him to do; but ofttimes the way in which he does it is so unlooked for, so original, so in keeping with his remarkable temperament, that one can do little more than wonder at him. His never-ending variety, and the undecided, curious way which he has of talking, form but one link in his complex character.

For sheer audacity he has not, and probably never will have, an equal. Younger readers have written to say that some of the things Cardew does simply take all the breath out of their bodies. I don't wonder at it! He has taken nearly all the breath out of the St. Jim's juniors—ay, seniors and masters as well!—before now!

A GOOD ALL-ROUNDER.

Since he has been at St. Jim's, Cardew has proved to heaps of fellows that if he wants to do a thing he can do it. When he first came to St. Jim's, a bigger snob and rotter could not have been found. Some readers want him to go on the tiles—to go to the deepest depths altogether; and I have actually letters in front of me now, asking that he should! A few—mighty few!—have written and suggested that Cardew should reform altogether—to stop smoking, being ridiculously lazy, snobbish, and caddishly impudent—all of which he can now be expected to be at a moment's notice. But I have recollections! When Ernest Levison was a blade, these same readers wrote and asked that he should be allowed to reform. He did, completely, and these same readers did not approve of the idea at all, and immediately wrote and asked if his reformation could not be described as a flash in the pan, and for Levison to go back again. But the coming of Doris Levison sealed any remote possibility of that!

MUST BE KEPT AS HE IS.

Can you imagine Cardew reformed, or, at least, running on the same lines as Tom Merry or Kildare? Wouldn't it be uninteresting! No sarcastic way of talking, no gibes, no "slating" and "getting at" those whom he does not care for, no smokes, no dropping in for an evening with Racke, and finishing up by fighting, or mucking up the whole crew. You can't imagine him like that, can you?

:: ANSWERS TO READERS ::

"SVENGALI" (Boulevard).—I have certainly struck some very enthusiastic readers of the GEM in my time, but I think you beat all records. Poor old Cardew! You seem to be most passionate on the fellow having a stretch of back-sliding. It is rather a difficult request. However, we can all see that Cardew reformed would be rather a wet blanket, so I must see what can be done. The way in which you mixed William S. Hart, and Warner Oland, with the St. Jim's juniors made me chuckle. Thanks for your letter; be sure to write again.

"A GOLLIWOG" (Dear Dirty Pompey).—What do you think of our flapper, Joy? She's just a reader, like yourself, you know. I think she will fill the breach for a little while. You needn't worry your head about greasy Baggibus, Mr. Martin Clifford never loses sight of pal Monty. Yes, it was George Durrance. He was supposed to be a German, under the name of Paul Laurenz. Gussy? Have a look at last week's back cover. Your writing is quite all right, my chum, and you have my best wishes for a speedy recovery.

"A LOYAL GEMITE" (Manchester).—Tom Merry, Talbot, and Harry Noble are the three best boxers in the Shell. Jack Blake has the same honour in the Fourth Form. "Gussy and the Girl," THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 682.

and such stories, are the best in your estimation. "The Lovelorn Grundy" also suited you down to the ground.

"ELISE OF FIFTEEN" (Hull).—Another who backs the GEM as the best. Good to you! Cardew has certainly been responsible for a great amount of feeling, hasn't he? Now for your questions: No. 1. Cardew's age and height are 15.7 months and 5ft. 4in. No. 2. The colour of his eyes and hair? Blue and blonde to yellow. No. 3. Not that I know of. He is under the care of his grandfather, Lord Reckness. No. 4. Doris Levison's age and height are 15.5 months and 5ft. 3in. No. 5. I should say yes! But it doesn't matter to the stories, though. Many thanks for your wishes.

"A FAG READER" (Penzance).—Leslie Owen is the best swimmer in the Junior New House. Figgins is the best runner. George Francis Kerr's role in the yarns is usually as a detective, peacemaker, or an actor.

MASTER FREDDIE TURKIE (Central Manchester).—The average age of the boys in the Second Form at St. Jim's is 10½ to 12. The eldest boy in the school has turned 18. I firmly agree with you that the GEM is the best of all boys' papers. Tom Merry fills the breach as the best sportsman in the Shell, Blake in the Fourth, and Figgins and Redfern in the New House. You will find the ages of Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther in the GEM of January 15. Tom Merry's best chum is Manners. Dick Julian and Brooke belong to the race you mention. I don't know of any others there at the moment.

T. L. F. (Harwich) writes: "Three cheers for the GEM. It gets better every week I see it—and that is saying a lot, for it wants some beating at any time. I have been a regular reader of it for the past ten years, and hope to read it for another fifty. When I say it is better than just merely good, I am speaking from experience, for the GEM was a real companion to me all the time I was in France, and a better one I could not wish for. It was sent to me every week. I think that the 'Invisible Hand' is simply ripping, and I must ask you to let us have as many tales of Kit Waldrake as you can, for he is a lot better than a tonic."

William Milligan (Blackburn, Lancs) writes: "I must write to compliment you on the stories, 'Redfern's Perilous Mission' and 'The Boy from the Wild West.' I wish Glyn would come back to the front with his wonderful inventions. I like the small photographs you have been publishing."

About those photographs, I think my chum will appreciate still more the page portraits of the celebrities of St. Jim's which I am now presenting each week.

Printed and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Limited, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Subscription rates: Inland, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Abroad, 8s. 10d. per annum; 4s. 5d. for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; and for Canada, The Imperial News Co., Ltd.—Saturday, March 5th, 1921.

THE INVISIBLE HAND

(Continued from page 16.)

Sharpe and Captain West were enjoying the good-natured jest of the soldiers. They had gone through a terrible time, and the hearty laugh came as a great relief to them. They had, in fact, been so interested in the fun that a certain industry on the part of Anne Crawford passed quite unnoticed by them. Seizing her opportunity, she took out a knife, and cutting the rope which was tethered to one of the horses, she freed the animal, and quickly galloped away.

At the sound of the horse's footsteps the men turned at once to see what was happening. Instantly there was great activity again.

One soldier close to Sharpe raised his gun and took aim at the fleeing girl. John Sharpe saw the danger which threatened her, and in spite of what seemed very like treachery, he could not be a party to seeing her shot down in this cool manner.

As the man pulled the trigger, the detective knocked his arm up, and the bullet exploded harmlessly in the air. Anne, who was crouching low on the horse, speeded the animal up, and soon disappeared over an incline.

Captain West gave an order to his men to pursue her, but this was stopped by Sharpe, who yelled out:

"Let her go; after all, boys, she's not a bad sort; if it hadn't been for her we wouldn't be alive now. She's a clever girl, but it is our job to hunt down Iron Hand and Potsdam. Let us give the girl a chance."

Captain West and his men agreed with the sporting action on the part of Sharpe. Then the detective turned to the soldier whose arm he had knocked, and, with a smile, he gracefully apologised for his action. There was just a slight tone of reproof in his voice when he said:

"You mustn't shoot a woman, you know."

The soldier smiled.

"I ain't that kind, sir," he replied. "I wuz going to stop the horse."

John Sharpe then turned to Captain West.

"I'm taking the train back to Los Angeles, captain; you had better return to your camp, and await further orders from me."

The officer agreed, and called his men together, with the exception of the two who were placed on guard duty on the ranch.

A Mysterious Message.

JOHN SHARPE was idly scanning the newspapers in his rooms at the hotel at Los Angeles. His attention was suddenly attracted by a curious advertisement in the personal column of the paper, and he endeavoured to puzzle it out and find the explanation of it.

He found it difficult, and decided that it was a matter that required deep thought, and taking out his pipe he filled it and settled down to an interesting half-hour wrestling with the problem.

The detective sat back in his chair and blew out a big puff of smoke, which he gazed at as though trying to read therein the answer to the riddle. He had cast his paper aside now, and in the smoke he could see the words:

"Mr. Fermaine expects his friends tonight at usual place. Important matter will be decided before two. Wide top floor."

It was the word Fermaine which stuck in his mind, and as the smoke-rings circled about him, in his imagination he seemed to see the letters darting about, backwards and forwards.

This particular word had a fascination for him, and he felt convinced there was more in it than met the eye.

He broke the word up into two syllables, "Fer" and "Maine," and pondered again over them; then suddenly he shouted out joyfully, "French, by heaven. Fer means iron, maine means hand. My old friend Iron Hand, as sure as Fate."

He eagerly picked up the newspaper again. The next thing which attracted him were the words "before two." He was beginning to see daylight now, and he wrote down on a scrap of paper before him what he thought was a possible solution of this—"4 2."

"We're getting on!" he muttered. "Now there is 'Wide'! What stands for 'Wide'? Perhaps broad!"

This suggested a solution to him, and he wrote it all down on a piece of paper:

"4 2 (Broadway) or (Broad Street)—Top Floor."

"Well, now I'll do a little investigating."

John Sharpe pushed aside his pipe, and, slipping a revolver into his pocket, he put on his hat and coat and left the room.

(Order next week's "Gem" early, for the continuation of this amazing story. Don't miss it!

Make a point of collecting these fine Art Portraits.

The GEM LIBRARY

1½d.

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW.

The most amazing character of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's. (Another Splendid Portrait Study next week.)