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JAMES TORRANCE
(Fulham F.C.)

No. 752. Vol. XXII.

Every Wednesday.

July 8th, 1922.



RACKE CARRIES OUT HIS RASCALLY SCHEME!

(An Exciting Incident from the Grand, Long, Complete School Story Inside.)

FOOTBALL FAVOURITES.

CHARLES FLOOD. & JAMES TORRANCE.

Bolton Wanderers F.C.

Fulham F.C.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER."

A Splendid Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck is awarded to the sender of what the Editor considers the most interesting paragraph. Half-a-crown is awarded for each other contribution accepted.

(If your name is not here this week it may be next.)

A PLAYER OF DISTINCT PROMISE.
CHARLES W. FLOOD, who was recently transferred from Hull City to Bolton Wanderers, is one of the many footballers who developed their game while serving in the Great War. He is, so far as we know, the only prominent footballer in England at the present time who was born in the Isle of Wight.

In the Army he served with the Royal Garrison Artillery, and in the course of only seven United Service League games he scored thirty goals, once getting six in a game, and five in several other matches. While playing in these games he was spotted by Manager Jack, of Plymouth Argyle, for whom he played a few times as an amateur. On the return to normal football conditions, Flood went to Hull City, and for three seasons put in useful service on behalf of the "Tigers." Last season, for example, he was their leading goalscorer, with seventeen successful shots to his credit in League matches.

Flood, however, is one of those men who are anxious to get on in the football world, and when he signed on for Hull he made it a condition that he should be allowed to leave when he felt that the time had come for him to advance. This time he considered had come at the end of last season, so in May he was transferred to Bolton Wanderers, and it may be said that the Lancashire club has secured a player of distinct promise. Strictly speaking, he prefers to play in the inside-left position; but at Hull he showed himself a most versatile forward, playing in all three of the inside forward positions, and at Bolton he is likely to be called upon whenever there is a vacancy in the attack.

He is a big fellow, standing practically six feet, and weighing over twelve stone, yet his play can best be described as brainy, rather than robust. He is also a very fair cricketer, and for several summers past he has kept wicket for the Hull Cricket Club.

A REAL HARD WORKER.

THE game of football knows no more enthusiastic player on behalf of his club than popular Jimmy Torrance, who has now been with Fulham for eleven seasons, and who is still playing as well as ever. For a big portion of his period of service with Fulham, Torrance was captain of the team, but during last season he relinquished the post in order to hand over the duties to Andy Burt, whom he considered had a greater experience of this sort of thing.

It is worthy of note that when Torrance first came to London from his native Scottish place, Coatbridge, he played at centre forward, and since then he has occupied at various times every position on the field on behalf of the Craven Cottage side. Once he even went into goal when the keeper

of the day was injured, and it is a standing joke at Fulham that when the days of Torrance as a centre-half are over, he ought to make a jolly good goalkeeper. A player with a lion heart and a great enthusiasm may rightly be expected to put up a decent show in any position on the field, and Torrance possesses these qualities to a very marked degree. He is an absolutely tireless worker, being specially good in the art of

TOMMY BROWELL

Manchester City F.C.



A Splendid Real ACTION
 Photograph of this famous footballer will be given FREE with every copy of next week's GEM.

recovery, and ready to take any amount of hard knocks with an air which suggests that he is quite unbothered.

More than once in the course of his stay at Fulham, Torrance has gone through a whole League season without missing a match, and, in fact, there is nothing which grieves him quite so much as to be compelled to stand down from his place in the side owing to injury.

EDITORIAL CHAT.

The Editor would like to hear from his reader's chums. Address all letters to Editor, "The Gem Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.O.4.

My Dear Chums,—

Tommy Browell, of Manchester City, is the subject of next week's fine action photograph given away with the GEM. It is a very telling little picture, and shows this champion at business. I will mention here that the "Magnet" is offering photos of J. T. Brittleton (Stoke F.C.), and George Butcher (Luton Town F.C.), while the "Boys' Friend" is well to the front with a capital portrait of the well-known boxer, Tommy Harrison.

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There is an extra long story next week of St. Jim's. Somehow there are always stirring happenings at the school. You will say, I am sure, "The St. Jim's Runaway!" need fear no comparisons with former yarns. It is pitched in Mr. Martin Clifford's style. The runaway is a highly esteemed junior. I shall not mention any names. He may wear a monocle; he may be dressed like a tramp who has been out in the rain, or quite in the latest style; but it is too hot work in these summer days to get guessing, so I shall let it go at that.

Of course, we hear more about Jim Ready, the small boy for hard work, and St. Beowulf's and Jorrocks. Duncan Storm has fairly hit it with this, his latest yarn. His characters stick in the memory after one has read about them. He was great in his stories of the Bombay Castle, but he goes one better in his new narrative.

About our Tuck Hamper Competition,

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER.

Most Confusing.

"John," said Mrs. Smith, "why do they quarrel so much about poultry in these disgraceful prizefights?" "Poultry," muttered John, laying down his newspaper. "Now, my dear, whatever do you mean?" "Well, it is clear enough," answered Mrs. Smith. "I read it all myself before you were down. It says the white man was inclined to show his chicken heart, but gave a pretty duck to avoid his coloured opponent. Why did he want to avoid him? Just because he was a coloured man? Then it said the coloured man claimed a fowl in the seventh round. Was that the duck the white man gave?"

A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to E. V. Ralph, 35, Foulsham Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey.

THE HAMMERKOP.

The hammerkop is an African bird, related to the herons and storks. It is about two feet long, has brown plumage, and when the crest of feathers at the back of the head is raised it gives the bird a certain resemblance to a hammer. The hammerkop is always found near water, and it lives on frogs, lizards, and fish. It is sometimes called the hammerhead.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to David Lees, Riggend Schoolhouse, by Airdrie, Scotland.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON

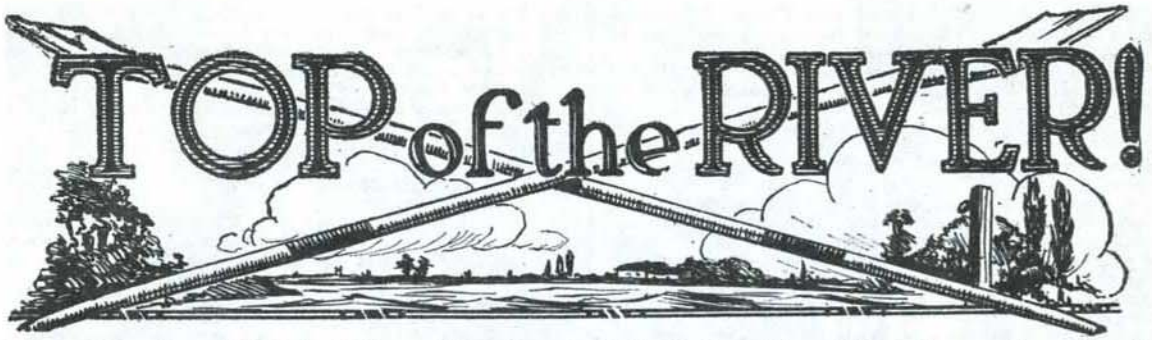
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No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

which is still going great guns, remember all entries should be sent to the GEM Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

As each week comes round, I generally drop in a reminder of the famous coloured plates of railway engines given away in the "Popular." Of course, reminders are not in the least necessary in the case of those of my chums who have seen this splendid feature in our Companion Paper, the "Pop." It would be a pity, however, for anybody to miss the treat offered, for these engine plates are really so much railway history in pocket form. They show something of the pitch of excellence to which engineering has brought the iron road, and thus constitute a notable record of railway progress. Keep your eye on the "Popular"—those of you who are keen on railways.

YOUR EDITOR.



A Grand Long Complete School Story of the Chums of St. Jim's, telling of Racke's rascally action in the Great Boatrice between the juniors of St. Jim's and the Grammar School.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Ragers Ragged!

"EASY all!"

As Curly Gibson's piping treble rang out shrilly across the sun-lit river, the St. Jim's racing eight slowed down with a rippling swish of feathered oars.

Curly Gibson grinned.

At St. Jim's, a command from a Third-Former to a Shell or Fourth Form fellow would have been taken as cheek, and punished accordingly. But here, on the river, it was different. For Curly Gibson was coxswain of the St. Jim's junior eight. He was monarch of all he surveyed; and the perspiring oarsmen obeyed his lightest word without question.

It was Wednesday afternoon—a half-holiday at St. Jim's. It was also a week from the race between the juniors of St. Jim's and their rivals of Rylcombe Grammar School. That boatrice was to decide which school was to be top of the river that season, and, needless to say, Tom Merry and his crew were determined to bag the honour.

For weeks now they had been in strict training. Practically every evening until dusk, and many an early morning, they had spent on the river. And the strenuous training had not been without its results. Every member of the crew was as fit as a healthy schoolboy can be, and Tom Merry, the stroke, was more than satisfied with the progress of his crew.

But apparently Curly Gibson, the coxswain, wasn't.

As the boat came to a stop, and the crew crouched, panting and exhausted, over their oars, he proceeded to address them with a few piquant and pointed remarks. Actually, they had just done the full course in record time—beating the known Grammar School record by several seconds. But, though inwardly jubilant, Curly did not intend his crew to suffer from swelled head.

"Well, my hat!" he observed witheringly. "Call yourselves oarsmen—eh? Why, you're like a lot of old women punting a barge along with telegraph poles. You're like a lot of pillow-cases flopping about! As for you, bow!"

From the bow thwart, Figgins, the lanky leader of the New House juniors, raised a heated, grinning face.

"What's wrong with me, cox?"

"Everything's wrong!" snorted Curly Gibson. "Use your legs, man—use your legs! They're long enough, goodness knows. If you can't make better use of 'em in the boat, hang 'em over the side and use 'em for punt poles."

"Look here——" began Figgins warmly.

"You needn't grin. No. 4," went on cox, addressing Levison. "Blessed if I ever saw a chap handle an oar like you. Do try to remember you're handling an oar—not a soup-ladle. If you must dig for gold in Australia, for goodness sake do the thing properly, and take a trip round the world. No good trying to dig the stuff out from this end with an oar. No. 2, you're the worst of the lot——"

"Weally, you young——"

"For heaven's sake leave your blessed eye-glass at home next time—or else get another one for your other eye to balance you. You're lobb-sided, man! Swing straight, man—swing straight!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"And you, too, No. 5! Get a grip, man—got a grip! You're not there to look pretty. Why the thump——"

"Here, I say; that's enough, youngster!" laughed Tom Merry. "We've done jolly well; and you know it. My hat! If you fellows will only back me up like that in the

race, we'll knock Gordon Gay and his crew into a cocked hat."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Anyway, I think that'll do for this afternoon, chaps. Just a gentle paddle back to the boathouse, cox."

"Touch her, bow!"

With a few deft strokes, Figgins straightened the boat, and the crew came forward to await the order to paddle. But before that order could be given there came an interruption. From the gloomy depths of the thickly-wooded bank came a sudden mournful howl—followed by a succession of mournful howls.

"Hallo! What the thump——" began Tom Merry.

"Sounds like a pig being killed," remarked Blake.

"It is—that was Trimble's voice," grinned Lowther. "Some kind friend of humanity has decided to end Baggy's wicked career. What a blessing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Tom Merry did not laugh. Baggy Trimble was the fattest, laziest, and least-loved junior at St. Jim's. But he was a St. Jim's fellow, for all that. If he was in trouble—and it certainly sounded like it—then it was up to the others to go to his rescue.

"I expect the Grammarians have got the fat ass," grunted Tom. "Blow the fat nuisance! But we'd better go and see. Take her in, Curly!"

Curly Gibson nodded, and under his skilful orders the light craft was carefully manoeuvred towards the bank. The bank was low here, and bow side merely raised their oars and allowed the blades to slide over the soft grass as the boat touched the shore. Figgins jumped ashore and held the boat while the rest stepped out. Leaving Curly Gibson in charge of the boat, Tom Merry led the way quickly into the wood.

The gloom was thick under the trees. But it was cool, and the shade was a welcome change from the shimmering river. Guided by the shrill sounds of woe from ahead, the party pressed on swiftly. And in a grassy glade they came upon a startling scene.

It was Baggy Trimble right enough; and, as Tom had opined, he was in the hands of the Philistines. He was on his knees in the centre of the grassy path through the woods, and he was a pathetic sight. His fat features had been artistically streaked with mud; his jacket was turned inside-out, likewise his cap; and his trousers were turned up to his fat knees.

But that was not all. His fat wrists had been tied together behind his back, and his ankles doubled up under him and his feet attached to his wrists. Behind him stood Lacy and Carker—two of the shadiest juniors of Rylcombe Grammar School. They were laughing uproariously as they prodded the hapless Baggy with sticks—apparently to encourage him to amble along on his knees.

It was a difficult task for anyone under the circumstances—much less the fat and awkward Baggy Trimble. Even as Tom Merry took in the scene, Baggy lurched forward and buried his podgy nose deep into the grassy path.

"Yarrough!"

"You rotters!" shouted Tom Merry. "Stop 'em!"

With gasps of alarm the Grammarians turned to bolt—but too late. In a flash they were surrounded by the eight St. Jim's juniors.

As Tom Merry released the luckless Baggy, his face darkened. This was beyond a harmless rag. It was, as Monty Lowther remarked, "cruelty to animals."

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"You howling cads!" breathed Tom Merry. "I suppose you couldn't find any Third Form fags to rag, and dropped on Trimble—he's just about your weight, Lacy."

"The fat cad checked us," said Lacy sullenly. "He was bragging about the boatrace—said we shouldn't stand an earthly, and—"

"Then he spoke the truth for once," said Lowther. "My hat! Wonders will never cease."

"Truth or not," growled Tom Merry, "they've no need to treat the fat duffer like that. You've got to go through it for this, Lacy! We'll jolly well— Stop him!"

Tom broke off and sprang forward as Lacy made a sudden dash to escape. Several other fellows also jumped forward; but it was Levison who reached him first—to his sorrow.

His hand had barely touched Lacy's collar when the Grammarian tripped over a hidden root, and fell, and headlong over him went Levison major, with a crash.

In a moment six pairs of hands had grasped Lacy and dragged him to his feet. Tom Merry stretched out a hand to help Levison up, but Levison did not attempt to take it.

"Hallo! What's the matter, Levison?" gasped Tom, in sudden alarm.

For a moment Levison did not reply. He staggered to his feet slowly, one hand gripping his other wrist. Then he doubled himself up, his features twisted with pain.

"It's my wrist," he panted, through his teeth. "It—it's sprained, I think."

"What!"

Levison nodded hopelessly.

"But—but it can't be—surely," almost wailed Tom Merry. "You're sure it isn't just—"

"Look at it!" groaned Levison. He held out his arm. The wrist was red and bruised—already showing signs of swelling. "I fell with my arm underneath. It's been sprained once before—years ago. I'm—I'm awfully sorry, you fellows."

Levison's voice almost broke—so bitter was his disappointment.

"Well, it can't be helped," muttered Tom Merry dismally. "And it's jolly hard lines on you—as well as us. But—but—Great Scott! What awful luck! Only a week off the race, too."

The St. Jim's oarsmen eyed each other in dismay as the full extent of the calamity dawned upon them. Since Gordon Gay had sent his challenge, weeks ago, they had toiled hard; they had pulled together, confident of victory. That confidence was not only held at St. Jim's, but it was shared—secretly—by many at the Grammar School. They were generally believed to be the best crew.

And now this had happened. There were plenty of good oarsmen in the Shell and Fourth at St. Jim's, certainly. But it would probably mean reshuffling the whole crew. To replace a man at the eleventh hour was asking for defeat. And, like Levison, Tom Merry could have wept with chagrin and disappointment.

CHAPTER 2.

Grundy's Offer "Turned Down!"

BLAKE broke the silence. His eye had happened to fall on Lacy's face. The cad of the Grammar School had grasped the situation in a moment. Lacy was not a sportsman. The thought that the interference of the St. Jim's oarsmen had probably lost them the great race filled him with glee. He grinned a grin of malicious triumph.

Unfortunately—for him—Blake saw that grin.

"You howling rotter!" shouted Blake, shaking his fist furiously in the cad's face. "This is all your fault! I'll jolly well make you grin, you cad! Put your fists up!"

As a preliminary, Jack Blake tapped Lacy's long nose sharply, and the Grammarian's grin disappeared, and he howled.

"Here, hold on, Blake!" said Tom Merry quietly. "After all, it was an accident. Let the rotters go."

"Oh, but that's rot!" growled Herries warmly. "We ought to teach the rotters better than bullying a St. Jim's chap."

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"Oh, all right!" said Tom dispiritedly.

The next moment he was lending a hand—though with little enthusiasm—in dealing with the two alarmed Grammarians. Despite the frantic struggles, the cads' hands were tied behind them, and afterwards they were bound back to back, with their legs free. A couple of handfuls of mud from the ditch rubbed over their faces, and the same amount of green, slimy moss rubbed well into their scented hair, completed the operation.

"Now march, you cads!" ordered Blake. "If you're not out of sight in two ticks we'll start on you with our shoes. March!"

And Lacy and Carker marched, or at least they attempted

to. But as both started off in opposite directions they did not get far. A brief tug-of-war ensued; but Lacy proved to be the stronger. With furious face and gleaming eyes he ambled along, and Carker, staggering and stumbling, followed—he had to.

It was a ludicrous picture, but the sight scarcely raised a grin on the St. Jim's juniors' faces.

Baggy Trimble had already scuttled away along the path, and almost in silence they turned and tramped back to the waiting boat. Tom Merry then turned to Levison, who was still nursing his swollen wrist.

"You'd better ship your oar, old man," he remarked glumly. "For once you'll have to be a passenger. Kerr, you'd better ship yours too—to balance the boat. What's the matter, cox?"

"Matter?" almost shrieked Curly Gibson. "What's the matter with Levison? You don't mean to say—"

Tom Merry smiled ruefully and explained the situation. And Curly Gibson's youthful wrath was terrible to behold.

"Oh—oh, you idiots!" he groaned at last. "Blessed if I can trust you out of my sight. For goodness' sake get in the blessed boat, the lot of you!"

Levison and Kerr shipped their oars, and a moment later the boat was out in mid-stream. But scarcely once during that dismal pull to the boathouse was cox's voice heard. He hadn't the heart to criticise even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's handling of an oar. They reached the landing-slip at last, to find a crowd of juniors awaiting them. The sight of the St. Jim's boat with two of its crew not rowing had aroused their curiosity.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Manners.

"Levison's sprained his wrist," explained Tom Merry briefly.

"Oh, great pip!"

A murmur of consternation arose at once.

"Eh? What's that?" demanded George Alfred Grundy, pushing his way through the crowd.

"Oh, get out of the way, Grundy!" growled Tom irritably. "Let's have the boat in, chaps."

But Grundy was not to be put off. As willing hands raised the light shell on high he stepped towards Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming.

"Is that the truth, Tom Merry—is Levison crooked?"

"Yes; can't you see—"

"Oh, good!"

"Eh? What's that?"

"Good!" said Grundy firmly. "St. Jim's ought to stand a chance of winning now—that's providing you do the right thing, Merry. You'll want another man now, and you've no excuse to ignore my claim, Merry."

"Oh, get out of the way, ass!"

"I suppose you can't deny that I'm the next best man on the reserve list—"

"My dear man, you're not on the list at all! There's something wrong with your supposing apparatus if you suppose that."

"You—you mean to say I'm not on the reserve list?" roared Grundy. "Then who does come next if I don't—tell me that?"

"Certainly," assented Monty Lowther gravely. "There are quite a number. To begin with, there's Skimpole of the Shell—"

"Eh? Skim—why, you thumping idiot—"

"And all the rest of the fellows in the Shell," went on the irrepressible Lowther. "Then there's Trimble—"

"Don't be a fool, Lowther! I'll jolly well—"

"And all the rest of the Fourth. Then there's Piggott of the Third—"

"You silly ass—"

"And all the rest of the Third. Of course, if they fail us we'll have to fall back on the staff. Old Taggles is a bit rheumatically, but I've no doubt he could pull his weight. Then there's Dame Taggles. At a pinch we could persuade her to take an oar."

"Look here, Lowther—"

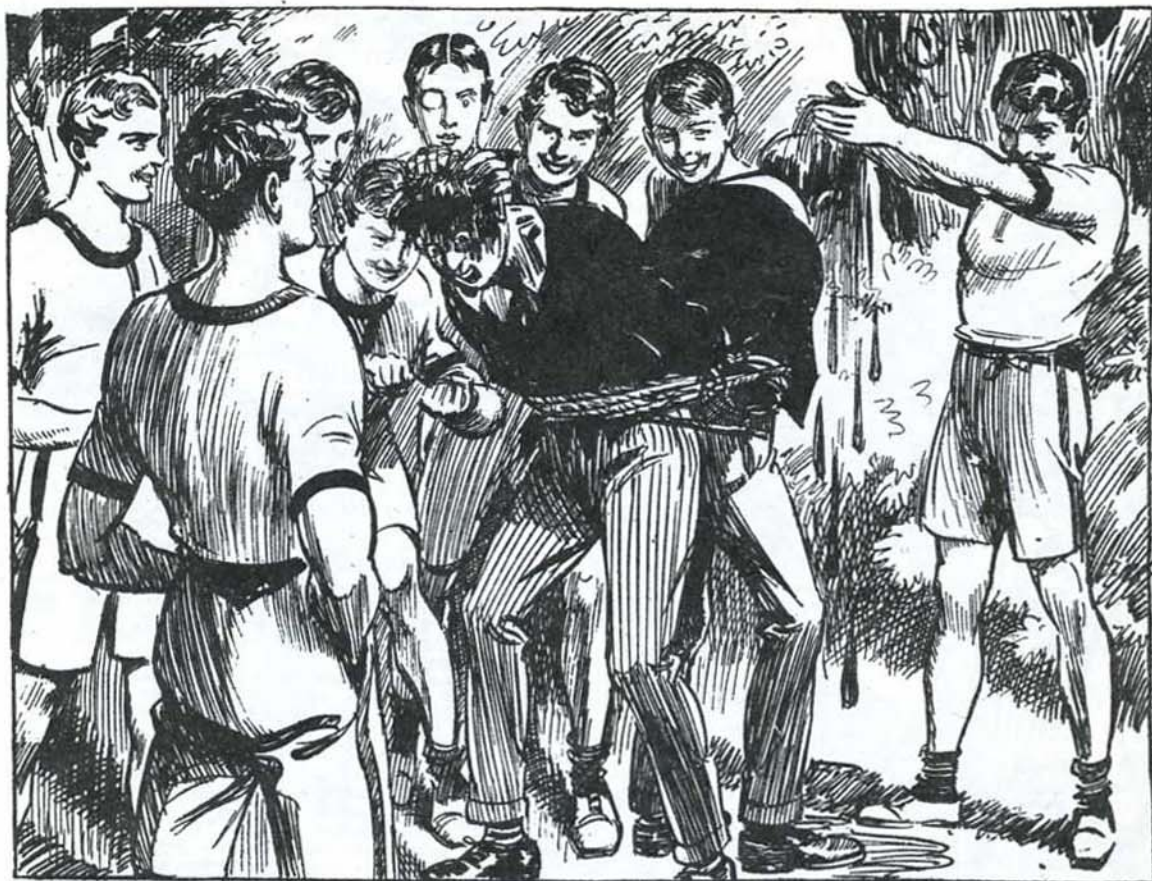
"And why not?" said Lowther innocently. "Lots of ladies row nowadays—and jolly well, too. Anyway, if they all fail us, then there's still old Cornelius, the school cat. You must admit that even he would be safer in a boat than you, Grundy. Anyway, that's the full list of reserves before you, old man. If they all fail us, then, of course, you'll get your chance, Grundy."

"You—you—you—"

Grundy broke off, speechless with wrath, as a chorus of chuckles went up. He raised a huge fist and stepped towards Lowther—but he never reached him.

At that moment—by accident or by design—the tapering prow of the racing craft swung round and caught the warlike Grundy a fearful crack on the side of the head.

"Yarooogh! Oh crumbs!"



Despite the frantic struggles of Lacy and Carker their hands were tied behind them, and afterwards they were bound back to back, with their legs free. Mud from the ditch was rubbed over their faces. "Now march, you cads!" ordered Blake. "If you're not out of sight in two ticks, we'll toe you along." (See page 4.)

Grundy staggered backwards, tripped over a loose plank in the staging, and fell into the river.

Splash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Another accident," murmured Lowther sadly. "Good job Grundy isn't our first reserve—eh?"

"You ass, Lowther!" said Tom Merry, smiling despite himself. "Let's get the boat in, though, while that silly duffer's out of the way."

It took but a minute to hoist the boat, and when the crew came out again, with their coats on, the great George Alfred was just staggering ashore, gasping and spluttering. His hitherto nice new boating flannels were soaked and muddy, and his wrath was a sight to behold.

For a moment it looked as though he was contemplating assault and battery upon the grinning crowd. But he apparently thought better of the project, for he turned suddenly, and muttering to himself, squelched dismally away along the towpath.

The bright little episode had raised the juniors' spirits a little, and they chuckled as Grundy disappeared. Levison had already hurried away to have his wrist seen to, and the rest of the crew strolled towards St. Jim's, discussing the situation.

"Well, that disposes of one giddy claimant to the vacant seat!" remarked Kerr. "But that doesn't help at all, Tommy. Have you any particular chap in mind?"

"I'm blessed if I know what to do, quite!" returned Tom Merry reflectively. "But—but I was thinking of—" He hesitated.

"What about Reddy?" suggested Figgins.

"Redfern's certainly a good man, but he's hardly up to Levison's weight," said Tom, shaking his head.

"There's Digby," said Blake. "He's the man!"

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy!"

"I was thinking of risking Cardew," said Tom quietly.

"Phew!"

"He's a lazy slacker, we all know," said Tom. "But there's no denying we've scarcely a fellow to touch him with

an oar when he cares to exert himself. If he'll only stop acting the goat, and pull himself together for a week—"

"That's a jolly big 'if,' though," remarked Blake grimly. "You know how erratic the chap is. He'll be dodging off on some fool game or other five minutes before the race, or doing something else like that. You never know what the fellow is going to do next!"

"I'm willing to risk it," said Tom Merry briefly. "That is, providing Cardew will turn out. Anyway, I'll think it over."

Blake and the others shook their heads, but said nothing. And, for the time being, it was left at that.

CHAPTER 3.

A "Sporting" Transaction!

"OH gad! What the thump—"

Thus Aubrey Racke of the Shell at St. Jim's to his crony, Gerald Crooke, also of the Shell.

The two dingy slackers were disporting themselves, as befitted members of the idle rich, on the stile at the end of the pathway through Rylcombe Wood when a curious trampling noise from the depths of the wood behind them became audible.

"What the thump," went on Racke, in alarm, "is that? Sounds like—Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Crooke. "Oh, what a scream! What is it—a dashed four-legged spider?"

Certainly Crooke's description fitted the queer, grotesque form which had just emerged from the shady trees admirably—excepting that the form possessed two heads as well as four legs.

It was, in fact, nothing more nor less than Lacy and Carker of Rylcombe Grammar School. They were still tied back to back as Tom Merry & Co. had left them. They had had many tumbles and scratches, but here they were, out of the wood at last. The sight of the two, staggering and stumbling, and abusing each other savagely, sent Racke and Crooke into fits of laughter.

They reached the stile at length, and there Carker collapsed, with a groan of exhaustion, dragging Lacy over on top of him.

"Oh crumbs!" chortled Racke, eyeing the struggling forms gleefully. "Are you chaps doin' this for a wager?"

"You—you rotters!" hissed Lacy furiously. "If you'd any decency, Racke, you'd let us loose!"

"Yes; that's likely, isn't it?" grinned Racke, with a sneer. "But, dash it all, who—ha, ha, ha!—tied you up like that?"

"Tom Merry and his pals—the howling cads! I'll get even with them for this!"

"Oh!"

Racke's face changed as he muttered that exclamation. He reflected a moment, then he grinned. He had no love for the Grammarians, nor did he care personally if they ever got loose. But he was "up against" Tom Merry & Co. The thought of spoiling one of his hated enemies' "rags" appealed to him strongly.

Without another word, he took out his pocket-knife and released the luckless Grammarians. Lacy and Carker fairly blinked at him. They had asked—but had not expected to be released by a St. Jim's fellow—and certainly not a fellow of Racke's kidney.

But they were glad, though not grateful. They scrambled to their feet, and began to brush themselves down savagely.

"And now, what was the trouble?" asked Racke curiously. "How did you come up against Merry? I thought he was on the river."

"So he was. He must have heard—but never mind how!" said Lacy savagely. "Anyway," he added, with a wicked grin, "we've already had our own back. If you've put your last shirt on St. Jim's winning next week, you'd better call it off."

"How's that?"

"Oh, nothing!" grinned Lacy. "Only St. Jim's won't stand an earthly!"

Aubrey Racke scowled. For all his faults, he had a certain amount of esprit de corps in his queer make-up.

"Don't talk rot!" he said angrily. "You know—and everyone knows—St. Jim's is the best crew. They've already beaten the Grammar School's best time."

"But they won't next week, my pippin; you can back on that! That is," added Lacy, with a sneer, "if you're not too big a funk to back your opinion!"

Lacy did not intend his suggestion to be taken literally. He liked to fancy himself a "sport," and he liked to talk in a "sporty" manner.

But the sneer went home, and Racke took him literally.

"I'll jolly well show you if I funk or not!" he snapped angrily. "I'll back my opinion against yours any day. In fact, I'm willing to give you two to one on St. Jim's, come to that—in quids or anything!"

"Done!" said Lacy, still grinning. "I'm not rolling in ill-gotten gains like some folks. But I can put a couple of quids down, Racke."

"Right! That's four for me to put up," said Racke, flushing.

"What about you, Croke?" said Lacy, winking at Carker. Croke looked alarmed, but he took out his purse with an affected air of carelessness.

"Here you are! Ten bob—all I've got—"

"Half a tick!" snapped Racke. "What about a stakeholder, Lacy?"

"Then—then you really mean it?" he gasped.

Racke stared, and hesitated. But he had not the moral courage to draw back now.

"Of course I mean it!" he snarled furiously. "What do you take me for?"

"Right-ho, then!" grinned Lacy carelessly. "Here's old Hake! He'll hold the cash like a shot!"

Lacy called to Hake, a Grammar School senior, who was passing on his bike. Hake jumped off, and listened as Lacy explained. Then he chuckled. Had it been anyone but Hake, he would have probably knocked the young rascals' heads together, and passed on. But Hake was by way of being a "sporting blade" himself—a fact Lacy well knew.

"Mean to say you're backing the school?" he asked, grinning. "Then more fool you, Lacy! You'll lose your money."

"I'll chance that," smiled Lacy.

"You young fool! But it's your own funeral. Hand over the cash!"

Racke took out a well-filled pocket-wallet, and handed to Hake four Treasury-notes, with affected carelessness. Croke parted with his ten-shilling note with obvious reluctance. Lacy, like Racke, was rarely short of cash, and by borrowing five shillings from Carker, he made up the required amount.

"I suppose I ought not to encourage this sort of thing among youngsters," observed Hake, pocketing the money with a grin. "But it'll do some of you young fools good to lose a bit—teach you a lesson, begad! Ta, ta!"

And Hake mounted his machine, and rode away. He appeared to regard the whole dingy transaction as a joke. Apparently Lacy did also.

"Well, by-by, Racke, old sport! See you again on Wednesday after the race—when you come to collect your winnin's!" he remarked, with a mocking grin.

And he lounged away with Carker, who was looking anything but happy.

"I—I say, Lacy, old man," said Carker uneasily, "that—that's a bit off the rails, isn't it? You knew Levison was crooked, and Racke didn't. It's a bit thick, y'know!"

Lacy shrugged his shoulders. As a matter of fact, he already regretted his action. He had led Racke on more with the intention of pulling that youth's leg than anything else. He certainly did not realise the seriousness of what he had done.

"Oh, rot!" he remarked lightly. "It'll do that purse-proud rotter good to be taken down a peg. In any case, he's bound to find out about Levison when he gets back, an' he'll be along soon, wantin' to call it off. If he wants to, I will, of course! I'm dashed if I want his rotten money!"

Which showed that Lacy was anything but easy in his own mind about the transaction. And, curiously enough, at that moment Racke and Croke were discussing matters in much the same terms.

"You're a dashed fool, Racke, letting that cad draw you on like that!" muttered Croke. "We'll win all right, I know. But—but there'll be trouble if any of the fellows get to know we've been betting on the boartrace."

Aubrey Racke scowled. Like Lacy, he already regretted his recklessness. He could see now that Lacy had led him on, too, and he began to wonder. He had been too cowardly to ignore the taunt, and had made the bet out of sheer bravado.

"Oh, shut up, Croke!" he returned uneasily. "You know jolly well I didn't want to bet, but I wasn't goin' to let that swanky Grammar cad call me a funk. Anyway, if the rotter wants to call it off, he can. I don't want to handle his beastly money!"

And Racke led the way sullenly towards St. Jim's. As yet the possibility of losing his money had not even entered his calculations. He was convinced that St. Jim's would win. That a member of the St. Jim's crew had been injured he had not the remotest idea. But he was soon to know.

CHAPTER 4.

The Ragging of Racke!

CLIVE, Cardew, and several more of the Shell and Fourth were standing talking by the gates when Tom Merry and the rest of the crew came along from the boathouse. It was plain from the serious looks on their faces that they were aware of Levison's unfortunate accident.

"I can see you chaps have heard the news," said Tom Merry, as they came up. "Seen Levison?"

"Yes. He's just gone across to the sanny," said Clive. "I say, this is rotten, Tommy! Looks sick for our chances of winning now."

"I don't know. We're not beaten yet," said Tom, though his looks belied his optimism. "We're up against it now, I know, and it won't be an easy matter to find a man to take Levison's place. Still—"

"Have you thought of anyone yet, Tommy?" asked Sidney Clive.

Tom Merry hesitated, frowning. But he decided there was no time to be lost in settling his mind upon a substitute.

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The juniors at the gate stared for a moment at the approaching cyclist, then they roared. Racke slowed down and jumped off his machine. In a moment he was surrounded by a grinning crowd. "Great Scott!" gasped Blake. "What— who is it?" "Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "It's Wacke, you fellahs!" (See page 8.)

"Yes," he replied quietly, watching the dandy of the Fourth closely. "I had thought of Cardew."

"Cardew!"

There was a gasp. Cardew himself gave a slight start.

"Little me?" he queried lightly, with a grin. "But, my dear man, have you considered the terrible risks? You know what a frightful reputation I've got. Begad! I may go off on the giddy razzle-dazzle any day! I might even—terrible thought—smoke a cigarette or two before Wednesday! Consider, fair sir, ere it be too late!"

Cardew's tone was light and his manner half-mocking. But his eyes were gleaming eagerly, and Tom Merry's keen eyes saw it.

"I'll risk that," he said. "The place is yours, if you want it, Cardew."

"My dear man, I'm no end keen. I'll don the giddy mantle of dear old Ernie with pleasure. But—but I'm afraid your choice won't be popular, dear old fellow."

"I can't help that!" said Tom, a trifle impatiently. "Providing I have your word to play up, and to refrain from acting the goat for a week, I'll be satisfied."

"My dear chap, I'll give you as many words as you want—I will, really!" said Cardew lightly. "It'll be no end of an honour to don Ernie's mantle, an' I wouldn't dream of draggin' it in the merry, old dust, you know. I'll back you up like a giddy Trojan, Tommy!"

"That's good enough, then, Cardew," replied the skipper of the Shell grimly. "I'll post you as a member of the crew at once."

And, without glancing round at the startled faces of the others, Tom Merry walked away towards the House. He was fully aware that his choice would meet with the approval of few—if any. Nobody doubted Cardew's ability as an oarsman, but everyone knew Cardew. He was a queer mixture. His slackness, his careless and utter indifference to what others thought about him was a byword. Would Ralph Reckness Cardew play the game?

Tom Merry believed that he would, and he had the courage to act upon his convictions, despite popular opinion.

Arriving in the hall, he walked straight to the notice-board,

and, running his fountain-pen through Levison's name on the list, he wrote Cardew's above it.

He had scarcely done this, and was walking away, when Racke and Crooke came hurrying indoors. Racke saw Tom Merry, and rushed up to him. His face was pale, and his eyes gleamed curiously.

"Just a minute, Merry!" he said in a low tone. "Is—is it true what Trimble's just told me—about Levison, I mean?"

"If he told you Levison was crocked—yes," said Tom, staring.

"He won't be able to row next week?"

"No."

Racke gritted his teeth.

"Was—were Lacy and Carker of the Grammar School there when it happened, Merry?" asked Racke, through his teeth. Tom Merry eyed Racke curiously.

"If you want to know—yes," he answered curtly. "In fact, it was all through those rotters that it happened!"

"About what time was it?"

"About four I think. Anything else? You seem jolly curious, Racke. Why—"

"I—I just wanted to know, that's all!" muttered Racke.

Tom Merry nodded, but he looked very puzzled as he walked away. He would have been more puzzled had he seen Racke's curious behaviour the next moment and after.

Immediately Tom Merry's back was turned, Racke's face became livid with rage. The look on his somewhat ill-favoured features startled even Crooke.

"I—I knew it!" he hissed furiously. "I knew the howling cad had some game on, Crooke! He—he knew all the time that Levison was crocked! That's why he led me on!"

"Looks like it!" assented Crooke, startled. "He's swindled us—the cad!"

"Has he?" Racke set his teeth savagely. "I don't care a hang about the cash, Crooke, but I'm not goin' to be dashed well swindled by that rotter! I'll make him call it off! I'm goin' to the Grammar School now. If he won't call it off, I'll—I'll smash the cad!"

And, without asking his chum to accompany him—a point

Crooke was thankful for—Aubrey Racke rammed on his cap again, and quitted the House in a towering rage.

A moment later he had run out his machine from the bicycle-shed, and was riding hard along Rylcombe Lane. It was just about tea-time, and fellows were streaming across the quad on their way indoors when Racke arrived at the Grammar School gates.

In the ordinary way, Racke would not have dreamed of entering the enemies' territory alone. But he was far too angry to think of the risk he ran of being ragged just then. Leaving his bicycle leaning against the lodge, he entered the gates. And, as luck would have it, almost the first fellows he saw there were Lacy and Carker, lounging about just ahead of him.

Ignoring the curious and hostile stares of the Grammarians he passed, Racke ran on and caught the two up. His hand fell upon Algernon Lacy's shoulder, and swung him round.

"Begad!" gasped Lacy. "Here, what— Oh, it's you! It's dear old Racke again!"

"Yes, it is!" said Racke fiercely. "I want to see you, Lacy! You know what about!"

Lacy winked at Carker, and grinned. "Haven't the faintest notion, my dear man," he said, "unless it's about our little flutter."

"Your dashed swindle, you mean!" snarled Racke furiously. "You knew all the time Levison was crooked! You got me to back St. Jim's, though you knew they'd lost all chance of winnin'! You've got to call it off, you dashed swindler!"

"What an idea!" smiled Lacy blandly. "My dear man, I don't deny I knew the facts. But isn't that in the game? Isn't it just making use of inside knowledge, old bean?"

"Then—then you refuse to call it off?"

Lacy chuckled. As a matter of fact, the young rascal had already made up his mind to "call it off." But he was enjoying the situation, and he intended to pull Racke's leg a bit longer yet.

"Just listen to him, Carker!" he said mockingly. "And he calls himself a sportsman! Dashed good thing— Ow! Yoop! Stop the mad fool!"

The humorous Lacy broke off with a wild howl as Racke, his patience exhausted, flung himself upon him. Almost beside himself with rage, and forgetting where he was, Racke threw himself upon Lacy, hitting out furiously. Lacy went to earth, howling.

"Here, none of that, Racke!" came the amazed voice of Gordon Gay.

And next moment the St. Jim's junior found himself in the grasp of half a dozen Grammarians.

CHAPTER 5. Racke's Resolve!

"WELL, my hat! What a thumping nerve!" ejaculated Frank Monk, staring at Racke. "Fancy having the cheek to come here pitching into one of our chaps."

"And Racke, too, of all people," grinned Gordon Gay. "What's the meaning of it?"

Lacy staggered to his feet, clasping a swollen nose, and glaring furiously at Racke. That junior glared back just as furiously; but neither answered Gay's question.

"It's something shady, I'll be bound," remarked Jack Wootton, shaking his head. "Still, that doesn't alter the fact that this unsaintly Saint has violated our territory."

"And despoiled the populace," grinned Gay, evidently referring to Lacy's nose. "He's evidently come along here looking for trouble. It would be a crying shame to disappoint him—what?"

Racke's face paled. He saw he was in for it, and he bitterly regretted his recklessness now. He began to struggle angrily, as the Grammarian's grip tightened upon him. Lacy and Carker, apparently afraid that something might come out, slunk away and left him to it.

"Bring the dear man along to the wood-shed," remarked Gordon Gay quickly. "We really must make an example of the dear Racke, or we shall have those college bounders overrunning the place. Awful cheek, I call it."

"Yes, by George!"

Despite his frantic struggles, the luckless Racke was dragged and hustled towards the wood-shed. Here, in the dim recesses, Gordon Gay rummaged for a while, and then he brought to light a tin of paint. It was red paint, and Racke eyed it uneasily.

"Better prepare the canvas first," suggested Wootton major. "Artists usually do that."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

They proceeded to make a few slight alterations to Racke's attire. His trousers were rolled up above his knees; his cuffs were taken off and refastened round his ankles. Next,

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his Eton jacket and elegant fancy waistcoat were taken off, and replaced again, inside out, with the waistcoat on top. His cap was also turned inside-out, and replaced on his head again. When this was done, Racke looked very peculiar.

But they had not finished yet. With a paint brush, Gordon Gay proceeded to paint rings round Racke's eyes—rings of red paint, while the unfortunate victim wriggled and gurgled, and struggled helplessly. This done, the leader of the Grammarians carefully wiped the brush on the wall, and dipping it into a bucket of tar, he thoughtfully tarred Racke's nose.

The effect of all this on Racke's appearance was truly remarkable. It made the Grammarians howl with laughter.

"Looks like a giddy owl, doesn't he?" observed Gordon Gay, critically viewing his handiwork. "Now bring him along to his bike."

After making sure that no masters were about, the chortling Grammarians hustled their hapless victim out of the shed. They were none too gentle with him in the process. The cheery Gordon Gay and his chums disliked Racke intensely—and they did not trouble to hide the fact. They lifted him on to his bike, and while Monk and others held him on, Gordon Gay tied his hands to the handle-bars.

"Now you can either ride, or jump off and walk," remarked Gordon Gay cheerfully. "But I should advise you to ride, old top. Give our kind regards to Tom Merry, won't you?"

And as Gordon Gay gave the bike a hefty push, Racke moved off, followed by roars of laughter from the Grammarians. It was a case of either pedalling, falling off, or jumping off. Racke chose the first. He pedalled away savagely, his face—or rather the little that wasn't already red paint and tar—white with passion.

He pedalled on until he had turned the bend in the lane, and then he slowed down, and jumping off carefully, began to tug and tear at the cords round his wrists.

But it was useless; the ragers had done their work too well. Racke gritted his teeth as he mounted again, determined to get the unpleasant journey over as quickly as possible. He rode hard, flashing past any pedestrians he overtook at top speed. But he could not escape notice for all that, and his progress along Rylcombe Lane was followed by yells of laughter.

By the time the gates came in sight, Racke's fury was almost homicidal. He groaned as his eyes fell upon a group of fellows chatting by the gates. They stared for a moment at the approaching cyclist, and then they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke slowed down by the gates and jumped off. In a moment he was surrounded by a grinning crowd.

"Great Scott!" gasped Jack Blake. "What—who is it? What a sight!"

"It—it's—bai Jove! It's Wacke, you fellahs!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, fairly blinking through his eyeglass at Racke's decorated features. "Is that weally you, Wacke, deah boy?"

"Can't you see it is!" snarled Racke, almost weeping with bitter humiliation. "You grinning fools; why don't some of you cut me loose?"

"Wathah not!" remarked Arthur Augustus emphatically. "Aftah askin' in that wude mannah, I shall uttably wufuse to do anythin' of the kind, Wacke."

And D'Arcy turned away loftily; nor did Blake and the others attempt to release Racke. They were too helpless with laughter, for one thing. But Crooke happened to be in the crowd, and he cut the cord that bound Racke's wrists to the handle-bars. The moment Racke was free, the luckless junior put his jacket, waistcoat, trousers, and cap in order, and leaving his bike with Crooke, he dashed off across the quad towards the School House.

A yell of laughter followed him, and Racke gritted his teeth. He had received no more than Tom Merry and his chums had often received at the hands of the Grammarians. But with Tom Merry & Co. it was all in the game; they took it like sportsmen.

Aubrey Racke wasn't a sportsman. He had a mean, revengeful nature, and his face was not good to look upon in more ways than one as he dashed for the bath-room. And while there, he apparently did some thinking, in addition to scrubbing. When he joined Crooke in Study No. 7 some twenty minutes later, his features, besides bearing traces of paint and tar, wore a hard and determined expression.

Crooke looked at him somewhat nervously. He badly wanted to know what had happened, but he dare not ask.

"Here you are, old man," he said, trying to speak carelessly. "I've made some fresh tea—"

"I don't want any tea!" returned Racke; and he flung himself into the armchair and sat biting his nails and glowering at Crooke.

Crooke eyed him, not a little startled. He knew Racke was not thinking of him. He also knew that though Racke's

voice was calm, he was inwardly smouldering with pent-up fury.

"I—I say, Racke," he ventured at length, "what happened? You look as if you'd been through it."

"I have," said Racke calmly, his face flushing at the memory of his humiliation. "But never mind that now, Crooke. Look here! Do you happen to know for certain which bank of the river Tom Merry will choose on Wednesday?"

Crooke stared.

"Not for certain," he answered slowly. "As they challenged, though, he has the choice, and is bound to choose the left bank. He'll have the advantage of the inside berths both at that nasty bend by the willow plantation, and at the one by the White House. He's bound to. But why—"

"Then that means the Grammar School boat will pass under the right arch of the old stone bridge—the one the workmen have been repairing—eh?"

"Of course! But—but—"

"I noticed to-day," said Racke, in a low tone, "that there's a scaffolding under that arch—a nice handy staging—just the place for us to watch the race from, Crooke. In fact," went on Racke, in a significant tone, "we could not only watch the race, but could easily drop a brick or some other dashed thing on the Grammar School boat, and sink it."

Crooke fairly blinked at his study-mate.

"I—I say, Racke," he muttered uneasily, "stow it! What do you mean?"

"Mean!" Aubrey Racke went to the door and glanced outside cautiously. He returned and faced Crooke, his eyes glittering vengefully. "I'll tell you what I mean. You saw what those Grammar cads did to me this afternoon. They made a dashed fool of me before everyone—the howling cads! And, by gad, I'm going to make 'em pay for it! But that's not all. You've guessed, of course, about Lacy?"

"He—he won't—"

"Exactly! He refuses to call it off," said Racke, through his teeth. "I never expected he would."

"The swindling cad!" hissed Crooke.

"He's all that. But," went on Racke, clenching his fists, "Lacy isn't goin' to swindle us, Crooke—I'll see to that! You'll not lose your dashed ten bob. I'm goin' to kill two birds with one stone. I'm goin' to get my own back, an' I'm goin' to see that brute Lacy doesn't swindle us!"

"But—but don't be a fool, Racke!" gasped Crooke, in alarm. "You—you can't mean to—"

"I'm not goin' to pitch bricks at the Grammar School crew, if that's what you're funky about, Crooke. But I am goin' to stop them waddin'! An', after all, it was all through the Grammar cads that Levison was crooked. It isn't right that they should win—you can't deny that, I suppose?"

"I—I suppose not," assented Crooke, licking his dry lips.

"But—but what's your plan, Racke?"

"It's not out and dried yet—I'll tell you when it is. But you've no need to book seats for the boatrice, old bean. You an' I are goin' to watch it from a front seat—in fact, from that staging under the bridge, Crooke. That's certain. And now, what about tea? I think I'll have some, after all!"

With an unpleasant grin, Aubrey Racke pulled up his chair and started tea. He ate with a good appetite, and had apparently quite got over his rage. But Crooke ate little. He knew what Racke was capable of when in one of his reckless moods, and he knew he would have to back him up. He was not at all happy at the prospect of a front seat at the boatrice. He would have been quite satisfied with a back seat where "backing up" his pal Racke was concerned.

CHAPTER 6.

The Rival Oarsmen!

THERE was a good deal of subdued excitement during the next few days at St. Jim's. No sporting event for a long time had aroused such keen interest as the coming boatrice between the rival schools—among the Lower School, at least. There was likely to be much weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth at St. Jim's if Gordon Gay's crew did win the boatrice. There had been little fear of that, however. Weren't Tom Merry's crew on the top of their form, and hadn't they already beaten the Grammarians' best time?

But with the croaking of Levison a change came over the spirit of the Saints' dream, as it were. For the first time,

then, the rank and file of the St. Jim's supporters began to visualise defeat and all it would mean. And the substitution of Cardew for Ernest Levison did not remove their pessimism by any means. As Cardew himself had foreshadowed, Tom Merry's choice proved anything but popular. In fact, it aroused the keenest resentment and foreboding.

But Tom Merry did not worry. He went on his way serene and regardless of criticism. And certainly Cardew's progress and conduct during those next few days of strenuous toil justified Tom Merry's selection. He displayed unusual punctuality in turning up at practices, and he plunged into training with the utmost vigour and enthusiasm. His masterly handling of an oar should have silenced the croakers.

But it didn't. The critics had to admit that he could row; but they could not forget that he was Cardew. They still believed he would let them down—that the cynical slacker's new-born enthusiasm would not last. It was a case of "give a dog a bad name and hang him." And there were many anxious and apprehensive faces among the crowd which foregathered to see the race on that fateful afternoon.

But they gave Tom Merry and his men a rousing welcome for all that, as the crew emerged from the boathouse. Tom Merry was smiling confidently; Monty Lowther was grinning; Cardew was looking slightly amused; but the rest looked grim and determined. All looked very fit and well, and anything but a losing crew.

"Feeling all right, you fellows?" called Talbot anxiously.

"Fit as fiddles!" smiled Tom Merry. "We're going to win, chaps!"

"What about you, Cardew?" asked Levison, who was looking on sadly, his arm in a sling. "Feeling up to it?"

"My dear man, I'm simply burstin' with energy—you've no need to worry about me!" said Cardew blandly. "I'm goin' to astonish the natives this afternoon. I sha'n't be the giddy Jonah on this trip, old boy!"

And Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled serenely around him. He was well aware how his inclusion in the crew was regarded, and the thought seemed to amuse him.

A moment later the final testing of slides and stretchers had been done, and then Mr. Railton came bustling up. Mr. Railton had undertaken to be the judge of the race.

"All ready, boys?" he asked cheerily. "Hurry up, please. You've just two minutes, Merry!"

"All ready, sir!" smiled Tom Merry. "Then you'd better start off. The Grammar School crew are waiting at the starting-point. I hope you'll give us a good race!"

"We'll do our best, sir."

And a moment later the St. Jim's crew were paddling up to the stake-boat, while the horde of juniors rushed off after

them along the towpath. Up opposite to the starting-point the bank was crowded with Grammar School followers, and the St. Jim's juniors mingled with them, exchanging good-humoured and chaffing remarks. To-morrow they might be scrapping and punching each other's noses; but to-day they were merely friendly rivals in sport.

A couple of minutes' wait while the rival boats manoeuvred into position; then Delamere, the Grammar School skipper, who was with Kildare in the stake-boat stood up.

"Are you ready?" he called out clearly. Then, after a tense moment's wait: "Go!" And simultaneous with the word, sixteen oars dipped as one, and they were off.

Both crews got away well, and a great roar of cheering accompanied them along the shining river. After the sharp, short pulls of the flying start, Tom Merry settled down to a long, steady stroke. But so also did Gordon Gay, and the two crews settled down to the grim struggle.

"Steady all!" came the shrill cry from both coxes, and for fifty yards both boats raced along, dead level. Both crews were pulling well, and so far it was anybody's race. From the rushing, jostling mass on the banks came frenzied shouts and cheers.

"Jump on it, St. Jim's!"

"Pull, you beggars—pull!"

"Oh, well rowed, Saints!"

And the Saints were rowing well—every man of them. They swung back as one man; the click of oars sounded like clockwork, and the boat seemed to lift like a living thing beneath them.

But the Grammarians were rowing well, too. Neck and neck they raced on, until suddenly a shrill yell of delight

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came from the Grammarians on the bank as the nose of their boat began to edge slowly, but surely to the front.

"Sch-ool, Sch-ool; you're leaving 'em!" It was true enough, and shrill appeals from the St. Jim's partisans were hurled at Tom Merry. But though the St. Jim's stroke realised what was happening, he still pulled with his steady, easy style, and he still smiled confidently. Then suddenly he gasped a quick command to cox; and young Curly Gibson understood.

"Now, men, pick it up!" he screamed. "Jump on it! Up, up, up! Oh, well pulled, you beggars!"

Then the onlookers saw as fine a spurt as perhaps had ever been seen on the silvery Rhyl. The boat simply flew over the water, and ate up the intervening space hungrily. The St. Jim's entreaties and exhortations changed suddenly to a triumphant roar.

But could they keep it up? Tom Merry himself wondered that. His only fear was of Cardew. Would the slacker and dandy of the Fourth be able to stick the terrific strain.

But he had no need to fear for Cardew. Up at the school, Ralph Cardew was just a lazy, lounging slacker. But here in the boat he seemed nothing but steel and whipcord and hard muscles. His blade cut squarely in with a measured rhythm and clockwork-like precision beautiful to watch.

They had recovered the lost ground now, and inch by inch the St. Jim's craft drew steadily away from their rivals. Half a length between them now, and Tom Merry knew that if only they could retain that lead until the bend by the White House the race was as good as won. For though it was a nasty bend, he had the advantage of the inside position, and he hoped to "go up" another few feet there.

And they did it. Passionately the Grammar School cox yelled to his men for a spurt. But though his men responded gallantly, it was useless. Gordon Gay had left his spurt too late, and when the bend was passed, St. Jim's had "gone up" another couple of feet.

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Half the course run now, and St. Jim's leading by three-quarters of a length! Ahead of the boats loomed the old stone bridge, and beyond that another fifty yards to go. From the banks came one continuous roar of cheers from the St. Jim's supporters. To them the race was already won.

But the race wasn't ended yet.

CHAPTER 7. A Rascally Scheme!

"RIPPIN' view from here, Croke, old bean—what?" And as he made the remark, Aubrey Racke chuckled—though it was a somewhat tremulous chuckle. The two young rascals of the Shell were lying full length upon the staging beneath one of the two arches of the old stone bridge. To enable workmen to effect much-needed "pointing" and other repairs to the stonework, a scaffolding consisting of stout baulks of timber had been built some six feet about water level; and upon this a platform had been erected. For some reason or other, work had not been started yet. It was this fact combined with the belief that the Grammar School boat would have to pass under the platform, that had given Racke his idea—an idea as ingenious as it was caddish.

Percy Mellish, of the Fourth, who was in the plot, had rowed there over an hour ago. He had then departed with instructions to return to take them off after the race, when all was clear. They had then lain down to watch and wait, and had seen the banks gradually fill with juniors from both schools, and had watched the preparations for the race. From where they lay, they had, as Racke had remarked, "a rippin' view."

But Croke, at least, wasn't enjoying the view. He realised, if Racke did not, what discovery of the plot would mean. It was, in fact, only after Racke had requested, and pleaded, and threatened in turn, that Croke had at last agreed to take part in the scheme.

Now, as he watched the rival crews being jockeyed into position, he bitterly regretted his rashness. Certainly there was little chance of being spotted from the tow-paths. The young schemers had guarded against that by erecting a barricade of loose planks at either end of the platform. But the remembrance that somehow Racke's crafty schemes always went wrong was not comforting. To add to Croke's alarm, a group of cheery St. Jim's fags, under the leadership of young Wally D'Arcy, had taken up their positions upon the bridge above their heads, and their merry laughs and chatter reached the conspirators clearly.

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"Another few seconds, old man," said Racke presently. "We'd better be getting ready."

Racke's voice was low, and thrilled with suppressed excitement. His hand shook visibly as he took from his pocket a small paper bag. From this he emptied a quantity of pepper into another bag, and handed this to the shivering Croke.

"You know what to do," he whispered. "Don't act until I give the word, though. And for goodness' sake don't show yourself."

There was little fear of Croke doing that. He took the paper bag hesitatingly; then he made a last effort to reason with Racke.

"I—I say, Racke, do drop this mad game before it's too late!" he stammered hoarsely. "We're bound to get nabbed. Besides, our chaps might win yet—without our help. Cardew—"

"Rot! I'm goin' through with it, I tell you. St. Jim's can't win. As for Cardew, he'll crack up before he's gone twenty yards. Don't be a rotten funk. We're as safe—Hallo! They're off!"

They were. There came a sudden roar of voices, and in the distance oars flashed and glistened in the sun. From Wally & Co., on the bridge, came a medley of yells and whistles.

"The fools!" hissed Racke, with a bitter sneer. "Get ready, Croke."

Croke did not speak. He licked his dry lips, his eyes staring at the approaching boats. His hand, holding the paper bag, like Racke's, was held above a narrow slit between two loose planks. Racke's plan was nothing more than to shower pepper down on to the heads of the Grammar School crew.

It was a cunning and unscrupulous plan, though none the less likely to succeed for that. As he watched the graceful craft racing towards him, propelled by sixteen healthy, lusty pairs of arms, the baseness of it all occurred even to Racke, and he flushed red with shame. But in the same moment

remembrance of the previous afternoon's humiliation came to him, and he gritted his teeth.

The roar of voices increased, and as the boats turned the bend, and he got a clearer view, Racke saw the reason.

"We're winnin'—gad! We're winnin', Croke!" he hissed.

"Then—then there's no need—"

"Fool! Of course there is! Think I'm riskin' it?" snapped Racke. "Look out! Here they come!"

The St. Jim's crew were leading by a clear length. They had scarcely shot through the next archway when Racke panted, "Now!" and shook his bag through the aperture. Croke was a second late, but his contribution was scarcely necessary.

Racke had timed it to a nicety. There came a splash of blades, echoing hollowly beneath the archway, and into that invisible cloud of pepper swept the Grammar School boat. The result exceeded even Racke's expectations.

To the onlookers the racing shell seemed to waver and shake, as though it had been struck an invisible blow.

"Steady, all! Stick it, men, stick it!" yelled their cox.

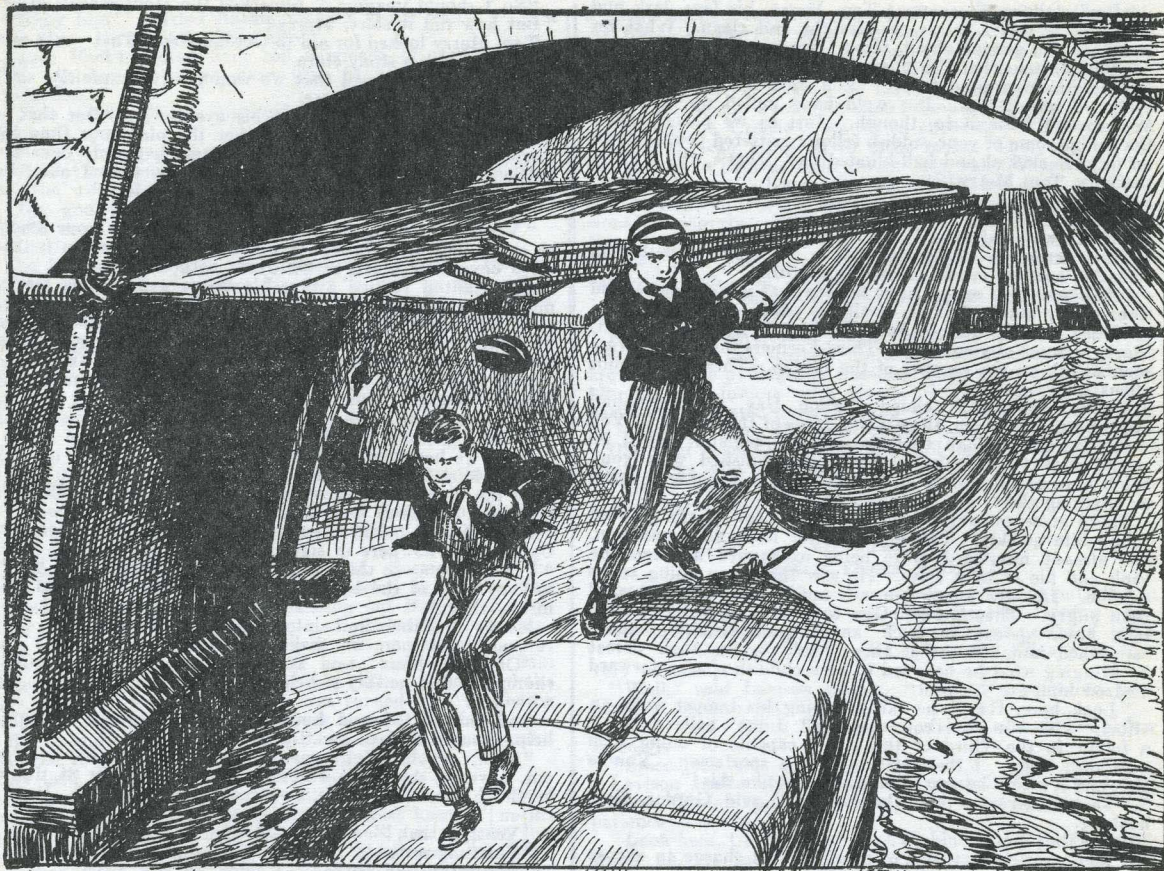
But it was exceedingly difficult to be steady, and "stick it," under the circumstances. Already exhausted, that mysterious cloud of pepper was the finishing touch. Choking, gasping, coughing, and in some cases half-blinded by the stuff, the Grammarians struggled on pluckily but helplessly.

They were utterly demoralised; their craft swayed and rocked like a ship in a storm. The next thirty yards was a wretched scramble. The cox, who, though he had suffered like the rest, also stuck pluckily to his job and managed to get them to swing together again. But by that time it was too late. The St. Jim's had passed the winning-post with three full lengths to the good.

"Gad!" breathed Aubrey Racke. "We—we've done it!"

Croke did not reply. In silence the two schemers watched the two boats, with the St. Jim's leading the way, paddle gently towards the boathouse, followed by the excited yelling crowd. There was silence on the bridge above them now. Wally & Co. had gone to join their triumphant schoolfellows on the tow-path. Racke's scheme had succeeded. But there was little triumph on his face. Like Croke, he was beginning to realise now what a caddish thing he had done. And now the excitement of it all was over he was feeling badly frightened. So far nobody had seen them they were certain. But did anyone suspect?

With white, strained faces they watched and waited. But the minutes passed, and the tow-path near the bridge became deserted. And, breathing freely again, they settled down to wait for the arrival of Percy Mellish—and freedom.



In frantic haste Racke and Crooks moved the barricade of planks. They had, scarcely finished when the barge swung into view. Racke waited until he caught a glimpse of white sacks, then he gave a shout. "Now!" he cried. "Jump for it!" The two cads jumped. (See page 13.)

CHAPTER 8.
From Rivals to Enemies!

The St. Jim's crew stepped from their craft at the boat-house, panting and exhausted but happy. They were immediately surrounded by a cheering, laughing swarm of delighted Saints. But Mr. Railton was the first to congratulate them on their unlooked for victory.

"Well rowed, Merry—well rowed, all!" he exclaimed, taking the St. Jim's stroke's hand in a hearty grip. "You have certainly earned the right to call yourselves top of the river. I hoped you would win; but I certainly did not expect such a sweeping victory as that."

"Nor did I, sir," laughed Tom Merry. "I can hardly believe it even now. I thought the Grammarians would give us a better race than that."

"It was jolly queer," remarked Kildare thoughtfully. "They seemed to crack up all at once—just after passing the bridge. Still, in my opinion they were a beaten crew then."

"I fully agree with you, Kildare," said Mr. Railton. And the Housemaster and Kildare departed, followed by a rousing cheer. Their going was the signal for another outbreak of enthusiastic hero-worship round the laughing victors.

"Here, steady!" protested Tom Merry, grinning. "My arm's already limp enough—don't shake the blessed thing off!"

But they would not be denied. They had come expecting to see St. Jim's defeated. They had witnessed an amazing and a slashing victory instead; and their delight knew no bounds. Cardew especially came in for more than his share of praise.

"You did wonders, you queer old dark horse," remarked Levison, shaking the smiling Cardew's hand. "Good job for St. Jim's I was crooked!"

"Surprisin', isn't it, dear old Ernie?" smiled Cardew blandly. "It was your giddy mantle did it. If I go on like this—Hallo! Here comes the merry Grammarians! Poor little fellows—don't they look forlorn—"

"Like a lot of giddy moulting owls!" remarked Monty Lowther. "Great pip! I do believe they've been weeping, poor dears!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price the Grammarians now?"

A chorus of chaffing remarks and cat-calls greeted the approaching Grammar School boat. Only Tom Merry was silent. He watched the rival boat uneasily. Keeping pace with their craft on the tow-path was a swarm of Grammarians. He felt instinctively that something was wrong.

The glistening blades ceased to rise and fall, and the rival boat "lay to" on the shimmering river, opposite to the St. Jim's landing-slip. Gordon Gay twisted round in his seat, and his voice came over the water.

"Tom Merry!"

"Hallo, old dear!"

"Can we come in? I've got something to say to you!"

Tom Merry's uneasiness deepened. It was quite unlike Gordon Gay's usual cheery voice. The tone was harsh and bitter.

"Certainly, Gay," replied Tom, frowning. "Make room for their boat, you fellows."

The St. Jim's shell was moved along the slip, and the rival craft came alongside. As Gordon Gay stepped onto Tom Merry advanced a step and held out his hand frankly.

"Hard lines, old man," he said quietly. "Better luck next time, though."

Gordon Gay did not appear to see the outstretched hand. "You say next time, Tom Merry," he said evenly. "That's what I've come to see you about. That race has got to be rowed again—"

"Great Scott!"

"What thumping cheek!"

"What a nerve!"

Gordon Gay stared round him calmly. His face was pale, his eyes, red-rimmed, were hard and steely.

"You've won, I admit," he said bitterly. "But you haven't won fairly. You've won by trickery—"

"What!"

It was an amazed shout. Tom Merry's face darkened.

"What do you mean by that, Gay?"

"I mean what I say," said Gordon Gay quietly. "There's been foul play, Tom Merry. I don't say on your part; I know you couldn't have had a hand in it. But the fact remains. Some of your chaps played us a dirty trick! They—"

"Don't talk rot!" snapped Tom Merry, his face dark and angry. "It was a fair race—straight and clean. What or earth are you gassing about, Gay? Are you potty?"

"I'll tell you what I'm gassing about!" said Gay, his face white with suppressed fury. "You were leading up to the bridge—I admit that. But we'd have pulled up all right. We weren't allowed to, though. Just as we passed under the bridge some of your caddish fellows scattered pepper down on us! It choked and half-blinded us! That's why we lost the race, Tom, Merry!"

"Gammon!"

"Rubbish!"

"Uttah wot, bai Jove!"

There arose a deafening chorus of scoffing, withering remarks, and the crowd pressed in angrily.

"And you—you expect us to believe that yarn?" demanded Tom Merry hotly. "Well, of all the piffle—"

"Piffle or not," put in Jack Wootton, "it's true enough, Merry! Some of your chaps—Third-Formers they were—were seen sitting on the parapet of the bridge. There's no doubt about it!"

"None whatever!" added Gordon Gay, glaring round defiantly at the angry, threatening faces of the Saints. "You won the race through trickery, and we demand that it be rowed again! If it isn't, then we've finished with you! We'll have nothing more to do with St. Jim's, either in sport or anything else! We'll cut you dead!"

There arose an angry murmur, and Tom Merry glanced round him quickly. There were bitter looks all round him, and already hot words were being exchanged between the rank and file of both sides. He saw there was going to be trouble. He was angry himself, but he was more amazed than angry. That Gordon Gay & Co. of all people should take their defeat in such an unsportsmanlike manner astonished him. But that they should excuse their defeat by bringing what he believed to be a childish charge forward amazed him.

"Look here, Gay," he said, keeping his temper with an effort, "what you say is rot—utter rot! I don't believe there's a fellow in the Third or the school capable of doing such a caddish thing. I thought you were a sportsman. You've lost, and it's not like you to take a defeat like this!"

"Then—then you don't believe us?" said Gordon Gay, flushing.

"Certainly not!"

"You—you think that I'm bringing this charge to excuse our defeat—to get it rowed again?"

"I suppose it does amount to that. But I—"

"Then there's your answer!" hissed Gordon Gay furiously.

And, almost beside himself with rage, the leader of the Grammarians struck Tom Merry across the face with his flat hand. The sound of it rang out like a pistol-shot.

There followed a moment's breathless silence. Then Tom Merry sprang forward, his face scarlet. His left shot out, and took Gordon Gay clean between the eyes. The Grammarian staggered back a step, then, with his eyes blazing, he flung himself like an infuriated tiger at the St. Jim's skipper. Next moment they were at it hammer and tongs.

It was the signal—the one spark needed to set the bonfire of the Grammarians' and the Saints' anger ablaze. In almost the twinkling of an eye several separate fights were in progress.

From every part of the towpath Grammarians and Saints came rushing up to join in the conflict. And what a conflict it was! It was the biggest fight between the two schools on record. Shell and Fourth, Third and even Fifth-Formers joined in vigorously, until towpath and stage seemed like one struggling mass of figures.

The conflict was too hot to last, though. The Grammarians were in the minority, and were suffering heavily.

Step by step they gave ground, until the rearmost found themselves, pressed by sheer weight of numbers, into the river. Then quite suddenly there came an interruption.

"Stop! Do you hear me, boys? Stop this hoodlomanism at once!"

It was Mr. Railton. He came hurrying along the towpath, his face full of alarm. Behind him were Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth.

The battle ended as if by magic. The popular Housemaster was as respected, perhaps, by the Grammarians as by his own boys. For a full minute Mr. Railton eyed the damaged and dishvelled combatants in grim silence. Then he spoke.

"I am disgusted," he remarked quietly at length, "and more than disappointed—disappointed that the boatrice has ended in—in this disgraceful riot! What does it mean, Merry?"

Tom Merry hung his head. He found it rather difficult to look at Mr. Railton, owing to possessing two swollen and highly-discoloured eyes.

"It—it was just a—a little disagreement, sir!" he stammered.

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"So I should imagine!" remarked the Housemaster dryly. "But how did it start, Merry?"

Tom Merry looked for aid to Gordon Gay. That youth met his glance with a stony stare.

"They—they claimed that we won the race unfairly, sir," he answered, after a pause.

"Ah!" Mr. Railton raised his eyebrows. "But that is nonsense! However, this is neither the place nor time for discussing the matter," he added, glancing sternly over the battlefield. "Gay, you realise, of course, that I shall be obliged to report this matter to your headmaster?"

"Ye-es, sir!" muttered Gordon Gay.

"Very well. I should advise you to return to your school at once. Kildare, Darrell, I will leave you to see to it that these boys also return to St. Jim's without delay!"

Mr. Railton rustled away, his brows grim. The Grammarians, with glares of hatred at their enemies, boarded their craft, and pulled sullenly away upstream. The crowd on the towpath began to disperse, groaning and gasping, nursing their injuries, and readjusting their disarranged attire.

"Oh, my giddy topper! What a scrap!" gasped Tom Merry ruefully. "Just look at my eye!"

"And my nose! Oh crumbs!"

"And I've lost two teeth!"

"But we beat 'em!" added Blake grimly.

"No mistake about that," agreed Tom Merry. "Let's have the blessed boat in now, you chaps! Hallo! Where's Cardew? Anybody seen Cardew?"

Tom Merry looked around him. But Ralph Reckness Cardew was nowhere in sight.

"Now I come to think of it," remarked Figgins, "I didn't see anything of the beggar during the scrap. Perhaps he's inside, though."

Monty Lowther ran into the boathouse to look. He returned next moment, shaking his head.

"Oh, blow him!" said Tom Merry irritably. "Why the thump couldn't he stay to help with the boat? Come on! Up with her!"

And they lifted and housed the boat without Cardew's help, though Kildare and Darrell lent a hand.

"Well, my hat!" groaned Tom Merry, as they started out, a weary, spirited, and disreputable band, for St. Jim's. "Who'd have thought it would all end like this? It—it's rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Fearfully rotten!"

"Too rotten for words!"

All were agreed upon that. It was rotten. The victory had turned out a hollow victory indeed. But that was not all. Gordon Gay & Co., their friendly rivals of many a hard-fought battle on playing-field and elsewhere, were now their enemies. They had liked and respected the cheery Grammarians. They had had many a good scrap, and shared many a jolly jape together, but it looked now as if all that was ended. That friendly rivalry seemed like developing into a bitter feud.

It was, indeed, rotten!

CHAPTER 9.

The Predicament of Racke & Co!

"WHAT on earth can have happened to the dashed fool?"

As Aubrey Racke muttered the words he clenched his fists furiously. It was two hours now since the schemers had watched the gradual clearing of towpath and river. But there was still no sign of Mellish, and both Racke and Crooke were growing impatient, and not a little uneasy. Supposing Mellish did not turn up—supposing—

Racke and Crooke shuddered at the bare thought.

"He—he can't have forgotten us, surely!" muttered Crooke uneasily.

"Forgotten my grandmother!" sneered Racke. "I offered the miserable cad a quid to do it, and he's too short of quids to forget that! But if he does fail us, I'll—I'll smash the little cad!"

And Aubrey Racke pitched his half-smoked-cigarette into the river below with a savage gesture. With a pack of cards and a packet of cigarettes the time had passed quickly and pleasantly enough to Racke & Co.—at first. But even those shady, dingy pursuits had begun to pall. Besides, two hours was a long time. If Mellish was coming, he ought to have arrived long ago.

The two Shell fellows could not understand it. Of the startling events at the boathouse they were, of course, in utter ignorance. They could see as far as the bend in the river only; beyond that the dark mass of Rylcombe Woods hid the boathouse and the river from their view. Certainly the fact that they had scarcely seen a soul on river or towpath was curious enough, especially on a half. But that was all the more reason why Mellish should have appeared before now. He had been instructed to come when the coast was clear.

“Hang him!” snarled Racke, looking at his watch. “It’s gone five. He can’t be long now.”

Again Racke peered over the barricade of planks hopefully. As he did so he gave vent to an exclamation of satisfaction.

“He’s coming!” he muttered joyfully. “There he is, Crooke!”

Crooke scrambled up eagerly and looked. Sure enough, a small boat containing a single oarsman was creeping slowly past the wooded banks.

“Oh, good!” breathed Crooke, with overwhelming relief. “We’ll soon be out of this beastly hole now!”

But Crooke had spoken too soon.

The fellow in the boat was Mellish undoubtedly. He was pulling along, steering “by his toes”; and he was doing both operations very badly. But he reached the end of the woods at last, and then an astonishing thing happened.

A white-clad form suddenly emerged from the bushes at the water’s edge, and hailed the oncoming boat. Startled, they saw Mellish stop rowing, and look round. Then followed the sound of voices, and, to their alarm, they saw Mellish pull into the bank.

“The fool!” grated Racke savagely. “Oh, the silly fool! Who on earth is it? It’s one of our fellows—”

“It—it looks like Cardew!” muttered Crooke, in alarm.

“I—I say, Racke, he—he can’t have tumbled—”

“How could he, you idiot!” snapped Racke impatiently.

“He—he’s only askin’ Mellish for a lift. If Mellish has any sense— Oh, my hat!”

Racke broke off, and his face paled. Scarcely had the boat touched the bank when the white-clad figure was seen to spring in, sending the craft dancing out into the stream. They saw Mellish gesticulating, and obviously protesting; then they saw Cardew—if Cardew it was—act swiftly.

He plucked Mellish from his seat, and dropped him without ceremony into the sternsheets. Then he grasped the oars, and next moment the boat was turned, and was being propelled with vigorous strokes back towards the boathouse.

Racke and Crooke, petrified with alarm and astonishment, watched it go with feelings too deep for words.

At last, however, Racke found his voice.

“Oh, the howling cad—the rotten brute!” he muttered hoarsely. “Then—then he knows; he must know.”

“I don’t see it. It may just be chance; it may be just a lift he wanted as you said, Racke,” said Crooke hopefully.

“Then what was he doin’ hiding in that bush—tell me that? I tell you he knows! You know what a crafty brute he is! Don’t you see his game? He’s goin’ to leave us stranded. It’s just the sort of thing the cad would do. Oh, the brute!”

And Racke clenched his teeth in impotent rage.

Crooke’s face was white as chalk. It certainly did look as if Cardew knew, or suspected something. If so, then Crooke felt certain Racke was right. He knew Cardew’s peculiar sense of humour only too well. It would be just like the cynical, sarcastic Cardew to punish them by leaving them stranded on the platform.

“But—but he can’t—he daren’t leave us here all night!” gasped Crooke, almost tearfully.

“Of course he would, hang him!” said Racke bitterly.

“He’s mad, I tell you—mad! He’d glory in doin’ it. Can’t you imagine the howling cad sayin’ nothin’ to anyone, an’ grinnin’ up his sleeve when everybody’s askin’ where we are? Gad! But I’ll make that funk Mellish sit up for this! Why didn’t the little sneak put up a fight?”

“Perhaps he’ll come back yet,” said Crooke huskily. “He knows better than let us down. He’ll give Cardew the slip, and try again.”

“If that brute will let him!” sneered Racke.

But his tone was hopeful again. There was still a chance that Mellish would give Cardew the slip, and try again later. And the two settled down again to watch and wait.

But that hope proved a futile one. Another miserable hour passed—two hours—during which time the two plotters alternately rested and paced their uncomfortable perch like imprisoned tigers. The shadows deepened over the river. A damp, cold mist began to rise from the water to add to their misery. But there was still no sign of Mellish.

Stiff and aching in every bone, Racke jumped up at last.

“Look here, Crooky, we’ve got to do something!” he said wildly. “We can’t stay here all night. We’ll have to shout, even if it all does come out!”

“It—it will mean the sack if it does!” faltered Crooke.

“Let it!” snapped Racke desperately. “Shout, you fool!”

And Racke set the example with a half-hearted yell for help. But pedestrians were few and far between in Rylcombe Lane—after lock-up at St. Jim’s, at least. There was no answer. Racke was just about to shout again, when he paused. To his ears had come the measured beat of engines.

“It’s a barge!” grunted Crooke. “No luck!”

But Racke thought different. Coming downstream was

a small, ancient tug, with an equally ancient barge in tow. As Racke’s eyes fell upon the barge his face lit up.

The hatches were off, showing piled-up sacks of flour. The sight of them presented to Racke a desperate chance of escape. To jump down on the sacks as the barge passed underneath them seemed to Racke beautifully easy.

“I’ve got it, Crooke!” he hissed excitedly. “That dashed barge! We can jump on to those sacks. Then we can tip the barge to land us somewhere. My hat! What luck!”

“But—but—” began Crooke. Then his eyes gleamed, and he nodded. “Jolly good scheme, Racke, old man!” he went on eagerly. “Those sacks look as soft as cushions.

But, I say, supposing they go under the other arch— My hat, no! They never do—the water’s too shallow under the other arch. Oh, good!”

“We’ll do it, then, Crooke! It’s better than stayin’ here all the dashed night! Quick!”

In frantic haste, they began to move the barricade of planks. They had scarcely finished when the tug, its funnel lowered, came puffing and clanking under the staging, almost blinding the juniors with clouds of black smoke. It was past in a moment, however, and was followed by a length of tow-rope. Then the prow of the barge swung into view.

One brief second Racke waited, until he caught a glimpse of white sacks, and then he gave a shout.

“Now! Jump for it!”

And Racke and Crooke jumped.

CHAPTER 10.

Cardew Thinks it Over!

LEIVISON and Clive were standing chatting outside the Common-room door just after prep that evening when Cardew joined them. There was an amused smile on Cardew’s face, and Levison and Clive eyed him very curiously.

“Well,” said Levison grimly, “finished dry-nursing your new pal Mellish yet, Cardew?”

“Oh, yes! Since lock-up, in fact!” drawled Cardew serenely.

“Since lock-up! But—but why—”

Levison broke off a trifle impatiently. The bland and cynical Cardew put a severe strain on even his chums’ patience at times.

“Look here, Cardew,” he went on bluntly. “You’ve something on. It isn’t like you to pal on with a chap like Mellish for nothing. Trimble’s telling everybody you’ve been hanging on to Mellish all the evening—wouldn’t let him out of your sight, in fact. What’s the game?”

“My dear man, it isn’t a game!” said Cardew. “The fact is, you fellows, I’ve suddenly realised what a fine chap dear old Mellish is; that’s why I’ve been cultivating his nearer acquaintance this evenin’. You’ve no idea what a charming chap he is—no end amusin’!”

“Rats, you silly ass!” grunted Clive. “He’s a sneaking little toad, and you know it. What’s your reason for doing it, Cardew?”

Cardew smiled.

“It’s like this, old beans!” he remarked, with a chuckle.

“I happened to meet dear old Percy pullin’ up-river alone this afternoon. Now you fellows know that Mellish is about as safe alone in a boat as a hippopotamus in a walnut-shell. In fact, I was so concerned for his safety, that I turned him back an’ saw him home safely.”

“But that’s all rot—”

“Not at all, my dear man! Trimble will tell you I came home with him.”

“But that doesn’t explain—”

“Yes, it does. You see,” explained Cardew blandly. “I rather fancied friend Percy might feel inclined to risk his life again in a merry old boat this evenin’ if he wasn’t watched. That’s why I pressed my chammain’ society on him. So I clung to him—closer than a brother, in fact. Comprenez-vous, old beans?”

But Clive and Levison did not understand. They stared more curiously—and suspiciously—than ever at their chum. That Mellish had ventured out alone in a boat astonished them. But why Cardew of all fellows should attempt to stop him passed their comprehension. But before they could pass any further remarks Tom Merry joined them.

“Seen Racke and Crooke anywhere, you fellows?” he asked.

“No!” said Clive. “Haven’t they turned up yet?”

“Not yet; Railton’s getting anxious. I suppose you haven’t seen ‘em, Cardew?”

“My dear man, fancy askin’ little me!” said Cardew lightly. “But if I might make a suggestion—”

“Well?”

“Why not inquire at the police-station? The bright young blades may have ‘been paintin’ the merry old village red an’ got themselves run in—”

"Ass!"

"If you don't find 'em there," went on Cardew, unmoved, "I shouldn't worry my little head about them. They'll come home with the milk in the mornin' all right."

And Cardew was moving leisurely away, when he stopped abruptly, with a little gasp. In the School House doorway had suddenly appeared an apparition—or rather two apparitions. There were two juniors, and they were covered from head to foot with a whitish powder.

Ralph Reckless Cardew fairly blinked at them.

"Oh gad!" he murmured. "Why—how—it's—it's—"

"Racke and Crooke!" gasped Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! How on—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors burst into a roar of laughter as the two dishevelled and flour-covered juniors limped miserably towards them. Evidently Racke and Crooke had found the sacks in the barge much more floury and much more unlike cushions than they had expected.

"Great Scott, Racke!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "How on earth did you get into that state—and where have you been?"

"Mind your own business, hang you!" snarled Racke; and he was pushing past the grinning juniors when Mr. Railton, evidently attracted by the laughter, came rustling up. He stared at Racke and Crooke like one transfixed.

"What—who—Racke, Crooke!" he gasped. "So—so you have returned? Where have you been to—and how did you get yourselves into that disgusting state?"

Racke's answer was—to the juniors, at least—suspiciously prompt.

"We've been assaulted, sir!" he muttered. "Some—some fellows captured us, and shoved us in flour-sacks. And—and we've only just got loose. It—it wasn't our fault, sir!"

"Bless my soul! I should imagine not!" said the House-master dryly. "However, this must be investigated. Who—who assaulted you in this scandalous manner, Racke?"

"They—they didn't give us the chance to see their faces, sir," muttered Racke slowly. "But—but I think they were Grammarians!"

"Ah!" Mr. Railton frowned and nodded. Being fully aware of the incessant japing that went on between the two schools, and in view of what had happened that afternoon, he saw no reason to doubt Racke's statement. "Very well," he went on grimly. "Under the circumstances, of course, I can hardly punish you. I will, however, report the matter to Dr. Holmes, who is making a report of the disturbance this afternoon to the Grammar School headmaster. You had better go and clean yourselves without delay."

And Mr. Railton walked away towards the Head's study, frowning.

"You—you rotter, Racke!" hissed Tom Merry, in disgust. "What did you want to give the Grammarians away for? You sneak!"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Racke once again; and he was turning away with Crooke, when he caught Cardew's mocking glance fixed upon him.

"Dear old Racke!" remarked Cardew affectionately. "What bright flashes of inspiration you do get! Did you get a good view of the boatrace, Racke, old top?"

"You—you rotter!" breathed Racke.

And with a glare of hate and fear at the smiling Cardew, Aubrey Racke walked after Crooke, his floury features drawn and haggard. There was no mistaking the hidden meaning in Cardew's last question, and Racke shuddered with dread. That Cardew was the fellow who had prevented Mellish

from rescuing them, he had little doubt now. They had escaped one danger—they had thrown dust into Mr. Railton's eyes with the yarn of an assault by Grammarians—but the thought that Cardew knew their secret, and at any moment might open his lips and expose them was terrifying.

Neither Racke nor Crooke slept well that night. In the evening Racke had interviewed Mellish—with a cricket-stump—and what that luckless youth had divulged only increased their dread. It was Cardew! But why didn't Cardew blab? Why, if he knew their secret, didn't he expose them? Racke and Crooke couldn't understand it.

CHAPTER 11.

Cardew Speaks Out!

CARDEW of the Fourth was observed to be looking very thoughtful all during morning lessons the next day. Clive and Levison, his study-mates, noticed it, and spoke to him about it after dinner.

"Blessed if I can understand what's come over you, Cardew!" said Levison, eyeing his chum keenly. "What are you looking so thumping mysterious about lately? Is it something about this rowing affair?"

Cardew eyed his chums reflectively for a moment; then he nodded sadly.

"It is," he rejoined smoothly. "I'm worried—no end worried. An' I'd like the benefit of your excellent advice, old tops. If a chap's made a mistake, an' he knows he's made a mistake, what should a fellow do?"

"Why, try to put it right, of course!" retorted Clive abruptly.

"Good!" said Cardew. "Then I'll do it. Comin', old beans?"

And, without waiting for his chums to reply, Cardew strolled away, and they followed wondering. At the end of the passage Tom Merry and a group of juniors were standing in gloomy conversation together. Cardew joined them carelessly.

"What a gloomy set of owls—a bright, cheery afternoon like this, too!" he remarked, eyeing them quizzically. "Still worryin' about the merry old Grammarians, Tommy?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"That and something else!" he grunted. "I've just heard that the Head's thinking of putting the village out of bounds, Cardew."

"Because of what happened yesterday?"

"Yes."

Cardew whistled.

"My dear Tommy, then that settles it!" he said, shaking his head. "You'll have to heal the merry old wound—you'll have to offer to row the race again—you will really!"

"We would be asses if we did. You don't believe that yarn about the pepper, do you, Cardew?"

"Every word of it, old top!"

"Then you're a silly ass!" said Tom bluntly. "There wasn't any pepper; it was just a feeble excuse—"

"My dear man, that's quite a mistake; there was," said Cardew. "I saw it myself. In fact, I happen to know the pepper merchants, too."

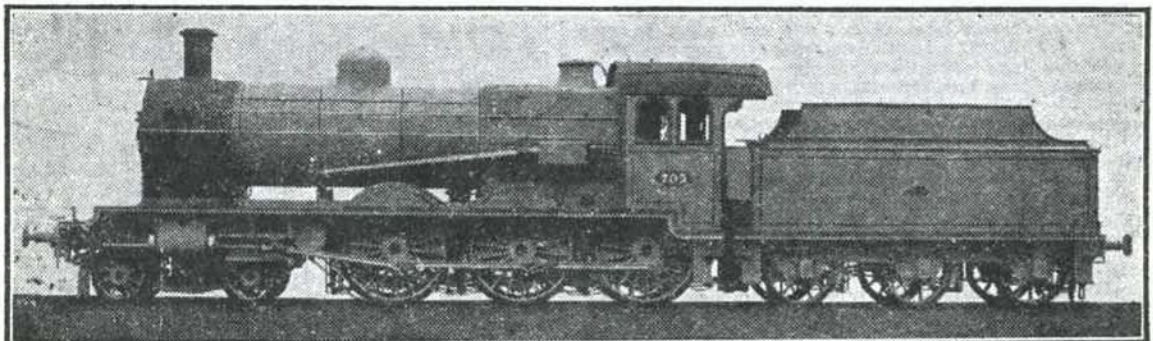
"What?"

"Look here, Cardew!" put in Levison quietly. "You seem to know a lot about it. What do you know? Let's have it!"

"Aren't I tellin' you?" complained Cardew. "Do give a fellow a chance! While you fellows were wastin' time

(Continued on page 18.)

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The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited by TOM MERRY.

Tales of the St. Jim's Sleuth.

Told by Jack Blake.

NOTE.—We are not giving away the identity of our tame private investigator. He is a junior, and one of us, and has established himself as a regular amateur detective. All little mysteries that crop up at St. Jim's are taken to him, and the stories of his cases from time to time will make interesting reading.

THE RISING-BELL MYSTERY.

CLANG! Clang! Clang!
The strident clashing of the rising-bell tolled upon the morning air at St. Jim's, awakening the slumberers in the dormitories and bed-rooms.

"Yaw-aw-aw!" yawned Tom Merry, sitting up in bed and stretching. "I feel dashed tired! Groooh! Tumble up, chaps—that's rising-bell!"

"Rats!" said George Alfred Grundy, looking at his wrist-watch. "It's only half-past six. We've another hour before rising-bell."

"Your watch must be wrong, old chap!" replied the captain of the Shell cheerfully. "There's no mistaking rising-bell. Get up, slacker!"

Grundy, still persisting that his watch was not wrong, arose from bed and dressed. The Shell were not slackers, and were soon out of the dormitory—although, curiously enough, a number of them showed peculiar signs of sleepiness!

Jack Blake & Co. were on the stairs, yawning.

"Groooh! Hallo, you chaps! I feel jolly tired!" said Blake. "Blessed if I can make it out—we're all sleepy!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking at his famous ticker. "It's not seven o'clock yet, deah boys! There's somethin' w'ong!"

"Must be your watch, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther.

"Wathah not, deah boy!" said Gussy indignantly. "My tickah is reliable, and—"

"My watch agrees with Gussy's," said Levi-son quietly. "It's not seven yet!"

All the fellows who had watches consulted them, and, sure enough, they were all more or less in agreement.

By this time fellows were emerging from other dormitories and bed-rooms, yawning and stretching. Many of them were glaring perplexedly at their watches.

"This settles it!" said the St. Jim's sleuth, looking round upon his schoolfellows. "The rising-bell went an hour too soon, and we have all been unnecessarily dragged from our beds!"

"Bai Jove!"

"That idiot Taggles must have underslept himself, and rung the giddy rising-bell an hour too soon!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "My hat! Let's go over and scrag the old buffer!"

Quite a crowd of indignant fellows surged downstairs and crossed the quadrangle to Taggles's lodge. The ancient porter was standing by the gate, scratching his head.

"Taggles, you old idiot, what do you mean by getting us up an hour early?" howled several voices wrathfully.

"Which Hi didn't ring that 'ere rising-bell!" exclaimed Taggles, blinking round. "I was in my room when it went. Wot I says is this 'ere, it's a joke of one of you young rips, and if I catches 'im—"

"Whew!" whistled Tom Merry. "Then it wasn't Taggy, after all! We—we've been japed!"

The whole school was up, of course, by now, and everybody was amazed at the news. Some audacious person had rung the rising-bell at half-past six, and got St. Jim's out of bed an hour too soon!

The St. Jim's sleuth soon set about investigating the mystery, for a thorough scragging was promised the delinquent when he was caught.

He went into the little room where the bell-rope hung, and examined everything in there. Outside this room was a lobby and a number of passages leading to some cellars.

It was interesting to watch our sleuth tracing footprints around these passages.

"It's pretty evident that the fellow who rang this bell did not belong to St. Jim's," he announced, coming outside at last. "From the tracks of the marauder's footprints, I gather that he was a stranger to the place, and walked in several wrong directions before he discovered the room where the bell-rope was."

"Bai Jove! That's awfully clevah of you, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

The sleuth immediately went over to the gates, walked out into the Rylcombe Lane, and examined the school wall in several likely places.

"Here's proof!" he said, pointing to some scratches on the wall. "Somebody has been over this wall within the last hour! He met several others outside here, and they made off together. We shan't have to look much farther than the Grammar School for the merry japer who rang our rising-bell!"

"My hat! Of course, it's just the sort of thing those blighters, Gordon Gay & Co., would get up to!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Kim on, chaps; we may catch 'em!"

An expedition then set out for the Grammar School, many of the fellows thoughtfully providing themselves with cricket-stumps and sticks.

PAID IN FULL.

Gordon Gay, the two Woottons, Carboy, and Frank Monk were standing by the cross-roads in the Rylcombe Lane, chatting, when Tom Merry & Co. came up. They greeted the St. Jim's fellows with many chuckles.

"Hallo! You chaps are up early!" grinned Gordon Gay. "Out for a constitutional?"

"No; we're out to find the merry joker who rang our rising-bell an hour early this morning!" said the sleuth, striding forward and gripping the Grammarian leader by the arm. "And I reckon I've got him here. Look at his elbow, you chaps. See that mark of whitewash on it? He rubbed it against the whitewashed wall of the room where the bell-rope is! It's as plain as a pike-staff!"

"Bowled out, you bouncer!" howled Monty Lowther. "Good old sleuth! Blessed if we'd have thought of that!"

Gordon Gay & Co. proceeded to struggle violently, but against such heavy odds they were powerless.

The chums of St. Jim's bore them down in the dust, and sat on them.

"Got you, my beauties!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Now for a little bit of our own back! Some of you chaps run over to that barn in the field opposite, and see if you can scrounge some rope and cord. Also, appropriate some of those bricks that are lying around there."

Much to Gordon Gay & Co.'s wonderment, bricks and ropes and cords were fetched behind them, and their feet also were tied together so that it was impossible for them to kick.

"Now, off with their boots!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We'll make 'em walk on—on bricks! Just tie a brick to the underneath of each of their feet—see?"

"You—you rotters!" spluttered Gordon Gay, as his rivals proceeded to remove his shoes. "You—you dare fix bricks on my feet—"

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

The Grammarians were powerless to resist. Each of them had a brick roped securely to each of his feet, so that the bricks would not come off. Their shoes and boots were tied round their necks, and then their legs were released and they were allowed to stand up.

Gordon Gay & Co. kicked wildly, but they could not get rid of those bricks. They were just like cats in patters!

"Now, then home you go!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Mind how you step, Gordon, dear boy! Ha, ha, ha!"

Clump, clump, clump! went the bricks, as the luckless Grammarians trod lumberingly away.

Tom Merry & Co. shrieked—they couldn't help it. The sight of Gordon Gay & Co. clumping along the road with their feet on bricks was too funny for words.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay & Co. uttered the most sulphurous threat upon our devoted heads, but that made no difference, of course! They clattered onward, followed by howls of laughter from their victorious rivals.

The St. Jim's sleuth was clapped heartily on the back for his prowess.

"Sherlock Holmes isn't in it with you, old man!" said Tom Merry heartily. "We caught those bouncers on the hop, didn't we—and we've sent them back on the hop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The affair didn't get to the masters' ears, but the whole school yelled over it, and whenever Gordon Gay & Co. were seen again in public after that, they were chipped unmercifully about the bricks!



Gordon Gay & Co. kicked wildly, but they could not get rid of the bricks which were roped securely to their feet. Clump, clump, clump! they went, as the luckless juniors trod lumberingly on.

START READING THIS GRAND SERIAL NOW!



The Story of a Lad's Uphill Fight for Fame and Fortune. By DUNCAN STORM.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

JIM READY, a sturdy lad of fourteen, having seen his last friend laid to rest, is left all alone in the great world of chance. He is leaving the cemetery gates, when he butts up against

A KINDLY STRANGER (John Lincoln), the principal governor of the great school of St. Beowulf's, who had been watching him at the funeral.

The two walk along the road together, and Jim tells his new-found friend that he intends starting work at the brickfields in Dennington. The stranger smiles, and tells Jim it is education he needs first. He then withdraws a piece of parchment from his pocket, and, after signing it, hands it to Jim. It is a free pass into the great school. Jim is to take his chance as a Lincoln scholar at St. Beowulf's.

Jim gets a warm reception from the bullies of the school, but the decent fellows welcome him, drinking to his health that night in Hall. After this ceremony Professor Faux de Blanqueres, the French master, enters, and presents his model flying-machine.

Jim finds a friend in Wobygong, a plucky lad from Australia, and the master of a pet kangaroo, Nobby. Wobby is giving a lantern show, when Nobby makes a bolt out of the window. The boys follow by the same exit, and mounting some hunters on which the scholars of St. Beowulf's are put through the riding-school, they give chase. Up hill and down dale travelled Nobby, with the mounted juniors hot on his trail.

"We'll run him down on the sands!" cries Wobby, as the horses galloped out of the valley on to the beach.

(Now read on.)

The Mysterious Lights.

THE flat, smooth sands under the towering chalk cliffs seemed to suit Nobby. He bounded along at a tremendous pace, and soon the boys were flogging their horses along at full speed to keep him in sight.

These were tiring now, though Aeroplane was roaring like a brass band, and Gladye Gladys was lathering and panting.

Now and then the riders lost sight of their quarry altogether, the white sheet dissolving against the cliffs and great piles of fallen chalk.

"Tide is well down," said Wobby. "Maybe he'll lead us right round the headland. I've had a good many kangaroo hunts, but I've never had one like this. Dad will be interested when I write and tell him all about it. We've done fourteen miles now, and at full speed, too. Keep the tambourine a-rolling, boys; we'll have the catliff yet!"

They had a sight of the red-and-white flash of the lighthouse up on the headland. As they approached it, they saw that the tide was coming in. The wide stretch of sands narrowed, and they could hear the monotonous splash of the waves close upon them.

Nobby kept on rounding the headland and going like a steamer.

Soon they were splashing in six inches of

sea-water that the breakers sent flying in over the sands. This began to worry the runaway.

"Now we've got him!" cried Wobby excitedly. "I'll rope him up if we have to swim the horses!"

They gained on the kangaroo rapidly now. He could be heard flopping and splashing through the water close ahead of them.

"He's going like a steamer duck!" cried Wobby. "Ah, got you! You peb—you peb of the beach!"

Nobby had had enough of it. The rising tide had beaten him. He sat up in the water with his paws hanging down, waiting for his master, with a pleading look in his dark-brown eyes, as much as to say:

"Go easy, master! I'm beat!"

"Come up, you rascal!" cried Wobby. And leaning from his saddle, he caught Nobby by his collar, and hoisted him across his saddle-bow.

Nobby made no protest. It was plain that he was accustomed to being picked up in this fashion. But Aeroplane, unaccustomed to kangaroos as baggage, kicked and plunged in the cold waters of the rising tide.

"Steady, you brute!" cried Wobby, mastering his steed with wonderful horsemanship. "You've got to carry this tug home, so you may as well get used to him. Now, what about it, boys?"

He looked back, and then forward.

"Water come up plenty!" said Lal Singh.

"We shall get caught round the Head," said Jim.

"It's as bad to go back as to go forward," said Wobby. "We'll go ahead. Come on, chaps! If the worst comes to the worst, we can swim the horses. You can always swim a horse!"

Nothing seemed to daunt Wobby. Yet the situation of the boys was anything but a safe one.

The tide was rising fast, and a night wind had sprung up, increasing the sea that was playing on the beaches below the headland.

Already the tide was up to the foot of the chalk cliffs, and they had to steer clear of the base of these, because of the great fallen boulders. They had near a mile to go before the cliffs fell back into Cockleshell Bay.

The water was over the knees of the weary horses. They plunged and stumbled along. Now and then a wave larger than the others would give them a wash, making them stagger.

Nobby, the kangaroo, appeared quite exhausted. He lay still in front of Wobby, hanging limp across the saddle-bow.

"We'll have to swim for it!" said Jim.

The water rose higher and higher till it reached the horses' girths, and the great wall of the cliff seemed to push them towards the dark sea.

"Think of it!" muttered Wobby. "If this silly gink hadn't hopped it out of the window, we might all be asleep in our warm beds now!"

"We be warm enough to-morrow morning," said Lal Singh thoughtfully. "We catch good ole smack for to-night!"

"We aren't caught yet!" answered Wobby cheerfully. "Looks as if we are more likely to be drowned than to get a swishing. My word, boys, did you hear those gipsies howl when old Nob stounded their fire for them? There will be all sorts of tales of ghosts round the countryside to-morrow!"

"Plenty more tale of ghost suppose we drown," said Lung, not too cheerfully, for his horse was nearly swimming now.

"Oh, I've been in some tighter places than this," replied Wobby. "I was once caught in a freshet on the Woolooloo River, and, I can tell you that when it rains in Australia, it does rain. The river came down like a wall. This is nothing to it!"

"Water him warm in Australia. Water him too cold here!" said Lal Singh, whose teeth were chattering.

"That's the worst of you Indians!" said Wobby. "You eat too much rice and muck; you don't get any stuffing into you. To shake hands with one of you is like shaking hands with a fresh haddock! Your hands are flabby and cold. What you want is good, strong nourishing diet. You want keeping up—five meals a day! Hallo!"

Aeroplane seemed to rise from the water.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Wobby. "We've found a bank!"

He was quite correct. Aeroplane had stumbled on a long spit of sand higher than the rest. Following this, they made their way to the shores of Cockleshell Bay.

There was no more steam left in the horses. They ambled along wearily, thoroughly pasted by their long, hard run.

"Horses are tuckered out!" said Wobby. "But we've had a most enjoyable little trip round the country. I don't think old Nobby will want to run away from us again. There's one thing, if we follow the path up from the bay, we're near the Round of Beef and Carrots, and will not be far off the old school. We can just put the horses back nice and quiet, give them a rub down, and then run the rabbit with Nobby back to the little old school, and nobody will be any the wiser."

"What are you going to do about Nobby?" asked Jim.

"Why, he's quiet enough now," replied Wobby cheerfully. "We'll hoist him back into the dormitory, then I'll warm up some water in a spirit-stove, and put him back in his sack with a hot-water bottle to warm him up. Nobby won't take any harm. He's tough—a regular peb, Nobby is!"

Wobby, like a general, led his party inland. With an instinctive eye for country, he made no mistake, but led them back to the rear of the stables without faltering, following the grassy, silent paths between the orchards.

They led their horses into the stables. Wobby taking the precaution to fasten a line to his pet's collar. Then they rubbed the

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horses down carefully, having off-saddled and unbridled them. Never were four horses more surprised to find themselves back in their stalls than were these four gallant steeds.

"This is a funny old country!" said Wobby, chuckling under his breath, as he made Aeroplane's toilet with practised hands in a manner that showed that he had rubbed down many a hundred horses in his time. "It's a funny little old country, this England. I bet the yarn will go round to-morrow that these four nags have been witch-riden. Now, boys, it's back to the school. We want a rub-down like the horses, or we'll catch chills and fever!"

Carefully, and by a roundabout way, they approached the school.

The kangaroo was quiet enough now. He followed Wobby like Mary's little lamb.

Wobby found a way through a break in the hedge surrounding the school grounds, then he led his chums towards the back of the school, through which he looked to make an easy entrance.

They would come past Abbot's Room, and slip round through Dark Alley. Then they would get a chance of getting under the windows of Dormitory No. 4.

"Supposing all the chaps have gone to sleep?" whispered Jim. "They must be fed up with waiting for us!"

"That's all right!" answered Wobby serenely. "I told Tennessee to tie a string round his neck, and to drop the end through the window. I just pull the string, and Tennessee dreams that he is being hung, same as he will be one of these days if he don't watch it. Then he wakes up and drops us the rope. Savvy? It's all as easy as eating pie! Now be quiet; we are right in the enemy country. If old Blackbeard-the Pirate wakes up, we are gone coons! We can throw up the towel without a question. We have done our dash!"

They made their way very quietly along the walls of the old school.

All of a sudden Wobby, who was leading, came to a sudden stop in the shadow of a great clump of laurels.

"A light!" he whispered. "A light!"

"Where?" breathed Jim.

"In the Abbot's Room!" whispered Wobby.

"Is it the doctor, I wonder?" asked Jim.

"Dunno!" replied Wobby. "But me heart would go down to me feet if they weren't so shrunk and cold! Hold the kangaroo, pardner, while I get forwards, and do a look, see. It may be the doc., or it may be burglars!"

A thrill of excitement ran through the boys. They knew that in the Abbot's Room, the doctor's own study, were stored many valuable objects. There was not only a collection of rare gold coins there, but numerous specimens of ancient jewellery—Roman, Saxon, and Norman. Any burglar who could make an entry into the Abbot's Room was sure of a rich prize.

"Stay right here, you chaps," whispered Wobby, in a parting injunction. "Don't show yourselves. If it's the doctor, 'nuff said. We wangle round to the other side of the building. This is not our trail. If it's burglars, maybe we can wipe out the whole of to-night, no matter what happens."

He stole off towards the latticed panes of the Abbot's Room, making his way in a most wonderful fashion, for, as a stalker, Wobby had few equals.

The party could see a small flashlight moving in the room, for once or twice it's gleams caught on the diamond panes of glass, making them shine like single jewels.

Nobby, the kangaroo, was as good as gold. He did not tug on the cord that was tied to his collar. He sat on his tail peacefully, watching the crawling form of Wobby with interested eyes.

Soon Wobby had gained the shelter of one of the grey old stone buttresses of the school. He stole round this, and got under the window behind which the mysterious light was showing. He had his boomerang, his only weapon, under his arm. Very slowly he raised his head. That strange light was dodging round in the great room like a glow-worm in a forest. It was certainly the light of a shielded electric torch.

"It's no doctor!" breathed Wobby to himself. "Doctor isn't such a piccan as to come out of his bye-bye at this time in the morning. Yet he might have left his pipe down in the Abbot's Room, and is looking round for it. I've often heard dad come down at nights, and stub his toes in the dark, looking for his pipe when he could not get to sleep!"

The light flickered round fitfully. There

was certainly someone moving about the room, stealthily groping here and there.

Presently the light fell upon a hand that was outstretched over one of the numerous glass cases in the room.

Wobby could only see the hand. It was like a ghost hand. It did not appear to be attached to any body. It was hovering over the lock of the glass case.

Then another tiny light made its appearance, fitting towards that illuminated hand.

Then the two lights seemed to come together, and two hands showed in the small circle of their illumination.

There was the gleam of some steel instrument at the lock of the case.

"That settles it!" muttered Wobby; and, snakelike, he melted along the wall, and crawled back to his anxious companions.

"Boys," he said solemnly, "we are in luck. The night's entertainment is not yet over. It's burglars! They are milking the doctor's gold-mine. We will surround and fall upon the catiffs!"

He led the way, taking Nobby by the collar.

Nobby seemed to know that he was to make no noise, for he got along without flopping.

"Good!" muttered his master. "Good boy! Got more brains than many!"

Ducking, the boys kept below the level of the windows of the Abbot's Room till they came upon the window through which the burglars had forced their entrance.

The iron frame of the lattice had been forced, and the leadwork of the diamond panes was bulged and out of shape. It was plain that these two cracksmen inside were well acquainted with the school. They had not attempted the great oak and iron door of the Abbot's Room, but had slipped in from the open country.

There were two large buttresses on each side of the forced window, and behind these Wobby hid his troops to wait until the burglars had done their job and were ready to come through the window to make their escape.

Wobby knew well that he could not use his chief weapon, the boomerang, in the room; so he was content to bide his time crouching below the windows and watching those mysterious lights.

There was no doubt that these were experienced cracksmen, for they wore kid gloves to avoid finger-prints. They were not loading themselves up with anything that was not of value to them. They had the doctor's case of Saxon gold coins open now, and were examining each coin as they took it. Some they rejected as worthless to the melting-pot.

Then there was a soft crackling sound in the darkness, and they moved on to the case of golden torques and collars of the Saxon and Danish periods.

There was a muttered exclamation of pleasure from the interior of the Abbot's Room, for the robbers had come upon a find. There was some good solid weight in this old jewellery, which was of soft and pure gold.

Wobby could glimpse the dark figures moving here and there as his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom of the room. Then presently it seemed as if the burglars had made their haul, for the lights were snapped out. An arm showed in the open window, and a heavy bag was placed outside on the grass.

Wobby took the bag, and, crawling round the buttress, handed it to Jim.

"They are coming!" he whispered, under his breath. "They are coming! Use that bag as a weapon. It's heavy!"

A leg suddenly made its appearance over

the sill of the Abbot's Room. The cracksmen had clicked. Now they were off with their booty.

The Capture!

THE boys' hearts stood still as that sinister masked figure crept out at the window of the Abbot's Room.

It was the shape of a well-dressed man, neatly attired in a smart suit of serge and a Homburg hat.

He felt about for the bag which Wobby had taken, and gave a muttered exclamation of annoyance as he failed to find it.

The boys, peering round the buttresses, saw him groping for it as another leg came through the window and a second man came into sight.

Then a third leg showed through the window.

"Gee whiz!" thought Wobby to himself. "The Abbot's Room is crowded stiff with burglars!"

But the third man was the last man. "What's up, Frisky?" he asked of the first burglar, in a low voice.

"That bag I put through the window," muttered the so-called Frisky—"it's walking about on its own! The thing must be bewitched! I just put it through the window—and it's gone!"

Then the notion that this was a school, and there might be boys about, even at this late hour, seemed to strike Frisky. He made a sudden leap clear of the buttresses, and found himself facing Jim and Singh!

He whipped his hand to his pocket, and Jim had the unpleasant feeling that he was looking straight into the barrel of an automatic pistol, behind which was a smooth-spoken gentleman, who would not make much bones of pulling the trigger.

"Quit foolin', boys!" said Frisky, in good-humoured tones, which, none the less, had a note of grim menace behind them. "None o' your school tricks here. You are interferin' with business men!"

"Your business seems to be stealing!" replied Jim boldly. He did not quail before that threatening pistol, for he felt that the honour of St. Beowulf's and of the Lincoln scholars was in his keeping.

"Hush, you young fool!" snarled Frisky. "Quit shootin' your mouth! Give us that bag!"

Frisky got the bag, but in a way that he did not expect.

"Take it!" snapped Jim; and, with all his force, he hurled it at the ruffian's head. (There will be another splendid instalment of this grand serial next week.)



Wobby gained the shelter of the grey old stone buttress of the school. Very slowly he raised his head and watched the strange light dodging round in the great room like a glow-worm in the forest.

"TOP OF THE RIVER."

(Continued from page 14.)

gassin' yesterday I was findin' things out. I noticed, f'instance, that the Grammarians' clobber was smothered in pepper—an' chaps don't pepper their clobber for fun."

"Well?"

"That set me thinkin'," resumed Cardew. "I knew it must have been chucked from the bridge, an' I knew those fags hadn't done it. Then suddenly I remembered that scaffolding under the bridge—"

"My hat!" breathed Tom Merry.

"An' while you merry old firebrands were squabblin', I trotted up there to investigate. It was no end interestin'."

"And you saw—"

"I saw quite a lot. I hid in the merry bushes and watched. I saw our dear old pals Racke and Crooke hidin' on the staging."

"Racke and Crooke?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes. They kept bobbin' up and down—watchin' for somebody. Then I spotted it. I knew they couldn't have swum there—they must have had a boat. An' as there was no boat there, I knew they must be waitin' for it to come an' take 'em off."

"Go on!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Then," said Cardew sadly, "I made my mistake—my mistaken sense of humour got the better of me. I thought it would be no end amusin' if the boat was prevented from rescuing them, and they were stranded there all night. So when the boat turned up I stopped it. I threatened to push Mellish's nose through the back of his neck if he didn't take me aboard."

"Mellish?"

"Yes. And he did. I jumped in an' turned the boat round and took it back to the boathouse. Then I took Mellish in tow back to St. Jim's."

"Then—then that was why you dry-nursed Mellish last night!" gasped Clive.

"The very reason, old top!" said Cardew, nodding. "To prevent the dear boy goin' back an' rescuin' his pals. That's the story. Quite entertainin', isn't it? The Grammarians were peppered, an' it was dear old Racke an' Crooke did it."

There was silence.

"But—but I don't quite catch on," said Blake, after a pause. "Why should Racke do such a thing? That rotter would rather see us lose, if anything?"

"Don't ask me. I'm merely tellin' you a story."

"Yes; but, hang it all, Racke and Crooke came home last night! They were covered with flour, and said—"

"My dear man, did you believe what they said?" smiled Cardew sarcastically. "I didn't. But I was puzzled myself until I had a chat with Mellish this mornin'. I then learned that the bright little fellows had escaped by jumpin' on to a

barge which was passin' beneath the bridge. It was loaded with flour, an' they fairly rolled in it. Catch on?"

They did. The juniors fairly blinked at Cardew.

"And—and you mean to say that's the truth," exclaimed Tom Merry, his face grave—that Racke and Crooke scattered pepper on the Grammar School crew, and lost them the race?"

"I don't say it lost 'em the race, but I do say it's the truth, Tommy," said Cardew grimly—"every word of it."

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry, his face dark with anger. "Oh, the howling cads! But—but why on earth didn't you speak before this, Cardew? You might have saved all this trouble. You're a silly, thoughtless fool, Cardew!"

"I know it," admitted Cardew sorrowfully. "I ought to have blown the gaff instead of attemptin' to punish the naughty fellows myself. I'm no end sorry, Tommy!"

"You ought to be!" snapped Tom Merry. "Anyway, we'll settle with those two howling cads at once! Come!"

"They've both gone out of the gates towards Rylcombe," put in Manners. "Saw them go a few minutes ago."

"Then we'll cycle over and put the matter right with Gay without delay," said Tom, his face grim. "We'll offer to row the race again, of course, now. Racke & Co. can be dealt with any time. You'd better come, too, Cardew, you ass!"

"What a bore!" sighed Cardew.

But he went, for all that.

CHAPTER 12.

Racke Asks for it—and Gets it.

TOM MERRY and his chums rode hard towards Rylcombe. As the Grammar School gates came into sight, Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo! What's the commotion?" he said.

"Something's on!"

There seemed little doubt about it. In the lane just outside the gates a group of angry juniors was congregated. But what startled Tom Merry was the sight of two St. Jim's caps in the centre of the crowd of Grammarians.

"They're ragging some of our chaps," remarked Blake grimly. "We're needed here, Tommy."

Tom Merry did not answer. He had recognised in the two St. Jim's fellows none other than Racke and Crooke. The sudden thought that Gordon Gay had discovered Racke's rascality struck him at once. Ignoring the hostile glances of the Grammarians, he pushed his way to the centre of the disturbance.

Then he started. Not only were Racke and Crooke held in Gordon Gay & Co.'s angry grasp, but so also were Lacy and Carker of the Grammar School. Confronting them, his features angry and disgusted, was Gordon Gay.

Tom Merry wasted no time.

"So you've bowled them out, Gay?" he began, clutching Gay's arm eagerly. "We were just coming to—"

Gordon Gay shook Tom Merry's hand off.

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"Then you can clear off again," he said curtly. "The less we have to do with you and your precious sportsmen the better! And you can take those two beastly betting bouts back with you! If you want to know what's the matter, I'll tell you, and leave you to deal with the cads. They've been betting with Lacy and Carker on yesterday's boartrace!"

Tom Merry looked bewildered. "Betting! Boartrace!" he stuttered. "I don't catch on. I thought—"

"Then I'll explain!" said Gordon Gay bitterly. "The afternoon of Levison's accident, Racke, not knowing about it, offered Lacy two to one on St. Jim's. Lacy, like the rotter he is, accepted the bet, though he knew the facts—"

"It was only a lark! I swear I never meant to take his dashed money!" stammered Lacy wildly. "I never—"

"Shut up!" snapped the Grammarian leader, with a glance of contempt at the shivering Lacy. "Anyway, you can guess the rest. Racke and his pal came along to collect their winnings, just now, and Lacy, believing like the rest of us that the race wasn't won fairly, refused to pay up. Then they quarrelled, and when we came along it all came out. I suppose Racke was too furious to care what he said. That's what's the matter, Tom Merry."

The St. Jim's juniors were staggered. They saw it all now. The reason for Racke's cunning plan to stop the Grammar School crew winning was clear to them now.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed Tom Merry, fixing a look of scorn and disgust upon Racke's pale face. "You—you beastly cad, Racke!"

Racke bit his lip. In his face was no remorse—only bitter chagrin. The betting transaction was out now, and it was all through his own savage, ungodly temper. When Lacy had refused to pay up, he had flung himself in a passion at the cad. And when the crowd of Grammarians had dragged him off, he had let it out, hardly knowing what he said in his passion. He wondered now how on earth he could have been such a fool.

But there was worse to come yet for Racke. Tom Merry turned to Gordon Gay.

"And now it's my turn to tell you something, Gay," he said quietly. "You claim that the boartrace was won by us unfairly—that someone from St. Jim's chucked pepper at you and mucked up your chance."

"Yes, I do. And it's true."

"It is—quite true," agreed Tom Merry, to the Grammarians' astonishment. "And that someone," went on Tom, pointing a scornful, accusing finger at Aubrey Racke, "stands there! Racke, helped by Crooke, did it! They hid on that scaffolding beneath the bridge, and scattered pepper over you as you passed beneath!"

Tom Merry paused. From the Grammarians came a low, angry murmur. Crooke stood, dumb and trembling.

"It—it's a lie—a beastly lie!" muttered Racke, white to the lips. "I—I—"

He broke off, and glanced about him wildly. But there was no hope of escape. They were hemmed in on all sides by the incensed juniors. Nobody seemed to question Tom Merry's startling statement.

"Racke and Crooke!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, a sudden light breaking in upon him. "I might have guessed it. This betting business explains the motive. We were right, then. There was foul play."

Tom Merry nodded, his face grave.

"Quite right," he agreed. "We came to tell you that, and we came to tell you we're sorry, Gay—sorry we ever doubted you! We ought to have listened to you. Only Cardew here seems to have had the sense to figure things out. Anyway, we hope you'll let bygones be bygones, and meet us again on Saturday, Gay. We'll give you a good race!"

Gordon Gay's answer was prompt. He held out his hand frankly.

"Like a shot, Tommy, old son!" he said, grinning. "And we'll lick you this time! But what about these howling cads? They ought to go through it—all four of them!"

"Yes, rather! We'll teach the rotters to bet on school sports!"

Next moment the crowd, Grammarians and Saints, were surging in an angry swarm round the rascally four.

And Racke and Crooke, and Lacy and Carker, went "through it." First they were trounced with a cricket-stump, wielded by lusty arms; then they were frog-marched to the nearest duckpond and flung in, and pelted until the indignant juniors decided the lesson had been pressed home sufficiently. But that was not all. At Tom Merry's suggestion, they were given the choice either of handing over the whole of the stake-money to the Rycombe Cottage Hospital or of having their rascally conduct reported.

Needless to say, all four chose the former course.

The following Saturday the boartrace took place again. And what a race it was! Gordon Gay & Co. took the lead at first, as before; but they did not keep it up. Once again Tom Merry's gallant men overtook them and passed them, winning the race by half a length. And this time nobody questioned their right to call themselves "Top of the River."

And in the evening a great celebration took place in the village tuckshop between the rival crews. The feud between the schools was ended, and Tom Merry & Co. and Gordon Gay & Co. were friendly rivals once again.

THE END.

(There will be another grand long story of the Chums of St. Jim's next week, entitled "THE ST. JIM'S RUN-AWAY," by Martin Clifford. Make sure of your copy by ordering EARLY.)

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