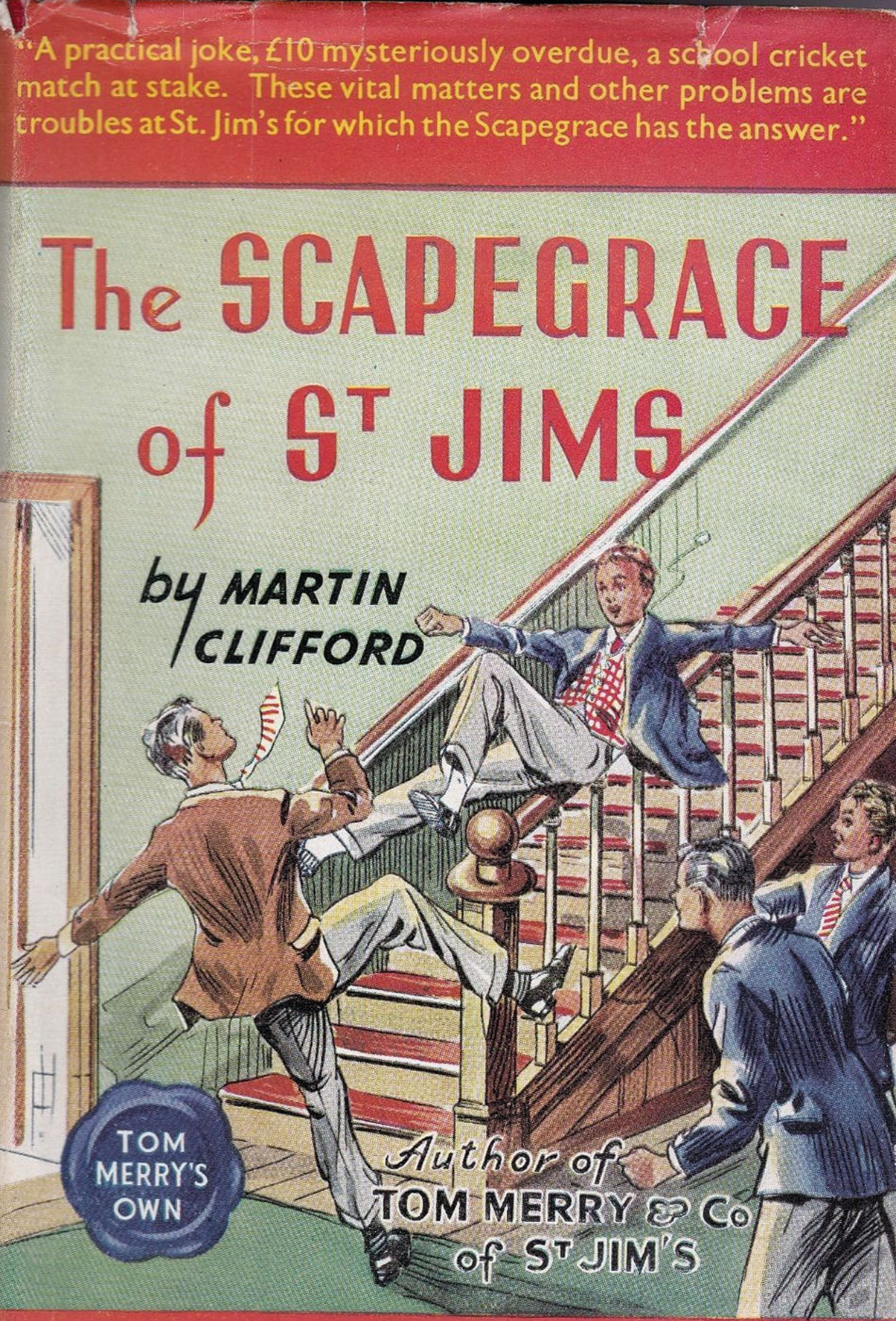
"A practical joke, £10 mysteriously overdue, a school cricket match at stake. These vital matters and other problems are troubles at St. Jim's for which the Scapegrace has the answer."

The SCAPEGRACE of ST JIMS

by MARTIN CLIFFORD



MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS

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TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S
THE SECRET OF THE STUDY
TALBOT'S SECRET

THE SCAPEGRACE OF ST. JIM'S

MARTIN CLIFFORD

SPRING BOOKS
LONDON

First Published 1951

PRINTED BY DRAGON PRESS, LTD., LUTON, BEDS.

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CHAPTER I

MORE HASTE, LESS SPEED!

Bump!

"Oh!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, were all taken quite by surprise.

It was tea-time in the School House at St. Jim's, and the three Shell fellows were coming up to their study to tea.

They were fresh from games-practice, and were talking cricket as they came up the staircase.

With a House match almost due, and the Carcroft match in the offing, cricket was the chief, if not the one and only, topic among the St. Jim's juniors. Even Manners had relegated his camera to the back of his mind, for the nonce, and concentrated on the summer game.

Thinking, and talking, cricket, they were certainly not thinking of Baggy Trimble, of the Fourth Form. They did not even remember his podgy existence. And even if they had remembered him, they certainly would not have expected him to shoot across the study landing, like an arrow from a bow, just as they arrived at the top of the stairs.

But it was the unexpected that happened.

As it chanced, there was nobody else on the study landing. Some of the fellows were still at the nets; others had gone into hall to tea, and some were in their studies. Trimble, as he shot out of the Fourth-form passage, had a clear course—and would have had an equally clear course down the stairs, had not Tom

Merry, Manners, and Lowther, stepped on the landing just as he came.

A collision was inevitable.

Trimble was going too fast to stop; and the "Terrible Three" did not even see him till he crashed.

"Oh!" spluttered the three Shell fellows in chorus, as Baggy Trimble's extensive weight suddenly hurtled at them.

Tom Merry staggered to the right, luckily catching the banisters. Monty Lowther staggered to the left, and sprawled half on the stairs, half on the landing. Manners had the worst luck of the three. He rolled down the stairs, and roared as he rolled.

As for Trimble of the Fourth, he staggered back from the shock, and sat down on the landing with concussion that almost shook the stout old oak planks. A bundle dropped from under his arm and banged on the floor. It was loosely wrapped in a newspaper, which, falling apart, revealed the contents—a large and luscious looking plum cake.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Trimble, as he sat.

He could only gasp. He was winded by the shock. He sat and gasped, heedless even of the cake, while Tom Merry clung to the banisters, Monty Lowther sprawled, and Manners rolled and roared.

Tom Merry, the least damaged, was the first to recover. He released the banisters, and gave Monty Lowther a hand up. Then they both went down for Manners.

Manners had travelled—rapidly—as far as the turn of the staircase. There he had pulled up. He ceased to roar and spluttered for breath instead.

"Hurt, old chap?" asked Tom.

"Eh? Oh! No," said Manners, with almost ferocious sarcasm, "I liked it! Ow! wow! Fathead! Ow! What idiot barged into us?"

"Trimble," said Lowther, "I'm going to smash him up into fifty thousand small pieces."

And Monty Lowther went up the stairs again, with that fell intention. Manners, with a helping hand from Tom Merry, scrambled up.

"Leave some for me!" he howled.

Manners, undoubtedly, was hurt. A fellow could not roll down a dozen stairs without getting a little hurt. But he seemed more excited than hurt. Breathless as he was, he charged up the stairs after Lowther, eager to have a hand in reducing Trimble of the Fourth to small pieces.

"Hold on, you chaps!" exclaimed Tom Merry. As the least damaged of the trio, Tom was able to take a more equable view of the little accident. "Perhaps he couldn't help it! Go easy!"

And he ran up after his chums.

Manners and Lowther, apparently, were not bothering about the possibility that perhaps Trimble couldn't have helped it. They had collected an almost infinite number of aches and pains, and seemed chiefly anxious to award Trimble of the Fourth an assortment of the same.

They reached him together and grasped him. They banged his head on the banisters. So far, Trimble had had breath enough only to gasp. Now he found enough to yell and his yells echoed far and wide.

"Ow! Leggo! Will you leggo? Wow! ow! Leggo! Wow!"

"Hold on," gasped Tom.

"Rats! Give him some more, Manners," hooted Lowther.

"What ho!" hissed Manners.

Tom Merry, grasping both his chums at once, fairly dragged them away from the hapless Baggy. Trimble sprawled against the banisters, yelling.

"Nuff's as good as a feast, you know," said Tom, "Trimble, you ass, what did you charge us over for, you fathead?"

"Ow! wow! wow!" was all Trimble could say in reply.

"Look at that!" Monty Lowther pointed to the cake, "He was cutting off with that. That's why he barged us. Trimble, you fat villain, whose cake is that?"

"Urrrrrgh! Mine!" gasped Trimble. He scrambled up, evidently alarmed about the cake, "Ow! I—I was going to take it down to hall to tea, to whack out with Mellish and Wildrake. Gimme my cake."

Lowther picked up the cake.

"You haven't answered my question yet," he said, "Whose is it?"

"I tell you it's mine," howled Trimble.

"Gammon," growled Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

Baggy Trimble's manners and customs were well known in his House. He was very likely to "snoop" a cake that did not belong to him : and he was extremely unlikely to whack out a cake of his own with other fellows. Appearances were against Baggy! It was, in fact, perfectly clear to Tom Merry, and Co. that the cause of Trimble's haste and hurry, was the fact that he had "snooped" that cake, and was anxious to get clear with it

before the owner came along. That, and that only, was why he had shot across the study landing like a runaway locomotive with such painful results for the "Terrible Three."

"That won't wash, Trimble," said Tom, "Where did you get that cake?"

"It—it—it came from Trimble Hall this morning," stuttered Baggy. "I—I can show you the letter that came with it, if you like."

"Do!" said Lowther.

"I—I mean, I left it in my study—look here, gimme my cake!" Baggy made a clutch at the disputed article. Monty Lowther put it under his arm, and, with his free hand, tapped Baggy on his podgy nose. It was not a gentle tap, and Baggy howled and retreated.

"We'll take care of this cake till we find the owner," remarked Monty Lowther, "Come on."

"Gimme my cake," howled Trimble, "I say, Tom Merry—you're junior house-captain—you make him gimme my cake."

"Bow-wow!" said Tom, "It's not yours, you fat spoofer—and that's why you were bolting with it. Tell us whose study you snooped it from."

"I didn't—I wasn't——I—I——leave off kicking me, Manners!" yelled Trimble, "Will you leave off kicking me, you swob?"

"Not at all," answered Manners, genially.

And he didn't—till Baggy, giving up the cake as a lost hope, bolted down the stairs, and disappeared.

The three Shell fellows crossed the study landing, Monty Lowther with the cake under his arm. Cardew of the Fourth looked out of the Fourth-form passage and called to them.

"Seen D'Arcy?"

"Left him at the nets,' answered Tom, "Lost a cake, Cardew?" Cardew stared.

"Eh! No! Why?"

"Somebody has," said Tom, laughing, "If you hear of a man in the Fourth who's lost a plum cake, tell him to come to my study for it."

And Tom Merry and Co. went on, to No. 10 in the Shell, leaving Cardew loitering on the Study landing, and Baggy Trimble, on the lower landing, rubbing a fat head where it had contacted the banisters, and perhaps realising, too late, that there was much wisdom in the ancient proverb—"more haste, less speed."

CHAPTER II

THE CAKE THAT VANISHED

Jack Blake, of the Fourth, ran his hands through his trousers' pockets. Then he ran them through his jacket pockets. Then he ran them through his trousers' pockets a second time. And then, in tones of deep feeling, he remarked:

"Rotten!"

"Putrid!" agreed Robert Arthur Digby. Dig's occupation had been precisely similar to Blake's, with a precisely similar result. Searching pockets for a stray coin or two that might possibly have been overlooked, had resulted in the expected but unpalatable discovery that every pocket was bare of a coin of the realm.

George Herries, a little slower than his comrades, was still going through pockets. Blake and Dig glanced at him hopefully.

It was a time of dearth in Study No. 6 in the Fourth. Riches take unto themselves wings and fly away : and nowhere is their flight more rapid than in a junior study. Not a single solitary coin rewarded Blake and Digby for their meticulous search of every pocket they possessed.

And Study No. 6 had been so keen on cricket, that they had missed tea in hall, the last resource of the stony. Fellows could cut tea in hall, if they liked, and they generally did, preferring to tea in their studies. But tea in the study required cash, and Blake and Dig were in the same state as Peter—silver and gold had they none!

Indeed they were worse off than Peter, for they hadn't even a copper.

"Well?" said Blake and Dig together, as Herries' hand came out with something in it. He seemed to have had more luck than his comrades.

"A threepenny bit," said Herries.

"Oh, my only hat!" moaned Blake.

"Better than nothing," suggested Dig.

"Only it's a bad one," said Herries, regretfully, "that's why I've still got it."

"Ass!" said Blake.

"Fathead!" said Dig.

"Where's that ass?" asked Blake, "Where's that chump? Where's that image?"

Blake did not need to mention a name. From the description, his comrades knew that he was alluding to the fourth member of the study : the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Oh, he's coming up," said Dig, "He wouldn't hurry if the house was on fire. He will blow in some time."

"And we're all famished, and he's our last hope!" said Blake. "He was saying something about a fiver from his pater. If it's come, we're saved. Why doesn't the howling ass show his silly nose."

"Weally, Blake——."

The most elegant figure at St. Jim's or anywhere else strolled in at the doorway. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his celebrated monocle into his eye, and surveyed his three study-mates.

"Anythin' the mattah, deah boys?" he inquired, mildly.

"Oh, nothing," answered Blake, with overpowering sarcasm, "We're perishing of hunger, we've missed tea in hall, and we haven't a brown among us, and we're waiting for a blithering idiot to blow in after crawling up the stairs like a superannuated snail. That's all."

"Bai Jove! If you are comparin' me to a superannuated snail, Blake——."

"Have you had that fiver you were burbling about?" demanded Blake.

"I wefuse to have my wemarks chawactewised as burblin'," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly.

"Have you had the fiver?" shrieked Blake.

"I am sowwy that I have not, Blake! The patah is goin' to tip me a fivah, but it has not awwived yet."

"Oh, rotten!"

"You stony, too?" demanded Herries.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Putrid!" said Dig, "We'd better cut down to hall—there may be something left."

"Too late!" grunted Blake, "Look here, whom can we stick for tea? That cousin of yours in No. 9, Gussy——."

"Cardew is not my cousin, Blake! He is a vewy distant welative."

"I don't care whether he's your cousin or your aunt, so long as he stands us tea," snorted Blake. "Shall we try him?"

"Might try Tom Merry," suggested Dig, "He will always whack out everything he's got."

"Or old Talbot?" said Herries.

"Hold on a minute, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "Pewwaps you fellows would like a plum cake for tea."

"No perhaps about it, ass," hooted Blake, "Have you got a plum cake in your waistcoat pocket?"

"I wegard that as a widiculous question, Blake. I have certainly not got a plum cake in my waistcoat pocket. But there is one in the study cupboard. I weceived it fwom home to-day, and it hasn't been cut yet. It is a wathah large cake, and pwobably enough for tea for four."

Three faces, which had been wearing pessimistic expressions, brightened up at once. A plum cake that was large enough for tea for four was an article of which Blake, Herries, and Dig were very glad to hear.

"Oh, jolly good!" said Dig.

"Fine!" said Herries, heartily.

"Come to my arms, my beamish boy!" exclaimed Blake, "Oh frabjous day! Callooh! Callay! Trot out the cake."

"Bai Jove! That cake seems to have awwived vewy fortunately, as we are all stony bwoke," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Couldn't have been better timed," agreed Blake, "Trot it out, old bean."

"Yaas, wathah."

Arthur Augustus crossed to the study cupboard. Blake spread the table cloth, Dig sorted out a knife, Herries collected plates. These preparations were completed before Arthur Augustus turned round from the cupboard.

"Ready," said Blake.

"Buck up with that cake, Gussy," said Digby.

"Get a move on slow-coach!" urged Herries.

"Bai Jove!"

"Are you going to stand there staring into that cupboard till calling-over?" hooted Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Are you going to hand out that cake, or are you not going to hand out that cake?" demanded Blake, categorically.

"I should be vewy pleased to hand out the cake, deah boy, if I could see it. But I cannot see it."

"You burbling chump, can't you see into the cupboard? You'd better chuck that eyeglass away and get a pair of specs."

"I can see into the cupboard all wight, Blake, but I cannot see the cake. It is vewy wemarkable. I certainly put it in after Taggles handed me the parcel to-day. But it appeahs to be gone."

"Gone!" yelled three fellows in unison.

They rushed to the study cupboard. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was twirled aside, and Blake and Herries and Dig stared in. They stared in vain. Nothing in the nature of a cake met their view. That cake, according to Arthur Augustus, was large enough to make a tea for four, so it was certainly large enough to be seen. But it was not to be seen. Like Mother Hubbard's, the cupboard was bare.

"Gone!" repeated Blake, faintly.

"Sure you put it there, ass?" asked Dig.

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Digby."

"Are you sure you put it there?" yelled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I certainly put it there. It is vewy wemarkable that it is not there now," said Arthur Augustus, in perplexity, "It was there befoah we went down to the cwicket. But it is not there now. It looks to me as if somebody must have taken it out of the cupboard."

"What a brain!" said Blake, "Fancy Gussy guessing that one, you fellows!"

"Weally, Blake——."

"That cake's been snooped, fathead," said Blake, "I wonder if Trimble was about when you brought it up to the study. We'll go and kick him, anyhow."

"Yes, let's," agreed Herries.

"Bai Jove! I weally think we ought to discovah who had the cake, befoah we kick anybody," said Arthur Augustus, "Pewwaps we can find out whethah anybody saw anybody wootin' about our study."

Blake and Herries and Dig breathed hard and deep. They were hungry : and even scrounging a tea in another study was a forlorn hope, as it was well past tea-time. Gussy's plum cake had turned up like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years—if it had been there! And it had been "snooped." They simply

yearned to get hold of the snooper, and make an example of him.

"Come on," hissed Blake.

They came out of the study, as Roylance of the Fourth came across the landing from the stairs.

"Seen Trimble?" called out Blake.

"Yes : left him in hall," answered Roylance.

"Oh! Has he been teaing in hall?"

"Yes."

"Then it wasn't Trimble," said Herries, "He wouldn't tea in hall if he had our plum cake to scoff."

"Wathah not."

"Seen anybody about our study, Roylance, while we were out of the House?" asked Blake.

"Only Cardew."

"Cardew!" repeated Blake.

"Yes : I think he wanted to speak to D'Arcy! he asked where he was," answered the New Zealand junior, and he went on to his study.

Study No. 6 exchanged glances.

"Cardew!" muttered Blake, "He's not the chap to snoop tuck but he's always playing some trick or other—and he wasn't at the cricket."

"It is quite imposs for Cardew to have snooped the cake," said Arthur Augustus, "He is a welative of mine, Blake."

"What difference does that make, ass?"

"A welative of mine would hardly snoop a cake," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake——."

"Let's go and see Cardew, anyway," said Herries, "If he was about the study he may know something about it. If he's got our cake we'll jolly well scrag him."

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"Oh, come on," said Blake, "If it wasn't Trimble, Cardew's as likely as any other fellow, I suppose. Let's go and see him, anyway."

Jack Blake tramped along the passage to No. 9. His comrades followed him. Cardew had not been at games practice : and his study-mates, Levison and Clive, were still at the nets when Blake and Co. came in. So they expected to find him alone in No. 9 Study. And that he was there, they had evidence as they reached

the study door, for they heard the voice of Ralph Reckness Cardew from within, apparently speaking to himself.

"Plum Cake! Ralph, my boy, you're on to a good thing! Plum Cake for me, and no mistake about it!"

Blake gave a jump as he heard that.

"Hear him?" he gasped.

"Bai Jove!"

"He's got it!" breathed Herries.

"Come on!"

And Jack Blake hurled wide open the door of No. 9 Study, and four wrathful and indignant juniors rushed in.

CHAPTER III

MERELY A MISUNDERSTANDING

Ralph Reckness Cardew was seated at the study table in No. 9. His occupation was a rather curious one.

It was an occupation upon which his study-mates, Levison and Clive, would have frowned, and which he would hardly have cared to pursue, had they been in the study. And it was an occupation which, if his form-master had seen it, would have caused Mr. Lathom to march him off to his house-master on the spot—if not to the Head.

There was a newspaper open on the table before Cardew—not the kind of newspaper that St. Jim's fellows were supposed to peruse. Its attractive title was "Sporting Spotlight."

Cardew had been studying that publication with much more concentrated attention than he ever bestowed on Caesar or Virgil.

He had a pen in his hand, and on a sheet of impot paper, he had written the names of several horses, culled from "Sporting Spotlight." Over that list he had been thinking hard.

Blue Smoke
Plum Cake.
Bag o' Tricks.

Cardew's problem, apparently, was to compare the various claims of Blue Smoke, Plum Cake, and Bag o' Tricks, and decide upon which "gee" to lay his money, through the medium of Mr. Bill Lodgey at the Green Man.

After much thought, he had drawn his pen through Blue Smoke, and then through Bag o' Tricks. Plum Cake's claims, it seemed, had weighed in the balance. The outcome of his meditations was the selection of Plum Cake when he backed his fancy: hence the satisfied ejaculation which Blake and Co. had heard as they arrived at the study door.

Certainly, it was not likely to occur to any of the four, that "Plum Cake" was the name of a racehorse. The Abbotsford races did not interest them in the least—they had not the slightest leaning towards the shady pursuits of the scapegrace of the Fourth. They were, at the moment, thinking of a plum cake, but it was a different sort of plum cake! Those words, falling on their ears, settled the matter for Study No. 6: even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had to believe that his relation had "snooped" the plum cake, when he heard that.

There was a cheery grin on Cardew's face. He had, as he believed at least, "spotted the winner." Cardew rather fancied himself as a spotter of winners. A long list of losers had not disabused his mind of that idea.

That cheery grin vanished from Cardew's face, as his study door hurtled open, and four excited juniors rushed in.

He jumped up from the table, staring at them angrily.

"What the dooce——!" he ejaculated.

"So it was you!" roared Blake.

"Where is it?" demanded Digby.

"If you've scoffed it, we'll jolly well mop up the study with you," bawled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "I am surpwised at you, Cardew! You are a welation of mine, and I am shocked and surpwised. I should not have supposed a welation of mine capable of anythin' of the kind."

"Hand it over!" hooted Blake.

Cardew stood and stared at them in angry astonishment.

What this sudden irruption into his study meant, he had not the faintest inkling.

"Gone mad?" he inquired.

"Weally, Cardew——."

"Where is it?" roared Herries, staring round the study in search of the plum cake.

"Where's what, you born idiot?" snapped Cardew.

"You know jolly well! We heard you burbling about plum cake," snorted Blake, "You're on to a good thing, are you, you snooper? Well, we want that plum cake, and we want it now."

"You—you—you want Plum Cake?" stuttered Cardew, almost dazedly, "What the dickens do you mean?"

"We mean that we want plum cake for tea, and if you don't shell out without any more palaver, we'll scrag you—that's what we mean."

"Mad!" said Cardew.

"Look here——!"

"Do you think I've got Plum Cake in my study?" hooted Cardew.

"Where is it, then?"

"At Abbotsford, I suppose," answered Cardew, "Have you all gone crackers at once? If not, what are you driving at?"

"Pway don't be an ass, Cardew! You couldn't possibly have gone ovah to Abbotsford since class. It is heah all wight."

"Nuff said!" snapped Blake, "Are you going to hand it over? Look here, collar him, and bump him till he shells it out."

"What-ho!"

"Hands off, you potty fatheads," yelled Cardew, as Study No. 6 rushed round the table, and collared him right and left, "Tell me what you want, if you want anything. Leggo! Oh, gad!"

Four pairs of hands swept the dandy of the Fourth off his feet. The next moment he was sitting on his own expensive carpet. He sat rather hard.

"Now will you shell it out?" demanded Blake.

"Ow! You howling lunatic—wow!"

"Give him another."

Bump!

"Whoooop!" roared Cardew, struggling frantically. "You mad chumps, leggo. What are you getting at? What do you want?"

"Plum cake," answered Blake, "That's what we want—that's what we've come here for, and that's what we're going to have, and we're jolly well going to bump you till we get it."

"Yaas, wathah."

"And if you've scoffed it already, we'll bump you bald-headed, and tip the inkpot over you," hooted Dig, "So if you've still got it, you'd better shell out."

"Shell out what?" shrieked Cardew.

"You jolly well know what—plum cake! Where is it?"

"You batchy blitherers——."

"Give him another!"

Bump!

"Oh, gad! Ow! Oooooh!"

"What on earth's the row?" It was a voice at the doorway, as Ernest Levison and Sidney Clive came into the study.

They stared in blank astonishment at the exciting scene in No. 9. Cardew glared round, and gave a yell:

"Rescue! Lend me a hand, you chaps! Help!"

"Pway keep out of this, you two," said Arthur Augustus, "We are bumpin' Cardew to make him shell out our pwopahty."

"But what——?" exclaimed Clive.

"They've all gone crackers!" shrieked Cardew, "Draggemoff, will you?"

"Give him another!" rapped Herries.

"And a bit harder," said Dig.

"Hold on," exclaimed Levison, "Let's know what the row is. You can't carry on like this in our study. Stop it."

"Wats!" retorted Arthur Augustus, "Bump him, deah boys."

"Will you tell us what the trouble is, you fatheads?" exclaimed Clive. "What have you been up to, Cardew?"

"Nothing!" yelled Cardew, "These mad idiots rushed into the study like a mob of wild Indians and collared me—that's all I know! Will you drag them off, and not so much jaw?"

"Better keep off, you two," said Herries, "We're going to bump him till he shells out our plum cake."

"Think we're going to let him keep it?" demanded Dig. "It's all we had for tea, and he's snooped it from our study."

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Levison, blankly, "Do you think a man in this study would snoop a fellow's cake, like Trimble?"

"We jolly well know he has."

"Mad as hatters!" gasped Cardew, "Get hold of these lunatics, you two, and help me kick them out of the study."

"Look here, there's some mistake here," said Levison, "What on earth put it into your heads that Cardew had snooped your cake?"

"We heard that he had been in our study——."

"I went there to see if D'Arcy had come in," yelled Cardew, "I wanted to speak to the prize idiot."

"Weally, Cardew——."

"That isn't all," snapped Blake, "We came along to see him, and heard him actually talking to himself about it. Didn't we, chaps?"

"We jolly well did!"

"And we know he's got it!"

"Yaas, wathah! We actually heard him say "Plum cake for me, and no mistake about it! Those vewy words!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"You—you—you—you idiot!" gurgled Cardew. He began to understand now, "Oh, you piffler! You—you—you—oh, there ain't a word for you."

"Blessed if I make it out," said Clive, blankly, "If they heard you say that, Cardew, you can't wonder——."

"Idiot!"

"Thanks," said Clive, drily, "If you've got their plum cake——."

"You howling ass," shrieked Cardew, "Look at that paper on the table, and you'll understand."

Clive looked at the paper on the table. So did the other fellows. And they stared as they read:

Blue Smoke.
Plum Cake.
Bag o' Tricks.

"Oh!" gasped Clive.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Levison.

"I fail to see any cause for mewwiment, Levison," said Arthur Augustus, "It is wathah wotten to bag a cake fwom a fellow's study. Twimble does such things, but it is the vewy last thing I should expect of a welation of mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Levison and Clive together.

"Weally, you fellows——."

Arthur Augustus's noble brain had not yet grasped it. But Blake and Herries and Digby released Cardew. They saw that there was a mistake in the matter now.

"Oh!" said Blake, "Is that it? A rotten racehorse—named Plum Cake—Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

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

Cardew struggled to his feet. He was dusty, rumpled, and untidy. But he was cleared, at last, of the suspicion of having snooped the plum cake, if that was any satisfaction to him. He stood panting for breath.

"Bai Jove! Is there weally a wotten wacehorse named Plum Cake?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, "Bai Jove! Sowwy for the mistake, Cardew——."

"You howling ass!"

"I wefuse to be called a howlin' ass, Cardew! And on second thoughts," added Arthur Augustus, warmly, "I am not sowwy for the mistake! It serves you wight!"

"What-ho!" grinned Blake, "Serves you jolly well right, Cardew! Come on, you men—it's not here, and we don't want to have anything to do with Cardew's variety of Plum Cake!"

Study No. 6 crowded out of No. 9 : three of them grinning, and one of them frowning. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his noble head seriously as he went. Cardew made a movement : but he was too breathless to carry on hostilities, and Clive kicked the door shut after Blake and Co. Cardew panted and panted for breath, while his friends regarded him with grinning faces. Apparently Levison and Clive shared Blake and Co's opinion that it served him right!

CHAPTER IV

A RIFT IN THE LUTE!

"Look here, Tom——!"

Manners paused.

Monty Lowther grinned.

Tom Merry, who had a slip of paper in his hand at the tea-table in No. 10 Study, glanced up.

"Eh!" he said, "What?"

Tea was over in No. 10. But the "Terrible Three" were still round the table. Tom was going over a cricket list. Manners was deep in thought. Lowther was gazing meditatively at a parcel on the shelf, wrapped in newspaper. That parcel contained the cake that had been rescued from the lawless clutches of Baggy Trimble, and conveyed to No. 10 for safety.

After tea, the chums of the Shell were going to inquire for the owner. But they had not made a move yet. They were all thinking—Tom Merry about the coming cricket matches, Manners as it happened about the very same subject, and Lowther about the cake. Tea in the study had been a little sparse : and Monty, not having such urgent matters on his mind as his two comrades, had leisure to reflect that a slice of luscious plum cake would wind up a rather frugal meal quite agreeably.

"I've been thinking——!" said Manners, and paused again.

Lowther's grin widened. He knew of what Manners was thinking. Tom Merry did not. The responsibilities of junior cricket captain were on his shoulders, and perhaps made him a little less observant of lesser matters.

"Have you?" he said, "Oh, all right, Manners, old chap! If you want to take out the camera, we'll come. Is the light specially good or something?"

"I wasn't thinking about taking photographs," said Manners, a little gruffly.

"You weren't?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"No!" snapped Manners. "Do you think I live and move and breathe cameras, you ass?"

"Oh! Don't you?"

"I suppose you don't want to hear what I was going to say," said Manners, "All right—I'll pack it up, then."

Tom looked concerned at once. There was a spot of acid in his chum's tone, Tom could not guess why. Manners, as a rule, was devoted to his camera, and amateur photography seemed the beginning and end of all things to him. Apparently, however, even his beloved camera was taking second place for once.

"My dear chap," said Tom, "Spout it out. Of course I thought you were going to talk about photographing."

"I don't see any 'of course' about it," said Manners. "I don't see that I'm such a rabbit at games, either."

"Nobody said you were, old fellow," said Tom, soothingly. "Why, I've got you down to play in the House match."

"I know that," said Manners, "But——." Once more he paused.

"Well?" said Tom.

"What about the Carcroft match?" asked Manners.

"Oh!" said Tom.

His sunny face clouded just a little. Manners was by no means a "rabbit" at the summer game. He was a useful bat, and good in the field. He was a good man for a House match, where the side was drawn from a single House. But in a School match, with both Houses to draw upon, there were so many more useful men that Manners seldom or never had a look in. Certainly the junior captain would have jumped at the chance of playing both his best friends. But cricket came before friendship. Lowther was in, and Manners was out. Which, with a single exception, every fellow knew to be a right and proper state of affairs. The exception was Harry Manners.

"Well, what about it?" said Manners. "You've told me yourself that I've come on jolly well."

"So you have, old fellow," assented Tom, "But——."

"I made twenty-five against Fatty Wynn's bowling at the nets. I don't call that bad. Carcroft haven't a bowler like Wynn."

"It was jolly good," said Tom, "But——."

"I caught out Kildare of the Sixth, in games fagging at senior nets," said Manners, "How many of your team have done that?"

"There was a spot of luck about that, wasn't there, old boy?"

"Oh! Naturally," said Manners, sarcastically, "I couldn't expect to catch anything without luck to help me."

"Hem!" murmured Tom.

Monty Lowther coughed. He had been grinning : but now he ceased to grin. The acidulous tone in Manners' voice hinted of a rift in the lute in No. 10. Lowther thought it time to change the subject.

"What about that cake?" he asked.

"Eh!" said Tom, "Oh! Yes! Must belong to some man in the Fourth—Trimble was coming away from the Fourth-form studies with it. Let's walk it round and see if we can spot the owner."

"I was speaking," said Manners, stiffly.

"Oh! Yes! But——."

"The fact is," said Monty Lowther, "That we could do with a spot of cake to wind up tea. I've got room, and I expect you fellows have. If that cake belongs to some decent chap like D'Arcy, or Wildrake, or Clive, or Hammond, he will ask us to go whacks when we cart it home. See?"

Manners gave him a look.

"Cart it away, then," he said, "I'm talking to Tom, and I

haven't finished yet. Look here, Tom, we're pals : but that's no reason for leaving a fellow out of a match, that I know of."

"It's a reason for putting you in, old chap, if I could," said Tom, "but in a school match, we have to give the New House a show, and that cuts down School House men, see?"

"I know that!" Manners grunted, "You've got the list in your paw. Who's down?" Isn't that the Carcroft list?"

"Yes," said Tom, slowly, "I'll read it out. Merry, Lowther, Blake, D'Arcy, Talbot, Kangaroo, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Owen, and——."

"That's four from the New House—Figgins, Kerr, Wynn and Owen," said Manners, "Isn't that overdoing it?"

"Well, four men out of eleven isn't a lot, is it?" said Tom, "And they're all jolly good men."

"Well, who's the other man, then?"

"Cardew," said Tom.

"Cardew!" repeated Manners. He breathed hard. "That slacking ass!"

"He doesn't slack at cricket," said Tom, mildly.

"Sure he'll turn up on Carcroft day?" asked Manners.

"Eh! Why shouldn't he?"

"Might have a prior engagement at the Green Man," suggested Manners, sardonically.

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's keen enough," he said, "I know he's rather a slacker, old chap, and rather prides himself on it—but on his day he's just top-hole. He's always at the nets——."

"He wasn't this afternoon."

"Well, no : but he's as keen as mustard. I don't think a tremendous lot of him, outside cricket, but his silly sporting rot has nothing to do with me, or with the game. He will bag runs at Carcroft, and that's what matters."

"And I shouldn't?" asked Manners.

"About that cake——!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, shut up about that cake, for goodness sake," yapped Manners, "Do you want to scoff it like that fat smudge Trimble? Look here, Tom, you know I don't make out that I play a game like yours, or old Talbot's, or Figgins's, or Kerr's, or Kangaroo's. But I can play the head off a fellow who smokes in his study half the time, and goes blagging at the Green Man the other half."

Tom Merry suppressed a sigh.

It was quite true that Cardew of the Fourth was a good deal

of a blackguard. But it was equally true that he was a first-class cricketer, when he chose to devote himself to the game. Tom would have given a good deal to play Manners instead of Cardew. But he was cricket captain, and he couldn't. Manners did not know that he was not in the same street with the dandy of the Fourth at the game, though any fellow in the House could have told him.

"Look here," said Manners, as Tom did not speak, not knowing exactly what to say, "We're playing the New House on Wednesday, and after that you'll pick the final team for Carcroft. Isn't that so?"

"That's so," agreed Tom.

"Well then, give a man a chance even if he has the disadvantage of being your pal," said Manners, tartly, "Wait and see! If Cardew does better than I do in the House match, shove him in for Carcroft. If I do better than he does, shove me in. That's fair."

Tom Merry's face brightened. Monty Lowther winked at the cake, with the eye that was furthest from Manners.

"O.K." said Tom, heartily, "Leave it at that, old chap! Nothing's definitely settled till after the House match on Wednesday. If you go ahead of Cardew—and I'll be jolly glad to see you do it—you go down for Carcroft. That's that."

Manner's frowning brow cleared.

"Well, a chap doesn't want to push in," he said, apologetically, "Some of the fellows make out that you favour your own pals—and that's likely to make you leave them out just to show that you don't. I believe I'm as good a man as that smoky swob, at any rate I shan't spoil my wind with cigarettes in the study. Mind, I shall go all out against Figgins and Co. on Wednesday."

"Do!" said Tom. smiling, "That's what we want, old chap."

"Only don't leave me at the end of the tail," added Manners, sharply, "If that's the idea——"

"Well——!" said Tom, hesitating.

"Somebody must be last man in," remarked Monty Lowther, casually.

Manners looked at him.

"Are you captaining the side on Wednesday?" he asked.

"Eh! No. What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you're not skipper, you can keep your oar out," said Manners, with acerbity, "Look here, Tom, let's have this clear. If you're going to bung me in last wicket, and leave

me to be not out for two or three, you may as well leave me out of the team altogether."

Tom Merry breathed a little hard.

"Do you want to open the innings?" he asked.

"Why not?" said Manners, coolly, "I want a chance to use my bat, anyway. Why not shove me on first, and that wonderful second Bradman, Cardew, at the other end? And see who stays in longest."

"But——!"

"Oh, if you're going to begin butting again, I may as well chuck it," said Manners, rising from the table, "I'll cut down to the dark room—I've got some films to develop, and I'm pretty good at photography, though I can't play cricket."

"Look here, old fellow——."

Manners did not "look there." He walked out of the study, and closed the door after him with somewhat unnecessary emphasis—leaving Tom Merry looking dismayed, and Monty Lowther shrugging his shoulders.

CHAPTER V

THE FOUNDER OF THE FEAST!

"Tom Mewwy, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked into No. 10 Study. Blake and Herries and Digby looked in also. Study No. 6 had come in a body to call on the junior captain of the House. But they found only Monty Lowther in the study. Manners had gone to the dark-room, like Achilles to his tent : and Tom Merry had gone down to post up the list for the House match. Lowther was clearing the tea-table when the Fourth-form fellows looked in.

"Oh!" Arthur Augustus's eyeglass gleamed round the study, "Isn't Tom Mewwy heah?"

"You've had tea?" asked Blake, without waiting for Lowther to answer Gussy's somewhat superfluous question.

"Yes," answered Monty, "Have you fellows dropped in to help me wash the crocks? Jolly good of you."

"We've come to tea—if any!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! At the pwesent moment, deah boy, we are wathah like lions seekin' what we may devour!" explained Arthur Augustus, "Nothin' in our study—nothin' in hall—and we are all stonay, and some wotten wascal has walked off with the cake I had fwom home to-day——."

"The last shot in the locker," said Herries.

"If you've got anything in this study, shell out," said Dig, "We'll do the same, when Gussy gets his fiver."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, "It would have been as wight as wain if that wottah hadn't walked off our cake. It was a vewy big plum cake, plenty to go wound, and some ovah. Now we are quite bunkahed."

"You've lost a plum cake?" asked Lowther, his eye lingering for a moment on the parcel on the shelf. The ownership of that luscious plum cake was discovered now!

"We haven't lost it—it's been snooped," grunted Blake, "And by gum, we'll make an example of the snooper, when we spot him. Look here, is there anything going in this study? If not, we'll trot along and try Talbot."

Monty Lowther's eyes glimmered.

He knew now to whom that cake belonged. Tom Merry or Manners would have stated the fact at once, and handed it over. But Tom and Manners were not born humorists like their chum Monty. The funny man of the Shell saw a chance here for one of the little jests on which he lived and thrived.

"My dear chaps, you've come to the right study," said Lowther, heartily, "Trot in! There's nothing but cake, but if you can manage on that——."

"We could manage on the hind leg of a mule!" said Blake, with deep feeling, "If you've got a cake here, old man, cough it up."

"What-ho!" said Dig.

"We were going to have cake, if some smudge hadn't walked off with Gussy's," said Herries, "Jolly good of you, Lowther."

"Not at all," said Monty, blandly, "You're more than welcome to the whole cake, and it's a pretty big one."

"Good man!"

"Bai Jove! That is vewy hospitable of you, Lowthah."

"This is a hospitable study," said Monty Lowther, "Sit down, old beans. Help yourselves to plates. Here's the cake."

Four juniors sat down round the study table. Monty Lowther lifted the parcel from the shelf, and unwrapped it. Four faces brightened at the sight of a large luscious plum cake.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon it quite attentively. Blake and Herries and Dig had never seen it before : but perhaps something familiar in its aspect struck the swell of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! That's a vewwy big cake, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus.

"The bigger the better, in the circumstances," remarked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! It's as big as the one I had fwom home to-day," said Arthur Augustus, "This is all wight, you fellows."

"Yes, rather," said Blake, heartily. "You fellows rolling in oof in this study? I'll bet that cake wasn't under fifteen bob."

"Tuck in," said Monty.

He cut large slices of the cake. Study No. 6 lost no time in tucking in. They were all hungry, a good hour after tea-time. And the cake was delicious. It almost melted in the mouth.

Large as that cake was, half of it vanished in record time. Lowther cut more slices and handed them round.

"Go it," he said, hospitably.

"Aren't you going to have any?" asked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway don't let us scoff all your cake, deah boy," urged Arthur Augustus. "It's weally wippin'. Do have some yourself."

"Oh, all right! I'll have a slice, if you make a point of it," said Monty Lowther. And he helped himself to a slice of that delicious plum cake.

Five fellows champed the cake happily. More slices were cut, and followed one another on the downward path. It had been a very large cake—quite an outsize in cakes. But it was growing smaller by degrees and beautifully less.

"Have some more," urged Lowther, when only a moderate wedge remained of the plum cake.

Blake shook his head.

"No : we're not going to eat you out of house and home," he said, "It's jolly decent of you to whack out a topping cake like that——."

"My dear chap, finish it!" urged Lowther, "I don't want a plum or crumb left. Do have another slice."

He landed another slice on Blake's plate without waiting for a reply. Then slices were landed on three other plates. It was the end of that big cake. Only a few crumbs remained. Monty

Lowther rose from the table, surveying his guests with a cheery smile.

"Like it?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Topping," said Blake.

"Scrumptious!" said Herries.

"Spiffing!" said Dig.

They finished the cake, and rose. They beamed on Monty Lowther. They had been fearfully hungry, and now they were full of cake—and such a cake! They did not always regard Monty Lowther with approving eyes, owing to his japing proclivities, of which Study No. 6 was sometimes the victim. Now they felt that they loved him like a brother!

"Jolly good of you, old chap," said Blake.

"You're a Briton!" said Herries.

"Thanks a lot," said Dig.

"Yaas, wathah! Many thanks, deah boy."

"Oh, don't thank me," said Monty Lowther, negligently, "Thanks are due to the founder of the feast!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"You see, it wasn't my cake," explained Lowther, in his blandest manner.

"Not your cake," repeated Blake. "Tom Merry's?"

"Oh, no."

"Manners?" asked Dig.

"Not at all."

"Bai Jove! Whose cake was it, then, Lowthah?" asked Arthur Augustus, blankly.

"Yours!"

Arthur Augustus jumped almost clear of the floor of No. 10 Study, in his astonishment.

"Mine!" he ejaculated.

Jack Blake uttered a roar.

"Our cake!"

"Bai Jove!" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

"Our cake!" repeated Herries, almost dazedly, "Gussy's cake from our study! Then it was you——."

"You!" roared Dig, "Snooping our cake and standing us a feed on our own tuck! Why you funny idiot——."

"Weally Lowthah——."

"You!" roared Blake, "Why you funny idiot——!"

"You see——!" began Lowther.

But he got no further. He was going to explain how the cake had been captured from Baggy Trimble, now that he had had his little joke. But he was not given time for explanations. So far as Study No. 6 could see, Lowther had snooped that cake for the purpose of carrying out one of his too numerous jests. And their one thought was to let him know just what they thought of a fellow who played such jests on fellows coming in hungry to tea. They all rushed at Monty Lowther together. It was a case of four souls with but a single thought, four hearts that beat as one! Four pairs of hands seized the funny man of the Shell, and in an instant he was up-ended.

"You silly ass!"

"You cheeky tick!"

"Snooping our cake——."

"Wag him, deah boys."

"Hold on," yelled Monty Lowther, "You see—yarooh! I mean—wow! Can't you let a fellow speak? I was going to say —oh, crikey!"

Lowther's frantic voice trailed away in spluttering gasps, as the four indignant juniors bumped him on the carpet, tapped his head on the study table, and finally jammed it into the coal-locker. Then they walked out of No. 10 Study. And Monty Lowther, wildly dishevelled, gurgling for breath, sprawling on the floor with his head in the coal-locker, realised that the life of a humorist, like a policeman's, was not always a happy one!

CHAPTER VI

THE DARK HORSE

"Ernest, old bean——."

"Haec ubi dicta——!" said Ernest Levison, without looking up.

"Clivey, old chap——."

"Cavum conversa cuspide montem——" said Sidney Clive, also without looking up.

Cardew, sitting at ease in the armchair in No. 9 Study, sighed. Neither of his study-mates seemed to have time for him.

Neither had Cardew time on his hands, as a matter of fact. Prep was on in the Fourth-form studies; and Cardew should have been sitting at the table, preparing the section of Æneid assigned by Mr. Lathom, as Levison and Clive were doing. Instead of which, he reclined gracefully in the armchair, with one elegantly-trousered leg crossed over the other, and whatever he was thinking of, it certainly was not the deathless verse of P. Vergilius Maro.

"Look here, you chaps——!" he began again.

"Cuspide montem," murmured Levison.

"Impulit in latus," murmured Clive.

Cardew breathed rather hard.

"How long are you fellows going to keep up that game?" he asked.

Levison looked up at last.

"Until we're through with prep," he said, "Why the dickens don't you get on with it too? If you're going to slack about, dry up and let other fellows get on."

"Is that what you call sympathetic, when a pal's in a jam?" asked Cardew, with a sorrowful shake of the head.

"Oh, rot! What jam are you in?" grunted Levison. But he turned his attention from prep and Clive also suspended operations. It was like Cardew to slack at prep, and tempt his study-mates to follow his lazy example, from sheer idleness of mind. But if he was in a "jam" they were prepared to sit up and take notice, even at the expense of prep, and a possible spot of bother in the form-room in the morning.

"Look at me," said Cardew, "In me you behold that touching figure of ancient drama—the good man strugglin' with adversity!"

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Clive.

"Is anything the matter, or is it only your usual gas?" asked Levison impatiently.

"How charmingly you put it, both of you," said Cardew. "But it's true. I'm up against it, and unless I can raise the wind, there are rocks ahead."

"Money?" asked Levison.

"The root of all evil," agreed Cardew, "To cut it short, can you fellows lend me a few quids between you?"

Levison frowned, and Clive grunted. The grandson of Lord Reckness had more pocket-money than most fellows in the Fourth Form, and if he had empty pockets now, they could guess where

it had gone. Bill Lodgey, at the Green Man, probably knew what had become of it.

"That means that you've been backing your fancy with that unwashed blot Lodgey," growled Clive.

"Guessed it in one."

"And you're cleared out?" asked Levison.

"Down and out," said Cardew, sadly, "Not a bean left! Not a single copper to jingle against a threepenny-bit. Stony as the rocks where Virgil's Shepherd found Love! Broke to the wide! If Dame Taggles was selling jam-tarts at a farthing apiece, I couldn't stand myself the ghost of one! If you have tears, prepare to shed them now!"

"You can't talk sense, I suppose," said Clive, "How much do you want? I've got a ten-bob note."

"And I've a pound note," said Levison, "If you're really in a jam, fathead, you can have it."

"Good men both," said Cardew, "You've practically saved my life! You couldn't make it a fiver, though?"

Levison laughed.

"If you want fivers, you'd better go and see that relation of yours in Study No. 6," he answered, "Precious few fellows in the Fourth can stump up a fiver."

"I did go to see him," sighed Cardew, "And it led to that misunderstanding about a cake, as it turned out. I don't feel like seeing him again, unless it's to punch his silly nose. Shell out."

Levison's hand went into his pocket for his wallet. So did Clive's. But Ernest Levison paused, and withdrew his hand, empty. The mention of the misunderstanding about a cake had recalled something to his mind. He gave his volatile chum a rather grim look.

"Hold on a minute, Clivey," he said.

"Eh! Why?" asked Clive, "If Cardew's hard up, he's welcome to my ten bob."

"We'll have it clear first," said Levison, "What do you want the tin for, Cardew? Is it to back Plum Cake for the Abbotsford races?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Clive. He had taken out his wallet. Now he put it back again.

Cardew coloured a little.

"Is that it?" snapped Levison.

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions," said Cardew, airily, "I've

asked you to lend me some tin. Are you going to lend it or not?"

"Not!" said Levison, briefly : and he devoted his attention to prep again.

"What about you, Clivey?"

"Same!" said Clive, with equal brevity. And he too reverted to Virgil.

Cardew sat in the armchair, looking at them, with a wrinkle in his brow. Levison and Clive went on with their prep, heedless of him. They were very pally in No. 9 Study, though Cardew's scapegrace ways often sorely tried the patience of the other two. Levison and Clive would have stood by him in a "jam" to the last shot in the locker. But if that "jam" only meant that he was in want of cash to back Plum Cake at Abbotsford, that, evidently, was a horse of quite another colour.

There was a long silence in the study. Two fellows were busy at prep, apparently having dismissed Cardew and his "jam" from mind. Cardew, after watching them for a few minutes, shrugged his shoulders, drew a little paper-covered book from his pocket, and became engrossed in its contents. Had his friends glanced at him, they could have seen the title on the cover—"Racing Form." No doubt he was absorbing information on the subject of Plum Cake, the "gee" that had taken his fancy.

Not till Levison and Clive rose from the table, did Cardew slip the little book back into his pocket, and break the silence.

"Look here, you chaps——!" he said.

"Coming down?" asked Levison.

"For goodness sake listen to a fellow, now you've finished that rot," exclaimed Cardew, impatiently, "I tell you I'm on to a good thing—it's a big chance. Plum Cake is a dark horse——."

"Oh, pack it up," said Clive.

"I can get odds of four to one. That means a packet when he romps home on Saturday," urged Cardew.

"I don't know a lot about racing," said Clive, laughing, "But I shouldn't think a horse was likely to romp home at four to one against. What are the bookies supposed to live on?"

"Can't you understand he's a dark horse?" snapped Cardew, "The odds will shorten before Saturday, you can bank on that. I'll bet he will run at evens, or perhaps odds on. But at the moment he's a dark horse, and the bookies don't know."

"You know more than the bookies?"

"I know that Plum Cake's a winner. If I get on at once, I'm

all right, at four to one. A fiver on Plum Cake would mean twenty pounds. "Look here," Cardew's manner became earnest and eager, "I've had frightful bad luck—I'm cleaned right out—stony as the Sahara—and this would set me up again. I rather thought my grandfather would weigh in with a tip—but he hasn't! I'm right at the end of my tether—and this would see me through. Be pally for once."

"Oh, don't be a goat," said Clive, gruffly, "Can't you think of cricket instead of that dingy tosh? You're picked for the Carcroft match next week——."

"Hang the Carcroft match," snapped Cardew, irritably, "I'm talking about Plum Cake now——."

"Rot!" said Clive, "I'm going down."

Levison opened the study door.

"Coming, Cardew?" he asked.

"Oh, go and eat coke! I'm not coming." Cardew had risen from the armchair. Now he flung himself into it again, with a dark brow and glinting eyes. "Get out, and leave me alone."

"My dear chap——."

"Chuck it, and get out!" snapped Cardew.

Levison and Clive looked at him, and then, without another word, left the study. Cardew rose from the armchair again, to kick the door shut after them. Then he moved about the study restlessly, thinking out the peculiar problem of Plum Cake—a problem that appeared to have no solution!

CHAPTER VII

THANKS TO CARDEW!

Manners came out of the Shell form-room, the following morning, and walked away by himself. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther glanced after him, and Tom frowned slightly, and Lowther smiled.

Generally, the "Terrible Three" came out in a cheery bunch. There was a good deal of dissimilarity in their tastes : but the bond of friendship was strong. No doubt it was still as strong as ever : but Manners was a little on edge. He did not feel that he was getting a fair show. He had fairly slogged at games practice : he had devoted himself to cricket, even at the cost of neglecting his beloved camera, and apparently it was all to go for nothing. He was in the House match, so far as that went; but he was left out of School matches, and worst of all, in favour of Cardew of the Fourth, a fellow whom he despised. And Manners felt sore about it.

Manners, in fact, was angry, and like the prophet of old, he felt that he did well to be angry! He left his chums on the steps of the School House, with a view of an uncompromising back as he walked away.

"I say, Manners," called Tom.

Manners seemed deaf that morning!

At all events, he gave no heed. He walked out into the quad, apparently oblivious of the existence of his chums. Three or four fellows glanced at him, and at Tom and Lowther. Baggy Trimble, loafing in the doorway, grinned. A rift in the lute, among the "Terrible Three," was extremely rare. Now it seemed to have happened. Baggy, perhaps mindful of the spot of bother on the study landing the previous day, seemed amused.

"Shirty!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Nothing to get shirty about, that I can see," grunted Tom.

"I know! Fellows get shirty about nothing at times!" sighed Lowther, "He'll come round all right."

"I've done all I can," said Tom, with a worried look. "Manners knows jolly well that a cricket captain can't play a man because he's a pal. He wouldn't want me to, if you come to that."

"Of course he wouldn't! But——."

"I've agreed that if he goes one better than Cardew in the House match to-morrow, he goes down for Carcroft next week instead of Cardew. I couldn't go further than that, could I?"

Lowther laughed.

"He knows jolly well that you don't expect him to," he said, "Neither do I—or anyone else. But look here, Tom——."

"Well?" grunted Tom.

"Well, if he goes in at the tail, he won't have much chance of showing what he can do—if anything! Can't you give him a shove up the list?"

"His proper place is in the tail, if he could only see it."

Monty Lowther laughed again.

"How many cricketers do you know, who can see that their proper place is in the tail?" he asked.

"Not a lot, I suppose," admitted Tom.

"Well, look here, why not stretch a point, and let him go in first?"

"And begin a cricket match by losing a wicket?"

"Um!" said Lowther.

"It's rotten for a chap like Manners to get his silly back up about nothing," said Tom, "I'll push him as far up the list as I decently can. I can't do more than that. He's going to have his chance of out-classing Cardew in the House match—if he can do it. Goodness knows I'd be glad enough to play him at Carcroft, if he were a better man than Cardew. I don't like Cardew's rotten ways any more than he does—but that's got nothing to do with cricket."

"Thanks," said a drawling voice, almost at Tom's elbow.

Tom looked round. Cardew, coming out of the House behind the two Shell fellows on the steps, had evidently heard what he said. Not that Tom Merry cared whether he had heard or not. As a cricketer, he valued Cardew highly: personally he had no use for him, and quite sympathised with Manners' opinion of him. A fellow who smoked surreptitious cigarettes, dabbled in horse-racing, and crept out of bounds after lights out, was not the sort of fellow that Tom Merry would esteem.

"So happy to hear your opinion," smiled Cardew.

"You're welcome to it," grunted Tom, "You've heard it before, and I daresay you'll hear it again, unless you change a good deal."

"Can a leopard change his spots, or an Ethiopian his skin?" sighed Cardew, "Can we all be models to youth like our excellent Thomas?"

"Oh, shut up," snapped Tom.

"So Manners is goin' all out to cut me out of the Carcroft game, is he?" said Cardew, evidently much amused at the idea, "What a happy dream! He will wake up when Wynn of the New House bowls to him to-morrow. How many do you think he will stop?"

"All of them, I hope," said Tom.

"What a hope! I suppose you'll put him in last?"

"You can suppose what you like."

"Well, I wouldn't undertake to advise my skipper," drawled Cardew, "But that's where he'll do least damage, isn't it?"

Tom Merry breathed hard. He would have given almost anything, just then, to feel justified in giving Cardew's place in the Carcroft game to Manners. But he could not, and that was that. Manners, a fellow whom he liked and respected, had to be set aside for the slacking, supercilious dandy of the Fourth, whom he could neither like nor respect. A cricket captain had his duty to do. But he could not feel pleasant about it.

"Like to know in advance what the dear man's score will be in the House match to-morrow?" asked Cardew affably.

"You don't know that, any more than I do," snapped Tom.

"Of course, it depends," said Cardew, thoughtfully, "Not on Manners' battin', of course—that's got nothin' to do with it. Let's see! It's single innings in the House match, isn't it?"

"Yes," growled Tom.

"Then that settles it," said Cardew.

"How does that settle it?" asked Lowther, staring at him.

"Elementary, my dear Watson!" drawled Cardew, "If it's single innings Manners' score will be a duck. Otherwise, it would be a pair of spectacles."

With that, Cardew walked down the steps, and strolled away, leaving Lowther grinning, and Tom Merry with a knitted brow.

"By gum!" muttered Tom, "If only old Manners could play cricket like that cheeky cad does! I've a jolly good mind——." He made a move to follow Cardew, but checked himself, "That smoky swob to cheek Manners—!"

"Easy does it," said Lowther, "Cardew likes getting a fellow's rag out—it amuses him."

"Oh, bother him," growled Tom, "Come out, Monty, and let's look for old Manners. I want to speak to him."

They went out into the quad, where Manners was found under the elms by the wall, walking by himself, his hands deep in his trousers' pockets, and a moody look on his face. He glanced up at Tom and Monty as they came up, and seemed disposed to change his direction, and keep out of their way.

"Hold on, fathead," called out Tom, gruffly.

"Well?" said Manners, far from amiably.

"About the House match to-morrow——."

"Oh, don't worry about that," said Manners sarcastically. "If you bat first, I'll take my camera for a walk. I'll turn up for last wicket—but if I don't, I suppose it won't matter very much."

Evidently, Harry Manners' back was very much up!

"You're going in first," said Tom.

"Eh?"

"I've settled that you open the innings with Talbot."

"Oh!" said Manners.

Monty Lowther stared, and then grinned. Ten minutes ago, Tom Merry had certainly not thought of opening the School House innings with Manners. That was the result of Cardew's airy remarks on the House steps.

"Oh!" said Manners, again. His clouded brow cleared. "Look here, Tom, I won't let you down, old fellow."

"I know you won't, old chap," said Tom with all the confidence he could.

The "Terrible Three" strolled in the quad together till the dinner-bell rang. There was no longer any sign of a rift in the lute, Manners had what he wanted—thanks to Cardew! And Tom Merry could only hope that Cardew's prediction would not prove prophetic!

CHAPTER VIII

ONLY A FALSE ALARM!

George Figgins, of the New House, gave a snort.

"Tick!" he said.

"Eh! what?" ejaculated Kerr.

"Eh! Who?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

"Worm!" said Figgins.

Figgy's comrades gazed at him.

"Smudge!" said Figgins.

Figgy's rugged face registered scorn and disgust. Kerr and Wynn could only stare. They could not suppose that Figgy's derogatory remarks were addressed to either of them. And the

three New House juniors, who were strolling on the tow-path by the Rhyl, had it to themselves—there was nobody else near at hand. So the remarks of George Figgins were quite mysterious.

"Smear!" snorted Figgins.

Somebody, in Figgy's estimation, was evidently a tick, a worm, a smudge, and a smear! Who, Kerr and Wynn had to guess.

"Blot!" said Figgins. "Toad!"

Kerr and Wynn stared round, after staring at Figgins. They could see nobody on the towpath, apart from themselves. At that spot the tow-path was bordered by a fence, almost hidden in tall hawthorns : the back fence of the inn-garden of the Green Man, which fronted on Rylcombe Lane. Figgins, as he spoke, was staring towards the hawthorns. But nobody was to be seen there. If there was a tick, worm, smudge, smear, blot and toad about, that tick, worm, smudge, smear, blot and toad was invisible.

"What the dickens——?" said Fatty Wynn, blankly.

"Who the holy smoke——?" said Kerr.

"That School House worm, Cardew!" growled Figgins.

"Eh! Can't see him," said Fatty Wynn, with another stare round. "Is Cardew about? And what are you calling him names for?"

Figgins pointed to the masses of hawthorns, back of the tow-path, a little distance ahead.

"I just saw him," he explained, "Taking a dekko to see if the coast was clear, I suppose, before he dodges into that den. Pah!"

Evidently Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the School House Fourth, was the tick, worm, smudge, smear, blot and toad, to whom Figgins had alluded!

"There he is again!" added Figgins. "Heard us, perhaps."

From the thick hawthorns at the fence, the handsome face of Cardew of the Fourth looked out, his head popping into sight. He shot a keen glance down the path, and saw the three New House juniors as they came along.

That Cardew was there, at that particular spot, either to enter the precincts of the Green Man, strictly out of bounds for St. Jim's, or else to communicate with some person therein, was fairly clear. Hence Figgy's remarks, and the scorn and disgust registered in his rugged features.

If that was Cardew's intention, he had to be wary. Sixth-form prefects, or even a "beak," might have come along the

tow-path. And Cardew, reckless scapegrace as he was, certainly did not want to be taken before his house-master on a charge of "pub-haunting."

But he did not care a bean whether juniors saw him or not. He stared at the New House trio indifferently. Then, as he noted the expression on Figgy's speaking countenance, he smiled. Apparently Figgy's indignation amused him. Whatever George Figgins thought of him and his proceedings, evidently Cardew couldn't have cared less.

He backed into the hawthorns again, and disappeared from sight. George Figgins expressed his feelings with another snort.

"And that chap's picked out to play at Carcroft next week!" he said, "Cricket ain't good enough for him—backing his fancy is more to his taste! Well, I jolly well hope his horse will come in eleventh."

"Probably it will!" said Kerr, with a grin, "The dear boy fancies he can spot winners—but I don't think Bill Lodgey loses much to him."

"Serve him right if Railton came along and nabbed him," said Fatty Wynn.

"Too jolly cautious for that," grunted Figgins, "Cheeky cad—staring at us and carrying on just as if it didn't matter what we think."

"He wouldn't care," said Fatty.

"By gum, though," said Figgins, his eyes gleaming, "I'll jolly well make him care. I'll jolly well make him think a beak has spotted him! You watch!"

Leaving his comrades on the tow-path, wondering a little what the idea was, George Figgins pushed on. The grass of the tow-path deadened footsteps, but to make assurance doubly sure, Figgy trod on tiptoe. Apparently he was going to take the fellow hidden in the hawthorns by surprise, though with exactly what object, his chums did not know. However, they waited, and watched.

Figgins reached the hawthorns. They grew so thickly that the School House junior, close to the fence, was hidden from sight. Cautiously—with all the caution he had learned as a Boy Scout—Figgy pushed in, till he glimpsed the Green Man fence, and the elegant figure of Cardew standing there.

He had a view of Cardew's back, as he stood at the fence : and a face view of the beery countenance of Bill Lodgey, looking

over from within. If Figgy had doubted before why Cardew was there, he knew now. He was in conversation with the racing man at the Green Man. He was speaking in a low voice, but what he had said came clearly, now that Figgins was close at hand.

"——Plum Cake, for the three-thirty at Abbotsford on Saturday——."

"You're on, sir," came Bill Lodgey's husky voice, "And I'll say you've picked a good 'orse, sir."

"Oh, just a fancy," drawled Cardew. "Put on a fiver for me, Bill."

"Oh!" said Mr. Lodgey. He seemed to pause.

"Well?" Cardew's voice came with a sharp note in it.

"Well, sir," said Bill Lodgey, apologetically, "You won't mind me mentioning that you ain't settled up old accounts yet, sir. You've 'ad a run of bad luck, I know, and I ain't the man to 'urry a young gentleman. But I 'ave to 'ave ready money in my line of business, Master Cardew, and ten quid is a lot. And now another fiver, sir——." Mr. Lodgey coughed.

"Plum Cake will get home," said Cardew.

"Like enough, sir—more'n likely. I know you know your way about, sir. But a cove has to 'ave ready money in 'and in my line of business."

Cardew breathed rather hard through his well-shaped nose. Bill Lodgey was apologetic, but there was a trace of doggedness in his voice. But the dandy of the Fourth answered lightly.

"My ship comes home next week, Bill! I've got something coming from my grandfather. You're all right."

"O.K. Master Cardew! I know I can trust you, of course," mumbled Bill, "You wouldn't go in deeper than you could stand for, sir."

"Hardly," said Cardew, laughing.

"O.K., sir! You're on for a fiver," said Bill.

At that point came a sudden interruption. A deep voice—as deep as George Figgins could make it—rapped out through the hawthorns.

"Cardew! How dare you be here! Go back to the school at once! This instant."

Cardew jumped almost clear of the ground.

Figgins had made his voice as deep as Mr. Railton's! It startled the sportsman of the Fourth almost out of his wits for a moment.

"Oh, gosh!" breathed Bill Lodgey. And he promptly disappeared from sight. He, like Cardew, supposed that a master from the school had come up, and he had no desire whatever to interview a St. Jim's master.

Figgins, grinning, backed out of the hawthorns to the tow-path. Cardew did not stir immediately. He stood with whitened face, panting. Who had spoken he did not know : he had not recognised the voice. But he had no doubt that a St. Jim's "beak" had spotted him, and if that was the case, he knew what it meant. Railton would take him to the Head.

With all his nerve, and all his nonchalance, the dandy of the Fourth was deeply shaken. For several long moments he stood there, in utter dismay. But he was caught—at least, he had no doubt that he was, and he moved out of the hawthorns at last, to take what was coming to him.

Then he stared blankly.

There was no master in sight. There was no man at all in sight. Figgins stood there grinning—at a little distance, Kerr and Wynn stood laughing. Cardew stared at Figgins, then at Kerr and Wynn, then back at Figgins again. He did not understand for the moment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgy's chums.

"What——?" stammered Cardew. "Who——?"

"Go back to the school at once, Cardew!" rapped Figgins, reassuming the deep voice he had assumed in the hawthorns, "This instant."

"Oh!" gasped Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins and Co.

Cardew's face blazed with rage. He understood now how his leg had been pulled. He was not caught—it was only a jape of the cheery Figgins.

"You—you—you cheeky fool!" he panted.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, "Did you think you were nabbed, you tick? Did you think a beak had got you, you worm? Ha, ha, ha! Only a false alarm! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Kerr and Wynn.

The next moment Cardew, with clenched fists and blazing eyes, was leaping at Figgins, hitting out. But the next, the three New House juniors had collared him, and sat him down on the tow-path.

They sat him down hard.

Then they walked on, leaving him sitting and panting for breath, laughing as they went, evidently greatly entertained by Figgy's little jest on the sportsman of the Fourth. Cardew was left staring after them with an expression on his face that the fabled gorgon might have envied.

CHAPTER IX

THE TENNER!

"Anythin' for me, deah boy?"

"Nix!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

A good many fellows were looking over the letter-rack in break on Wednesday morning. Study No. 6 had come along in a body, in the hope that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's expected fiver had materialised. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were there—Tom looking for a letter from his old guardian, Miss Priscilla : Lowther hopeful of a tip from an affectionate uncle, and Manners in the happily assured expectation of a promised remittance. Baggy Trimble was there, not so much in the hope of a remittance for himself, as in the hope of raising a small loan from some other fellow who did receive one. Keenest of all were Cardew's eyes in scanning the letters.

His careless nonchalant look gave no indication of the anxiety he was feeling. But as a matter of fact, Cardew was feeling very anxious.

The dandy of the Fourth generally had plenty of money. Most fellows would have been surprised to hear that he was hard up.

But he was not only hard up for once : he was in deep water. He was satisfied that he had picked out a winner in "Plum Cake," and that his win on the favoured "geegee" would clear

him of all his difficulties. Yet a lingering doubt remained. And if Plum Cake did not win at Abbotsford on Saturday, the Fourth-form sportsman hardly cared to think of what the outcome would be.

It was not uncommon for a liberal remittance to reach him, from his grandfather, old Lord Reckness. He had almost banked on it. But it had not come : and a glance over the rack showed that there was no letter for him this morning.

He set his lips hard.

Neither was there a letter for the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The fiver had not materialised.

"Nix!" repeated Jack Blake, "Gussy, old man, you'd better 'phone up your pater after third school. Railton will let you use his 'phone, if you tell him that the old bean has forgotten to cough up a fiver."

"Weally, Blake——."

"Tell him that the whole study's on its uppers, Gussy," advised Digby.

"Weally, Dig——."

"And if he's short of a fiver, tip him that a pound note on account would help us out a lot," suggested Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"One for you, Herries," said Blake, "Here you are—open it, quick! Looks like tea in hall for the rest of the week for our study."

"Five bob," said Herries, opening his letter, and taking out a postal-order.

"Saved!" said Blake, dramatically.

"Well five bob that turns up, is better than five quid that doesn't!" remarked Herries, "This will see us through to-day."

"Yaas, wathah."

"I say what's that?" There was quite an excited squeak from Baggy Trimble, "I say, is that a tenner, Manners?"

All eyes turned on Manners of the Shell—Cardew's among the rest, with a glint in them.

There was nothing for Tom Merry or Lowther, but they waited while their chum opened a letter. Nobody, except Baggy, noted what he had taken from it : but Baggy's eyes were very keen on matters that did not concern him. Baggy noted a flimsy strip of paper : and his eyes rounded as he spotted the figures on it. He edged nearer to Manners. Baggy quite forgot that a couple of days ago, Manners had banged his fat head on the banisters. At the present moment he loved Manners like a brother.

"A tenner!" gasped Baggy.

"Bai Jove! Gwattahs, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, genially, "That's wathah toppin'."

Manners was reading his letter, with the banknote in his other hand. Nobody would have noticed it but Baggy, and Manners coloured a little with annoyance as Trimble drew attention to it. He put it rather hastily into his pocket. Manners was a quiet and very unostentatious fellow, and certainly did not want to "swank" with his ten-pound note.

"Better keep it dark, old man," said Blake, "Railton would want to know, if he heard about it."

"Yaas, wathah," remarked Arthur Augustus, "It's wathah a lot for a juniah, and you don't want the House beak to take charge of it, Mannahs."

"That's all right," said Manners, "Railton woudn't mind in this case. I don't get whacking tips like you and Cardew, Gussy. This is a special case—my uncle promised it me if I bagged the Latin prize this term—and I did. That's all."

"The reward of virtue!" remarked Cardew, sarcasticallv.

Manners looked at him.

"It won't go on the Abbotsford races, at any rate," he said, and he turned his back on Cardew, and walked away with his friends.

"Bai Jove! Old Mannahs is in luck," remarked Arthur Augustus, "But I wathah think he earned it, swottin' for a Latin pwize."

"Some fellows are born swots!" sneered Cardew.

"Weally, Cardew——."

"And some are born wasters," said Jack Blake, "How's Plum Cake getting on for the Welshem Stakes, Cardew?"

"Go and eat coke," was Cardew's reply to that, and he shoved his hands into his pockets and walked out of the House.

Arthur Augustus gave a sniff.

"Old Mannahs is worth fifty of that boundah," he said, "If I were cwicket captain, I wathah think I should stwetch a point, and play Mannahs at Carcwoft, and scwatch Cardew. The fact is, deah boys," went on Arthur Augustus, with a wise shake of the head, "I'm not suah that Tom Mewwy is wight in the mattah. I fancy I know a little about a cwicketah's form——"

"You do!" agreed Blake, "A very little."

"Weally, Blake——."

"Manners has picked up a lot, but he isn't in the same street with Cardew at cricket," said Herries.

"I am not so suah of that, Hewwies. Mannahs showed vewy wemarkable form at games pwactice yestahday."

"Did he? I never noticed it specially," said Blake.

"Nor I," said Dig.

"Weally, deah boys, you must have had your eyes shut," said Arthur Augustus, "Don't you wemembah that I gave Mannahs some bowlin' at the nets?"

"What about that?" asked Blake.

"He stood up to it," explained Arthur Augustus, "It was wathah unexpected, but I was quite unable to take his wicket. I thought he showed quite wemarkable form."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for mewwiment in that wemark," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass on his chums in surprise. "What's the joke?"

"You are!" explained Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Come on, Herries, old man—Dame Taggles will change that for you," said Blake : and Study No. 6 adjourned to the school shop : Arthur Augustus continuing to point out Manners' definite claim to be included in the team for Carcroft—and Blake, Herries and Digby continuing quite unconvinced that Manners had proved that claim by the remarkable feat of standing up to Gussy's bowling!

CHAPTER X

TRIBULATIONS OF A SPORTSMAN!

"Here you are," said Levison of the Fourth.

Levison and Clive met Cardew as he came out of the House. Levison had a folded newspaper under his arm.

Cardew did not answer, as he joined his chums. His brow was

dark, and his eyes glinting. It was not often that the dandy of the Fourth displayed feeling of any kind : he rather prided himself upon being " serene, indifferent to fate," and on being able to take a knock without showing a sign. At the moment, however, he seemed quite unable to disguise his irritation and resentment. His chums could see at a glance that he was in one of his worst tempers.

He had asked Levison to " bag " a newspaper from Common-Room, while he went to look for letters in the rack. Now, however, he seemed to have forgotten it, with dark and bitter thoughts in his mind.

" What's the trouble? " asked Clive, not without a touch of impatience. He had little doubt that it was something amiss with Cardew's sporting speculations that had brought that black look to his face.

" Nothing by the post? " asked Levison.

" No! " Cardew bit his lip, " I've written twice—and I haven't even had an answer. I daresay my uncle Lilburn has butted in. He never loses a chance of queering the pitch for me with his father. He doesn't like the family resources bein' wasted on the son of a younger son! " he added, bitterly.

Levison and Clive made no rejoinder to that. If Lord Lilburn desired to check an old man's thoughtless liberality to a schoolboy who threw money away on racing, they could not blame him so much as Cardew evidently did. But it would not have improved matters to tell Cardew so.

" The old bean may be ill, of course," went on Cardew, his expression changing a little, " He's ill half the time—and then Lilburn takes control. If it's that, it's rather beastly to bother him. I won't write again." Then he shrugged his shoulders angrily, " Anyhow, it seems no good. I was as good as banking on it—and I'm let down."

" If you're hard up for anything but backing horses, you've got pals to come to," said Clive, quietly.

" Thanks! I'll come to you for sermons, when I want them," grunted Cardew, " At the moment I can do without them. Anyhow you couldn't see me through—with a pound note and a ten-bobber. I'm in too deep for that."

" Oh, you ass! " said Levison.

" You're a bit of a rotter, Cardew," said Clive, " You're in the Carcroft game, and you ought to be going all out at cricket

—and you let rot like this weigh on your mind. It's silly and rotten too."

"Is that sixthly or seventhly?" asked Cardew.

"Oh, rats!"

"Anyhow, Plum Cake will see me through," said Cardew, his face clearing, "If he doesn't, I shall be in a dooce of a hole. But he will! I tell you, that horse can't lose."

"Fathead!" said Clive.

"I'm on at four to one," said Cardew, his eyes glistening. Now that he was on this engrossing topic, he seemed to have thrown aside his irritation and uneasiness, "That's all right. And you can bet that the odds will shorten this week—I'll bet he'll run at evens on Saturday. The bookies will spot his form before then —but I'm on, so I'm on velvet."

Clive expressed his feelings with a grunt.

"Hand over that rag," went on Cardew, holding out his hand for the newspaper under Levison's arm. "There may be something in it."

"There is," said Clive, "The cricket news is worth seeing this morning. Surrey——."

Cardew stared at him for a moment, and then laughed.

"Did you think I wanted the paper to see the County scores?" he jeered.

"Well, what else, then?"

"Something a bit more important, you ass. Here, let's get under the elms—I don't want every eye at St. Jim's on me."

Levison frowning, and Clive puzzled, they moved off under the elms, where Cardew unfolded the newspaper.

But he did not open it at the County cricket news. It was the columns devoted to "sport" that Cardew scanned eagerly.

"Oh!" ejaculated Clive, "That!"

"Just that!" grinned Cardew, "Shut up a minute while I see whether there's anything about Plum Cake."

"Well, I'm not interested, if you are," said Clive, gruffly, I'll cut."

"Please yourself."

The South African junior, frowning, walked away. Levison looked disposed to follow him : but he lingered. Cardew, heedless of either of them, scanned the columns of close print eagerly.

He was eager for news of Plum Cake, that wonderful "gee" that was to lift him out of all his difficulties on Saturday—perhaps! He hoped to find that the odds against Plum Cake had

shortened—now that he was safely "on." Odds of only two or three to one, instead of four, would have been very encouraging showing that Plum Cake's chances were considered to have improved, by the people who knew. He uttered an exclamation, as he spotted the name "Plum Cake" in a paragraph in small type.

"Oh! Here it is!"

Then the next moment the colour wavered in his cheeks, and his eyes seemed to start. He stared at the newspaper blankly, almost incredulously.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Levison was turning away. But he turned back. Cardew looked as if he had been struck a stunning blow.

"What is it, old chap?" asked Levison, hastily.

"I—I can't make it out! It says here that the odds have lengthened—they're six to one now," muttered Cardew, "What does it mean?"

Levison did not need to answer that. Cardew knew very well what it meant and could only mean. Four to one meant that the horse was not expected to be in the first three. Six to one meant that he was not considered to have a chance at all. So far from the "bookies" having discovered that Plum Cake was a "dark horse,' with the result of shortening the odds they were evidently of opinion that he was no good.

Cardew panted.

"What does it mean?" he repeated, "He's a good horse—I know that! I know somethin' about gees! Is it some wangle at the stable, or what? Or——." He caught his breath, "He's running again on Wednesday next week—are they going to pull him on Saturday, and save him for Wednesday—it might be that!"

Cardew's face was quite pale.

Whether he had been mistaken in selecting that "gee," or whether it was going to be "pulled" on Saturday, or whether it was some other kind of a "wangle" of the Turf, it made little difference—if Plum Cake lost the three-thirty. If that happened, Cardew's debt to Mr. Bill Lodgey at the Green Man increased to fifteen pounds, and Bill, already a little "edge-wise," would certainly give trouble if he was not paid—and Cardew, so far from having fifteen pounds, had not so much as fifteen sixpences!

"Oh!" breathed Cardew, "He's a good horse—I tell you, he's a good horse. I know that! But you never know what they may wangle in the stable."

"A good reason for leaving it alone," remarked Levison, drily, "Look here, Cardew, you'd better pull yourself together, and chuck this right out of your mind. You're playing in the House match this afternoon——."

"Oh, don't be a fool!" hissed Cardew.

"What?"

"Do you think I'm thinking about House matches?" snarled Cardew, "Don't be a fool, if you can help it! If Plum Cake lets me down on Saturday——."

Levison gave him a look, and without answering, walked away to rejoin Clive in the quad. He seemed to have had enough of Cardew's sporting troubles, and of his temper too. Cardew cast an almost evil look after him and hurled the newspaper away among the elms, and then stood with clenched hands, and knitted brows, his eyes glinting and gleaming. If Plum Cake let him down on Saturday, what was going to happen then? And it was borne in on his mind that Plum Cake was going to let him down —the lengthening of the odds could hardly mean anything else.

"Oh!" breathed Cardew, "If I'd guessed—I'll bet they're keeping him for next week's race—it's a bigger race and a bigger stake than the tinpot handicap at Abbotsford—that's it. They want to keep his weight down for the big race—I'll bet that's it! I know he's a good gee—I know it!—he could win at Abbotsford if they liked—but he's not going to win—the bookies know that! If I'd guessed——."

His hands were clenched till the nails almost dug into the palms. Whatever the explanation, Plum Cake, four to one on Monday, was six to one on Wednesday : and that pointed out the only too probable result, like the finger of fate. It was borne in upon his mind that he was going, after all, to lose his money on Saturday—and he would owe Bill Lodgey more than he could possibly hope to pay : and what was Lodgey likely to do? Worst of all, as it seemed to Cardew at least, was the fact that he now felt absolutely certain that Plum Cake would win the following week—without Cardew being "on" : for even if Bill Lodgey consented to wait for his money, he was hardly likely to take another bet "on the nod." It was quite overwhelming for the sportsman of the Fourth : and he was not likely, in such circumstances, to give much thought to the House match.

He stood thinking it out, savagely, or trying to think it out, till the bell rang for third school, and the St. Jim's crowd went to the form-rooms.

But he did not immediately heed the bell. Everyone else had gone in before he moved, at last, and tramped sullenly towards the House. He was five minutes late for class in the Fourth-form room, and Mr. Lathom gave him a severe glance as he came in.

"Cardew!" he rapped.

"Yes, sir," muttered Cardew, barely able to reply respectfully.

"You are five minutes late, Cardew."

"I know that!" grunted Cardew.

"What? what?" Mr. Lathom almost jumped. "What did you say, Cardew?"

All eyes in the Fourth form-room turned on Cardew. His manner to his form-master often verged on impertinence : but this was the first time that he had ever answered him with actual insolence.

Mr. Lathom frowned portentously. He was a mild little gentleman : but there was a limit to his forbearance.

"You are impertinent, Cardew," he exclaimed, "I should have given you an imposition for unpunctuality. Now I shall cane you."

Cardew's eyes glittered. But he checked the further insolence that was already on his lips. The Fourth-form master picked up the cane from his desk.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "That ass is askin' for it! What's the mattah with him, I wondah?"

"Cardew! Bend over that desk."

Breathing hard, Cardew bent over the desk.

Whop! whop!

"Now go to your place, Cardew," said Mr. Lathom, severely.

Cardew, with a black brow, went to his place. But in a few minutes he forgot both his form-master and the whops of his form-master's cane. What was he going to do when Plum Cake "let him down" on Saturday? That question hammered in his mind, and he did not know the answer.

Other fellows in the Fourth were not very attentive in third school that morning—thinking of the cricket to follow in the afternoon. Cardew was not thinking of the cricket. He was keen enough on the game when his sporting speculations did not interfere with it. Now it was less than nothing to him, with his tormented mind occupied and harassed by the tribulations of a sportsman!

CHAPTER XI

QUID PRO QUO?

Manners looked round.

"Time?" he asked.

Then he frowned.

Manners was in his study after dinner. Tom Merry had gone down with Lowther to look at the pitch on Little Side. Manners, certainly, was keen on the House match that afternoon: but cricket did not fill his mind quite to the exclusion of his favourite hobby, photography. He had some negatives to print out, and the sun was bright in the early afternoon at the window of No. 10 Study in the Shell—likewise, Manners preferred the study to himself when he was doing this kind of work. So there was Harry Manners, with his negatives and printing frames, at the study window, when the door opened, and he looked round at a footstep, expecting that it was one of his friends who had come to tell him that it was time to change for cricket.

But it was Cardew who lounged into the study: hence Manners' frown.

Manners did not exactly "bar" Cardew of the Fourth, but he did not like him, and the less he saw of him the more he was satisfied. Certainly he did not want a visit in his study from the scapegrace of the House.

His look could hardly have been more unwelcoming.

If Cardew observed it, he did not take heed of it. Cardew was, in point of fact, sensitive : sometimes too much so. But when it suited him, he could be as thick-skinned as Baggy Trimble.

He strolled into the study, his hands in his pockets, and glanced carelessly at Manners' printing outfit.

"Busy?" he drawled.

"Not specially! If Tom's sent you to tell me it's time, I'm ready."

"Not at all! Bags of time yet," answered Cardew, "Just strolled in for a chat for a few minutes, old boy."

Manners did not answer that. He went on arranging the printing frames. He did not like the "old boy" from Cardew : and he did not want any of his chat.

To a serious, thoughtful fellow like Manners, an airy and volatile fellow like Cardew was a puzzle, and neither an interesting nor an agreeable one.

Manners took things seriously : and Cardew was never known to take anything seriously. He could distinguish himself in class, when he liked, and draw approving comments from Mr. Lathom: but he seldom liked. He was good at games—when he liked! At present he was tremendously keen on cricket, and was, in the opinion of everybody but Harry Manners, at the top of his form, and a fellow who could not possibly be passed over in matches. Yet it had happened more than once that Cardew had been in trouble for slacking at games : and had, indeed, been "whopped" by the captain of the school for that reason.

The only certain thing about Ralph Reckness Cardew was his uncertainty : and Manners of the Shell had no use for a fellow who could not be depended on, and who could not even depend on himself, from day to day.

Manners did not want to be uncivil, but he had little civility to waste on Cardew. His expression showed as much, if Cardew cared to see it. But the Fourth-form sportsman had come there with a purpose, and he was not easily to be rebuffed.

Cardew stood looking at him, for a moment or two, in silence. There was a careless smile on his face, but his eyes were hard, and his feelings bitter. For whatever reason, the old Lord at Reckness Towers had failed him, and he was "up against it" very badly. And that swot, that ass, that old sobersides, who thought of nothing but photography, and Latin prizes, and fancied that he could play cricket, had a "tenner" in his pocket—a scrap of paper that would have relieved Cardew of all his sporting troubles, and made it possible for him to back Plum Cake a second time in the later race, and thus recoup all his losses!

But bitter as he was feeling, Cardew's voice had an easy drawl as he spoke again.

"You're pretty keen on the House match to-day, Manners."

"Yes!" answered Manners, briefly.

"I hear that if you put up a good show you've a chance for the Carcroft game next week."

Manners turned his head and looked at him.

"You know exactly how that stands," he said, icily. "It's between you and me. The one of us that puts up the better show this afternoon will go down for Carcroft. I've heard some of your little jokes on the subject in the day-room—I daresay you intended them to be repeated to me. I don't want to hear any more from you."

And with that, Manners turned back to his printing-frames, with a faint flush in his cheeks. But he turned back again, with a start, as Cardew drawled:

"I mayn't be playin' after all."

Manners stared at him.

"Not playing in the House match!" he ejaculated.

"I'm not sure."

"What rot are you talking?" exclaimed Manners, gruffly, "If you let Tom Merry down this afternoon——!"

"Oh, he'll find another man easily enough, for a House match," said Cardew, carelessly.

"You can bank on it that if you don't turn up this afternoon, you will be scratched for the Carcroft game next week."

"That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Oh!" said Manners, taken aback.

"If I go out, you go in," said Cardew.

"That's so! But——." Manners stared, "What the dickens do you mean, Cardew? Have you changed your mind about playing for School?" Manners did not try to keep the contempt out of his voice, "You're as changeable as a leaf in the wind—but I should have thought you'd stick to that. You've got a chance that twenty fellows in either House would jump at."

"I know."

"Well, don't you value it at all?" snapped Manners.

"Oh, lots and lots! Still, there are other things in life, as well as cricket, though Tom Merry wouldn't believe it if I told him, and spoke with the tongue of men and angels," drawled Cardew.

"If you don't want the place, you'd better tell Tom so."

"I do want it."

"Then what the thump are you driving at?"

"A quid pro quo," said Cardew.

"What does that mean, if it means anything?" said Manners, testily.

"And you the man who's won a Latin prize!" grinned Cardew,

"Quid pro quo, my dear man, means a fair exchange—something for something—tit for tat——."

"Don't be a fool!" said Manners, roughly, "I want you to tell what you mean, if you mean anything."

"I'm in a hole."

"Are you? The geegees let you down?' asked Manners, sarcastically.

"With a bump!" assented Cardew.

"Nothing to do with me, is it?"

"Not at all—excepting on 'quid pro quo' lines," said Cardew, coolly, "You can help me out—and I can help you out! One good turn deserves another. See?"

"No, I don't see. Make it plainer."

"Shall I put it in words of one syllable? You've got a tenner in your pocket——."

"I've got one in my desk," said Manners. "What do you mean? You're not asking me to lend you my tenner, are you?"

"Exactly."

"Then you'd better go to sleep and dream again," said Manners, contemptuously. "Of all the thumping cheek—!"

"I've mentioned a quid pro quo," drawled Cardew, "I'm not a fellow to ask favours, and if I were, you're the last man at St. Jim's I'd ask. I'm willing to make it worth your while. Your money will be safe enough—you're not lending it to Baggy Trimble! I want it for a week."

"You can go on wanting."

"And you want to play at Carcroft," went on Cardew, unheeding, "If I stand out of the House match this afternoon, it's a cert for you. Now do you get me?"

Manners stood looking at him. It took a few moments for this to sink into his mind. But when Cardew's meaning became clear to him, his brow darkened, and his eyes glinted.

"You rotter!" he said.

"It's a good offer," drawled Cardew, "Tom Merry's told you that if you out-class me in the House match, you play at Carcroft. He must have been pulling your leg, but he will have to stick to it. He knows, and every other man in the House knows, that I can play your head off. You know it yourself."

"I don't!"

"None so blind as those who won't see!" said Cardew, lightly, "That's that, whether you can see it or not. If I stand out of the game to-day, that dishes me, and leaves the field clear for

you. If I play, you haven't a dog's chance. I'll stand out—if you like."

"You'd stand out of cricket altogether, if Tom Merry heard you offering to sell a place in the eleven," said Manners, scornfully.

"I'm not talking to Tom Merry—I'm talking to you—and in confidence, too," said Cardew, "I'm keen enough to play, but I'm keener on something else—I'm in a hole, as I told you. Is it a go?"

Manners raised his hand, and pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said.

Cardew breathed hard.

"Is that all you've got to say?" he asked.

"No!" said Manners, "Get out or I'll throw you out.'

"Thanks! I won't give you the trouble." Cardew lounged to the door. With his hand on the door-handle he glanced back, "If you think better of it, Manners——."

"That's enough!"

"Give me the tip before stumps are pitched, if you do. Any time up till then."

"Get out!" roared Manners.

"Cheerio, old bean."

Cardew strolled out of the study, laughing. But his face set hard as he went down the passage.

CHAPTER XII

A SPOT OF TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Baggy Trimble.

His podgy heart almost missed a beat.

If Baggy had expected anything at that moment, it certainly was not the turning of the door-handle of No. 9 Study in the

Fourth. That really was the last thing Baggy could have expected, in the circumstances.

Stumps were pitched for the House match. The cricketers were gathering, or had gathered, on Little Side. The School House junior team consisted of Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, Blake, D'Arcy, Herries, Talbot, Noble, Levison, Clive and Cardew. It followed, therefore, that all the three members of Study No. 9 were, or should have been, on the cricket ground, and thinking only of cricket, and beating Figgins and Co. at that great game.

So how could Trimble of the Fourth have expected any one of the three to arrive at No. 9 Study?

Obviously, he couldn't have! Had Trimble anticipated anything of the kind, he certainly would not have been in No. 9 at that moment.

It had seemed to Trimble as safe as houses. And the attraction that drew him to the study was strong. He was deeply interested in a parcel that had arrived for Sidney Clive that day, from his relatives in South Africa.

It was not uncommon for the South African junior to receive such a parcel from overseas. He had kind relatives there who did not forget that he was in a land of short commons. On such occasions there were spreads in No. 9. No doubt there was going to be a spread after the House match that day. Baggy Trimble's idea was to get in before the crush, as it were!

Baggy's wide mouth fairly watered at the thought of what was in that parcel from South Africa. He was going to sample the contents, while the chums of No. 9 Study were at a safe distance on Little Side. He had had no luck with Arthur Augustus's plum cake a few days ago, but he counted on samples from that South African parcel as a certainty.

So there was Baggy, standing inside the study cupboard, in the very act of unpacking the parcel, which Clive had left on the shelf at the back of the cupboard. It was a wall-cupboard, from floor to ceiling, with shelves round it.

And then, without the slightest warning, came the rattle of the door-handle of the study door, as it was turned.

Baggy stood stock still.

There was no retreat for him. There he was! Obviously one of the three fellows who belonged to the study was coming in —any other fellow would have knocked. Baggy was fairly cornered.

The study door was flung open. Someone tramped in—almost stamped in. Then there was a heavy slam as the door was hurled shut.

Baggy trembled.

Those manifestations indicated very clearly that the fellow who had come in was in a bad temper. And when he discovered Baggy——!

For the moment, at least, he did not discover him. He tramped across the study, without a glance in the direction of the cupboard, and flung himself into an armchair by the window.

Baggy breathed again.

He had not seen who it was—but he knew that it must be Cardew, Clive, or Levison. But from where he sat by the window, the fellow, whoever he was, could not see into the open cupboard. Baggy, for the moment at least, was safe.

"Fool!"

Trimble gave quite a jump as he heard that. The fellow in the armchair was speaking, and it was Cardew—Baggy knew his voice. For a second, Baggy supposed that Cardew knew he was there, and was addressing him. Then he realised that the dandy of the Fourth was speaking to himself.

"Fool!" repeated Cardew, in tones of intense bitterness, "Fool! You've landed yourself at last, good and proper! Fool!"

A long silence followed.

Baggy did not stir.

So far, he was not discovered. He would have been glad to pull the cupboard door shut after him—there was plenty of room for even the fat Baggy to stand inside, between the door and the back shelf. But he dared not make the venture. He could only hope that Cardew would remember that he was due for cricket, and quit the study as hastily as he had entered it, without glancing at the cupboard. If he glanced at it, he could hardly fail to see Baggy there! The hapless sampler of other fellows' parcels could only hope that he wouldn't. Anyhow, Baggy's present cue was undoubtedly to follow the example of that astute animal, Brer Fox, and "lie low and say nuffin'."

The minutes passed—very long to Baggy. Several times he heard the armchair by the window creak, as Cardew stirred restlessly. Several times he heard him muttering, without catching the words.

Then, at long last, the study door suddenly opened.

Baggy trembled!

It was another of them—had the whole study forgotten the cricket?

But the newcomer did not come in. He stood in the doorway, looking in, and Baggy heard Levison's voice:

"Oh, here you are!"

"Shut the door after you!" snapped Cardew.

"What? What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"Gone crackers?"

"Oh, don't be a fool! Get out and leave me alone," said Cardew, savagely, "I'm trying to think something out. Cut."

"Have you forgotten the House match?" asked Levison, quietly.

"Hang the House match."

"Look here, Cardew——."

"Oh, chuck it," exclaimed Cardew, with angry impatience, "I'm in a hole! I've got landed! You know what we saw in the paper this morning—and I daresay you know what it means! I've got that to think out."

"I came to look for you—it's time to change for the game——."

"Bother the game."

"Don't be a goat, Cardew. You'd better put that racing rot out of your head, and come along. If we bat first, you're third on the list. If we go into field, you'll be wanted at once."

"I'm dished," muttered Cardew, "I've given up expectin' anythin from home, and I've tried another resource, and it's failed. Plum Cake is going to lose on Saturday—he's meant to lose, keeping him for next week's race——."

"Not much use thinking about that now——."

"What else am I to think of?" snarled Cardew, "If I could raise the wind, I could get it all back by backin' Plum Cake for his next race—he's meant to win that, and he can win. But I'm in too deep—I can't raise the wind—I'm landed! Fairly up the spout."

"Are you coming down to the cricket or not?" Levison's voice was sharp, "Shall I tell Tom Merry you're not playing?"

"What do I care?"

"For goodness sake, Cardew——."

"Oh, I'll come." Cardew rose from the armchair, "I'll come, if only to dish that smear Manners. I'll see that he doesn't get

away with it! The silly swob fancies he can go one better than I can—and bag a place for Carcroft. I'll put the stopper on that, at any rate."

"You'd better pull yourself together," said Levison, "Manners isn't your form, but he's a good man, and if you go to pieces, you may find that he's beaten you to it for Carcroft."

"I'll see that he doesn't. I'm coming," growled Cardew, "Where's my bat? It's here somewhere—oh, in the cupboard! I'm coming."

Cardew stepped to the cupboard. The next moment he uttered almost a yell of fury, and Baggy Trimble a squeak of terror.

"What——!" exclaimed Levison, from the door.

"Trimble!" yelled Cardew, "That spying worm——." Cardew said no more. He grabbed the hapless Baggy. That Baggy, in the cupboard, must have heard every word he had uttered, Cardew realised at once—and that meant that every fellow in the Fourth would know about it before calling-over. Baggy, scared out of his fat wits, made a desperate bound to escape, but Cardew's grasp was on him, and there was no escape for Baggy.

He was whirled headlong out of the cupboard in that angry grasp. The next moment Cardew was punching him right and left.

"Oh! ow! wow!" roared Trimble, "I say—oh!—ow! Oh, scissors! Wow!"

"Hold on, Cardew" exclaimed Levison. He ran into the study, and caught Cardew's arm. It was dragged away again at once.

"Leave me alone, you fool!" shouted Cardew.

"Ow! oh! ow!" Baggy Trimble tottered right and left under Cardew's angry thumps, "Wow! I say—yarooh!"

Thump! thump! thump!

"Oooooogh! I say—woogh! Help!"

"That's enough," exclaimed Levison, and he grasped Cardew, and dragged him away from Trimble by main force, "Cut, Trimble, you idiot."

Baggy did not need telling twice! He shot out of the doorway. Baggy was no longer thinking of the parcel from South Africa! Baggy was thinking only of putting the widest possible space, in the shortest possible time, between himself and Ralph Reckness Cardew. Leaving sounds of angry argument behind him in No. 9 Study, Baggy did the Fourth-form passage as if it had been the cinder-path, and vanished into space.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOUSE MATCH

"Feeling fit, old fellow?"

"Fit as a fiddle," said Manners.

"Good man!" said Tom.

Manners gave him a slightly sarcastic grin.

"I'm not going to let you down," he said, "If I can't put up fireworks like Cardew, I can stop a ball or two. But if you'd rather not open with me——."

"That's settled," said Tom, "Ready, Talbot?"

"Ready," answered Talbot of the Shell.

Figgins and Co. of the New House, were in the field. Fatty Wynn, the champion bowler, was tossing up the ball, and catching it again in a fat hand. Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Owen, Lawrence, Redfern, and the rest of the New House junior team, all looked fit and keen. House matches were closely contested at St. Jim's, and this particular match was a sort of trial run for the fixture at Carcroft the following week. Not only Manners hoped to be picked out on his form in that game : a good many other fellows had the same hope, of inspiring the junior captain to make changes in the team he had mapped out for Carcroft.

George Figgins had told his men that they simply had to wipe the School House off the ground this time in order to demonstrate clearly to Tom Merry that more New House men were wanted to play Carcroft. And by way of a beginning he gave Fatty Wynn instructions to knock out Manners of the Shell first ball—at which Fatty grinned, and promised to do his deadliest.

"That chap can take photographs," said Figgins, "And he can walk off with Latin prizes, and bottle any other fellow in the school at maths—but I've never heard that he's any great shakes

with a cricket bat. Put him out of his misery to begin with, Fatty, and put the wind up that crowd, see?"

"I see!" agreed Fatty.

"All he can do is a spot of stone-walling, so far as I've ever noticed," said Figgins, "Tom Merry's making us a present by putting him in first. So don't look a gift-horse in the mouth, Fatty. Just kybosh him."

And Fatty went out to the bowling crease with the fell intention of putting paid to the luckless Manners first shot, if he could. And David Llewellyn Wynn was not only the champion bowler of the New House. Even School House men admitted that he was far and away the best junior bowler at St. Jim's. Figgins and Co. did not expect Manners to last through an over from Fatty. And the batsmen at the pavilion probably had much the same idea. There was a faint cloud on Tom Merry's face.

It was Cardew, with his sneers and jeers at a fellow who was worth fifty of him, who had caused Tom suddenly to decide to open the innings with Manners. As cricket captain he could not feel wholly satisfied with that decision. He hoped for the best, but he felt some dubiety, and something of annoyance with Cardew. Thinking of him, he looked round for him, and noted that he was not present. He frowned and called to Clive.

"Where's Cardew?"

"Levison's gone to fetch him," answered Clive, "He'll be here in a minute."

"He ought to be here now," grunted Tom, "He's third on the list, and he may be wanted."

Which hinted that even Tom did not expect his chum to stand up very long against the bowling of David Llewellyn Wynn.

Fatty Wynn took his little run, turned himself into a sort of plump catherine-wheel, and delivered the ball.

But if Figgins and Co. were expecting Manners to go down at the first shot, they had another guess coming. There was a click of willow meeting leather, and the ball dropped dead on the crease.

And the second, third, and fourth balls of the over met with the same fate. Manners, slow and sure by nature, was playing himself in with care, and resisted the temptation to hit out. There was nothing of a pyrotechnic kind about Manners' batting—nothing showy like Cardew's style, and little resembling Tom Merry's vigorous game. He was better at defence than at attack, and he knew it, and he contented himself with what he could do best,

while keeping a keen eye open for chances. Nothing, at all events, could disturb his phlegmatic calm. He was as steady as a rock.

Not till the fifth ball did Manners hit out, and that gave him a single, and brought Talbot to the batting end. Tom Merry breathed more freely. Manners had lived through the over, at any rate, and if Talbot kept the batting——."

But Talbot made two on the last ball of the over, and remained where he was. So when the field changed over, Manners still had the bowling.

Kerr went on to bowl. Kerr was a good man with the leather, though not in the same street with Fatty. He put in all he knew in that over, and Manners, with undisturbed calm, stopped ball after ball till it ended.

"Slow but sure, what?" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "Mannahs is a good man at stone-wallin', Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry nodded. He would have liked to see his chum taking runs : but he was glad, at any rate, to see him keeping up his sticks.

"Talbot's going strong, anyhow," remarked Blake.

And Tom's face brightened as he watched Talbot of the Shell.

The contrast between Manners' batting and Talbot's was rather striking. Talbot was hitting all round the wicket. A two, and another two, were followed by a boundary, amid cheers from the crowd round the field. The boundary was followed by three, and Manners had the bowling again for the last two balls of the over. Not for a moment did he seek to emulate Talbot's fireworks. He knew that he could not do it, and he did not waste his wicket in trying. Phlegmatically, he stopped the last two balls dead.

"How's it goin'?' asked a voice at Tom Merry's elbow, in cool drawling tones.

Tom looked round at Cardew.

"Oh, you're here," he grunted.

Cardew in flannels looked very handsome and fit. His face had its usual careless and slightly supercilious expression. Looking at him, no one could have supposed that a quarter of an hour ago he had been scowling and muttering in his study, and thumping Baggy Trimble right and left. He looked as if he had not a care in the world.

"Am I late?" smiled Cardew, "O.K., I knew there was no

hurry, you know, with such a Bradman as Manners at the wicket."

Tom made no reply to that.

"Mannahs is doin' vewy well, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, in a tone of mild reproof.

"Piling them up?" asked Cardew.

"Dry up, you ass," muttered Levison.

Cardew did not seem to hear him. He noted the score, and smiled again.

"By gum! You're right, D'Arcy," he remarked, "Manners seems to be doing jolly well—for him! He's broken his duck!"

"Weally, Cardew——."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Blake, "There goes old Talbot!"

Talbot was getting the bowling from Fatty Wynn. He had scored thirteen runs so far, to Manners' single run. Thirteen proved an unlucky number on this occasion. For as the ball flew hot from the bat, a long lean figure leaped into the air, and a large hand closed on leather, and Figgins held up the ball and chirruped:

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"You're wanted, Cardew," said Tom Merry, gruffly.

Talbot came back to the pavilion with a slightly rueful face. There was no "swank" about Talbot of the Shell, but certainly he had not expected to be out before Manners. Neither had anyone else expected it. It was one of those glorious uncertainties of the uncertain game of cricket. Talbot, the best bat in the School House side excepting Tom Merry, was out : and Manners was still in : with only a single to his credit, it was true, but at all events, still in.

"Wotten luck, Talbot, old man," said Arthur Augustus.

"Good catch by Figgins," said Talbot.

"Man in," said Tom Merry, sharply. Cardew was extremely leisurely : perhaps it amused him to keep the field waiting.

He strolled down to the wickets. There was a perceptible tincture of swank in his manner, which pleased nobody.

Levison, watching him, rather wondered whether he would be up to his usual form, after what he had seen in the study. That the sporting man of the Fourth was in deep waters, Levison knew, though he did not know how deep. But Cardew seemed able to throw aside his personal cares, now that he was on the cricket field. He was, with all his faults, keen on the game : and he

was still more keen to make it very clear and distinct that he was whole leagues ahead of Manners of the Shell. His feelings towards Manners, at the moment, were bitterly hostile, and it was a consolation to him to put "paid" to Manners' hopes of figuring in the fixture at Carcroft School.

He faced Fatty Wynn's bowling with an air of negligence, but with eyes as keen as a hawk's. He put on six for the rest of that over, giving no chances to any man in the field.

Then Owen of the New House bowled to Manners. Owen was good, but nowhere near Fatty Wynn's form, and Manners ventured to take more liberties with the bowling. He was cool and cautious, stopping two balls dead, and then hitting one for three, leaving the bowling to Cardew.

Then came a display of "fireworks" in which Cardew delighted. With an air of carelessness, as if it cost him no trouble whatever, he drove three successive balls to the boundary.

"That chap can bat," Monty Lowther remarked to Tom Merry. "Too much swank, but he's a jolly good bat."

"Jolly good," said Tom, slowly. Tom had had, perhaps, a faint hope that his chum might pull out ahead of Cardew in the House match. But this did not look like it. Manners' cautious game was good, of its kind : and in certain circumstances might be very useful to his side : but there was no doubt that the dandy of the Fourth put him completely in the shade.

The game went on : Manners sticking to his own cautious game, and Cardew putting up the pyrotechnics. By the time Manners had taken eight, Cardew's score was twenty-eight, and both of them looked like going on indefinitely in the same style. But then there came a change. Perhaps it occurred to Manners that at this rate, he would be so hopelessly out-shone by his rival that his chances of playing at Carcroft would be reduced to vanishing point. Or perhaps the mocking smile on Cardew's face had some effect on him. Anyhow he suddenly abandoned his cautious game, and began to hit, not wisely, but too well.

"Bai Jove! Old Mannahs is wakin' up," remarked Arthur Augustus, as the ball went on its travels and the batsmen ran.

Once, twice, thrice, the white clad figures crossed.

"By gum, it's four," said Monty Lowther.

And four it was, and Manners, getting home just in time before the ball whizzed in, panted, with a flush in his cheeks, and an elated gleam in his eyes. After all, the fireworks were not all for Cardew!

And no doubt encouraged by that happy result, Manners swiped the next ball—fairly into the ready hand of George Francis Kerr of the New House!

"How's that?"

"Bai Jove! Mannahs is out!"

Manners of the Shell drew a deep, deep breath. His face was a little set, as he came back to the pavilion, with twelve to his credit.

"Rough luck, old man," said Kangaroo, passing him going in.

Manners nodded without speaking. His feelings just then were too deep for words. He did not look at Tom Merry as he came in.

Arthur Augustus tapped him on the arm, as he leaned on the rail, watching the batsmen, trying to look indifferent.

"Wuff luck, old boy," said Arthur Augustus, "Wathah weckless, old chap, if you don't mind my sayin' so. If I had been playin' that ball——Bai Jove! Where are you goin', Mannahs?"

Manners did not state where he was going. He just went. And he was not seen again on Little Side till the School House innings was over, when he rejoined Tom Merry and Co. going into the field.

CHAPTER XIV

OUT!

Prep, in No. 10 Study that evening, was an unusually silent function.

There was an unusual constraint in the study.

Generally, there were three cheery faces over the books, three fellows comparing notes, or looking out words in the "dick," elucidating the meaning of P. Vergilius Maro by a combined operation, so to speak.

Manners was easily the best of the three at that game : and he would help his comrades over knotty points in his quiet, unostentatious way, making things easier all round.

Now he was silent, and the others were silent.

Not that he was "shirty." There was nothing sulky about Harry Manners. But he simply could not feel his usual good-tempered self. The result of the House match that afternoon had—temporarily at least—given him the "knock." He could not feel pleased at being out-classed by a fellow he despised. That was asking rather too much of human nature.

He realised that he had hoped too much. He was not in the same street with Cardew of the Fourth when it came to cricket. Cardew had told him that he hadn't a dog's chance, and Cardew had been right. Never had he disliked the dandy of the Fourth more: but he had to admit that he was right.

And he had not even done his best. His own slow cautious game was not showy, but at least it kept his wicket up. He had practically thrown it away in an attempt to put on "fireworks" like Cardew. And he had been out for twelve, leaving Cardew still scoring. Cardew's total had been forty, the best in the innings. So Manners had learned when he came back to the field.

But that was not all. Manners was a good, reliable man in the field, and a good change bowler. But Cardew was almost as good with the leather as with the willow, and he was lucky in the field. He had bowled Owen and Kerr, and he had caught Figgins out. In every way, in fact, he had put Manners hopelessly in the shade, and completely washed out his hope of getting that coveted place in the team going over to Carcroft. And all the while, as Manners bitterly reflected, he would not have been playing in the House match at all, if Manners had chosen. He thought more of his rotten racing stunts than of cricket. If Manners had agreed to that "quid pro quo," Cardew would have cut the House match, and probably never have given it another thought.

Manners wondered, sardonically, what Tom Merry would have thought about that, had he known. Certainly he had no intention of telling him.

The matter was settled now. School House had won by twenty runs, and Cardew had contributed a good deal to the victory. Manners' dozen had made no difference : the House would have won without him, if it came to that. It was no wonder that Harry Manners was not in his usual spirits that evening.

Neither was Tom. He did not like Cardew, and Manners was a pal whom he liked very much. He had had a faint, faint hope that old Manners might pull out ahead—but it had been a very faint hope, and it had been knocked right on the head. Cardew was in, and Manners was out, and there was no help for it. And as old Manners seemed to have set his heart on it, it was a trouble on Tom's mind.

With two glum faces at the table, even Monty Lowther's spirits were dashed. The funny man of the Shell had never felt less funny.

All three were glad when prep was over.

Tom and Lowther moved to the door : Manners moved to the armchair, where he sat down. Tom looked across at him.

"Not coming down, old chap?" he asked.

"Not just yet. Just a word before you go down," said Manners, "It's settled now about the Carcroft match, I suppose?"

"Well, yes. I'm sorry——."

"Nothing to be sorry about, is there?" said Manners, "I was rather a fool. Cardew told me that he could play my head off at cricket, and he was right. I could no more keep my end up against him at cricket, than I could at backing horses, or crawling out of bounds after lights out."

"Hem!" murmured Lowther.

"That's got nothing to do with the game, you know, old fellow," said Tom. "I like his ways no more than you do : but cricket's cricket."

"Oh, I know," assented Manners, "You've got a good cricketer in Cardew, if he isn't sacked before next Wednesday. If the pre's happened to spot him at the Green Man, or out of bounds at night, you'd lose your champ all of a sudden. Let's hope they won't spot him before the Carcroft match."

"Hem!" murmured Lowther again.

"Look here, Manners, old chap——" said Tom.

"But he's pretty wary, so you needn't worry," added Manners. "He's safe for Carcroft—if he doesn't change his mind and hike off to Abbotsford races on Wednesday instead. Now you fellows cut off—I've got some films I want to attend to."

Tom and Monty left the study, and joined Talbot and Kangaroo going down. Manners, left on his own in No. 10, remained in the armchair : apparently having forgotten the films to which he was going to attend. Even his beloved photography was taking second place in his mind.

He was feeling disgruntled, dissatisfied, and indeed bitter. Manners was by no means an unreasonable fellow. He was keen on games, but generally he acquiesced in Tom Merry's judgment without demur. He would have liked a show in the matches, but a cricket captain's business was to win matches, and when there were better men available, second-rate men had to make the best of it, and Manners was too sensible to grouse at what could not be helped. When he was passed over by men like Talbot or Kangaroo or Blake or Figgins or Fatty Wynn or D'Arcy, he had no kick coming, and he knew it, and took it equably. But it irked him to be passed over for a fellow like Cardew.

A slacker who had been "whopped" for slacking at games was the fellow who had cut him out. A "bad hat" who would be sacked if the head-master learned what a dozen fellows could have told him! A careless, supercilious ass, who did not care much for what other fellows valued, if he cared at all. It was true, though Manners winced to admit it, that he could play Manners' head off at cricket. But even that was not everything, for so unreliable a fellow was quite capable of letting his skipper down. Indeed, Manners, at least, had no doubt that he would do so without hesitation, if cricket matches came in the way of his racing stunts.

Cardew was not to be trusted, in Manners' opinion. A fellow who could be trusted might be more useful in the long run, even if he couldn't get fours off Fatty Wynn's bowling, or catch Figgins out in the field.

That was how it looked to Manners. Tom Merry did not seem to see it, and Tom was skipper. Manners, certainly, was not going to argue about it, but he was going to keep his own opinion.

The matter was settled now, so far as the Carcroft match was concerned—Cardew was in, and he was out. Harry Manners had to make the best of it. But he could not feel pleasant about it, or take it with his usual equanimity.

He shook himself at last, as if to shake away gloomy reflections, and rose from the armchair. Taking a little steel key from his waistcoat pocket, he stepped towards his desk in the corner of that study.

In that desk reposed the "tenner" he had received that morning. Manners was a careful fellow in money matters, as in other matters. He was not in the least disposed to "blow"

that tenner, as many schoolboys would have done. It was locked up in the deck, to remain there unchanged till the holidays, when it would be needed.

But it was not of the tenner that Manners was thinking now. In that desk he kept his films. Films were too expensive, and too hard to come by, to be left carelessly about the study.

Manners could always put in a pleasant half-hour with his photographic hobby. And he did not want to go down to the day-room now, where the talk would be of cricket, and very probably of the good show Cardew had put up in the House match. He did not want to hear anything about Cardew's cricket. He could stay in his study, if he liked, till supper, and that was what he was going to do.

Tap!

He turned his head irritably, as he was about to slip the little steel key into the lock of the desk. He did not want company in his present mood.

The door opened, and Cardew of the Fourth looked in.

Manners gave him a grim look.

"Well?" he rapped.

Cardew gave him a cool, careless glance.

"Tom Merry gone down?" he drawled.

"Can't you see he has?" grunted Manners.

"Oh, quite!" drawled Cardew.

"You'll find him in the day-room. If it's about the cricket," added Manners, sarcastically, "You can set your mind at rest. You're down for Carcroft—I've had that from Tom."

Cardew's eyes lingered, for a moment, on the desk, and on the key in Manners' hand. Perhaps he was thinking of that "tenner" in the desk, which would have been so very useful in his speculations on Plum Cake. Then he laughed lightly. The uncompromising grimness of Manners' look seemed to amuse him.

"Gratters on your game to-day," he said.

Manners' eyes gleamed.

"Good show," said Cardew, "You knocked up twelve—exactly a dozen more than any fellow might have expected. Gratters!"

Manners made a step towards the door. Cardew laughing, closed it, and walked away. It was some minutes before Harry Manners unlocked the desk and got busy with his films. He had to resist a strong temptation to follow Cardew into the passage, and punch that mocking grin from his handsome face.

CHAPTER XV

THE WORM TURNS!

"Please, sir——."

"What is it, Trimble?"

"May I fetch my map, sir?"

Mr. Lathom frowned.

It was geography in the Fourth, in second school that morning. The Fourth had been told to bring in their maps. Baggy Trimble, apparently, had not.

"You should not have forgotten it, Trimble," said Mr. Lathom, severely, "You may go and fetch it, and lose no time."

"Yes, sir."

Baggy Trimble left the form-room.

He grinned as he rolled away to the stairs.

The Fourth-form master had taken it for granted that Baggy had forgotten his map, as he had not brought it in. Baggy, in point of fact, had left that map in his study, of malice aforethought, as it were. Baggy wanted an excuse to cut up to the studies before the rest of the form came out in break. Baggy was going up to his study—but he was going to call in at No. 9 as he went.

Baggy was, in fact, on the trail of vengeance! There were still a large number of aches and pains distributed over Baggy, from the severe thumping Cardew had given him. But that was not all. Baggy had, of course, tattled up and down the form what he had overheard in No. 9 Study—much to Cardew's annoyance and discomfort. The dandy of the Fourth found solace in kicking Baggy, and he had done so several times—hard! Baggy was not unaccustomed to kicking—but there

was a limit. The worm will turn—and Baggy was a good deal of a worm! Now he was turning!

There was nobody about while the school was in form—nobody to interfere with Baggy's designs on Cardew's study. He passed only the house-porter, who was putting the letters up in the rack for the fellows to take when they came out in break. He hurried up the stairs, and arrived at No. 9 Study in the Fourth.

Mr. Lathom had told Baggy not to lose time : and he did not lose any. He was only two or three minutes in Cardew's study. But they were busy minutes, and well-filled.

Into Cardew's handsome leather armchair, in which the dandy of the Fourth was wont to lounge, Baggy poured the inkpot from the study table. Then he found a bottle of gum, and added its contents to the ink. To the ink and the gum he added the contents of a tin of cycle-oil. Then he shifted the armchair a little, so that the high back shaded the seat from the sunlight at the window. The horrid mixture of ink and gum and oil was invisible on the dark leather, unless a fellow looked very closely. Cardew of the Fourth was very particular about his clothes—as particular, indeed, as his relative Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. What he would feel like, after his beautiful trousers had squelched in that horrible mixture, Trimble could guess—and he emitted a fat cachinnation as he thought of it.

Grinning, Trimble rolled out of No. 9, and fetched his map from his own study. With the map under his arm, he went downstairs again, to return to the form-room.

He paused at the letter-rack. The house-porter had put out the letters, and gone. Baggy, like most fellows, was interested in letters from home—there was always the possibility, if not the probability, of a tip from some affectionate relative. Being out of the form-room, Baggy had a pre-view, as it were. He looked over the letters in the hope of finding one addressed to himself.

"Br-r-r-rr!" grunted Baggy, when he had looked.

There was none for Trimble. There was one for D'Arcy, on which his eyes lingered. Quite probably there was a tip in that from Gussy's noble pater. There were a good many others : and among them, one addressed to R. R. Cardew.

"Smudge!" hissed Baggy, apparently addressing the name on the letter. Baggy's feelings towards Cardew, just then, were very deep.

He was aware, from what he had overheard in the study, that Cardew had been deeply and savagely disappointed in his expectation of a remittance from home. That had, as he expressed it, "dished" him. His usually indulgent grandfather had disregarded his letters, and left him "in a hole.

Now, it seemed, the old Lord had played up. Baggy knew the thin, delicate, slightly shaky handwriting on the envelope. He had seen it a good many times before. This was a letter from old Lord Reckness, and very likely the one for which Cardew had so anxiously waited. It was only a spot of delay.

Baggy stood eyeing it morosely.

Then he grinned, and took it down from the rack.

Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way. Had there been an eye on him, Baggy would have restored that letter to the rack at once.

But like Moses again, he saw no man. There was nobody about to observe Baggy playing tricks with another fellow's letter.

Baggy chuckled.

This was genuine "pie" to Baggy. He had, of course, no felonious designs on that letter. The idea that came into his fat and obtuse mind was to hide it somewhere, and let that smudge, Cardew, go on waiting for it! The longer he waited for it, and the more savage he grew waiting for it, the more it served him right for kicking Baggy! If that smudge fancied that he could thump a fellow, and boot a fellow, without getting something back, he had another guess coming! That was the happy idea that would occur to the fattest and most obtuse brain in the St. Jim's Fourth.

Later on, of course, he would find an opportunity of slipping the letter back. But he was not going to be in any hurry about that. Let the smudge wait for it.

He slipped the letter into a pocket, chuckled, and rolled away to the Fourth-form room, map in hand.

Mr. Lathom glanced at him as he came in.

"Trimble! You have been unnecessarily long in fetching your map," rumbled Mr. Lathom, "If you have been wasting time, Trimble——."

"I couldn't find it for a minute or two, sir! Somebody had moved it."

"Very well : you may go to your place."

Trimble went to his place, feeling quite cheery.

Twinges in his fat person, reminiscent of thumps and bootings,

did not worry him so much in the contemplation of Cardew sitting in that inky, gummy, oily armchair, and scanning the letter-rack for the letter that wasn't there! Fat grins came over Trimble's face every few minutes, as if he found something quite entertaining and amusing in geography!

When the lesson was over, and the form dismissed for break, a good many of the juniors headed for the rack to look for letters. Study No. 6 were among the first.

"Hallo! One for you, Gussy!" called out Blake.

"Bai Jove! Hand it ovah, deah boy! It wathah looks as if the governah has played up," said Arthur Augustus, cheerily. He took the letter, and turned his eyeglass upon it, "Yaas, wathah! It's the patah's fist."

"Well, open it, fathead!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"Open it, image!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig——."

"Can't you see we're all on tenterhooks, burbler?" demanded Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Ass!" said his three friends, all together.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. However, the letter from Eastwood House was opened at last, and the missive within unfolded, revealing a crisp slip of paper. It was the anticipated fiver at last! "Bai Jove! It's all wight, deah boys! The governah has played up!"

Cardew glanced at the swell of St. Jim's.

He had given the letters a swift, searching look : and set his lips hard, as he saw that there was none addressed to himself. He had told Levison, that he had given up the hope of getting the remittance from home that he so badly needed : but his eager eyes scanning the rack showed that hope still lingered. Levison touched him on the arm.

"Come on," he said, "Nothing for us."

"Leave me alone," muttered Cardew.

"Oh, come on," said Clive.

"Leave me alone, I tell you."

Levison and Clive went out together. The other fellows cleared off, some with letters, some without. Cardew's eyes followed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he went with Blake and Herries and Dig. He was unconscious of a fat, grinning face watching him from a little distance.

He moved at last, and went slowly out into the quad. Baggy Trimble grinned after him, as he went, quite unnoticed by Cardew. The sportsman of the Fourth still had his problem on his mind, and little dreamed that the solution of it was, at that very moment, in Baggy Trimble's grubby pocket. The worm had turned at a very awkward moment for Cardew.

CHAPTER XVI

DAMP!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a shade of thought on his aristocratic brow in third school that morning.

It was not caused by undue concentration on the lesson in hand. Mr. Lathom was expounding history to his form in third school, but Arthur Augustus was not concentrating on ancient kings and queens and battles long ago. Some other matter, quite unconnected with the annals of his native land, was on Gussy's noble mind. Indeed, when Mr. Lathom asked him to give the year of the Spanish Armada, Arthur Augustus answered "1688," vaguely remembering that there was a double-eight in it.

On which, his form-master looked at him very expressively. No doubt Mr. Lathom expected any fellow to remember the precise year in which Drake and his merry men drummed the Dons down the Channel.

"D'Arcy!" rapped Mr. Lathom.

"Yaas, sir."

"Are you not aware that 1688 was the year of the English Revolution?"

"Oh! Yaas, sir."

"And do you imagine that the Spanish Armada came in the same year?" further inquired Mr. Lathom.

"Oh! Wathah not, sir."

"I fear that you are not attending to the lesson, D'Arcy! In order that you may remember a year of great importance in English history, you will write out after class, fifty times, that the Spanish Armada came in 1588."

"Oh! Vewy well, sir," said Arthur Augustus, resignedly.

Fifty lines the richer, the swell of St. Jim's made an effort to give his attention to his form-master. But it was a relief to him when the Fourth was dismissed, and he came out with his friends.

His brow was very thoughtful as he walked into the sunny quad with Blake and Herries and Dig.

"What were you mooning about in form?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I was quite unawah that I was 'moonin,' as you expwess it," said Arthur Augustus, "I was thinkin'——."

"What were you doing that with?" inquired Blake.

"Wats! The fact is, Blake, I was thinkin' about Cardew——."

"What rot! Better think about the fellows we're going to ask to a spread on your fiver," said Blake.

"Yaas, but I am wathah wowwied about Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, "You are awah that he is a welative of mine, though, I am wathah thankful to say, only a vewy distant welative. There has been a lot of gossip about him in the form—that fat boundah Twimble has been sayin' a lot of things——."

"Bother Cardew, and blow Trimble," remarked Blake.

"That's all vewwy well, Blake, but a welative of mine is headin' for twouble and pewwaps the sack, I cannot be quite indiffewent," explained Arthur Augustus, "I have thought sevewal times of speakin' to him vewy sewiously, and pointin' out the ewwah of his ways——."

"Guard with your left when you do it," grinned Blake, and Herries and Dig chuckled. Gussy's chums did not suppose that Cardew was likely to welcome fatherly advice from his noble relative.

"To tell the twuth, I have not done so, because I wathah thought that he might cut up wusty," confessed Arthur Augustus, "But now I think it will be all wight. He has asked me to speak to him in his study aftah third school, and that looks as if he may be willin' to listen to a wisah fellow than himself. A fellow of tact and judgment is bound to wally wound with good advice for a chap who is headin' for twouble."

"What the thump does Cardew want to jaw to you in his study for?" grunted Herries.

"I pwesume that he feels in need of advice, Hewwies, and has wealised that I am the wight fellow to give it."

"More likely pulling your leg," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——."

"Look here, come for a trot before dinner, and let Cardew pull somebody else's leg," said Digby.

"Weally, Dig——."

"Oh, cut in, fathead, if you must have your silly leg pulled," said Blake, "Come on, you chaps—trot!"

Leaving his chums in the quad, Arthur Augustus went up to the Fourth-form studies. His noble brow was very thoughtful. He had been thinking in class, and he was thinking now, of the good advice he was going to give the scapegrace of the Fourth. Cardew's manners and customs were pretty well known in his form : and, according to Baggy Trimble's tattle, those manners and customs had landed him, at last, in a "hole." In such circumstances, it seemed to Arthur Augustus quite natural that Cardew should seek counsel from a fellow of tact and judgment, and he was prepared to give the unlucky sportsman unlimited excellent advice. It did not occur to his noble mind that it was something rather more material that the sportsman wanted from him.

He found Cardew in his study, walking about the room with his hands in his pockets, restlessly, a deep moody line in his brow. The moody look vanished at once as D'Arcy came in, and Cardew gave him a nod and a smile.

"Trickle in, old bean," he said.

Arthur Augustus trickled gracefully in. Cardew waved his hand to the armchair by the window.

"Take a pew," he said.

"Thank you, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus sank gracefully into the deep leather armchair—with due regard to the crease in his superb trousers.

"Good of you to come," said Cardew. The dandy of the Fourth was not always particularly polite to his noble relative. Now he seemed almost as if butter would not have melted in his mouth.

"Not at all, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus benevolently, "If you are in any difficulty, I assuah you that I am entiahly at your service, Cardew."

Cardew's brow darkened for a moment.

"I suppose you've heard something of Trimble's tattle," he muttered.

"A fellow can hardly help gossip weachin' his yahs, you know," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, quite! The fact is, I'm in rather a hole," said Cardew.

"I am sowwy to hear it, Cardew! But pewwaps," suggested Arthur Augustus, brightly, "It may pwove a blessin' in disguise."

"Eh?"

"I will speak fwankly, old chap," went on D'Arcy, "Your goin's on are pwetty well known in the form, and wathah disgwaceful——."

"What?"

"I wemembah once luggin' you down fwom the fence of the Gween Man, when you were goin' out of bounds," continued Arthur Augustus, "Pewwaps you wecall it?"

Cardew's eyes glinted.

"You genewally cawwy on in a vewy wotten way," said Arthur Augustus cheerily, "Bweakin' bounds, backin' horses, smokin' in your study—a vewy wotten wecord, old fellow. I have been quite surpwised that you have not been found out and sacked. Well, now it seems that your wotten conduct has landed you in twouble: and, as I wemarked, it may pwove a blessin' in disguise, if it opens your eyes to the wotten way you have been goin' on, and makes you wesolve to do bettah in the future. What do you think?"

Cardew did not tell Arthur Augustus what he thought! He stood looking at him.

"I twust," resumed Arthur Augustus "That this will be a lesson to you, Cardew, and that you will make the most of it. As you ask my advice——."

"Your advice?" gasped Cardew.

"Yaas—I suppose you asked me to come up heah to ask my advice," said Arthur Augustus, innocently, "Well as you ask my advice, I advise you vewy earnestly to chuck up your wotten ways, turn ovah a new leaf, and wesolve to be a decent chap fwom now on. There is no weal weason, Cardew, why you should not be as decent a chap as any fellow at St. Jim's."

Cardew opened his lips—and closed them again.

"I need hardly say," continued Arthur Augustus, "How vewy glad I should be to see you become a thowoughly decent chap like Tom Mewwy, or Figgins, or Blake, or Mannahs, especially as you are a welative of mine. I can undahstand that you feel that it is wathah an uphill task, for a fellow like you, Cardew—but couwage, deah boy—nevah say die! Nil despewan-

dum, you know! Stick to the path of weform, and in the long wun, you may be a cwedit to your House, instead of a disgwace to it."

Arthur Augustus never knew how near he was, at that moment, to receiving a punch on his aristocratic nose.

Cardew controlled his feelings with difficulty.

"My advice to you is to thwow up all your wotten associations, thwow away your silly cigawettes, forget all about backin' horses and that kind of dingy wubbish, and stick to cwicket, Cardew. That is the way to wegain your self-wespect, and the wespect of othahs," said Arthur Augustus in his most fatherly manner, "You are wathah a bad case, but there are worse fellows than you in the House."

"Are there?" breathed Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah! Wacke and Cwooke in the Shell, for example. I assuah you, Cardew, that there is a chance for you, if you chuck up your wotten ways, and wesolve to weform. And you may wely on it," added Arthur Augustus, benevolently, "that I shall always be weady to help you with advice."

Cardew checked the words that were upon his lips. He had to borrow Gussy's five-pound note, if he could! Five pounds would satisfy Bill Lodgey temporarily, and enable him to try a second chance on Plum Cake! Telling Arthur Augustus what he thought of him and his good advice, or punching his noble nose, certainly would not help.

"Oh! Yes! Quite!" muttered Cardew, "But—you see——."

"Yaas, I quite see," agreed Arthur Augustus, "You feel that you have a long way to go befoah you can become a wespectable membah of the House! But nevah say die, deah boy! Make a firm wesolve and stick to it, and—Bai Jove! this chair seems to feel wathah damp, Cardew."

"Does it," said Cardew, staring.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus had been conscious, for some moments, of a feeling of dampness under him. Now it felt so very damp that he could not ignore it.

The fact was, that Baggy Trimble's mixture of oil, ink, and gum was soaking through his trousers, as it was bound to do with the swell of St. Jim's sitting fairly in the middle of it.

He wriggled in the armchair.

"Well, look here," said Cardew, "The fact is——."

"Bai Jove! This chair seems to be wet," said Arthur Augustus, "Have you been spillin' anythin' in it?"

"Eh! Of course not! Just listen to me a minute, D'Arcy, will you?—Don't go yet, old chap," said Cardew, hastily, as Arthur Augustus rose from the armchair. "I was going to say——."

"Oh, cwikey!"

"What——?"

"Oh, cwumbs! You wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?"

"You wotten wascal! Blake and Hewwies and Dig said that you asked me hèah to pull my leg——."

"What the dickens——."

"Oh, cwiky! My twousahs are wuined!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Look at my twousahs! Look at that chair! Oh, scissahs."

Cardew stared at him, blankly. Arthur Augustus was twisting frantically to get a back view of his trousers. They were fairly streaming with a sticky mixture of oil and gum and ink. And—now that he looked—Cardew could see that similar mixture was squashed all over the seat of the armchair. He stared in astonishment.

"Great gad! What——!" he stuttered.

"You wotten wapscallion!" yelled Arthur Augustus, "Look at my twousahs! You are a tweachewous wat, Cardew."

"I——I——!"

"Askin' a fellow to your study, to sit in a chair all inky and gummy! If you wegard that as a joke, Cardew——."

"I—I didn't—I—I never knew—I—I——."

"You wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"I tell you——."

"Bai Jove! I have a gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin'. You uttahly tweachewous weptile. Look at my twousahs!"

"But I—I—I——" gasped Cardew, "I—I——."

"Wottah! Wat! Wuffian!" hooted Arthur Augustus, "I wegard you, Cardew, with uttah despision—I mean contempt! You can get sacked as soon as you like, and I shall wegard it as a good widdance! Wottah!"

And Arthur Augustus, realising that what he needed chiefly at that moment was a change of trousers, rushed from the study. Cardew was left staring at the inky, gummy, oily armchair: and it was borne in upon his mind that his sporting speculations would have to carry on the best they could without the assistance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's fiver!

CHAPTER XVII

STOP PRESS!

"Tom Mewwy!"

"Hullo, Gustavus!"

"Pway keep an eye on Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus, impressively.

Tom Merry smiled.

It was Saturday, and a good many fellows were at junior nets. Talbot of the Shell was giving Manners some bowling, after tea.

In spite of his disappointment in the House match, and the washing-out of his prospects of playing for School, Manners was sticking steadily to cricket. There was a good deal of determination in Harry Manners: perhaps a vein of obstinacy. It was unlikely that he would or could ever be a brilliant cricketer like Cardew: but he was a good man at the game in his own way, and he was going to be better and better, if steady practice and determination could make him so. It was not exactly that he had his back up : but he did want to let Tom Merry, and other fellows, see that he was not precisely a "rabbit."

And he had at least one champion, in D'Arcy of the Fourth. Arthur Augustus flattered himself that he was rather a judge of a fellow's form: and he had a favourable eye on Manners of the Shell. And he had a far from favourable eye on Cardew—especially since he had sat in the ink and gum and cycle-oil in Cardew's armchair! That, it was true, had nothing to do with cricket : but Gussy really could see little good in any fellow who had no respect for a fellow's trousers.

"Keepin' his end up all wight, what?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Fine!" agreed Tom.

"Old Talbot is jolly good with the leathah, you know. But Mannahs is stoppin' him evewy time."

"Good," said Tom.

Manners, undoubtedly, was standing up well to some very good bowling. But he was not doing much in the way of hitting, but Talbot, so far, had been unable to knock his bails off, at least. And Talbot of the Shell was one of the best School House junior bowlers.

"As a mattah of fact, Tom Mewwy, I wathah think you are makin' a mistake," went on Arthur Augustus.

"So good of you to put me wise, Gussy," said Tom, gravely.

"Not at all, deah boy," assured Arthur Augustus, "I wathah think I know somethin' about cwicket, you know——."

"What put that idea into your head?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Barge on, Gussy," he said, "Always willing to learn."

"That's wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, "Nevah be too pwoud to take a tip. I wathah think that if I had been in your place, Tom Mewwy, I should have picked out Mannahs for Carcwoft, next week, instead of anothah fellow of whom I weally don't think vewy much, although he is a welative of mine."

"I'd be glad to," said Tom, "But——."

"Mannahs is pewwaps a little slow," said Arthur Augustus, sapiently, "But he is suah, deah boy. No fireworks, but you can wely on him. A spot too much on the stone-wallin' side, pewwaps: but stone-wallin' comes in vewy useful in some circumstances."

"Oh, quite," said Tom, "But a game's won on runs, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! I know that, Tom Mewwy. But suppose Mannahs was on at one end, and I was on at the othah?" suggested Arthur Augustus, "A stone-wallin' chap would be enormously useful, with a weally bwilliant batsman at the othah end. What do you think?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the captain of the Shell in surprise.

"What are you laughin' at, Tom Mewwy? Have I made a joke?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"I am vewy glad you find my wemarks amusin', Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, a little stiffly, "I was not awah that I was bein' funnay. Sewiously, my opinion, for what it is worth, is that Mannahs is a bettah man for the team goin' ovah to Carcwoft than Cardew."

"What about a brass farthing?" asked a sarcastic voice, and they looked round at Cardew.

Cardew was in flannels, but he was not joining in the practice. He was, in fact, loafing about aimlessly to kill time that afternoon, too restless to put his mind into cricket or anything else. Plum Cake was running at three-thirty that afternoon, at Abbotsford : and the sportsman of the Fourth was likely to remain in a restless state till he learned the result of the race.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on his relative, with a glance of lofty disdain.

"Did you speak to me, Cardew?" he inquired, icily.

"I did," assented Cardew, with a nod.

"I fail to see the meanin' of your wemark."

"I said what about a brass farthing?" drawled Cardew, "That's about what your opinion's worth, isn't it?"

"Weally, Cardew——."

"Hardly as much, perhaps," suggested Cardew.

"Wats! I wepeat, Cardew, that I wegard Mannahs as a bettah man for the team, and if Tom Mewwy took my advice, he would play him."

"That's all settled, Gussy," interposed Tom Merry, hastily, "By gum, though," he went on, "Manners is sticking it out. He can keep his sticks up, and no mistake."

"Quite a rest cure, to watch him," said Cardew.

"Oh, can that," said Tom, gruffly.

Tom had no intention of taking Arthur Augustus's advice, and making changes in the team for Carcroft. But he had no use for Cardew's sneers at a fellow who was worth a dozen of him, in everything but cricket.

Cardew laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

Few would have guessed, from his unconcerned looks, that black care was eating into his heart. He stood watching Manners, with a hostile glint in his eyes. He would have been glad to see the wicket go down.

But the wicket did not go down. Manners games was slow, and not very exhilarating to watch, but Talbot did not seem able to touch his sticks. Cardew shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. He would have lost his wicket a dozen times over, rather than have played that cautious steady defence.

Six o'clock sounded from the clock-tower, and Cardew cast a hasty glance round in the direction of the House. At six o'clock the evening papers were delivered at the school : and Cardew had tipped Toby, the house-page to bring him one of them as

soon as he could. A deep interest in the County cricket scores was his excuse, if anyone wanted to know.

But there was no sign of Toby in the offing.

Cardew drew a deep breath.

The papers might be late—they sometimes were. Toby might not be able to get hold of one immediately. He had to wait.

The race at Abbotsford, at three-thirty, was long since run and over! If only he could have known the result! But he could not know, till he scanned the "Stop-Press" in the evening paper. The suspense was something like torture to him. He almost wished that he had asked Bill Lodgey to put through a 'phone call. But that was too risky even for Cardew. He had to wait.

He hardly knew how he had got through that afternoon since three-thirty. Hope and fear alternated.

The odds against Plum Cake had lengthened still further during the week. Cardew had little hope that the "gee" would get home. He was hoping against hope, as it were!—his heart sinking at the thought of his next meeting with Bill Lodgey, if Plum Cake failed him Lodgey would expect to be paid : and Cardew had not the remotest prospect of paying him. And he had a well-grounded apprehension that Bill, if he was not paid, would cut up rusty—extremely rusty. Mr. Lodgey was not running his bookie business on bad debts!

It was a deadly weight of care on Cardew's mind, and it was no wonder that he could do nothing but "mooch" about restlessly. No such care should have been on any schoolboy's mind, as he knew very well. The way of the transgressor was hard!

"Bai Jove! Old Mannahs is a stickah!"

Cardew glanced round.

"Is that dummy still standing there like a sack of coke?" he said, "Shall I send him down a few?"

Tom Merry's eyes glinted, but he made no reply. Arthur Augustus gave his relative a disdainful glance.

Unheeding either of them, Cardew called to Talbot.

"Chuck me the ball, old man."

"Like to try old Manners?" said Talbot, "Here you are."

He tossed the ball to Cardew, who caught it carelessly in his left hand. Manners, at the wicket, gave him a look. He wanted to have nothing whatever to do with Cardew, in cricket or anything else. However, he could hardly object to a change of bowler in practice at the nets, and he prepared to deal with Cardew's bowling.

Only too well he knew that Cardew had not forgotten the

incident of the "quid pro quo," and that his feelings were bitter and hostile. Cardew would like to make him look like a "rabbit" if he could.

The ball rame down like a bullet. Manners only just stopped it. Still, he did stop it, and he smiled sarcastically at the expression that flashed over Cardew's face. The dandy of the Fourth had intended to knock Manners out first ball, and then stroll away, leaving the Shell fellow to digest it, as it were. That would have been some consolation to him in his present angry and savage mood. But it had not come off.

Again and again the ball came down, with all that Cardew knew in it. Manners, cool and calm, stopped it every time. Manners, probably, was never destined to shine as a run-getter, but when it came to stone-walling, he certainly was "all there."

Tom Merry smiled, and Arthur Augustus chuckled. Cardew was putting all he knew into the bowling, with no result except to show that Manners of the Shell was a rock in defence.

Manners, at last, snicked the ball away. Talbot fielded it, and tossed it back to the bowler.

"Not so easy to shift him, what?" he said.

"Oh, rot!" snapped Cardew.

Talbot stared, and made no reply to that polite remark. Cardew, growing more and more intensely irritated every moment, sent down ball after ball. Manners, cool and phlegmatic, put "paid" to every one in turn. Several fellows gathered round to watch the contest.

"By gum, old Manners is coming on, Tom," remarked Lowther.

"He can keep up his sticks, and no mistake," said Tom, "Manners always was a sticker. That ass Cardew is losing his temper—but it's good bowling. Hallo, Toby, what do you want?"

The house-page came up.

"Master Cardew 'ere, sir?" he asked.

"He's bowling—are you chucking it, Cardew?"

Cardew did not answer. He threw down the ball, and cut across to Toby, all the juniors staring at him. In his keen desire to knock Manners out, he had for a moment forgotten his gnawing anxiety. But as he heard Toby's voice he forgot all about Manners.

He almost snatched the paper from the page's hand.

"Let's have a look," said Jack Blake, "How's Yorkshire getting on?"

Cardew did not speak, or even hear.

His eyes were fixed on the "Stop-Press" column of the evening paper, regardless of a dozen pair of eyes on him.

What he saw there gave him a feeling of physical sickness. He had expected it—dreaded it—but it came like a blow, all the same.

ABBOTSFORD—3.30
Bag of Tricks.
Sanseverino.
Hoity-toity.

There was no mention of Plum Cake. No doubt the name was among the "also ran," but Cardew did not trouble to look. It was not in the first three, and that was all that mattered. Cardew threw the paper on the ground, as he had thrown the cricket ball, and walked away, with a white face.

He left a group of juniors staring.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, "Cardew must take a vewy deep interest in his County, deah boys. They must have done vewy badly to-day, to make him look like that."

"Dear old Gustavus!" said Blake, affectionately.

"Weally, Blake——."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the only fellow there who supposed that it was the County cricket news that had affected Cardew of the Fourth so deeply!

CHAPTER XVIII

LOST!

"Please, sir——."

"Well?"

"May I fetch my book, sir?"

It was Baggy Trimble in second school on Monday morning. Baggy was, so to speak, at it again."

Mr. Lathom gave him a fixed look.

"Trimble! Have you forgotten your book?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I——."

"A few days ago, Trimble, you forgot your map! Now you have forgotten your book. You must learn to be more careful, Trimble."

"Oh! Certainly, sir! M-a-a-a-may I go and fetch it from my study, sir?"

"You may, Trimble! And you may take a hundred lines, which you will bring to my study after tea to-day."

"Oh!" gasped Baggy.

Trimble had not expected that. On the occasion when he had —or rather hadn't—forgotten his map, he had got by quite easily. So, as he wanted to get out of the form-room this morning before break, he cheerfully tried on the same game again. But it seemed that that chicken would not fight twice! This time the fat Baggy had captured an imposition, and the circumstances that he deserved it was no comfort at all to him.

"Blow!" murmured Baggy, as he closed the door of the form-room behind him, and rolled away.

He stopped at the letter-rack. The letters had been put out, ready for the fellows when they came out in break. Baggy gave them only a cursory blink. He was not there to take a letter from the rack, but to put one in.

Four days had elapsed since the fat and fatheaded Baggy had abstracted Cardew's letter. He had shoved it into the inside pocket of his jacket, and left it there. For several days, Baggy had derived considerable amusement from seeing Cardew scan the rack and turn away disappointed. Cardew deserved that, and more, in Baggy's opinion at least, for thumping and booting a fellow. Still, even the obtuse Baggy realised that this game had now gone on long enough. Now he was going to let Cardew have his letter.

That was why he had "forgotten" his book, to get out of the form-room, after the letters were put out, while everyone else was in form and no eyes would be upon him. Baggy was well aware that he had to be very cautious about it.

He was satisfied, in his own podgy mind, with giving Cardew a Roland for an Oliver, in that peculiar way. Serve him jolly well right, was Baggy's opinion. But he knew that nobody else was likely to take the same view : and that the consequences would

be painful, if it came out that he had meddled with another fellow's letters.

However, that was all right : it was not going to come out. All Baggy had to do was to make sure that he was unobserved, extract that letter from the inside pocket of his jacket, and replace it in the rack. Cardew would find it there in break, and would, of course, suppose that it had arrived that morning. Even if he noticed the post-mark, which was unlikely, he could only suppose that it had been delayed in the post. Anyhow, there would be nothing to connect Baggy with it, and that was all that really mattered!

Standing before the rack, Trimble blinked round him watchfully. Toby, the page, was going up the staircase, and Trimble waited till he was out of sight. There was no one else at hand, at the moment : the coast was quite clear, and Trimble thrust a grubby hand into his inside pocket for the letter.

Then he jumped.

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Baggy.

With quite an alarmed look, Baggy groped in that pocket. He had expected his fat grubby fingers to feel the letter there, as a matter of course. He had put it there, and left it there, and it must still be there—why shouldn't it be? Only—it wasn't.

"Oh, corks!" murmured Baggy, in utter dismay.

He groped and groped in that pocket. But it was empty!

He did not discover a letter there—all he discovered was a rent in the lining : through which, there could be no doubt, that letter had slipped, and fallen.

It was too late for Baggy to restore the letter he had abstracted! It was gone!

"Ooooh!" breathed Baggy.

Where was that letter? Obviously it had slipped through the torn lining and fallen somewhere. It might have happened anytime and anywhere—perhaps on the very day last week when he had placed the letter there. It was fairly certain that it had not dropped inside the House, at any rate, or it would have been seen by somebody and picked up. If it had dropped out of doors, the wind might have blown it away anywhere.

"Oh, lor'!" muttered Baggy.

He stood there, dismayed, and considerably scared, wondering what he was going to do. Certainly he could not restore a letter that was no longer in his possession. Looking for it, after class, did not seem to promise much in the way of results : for if it was anywhere in sight, some fellow would have seen it and picked

it up already. That letter, Baggy realised, was a goner! From the bottom of his podgy heart, Baggy Trimble wished that he had never meddled with it. But it was rather too late for wishing that now.

"Trimble!"

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. He fairly bounded, at the sound of Mr. Railton's voice behind him.

He spun round, and blinked at the house-master. Mr. Railton gave him a severe look.

"What are you doing out of form, Trimble?" he asked.

Trimble felt a spasm of terror. If Railton guessed——! Still, he realised that Railton couldn't!

"I—I—I——!" stammered Baggy.

"Well?"

"Mr. Lathom gave me leave to fetch a book from my study, sir!" gasped Baggy, "I—I was just—just looking at the letters——."

"Go and fetch your book at once, and return to the form-room."

"Oh, Yes, sir."

Baggy was glad to get away. He fairly scuttled up the stairs to his study.

Railton couldn't know anything—of course he couldn't—there was comfort in that reflection. But what was he going to do about that wretched letter? There was, Baggy decided, nothing that he could do—except keep it dark. If that letter ever turned up again, Cardew would get it all right. If he didn't, Baggy most decidedly did not want to face the consequences of having meddled with it and caused its loss. He fairly cringed at the thought of Cardew discovering what had happened. The thumpings and bootings he had already had would be as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with what he would get if Cardew knew! That was not to be thought of for a moment.

To do Baggy justice, he was sorry that the letter was lost. He wished that he had never touched it. But he left it at that. He was not going to get a certain kicking from Cardew, and a probably caning from his house-master, if he could help it. Least said was soonest mended!

Baggy took his book and went down again. He was not feeling comfortable in his fat mind. But he was quite resolved to say nothing about that lost letter. He would look for it after class, and find it if he could. If he couldn't—and it was most likely

that he couldn't—that was that, and it could not be helped! It served Cardew right anyway—thumping and booting a fellow——!

Baggy rolled into the form-room with his book. He stole a glance at Cardew as he went to his place. The dandy of the Fourth gave him a supercilious stare as he passed. Baggy Trimble did not like being looked at as if he were something that the cat might have brought in : and his reflection, as he sat down, was—serve him jolly well right, and be blowed to him! After which, Baggy dismissed the matter from his fat mind.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DOWNWARD PATH!

"Is that you, Cardew?"

"Quiet, you fool!"

Cardew's reply was not polite. It was an angry snap, in a suppressed voice. Ernest Levison's voice, at that moment, was not welcome to his ears.

There was a dim glimmer of starlight at the high windows of the Fourth-form dormitory in the School House. The hour was very late : but Cardew had not closed his eyes since lights out.

The hapless sportsman of St. Jim's was, in fact, almost at the end of his tether. He had lain there, in the darkness, wakeful while others slept, thinking it out—trying to think of some avenue of escape. Since Plum Cake had lost on Saturday, he owed Bill Lodgey a total of fifteen pounds—and he had not so many shillings. He no longer expected anything from home : there was no possibility of borrowing money : and if the racing man did not hear from him, it was certain that he would hear from the racing man.

That was what his sporting speculations had led him to—dread of a letter from Bill, which might fall into the hands of his

house-master—dread even of seeing Bill Lodgey's beery face looking in at the gates of the school!

That would be the finish for him at St. Jim's. He had sailed very near the wind more than once, and now it was disaster.

No wonder he could not sleep. But even in that extremity, he kept a cool head, and thought and thought it over. It was the end, unless he found a way out—and there was one way out, he decided at last, risky and uncertain, but all that was left to him. And that way he had resolved to take. At the best, it would see him through—at the worst, it would postpone the crash. And he turned quietly out of bed, and dressed in the dark, careful to make no sound. Levison's whispering voice startled him, and made him grit his teeth

Levison sat up in bed, peering at him.

"Look here, Cardew," he said, quietly, "If you're going out of bounds——."

"I'm not, idiot."

"Then what's the game?

"Nothing that need worry you."

"Are you going to see that man Lodgey?"

Cardew gave a low laugh. That question rather amused him. Bill Lodgey was about the last man in Sussex he wanted to see.

"You're not?" asked Levison.

"No, ass! Not unless you can lend me fifteen quid to hand to him," sneered Cardew. "Can you?"

"Don't be an ass!"

"Or a tenner," said Cardew, in the same sneering tone, "That would keep him quiet."

"Talk sense! What are you going down for, if it's not that?" muttered Levison. He kept his voice low, not to awaken sleeping ears. In the glimmer of starlight, he could see that Cardew's face was pale, with a sneering grin on its pallor.

"Want to know?" jeered Cardew, "I'm going down to borrow Railton's telephone.'

Levison gave quite a jump.

"At this time of night?'

"Think I could borrow it in the mornin', to call up a pal at the Green Man?" asked Cardew, mockingly.

"You're mad," breathed Levison, "The risk——."

"Graspin' the nettle, old bean. Always grasp your nettle!" drawled Cardew, "Not so risky as seein' Bill at the gate to-morrow."

"Oh!" muttered Levison.

"Now shut up, before you wake somebody."

"But——."

"Oh, go to sleep."

Cardew moved silently to the door. Levison stared after him, till he was gone into the gloom : and then laid his head on the pillow again—though not to sleep. He was too anxious about his wayward chum for that.

There was no sound as the door opened and closed again. Neither was there any sound as Cardew, in rubber shoes, flitted away by dark passages and staircases. It was nearly midnight, and at that hour St. Jim's was in darkness and slumber. In a few minutes the scapegrace of the Fourth was in his housemaster's study.

He closed the door quietly and carefully. The blinds were drawn, and the study was black as a hat. He turned on a glimmer from a flash-lamp to guide him, and turned it off again after he had dialled the number he wanted. He stood in the darkness at the telephone.

Even in the dark, his face glimmered white. It was a desperate resolution to which he had come : but he was desperate now. Yet he was quite cool, and when a beery voice came through, he answered in his usual drawling tones.

"Ask Bill Lodgey to come to the 'phone! Tell him it's Cardew speaking."

He heard an exclamation of surprise from the other end. Then the beery voice came through again.

"Yes, sir! 'Old on."

A few moments later Bill's husky voice came.

"That you, sir?"

"Little me, Bill!" drawled Cardew, "Surprised to hear from me at this time of night, what?"

"You can lay to that, sir," said Lodgey, "You surely ain't speaking from the school, are you?"

"Just that!"

"Oh, my eye!" murmured Mr. Lodgey.

"I couldn't get out to see you, Bill. I've got to mind my step now. You remember what happened the other day on the tow-path."

"I remember, sir! But——."

"I can't risk it now—after that," said Cardew, glibly.

Cardew did not want to meet Mr. Lodgey personally, for a very simple reason : Bill would have wanted his money, and the scapegrace had no money for him. He was coolly making use of the incident on the tow-path the previous week as an excuse. Bill Lodgey on that occasion, had disappeared too promptly to learn that it was only a jape of the cheery Figgins.

"I've got to be careful, Bill! That's why I'm getting you on the 'phone. I know that you don't keep early hours," chuckled Cardew.

"That's all very well, sir." There was a dogged tone in Bill's voice, "But you know what 'appened on Saturday, sir, and it tots up to fifteen quid in all, and I've jest got to 'ave the money. I got to pay out losses, sir, and if I don't get what's doo, where do I come in?"

"What about a tenner to go on with, Bill?"

"Oh!" It was quite a breath of relief from Bill, "That's all right, sir. I wouldn't be 'ard on a young gentleman, as you know. If you make it a tenner, sir, it's O.K."

Cardew drew a deep, deep breath. Wild and reckless, unscrupulous in many ways as he was, it did not come easy to him to lie to the man. The circumstance that Lodgey accepted his word without doubt or question, made it harder. A flush of shame came into his pale cheeks, as he stood there in the dark.

But he had left himself no other resource. One step on the downward path was inevitably followed by another.

From betting and losing money he could pay, he had already progressed to betting and losing money that he could not pay. Now, to stave off the result, he had to descend to subterfuge—to deceiving a blackguardly racing man.

There was shame in his face, and in his heart. But he did not hesitate. He was at the end of his tether : and if he could not pull through by fair means, he had to pull through by foul.

"I'll get along with it as soon as I can, Bill." His voice was drawling and easy. "Don't you worry! My grandfather's been ill—that's why there was delay. You're all right."

"O.K., sir. I'm glad to 'ear it," said Lodgey, "Anything else, sir?"

"Oh! Yes! What do you think about Plum Cake for the two o'clock on Wednesday, Bill?"

"Well, sir, he's a good 'orse," said Bill, cautiously, "He never had a show on Saturday, and between you and me, sir, I don't

believe he was meant to. It's a bigger thing on Wednesday at Cranford, and my belief is that they're keeping him for it."

"Exactly what I think," said Cardew, "I'm going to back him again, Bill—the odds are down to three to one, and that looks good."

"Good enough, sir, if you want to take the chance. But——."

"Put a fiver on for me, Bill."

There was a momentary pause. Cardew almost trembled with eagerness and doubt. If Bill booked that bet, all was safe. Plum Cake would win on Wednesday at three to one. That meant a win of fifteen pounds, exactly the sum he needed to get clear with Lodgey. All his harrying troubles would vanish in a flash. But it all depended on Bill Lodgey taking the new bet on "tick."

And Bill was evidently hesitating. He believed what Cardew had told him—that there was a ten-pound note ready for him, as soon as the scapegrace found an opportunity of slipping away unobserved from the school. But——.

"You ain't going a bit too deep, sir?" asked Bill, at last.

Cardew laughed lightly.

"Hardly! Don't you worry, Bill! But don't take me on if you'd rather not. I can find somebody else——."

"That's all right, sir," said Bill, quite hastily, "I know I can trust you, sir." Cardew winced, "You're on, sir! A fiver on Plum Cake at three to one for the two o'clock Wednesday. Right!"

"O.K.," drawled Cardew, "And look here, Bill, I don't want to hang about for an evening paper—and I shall be over at Carcroft on Wednesday, playing cricket. Put a 'phone call through with the result to Carcroft School."

"Oh, my eye!" muttered Bill.

"Easy as falling off a form," drawled Cardew, "I wouldn't risk it here, but it's all right at another school. 'Phone a message for me to the school porter at Carcroft. I'll give you a code. 'Grandfather better' for a win, and 'Uncle worse' if Plum Cake loses. Got that?"

There was a chuckle from the Green Man end.

"You're a card, Master Cardew, you are!" chuckled Bill.

"You've got it clear?"

"I got it, sir! I won't let you down," said Bill, "I'll put that message through soon as I can after the two o'clock. You'll get it all right."

"O.K. Good-night, Bill."

"Good-night, sir, and good luck."

Cardew put up the receiver and crept out of the study. Two or three minutes later he was back in his bed in the Fourth-form dormitory. He heard Levison stir, but his chum did not speak. No doubt he settled down to sleep now that Cardew had returned. And Cardew could settle down to sleep now.

Plum Cake, who had lost on Saturday, and landed him in such a hole, was going to win on Wednesday, and see him through. All would be clear, and a crushing weight lifted from his mind. If Plum Cake did not win, he would owe Bill Lodgey twenty pounds instead of fifteen, which he could not possibly pay : and only too well he knew how fiercely resentful the racing man would be, when he discovered that he had been bamboozled, and in fact swindled, by a schoolboy. The mere thought of it sent a chill to Cardew's heart. But he drove the thought away angrily. Plum Cake was going to win this time —it was a sure thing—a dead cert—safe as houses. It meant ruin and disgrace if Plum Cake failed him again—and he dared not think of it.

CHAPTER XX

FOLLOW YOUR LEADER!

"Follow your leader!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No beaks about?" asked Dig.

"Not a ghost of one," said Herries, peering down the staircase, "Nobody about but D'Arcy minor. Get going."

It was a golden opportunity : or, at all events, seemed so to the chums of Study No. 6.

After class on Tuesday, they were coming downstairs, and now they were on the middle landing. From that landing, the wide, polished oaken banister ran straight as a die to the hall below.

That long gleaming oaken banister was a perpetual temptation to venturesome juniors coming downstairs.

It was so easy for a fellow—with the necessary nerve—to throw a leg across it, and shoot down, sitting astride—throw the other leg over the rounded newel-post at the lower end, and jump off. You came down in a flash, instead of walking down the stairs : and it was quite an attractive mode of descent : all the more so, perhaps, because it was severely forbidden. A clumsy fellow, or a fellow who lost his nerve, might easily take a tumble, and a crash at the foot of the staircase was risky, as well as certain to be very painful. For which excellent reason the rule on the subject was strict : and any fellow caught sliding down that long banister was booked for penalties. Schoolmasters have to be a little more thoughtful than schoolboys.

Such considerations, however, were quite lost on Study No. 6, when they saw that the coast was clear.

Generally there was somebody about. On this occasion, there was no master in the offing, not a sign of a prefect : or indeed of anyone else excepting D'Arcy minor of the Third Form : and Wally of the Third, of course, did not matter.

So Jack Blake and Company were not going to lose that golden opportunity. They were going to whiz down that tempting banister one after another, and land on their feet : demonstrating to their own satisfaction, at least, that rules on the subject were unnecessary so far as they were concerned.

Jack Blake started.

He threw a leg over the polished oak, and whizzed, in a sitting position. In a twinkling he was at the newel-post, where he lifted his leg over it, and jumped clear, landing on his feet.

Digby went next, whizzing, and landed beside Blake.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and George Herries made a simultaneous movement to follow Dig. Arthur Augustus, with his usual polished politeness, drew back to let Herries go first.

Off went Herries, whizzing. He too whizzed in safety and landed on his feet beside Blake and Dig.

Then an elegantly-trousered leg was put across the banister, as the swell of St. Jim's prepared to follow. Just as he started, came a yell from Wally of the Third below.

"Cave! Ware pre's."

But it was too late! Arthur Augustus was whizzing! Once on that dizzy rush, it was impossible to stop. Kildare of the Sixth came across towards the staircase, with a frowning brow, and looked up, to see Arthur Augustus whizzing down.

"Oh, cwikey!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

But for that interruption, Arthur Augustus would have shot down the banister and landed as safely as his comrades. But the sudden sight of the frowning prefect put him off his stroke, as it were. Just for a second he was startled—and at such breathless speed, a second was enough. The next second, he was at the bottom of the long banister, just failed to clear the newel-post with the necessary leg, and crashed.

"Yawooh!" roared Arthur Augustus.

He hardly knew what was happening as he flew. He crashed into something, which fortunately broke his fall, without for the moment quite knowing what it was. He knew the next moment, as he rolled on the floor mixed up with Kildare of the Sixth.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Herries.

"Oh, scissors!" murmured Dig.

"Gussy all over!" remarked Wally of the Third.

"You young ass!" roared Kildare. He pitched Arthur Augustus aside, and tottered to his feet, bumped and breathless and in a state of considerable wrath. Arthur Augustus had crashed fairly into him, and he had been helplessly strewn on the floor under the swell of St. Jim's. Kildare was a good-tempered fellow, but he did not look good-tempered as he scrambled up.

"Oh, cwumbs!" Arthur Augustus gasped, "Oh, cwikey!"

He sat up, dizzily.

"Get up, you young lunatic, and all four of you go to my study!" rapped Kildare.

Arthur Augustus strove to rise. But he sat down again with a howl.

"Oh! Ow! Wow! Woooooh."

"Hurt, old chap?" exclaimed Blake, anxiously.

"Ow! My knee! Wow!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The wrath faded out of Kildare's face. He bent, and lifted the swell of St. Jim's to his feet. Arthur Augustus stood on one leg, with the prefect's assistance. His face was quite pale.

"Oh Gussy!" gasped Dig.

"Gussy, old man——!" exclaimed Herries.

"Ow! wow!" said Arthur Augustus, "All wight, deah boys—wow!—only a knock—yow-ow-ow! wight as wain in a minute—wooooh!"

Come to the matron's room at once," snapped Kildare : and he led Arthur Augustus limping away. "You three go to my study."

Blake and Herries and Dig trailed away rather dismally to Kildare's study to wait for him there. They waited disconsolately. Perhaps it dawned upon their somewhat thoughtless minds that the rule against sliding down the banisters was not so unnecessary, after all.

"Rotten," growled Blake.

"This means swipes!" said Herries, "Kildare's waxy."

"Blow!" said Digby.

As a matter of fact, the three were thinking more of the damage to their chum, than of the probable "swipes" for themselves. They waited very anxiously for Kildare to come in.

It was several minutes before he came, with a frown on his face.

"Gussy all right?" asked Blake. "I mean D'Arcy! Is he all right, Kildare?"

"No!" grunted Kildare, "He isn't! He's got a bruise as big as an apple on his knee, and will be limping for a week. You young sweeps, can't you keep off those banisters?"

"Hem!"

The captain of St. Jim's picked up the cane from his table, eyeing the three juniors grimly. However, he laid it down again. Perhaps he thought that Gussy's accident might be a sufficient warning to them.

"You can cut!" he rapped.

Blake and Herries and Dig were only too glad to cut.

They made their way to the matron's room: and met Arthur Augustus coming out. The swell of St. Jim's was limping, and the right knee of his elegant trousers bulged. No doubt the damaged knee had been bandaged by the house-dame.

"Bad?" asked Blake.

"Not vewy, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus, "It is wathah painful—there is wathah a bwuise. But it is all wight, weally. Only——."

"Only what?"

"Its wathah a wotten outlook for Carcwoft to-mowwow," said Arthur Augustus, "This doesn't look like takin' wuns."

"Oh, rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah! We want to beat Compton's cwowd at Carcroft—but if I have to stand out, pwospects look wathah doubtful, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus with a sad shake of his noble head.

At which his comrades, deeply concerned as they were, grinned. Probably they thought that St. Jim's might beat Carcroft, even without the aid of Arthur Augustus. However, they forbore to say so.

Chapter XXI

MANNERS IS THE MAN!

Manners put his bat under his arm.

"Nets?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes—Fatty Wynn's going to give me some bowling."

"Good man!"

Manners left the study, where the "Terrible Three" had finished tea. Monty Lowther gave Tom a rather comical look, and Tom looked rueful.

"Old Manners is sticking to it," Lowther remarked.

"Like glue," agreed Tom, "I wonder——." He took a crumpled sheet from his pocket, and ran his eye over it. He knew it by heart, of course, but he gave it another look. "I wonder——." Then he shook his head, "There isn't a man who could be left out to make room for Manners."

"You've got four New House men there," remarked Lowther.

"Figgins has been ragging me for not making it five or six. New House has to have a show in School matches. And they're all good men. Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Owen—they've got to play."

"And Cardew's too good to lose—though Manners doesn't think so."

"Well, old Manners is right about him, in a way—he's not too reliable," said Tom. "But he's at the top of his form now, and we want his runs at Carcroft. And he's our next best bowler after Wynn—good in the field, too. I'd rather leave you out than Cardew, old chap, on his present form."

"Thanks!" said Monty.

"But I wish—hallo, come in!" called out Tom, as there was a tap at the door.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth came in.

Tom Merry jumped. Monty Lowther stared.

"What——?" ejaculated Tom.

"What——?" exclaimed Lowther.

Arthur Augustus was not moving with his usual leisurely grace. He came in limping. And the expression on his noble visage was sad and apologetic.

"Awf'ly sowwy, Tom Mewwy," he began.

"What's the matter with your silly leg?" hooted Tom, "Is this a game of dot-and-carry-one?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——."

"What's up?" roared Tom. He looked excited. The sight of one of his best batsmen painfully limping, on the day before an important fixture, was enough to excite any cricket captain.

"Pway don't woar at a fellow," expostulated Arthur Augustus, "It weally thwows me into a fluttah when a fellow woars at me."

"What's happened?" yelled Tom.

"Cwocked deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, sadly, "Fwightfully sowwy, but I shall not be able to play to-mowwow, or for a week to come."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, you know——."

"Ass!"

"Addwessin' oppwobwious wemarks to a fellow will not mend mattahs, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I did not get cwocked on purpose. I can assuah you that my leg is vewy painful."

"How did it happen?" asked Lowther.

"Slidin' down the banistahs——."

"Oh you goat!" hooted Tom. "You had to pick the day before the Carcroft match to slide down the banisters! No other day would suit, I suppose?"

"I did not expect to take a tumble, Tom Mewwy——."

"You might have!" howled Tom, "Don't you know what a born idiot you are?"

"It was weally Kildare's fault. He came up just as I was slidin' down, and wathah cwamped my style. So——."

"I hope he gave you six!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——."

"And I hope he laid them on hard."

"I wepeat that I am sowwy, deah boy. I wealise that without my battin', pwospects at Carcroft do not look too bwight. But——."

"Oh, you ass!" said Tom, "You chump! This means a change in the team at the last minute! Didn't Kildare whop you?"

"He did not, Tom Mewwy."

"Then he's not much good as a prefect," growled Tom, "He ought to have given you six, if not sixty! Fathead."

He picked up a pencil, and drew a line through the name "A. A. D'Arcy" in the cricket list. Then he calmed down a little.

"Sorry you're crocked, Gussy," he said, with rather belated sympathy, "And we can find another man all right. But you ought to go and kick yourself."

"It's wathah wuff all wound," said Arthur Augustus. "But as I have to stand out tomowwow, Tom Mewwy, pewwaps you will allow me to make a suggestion wegardin' the man to replace me."

"Carry on," said Tom, "No good suggesting Herries or Dig—they're not up to the Carcroft game."

"I am awah of that, Tom Mewwy. I wathah think that I know a fellow's form at cwicket. What about Mannahs?"

"Manners!" repeated Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! I have always stated my opinion, for what it is worth, that if I were in your place, I should have put in Mannahs instead of Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "Now that there is a vacant place in the eleven I twust you will permit me to pwess Mannah's claim."

Tom Merry looked at him. Then he smiled. Monty Lowther chuckled. Arthur Augustus's suggestion was quite welcome in No. 10 Study.

"By gum!" said Tom. A minute or two ago he had been looking as if he could almost have eaten Arthur Augustus! Now he seemed to have taken comfort. Certainly, he would never have dreamed of dropping Gussy, to put Manners in. But Gussy having dropped himself, as it were, it was a question of picking out the next best—and Manners undoubtedly had a good claim.

"Personally," went on Arthur Augustus, "I would natuwally wathah see Hewwies or old Dig in the team. But cwicket comes

befoah fwiendship. I twust, Tom Mewwy, that you have some wespect for my judgment."

"Lots!" said Tom, laughing.

"Vewy well, then! In my opinion, Mannahs is the man!" said Arthur Augustus, "Pway think it ovah, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus limped out of No. 10.

Tom Mewwy looked at Monty Lowther. Lowther smiled.

"Gussy really knows a lot about a man's form," said Monty, "He's been sticking up for old Manners all the time. He's right, Tom."

"Right as rain," said Tom. "I'm sorry to lose Gussy—but he's out, and that's that! Manners is the man!"

And under the crossed-out name of A. A. D'Arcy, in the list, Tom Merry pencilled in H. Manners. When the chums went down from the study, that list was duly posted up in the junior day-room. And when, a little later, Manners came in, Talbot of the Shell called out to him:

"Gratters, old man."

Manners stared.

"What——?" he began.

"The list's up for Carcroft."

"Nothing to do with me," said Manners, gruffly.

"Your name's in it."

"What?"

Manners made a bound. He stared at the list. A dozen fellows offered "gratters." But Manners only stared. Then he looked round, and spotting Tom Merry and Lowther by the window, called out:

"Look here, Tom!"

"Like the list?" asked Tom, with a smile.

"No!"

"Oh!" said Tom, "What's wrong with it now?" He stared at his chum. Certainly he had expected Manners' face to brighten when he saw his name in the list for the Carcroft game. But Manners was frowning.

"That's rot," said Manners, quietly, "If you'd put me in instead of a fellow I needn't mention, O.K. Putting me in D'Arcy's place is rot, and if you don't know it, you ought to. That's all."

"Modesty, thy name is Manners!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Manners, "D'Arcy can play my head off at cricket, and the sooner you wash that out again, the better, Tom."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Sorry I can't oblige, old man," he answered, "You see, Gussy has gone and got himself crocked, and he can't take runs at Carcroft on one leg."

"Wathah not," chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, from the armchair where he was resting a painful leg, "It's all wight, Mannahs, deah boy. Wight as wain."

"Oh!" said Manners, "Sorry you're crocked, old chap. So you're out anyhow?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"And you're in, fathead," said Tom Merry, "Or would you like me to push you out again and put in Trimble or somebody?"

Manners laughed.

"O.K.," he said, "I can't score like Gussy, but I'll keep my wicket up, at any rate. I won't let you down, Tom."

Manners' face was very bright in No. 10 Study that evening. He smiled cheerily over his prep. Indeed, anyone looking into the study, and spotting that bright countenance at the table, might have supposed that there was something quite entertaining and exhilarating in the deathless verse of P. Vergilius Maro!

Chapter XXII

CARDEW'S LUCKY DAY?

Ralph Reckness Cardew looked as bright as the sunny morning, when he joined the cricketers in the brake to roll over to Carcroft.

Levison and Clive wished him luck, before they went in to second school. Both of them were rather surprised by Cardew's high spirits, and relieved at the same time.

True, the whole cricketing crowd looked cheery enough. It

was a glorious morning: ideal weather for cricket. The Carcroft game was a big fixture, and any fellow selected to play in it had reason to feel pleased with himself and things generally. Moreover, the party going over to Carcroft had leave from third school—and few fellows would have preferred the dusky form-room and Latin prose to the fresh air and sunshine.. There was every reason why Cardew should look merry and bright—but his chums, who knew that he was deep in trouble over his sporting speculations, hardly expected it. He was hardly to be recognised as the pale and harassed fellow who had crept down from the Fourth-form dormitory on Monday night to 'phone to Bill Lodgey.

"Feeling fit, old chap " asked Clive.

Cardew laughed.

"Don't I look it?" he asked.

"You do, and no mistake! We'll run over on the bikes this afternoon, and see you taking Carcroft wickets."

"Do!" grinned Cardew.

Ernest Levison eyed him curiously. That Cardew had not received any letter from home, and that no remittance from that quarter could have rescued him from his spot of bother, he knew. Yet he looked as if he had not a care in the world.

Cardew, meeting his eyes, laughed again. He knew what was in Levison's thoughts.

"O.K.," he said, "Don't you worry, Ernest, old bean! Everything's goin' my way."

"I'm glad to hear it, old chap! You don't want to be thinking of anything but cricket to-day," said Levison.

"Well, a chap might be thinkin' of one or two other unimportant trifles," drawled Cardew, "But I'm playin' the game of my life to-day. I've got a feelin' that this is goin' to be my lucky day—in cricket and everythin' else."

"What else?" asked Levison, quietly.

"Well, there might be other things, though I wouldn't venture to whisper as much to the strenuous Thomas!" smiled Cardew, "Thomas will want all the runs I can give him, as he's playing a dud in the team out of pure friendship." A sneer replaced the smile on his face.

"If you mean Manners, that's rot," grunted Clive, "Manners isn't your form, but he's no dud."

"Opinions differ," said Cardew with a shrug of the shoulders,

"Manners ought to get a job under the National Health Act."

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I mean that he's the man to hand out a free pair of spectacles."

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"I hear that D'Arcy was pushin' him in," went on Cardew, "Dear old Gussy would rather see Herries or Dig in the team, but he thinks that cricket comes before friendship. Thomas seems to think that friendship comes before cricket—judgin' by Manners in the eleven."

Manners of the Shell, with his cricket bag in his hand, was passing the three, as Cardew spoke. Cardew, in speaking, raised his voice just a little, and his friends coloured uncomfortably, aware that he wanted the Shell fellow to hear what he said.

"Shut up," muttered Clive. He saw the colour come into Manners' face, and knew that he had heard.

Manners paused, setting his lips. Cardew smiled, cheerfully prepared for a row if Manners wanted one.

"Bit risky, to take ten men and a passenger to play Carcroft," said Cardew, shaking his head, "We shall want all the runs we can get."

"Oh, chuck it," said Levison, frowning, "Anyhow, I'm glad to see you looking so fit, and feeling so keen."

"Keen as mustard, old man! Feelin' as if I could knock up a century or two, and hand out hat tricks by the dozen," said Cardew, "To tell the truth—a weakness of mine, sometimes—to tell the truth, old bean, I'm expectin' somethin' besides cricket at Carcroft to-day."

"What on earth——?"

"Well, there might be a 'phone call," said Cardew, negligently.

"A 'phone call at Carcroft," said Clive staring.

"Why not?"

"Cardew!" Levison caught his breath, "You wouldn't be fool enough—silly ass enough——!"

"And you know me so well!" said Cardew, "Why not?"

"You must be crackers, to run such a risk——."

"Here, perhaps—but at Carcroft, where's the risk? My dear chap, good news can't come too early!"

"Oh!" breathed Levison. "But if it isn't good——."

"The very best, old bean."

"Oh, you ass!" muttered Levison. He could guess now the cause of Cardew's high spirits. The scapegrace of St. Jim's was

keen enough on cricket—he was looking forward to a great game, which he was going to enjoy, and in which he expected to cover himself with glory, and put up a striking contrast to anything that Manners of the Shell was likely to do. But that was not all. He had money on a race, and was banking on news of a win. And clearly he had dismissed any doubts that he might possibly have had, and was banking on it as an absolute certainty! A 'phone call at Carcroft was to apprise him of his good luck—in the middle of a cricket match! And if his luck was bad——!

"You ass!" repeated Levison.

Cardew laughed lightly.

"Don't you worry—it's goin' to be good! Come over after dinner, and see me makin' hay of Carcroft—I tell you, this is my lucky day. There will be ducks about—but they won't belong to me." He chuckled, as Manners turned towards him, his face red, "I'm afraid our good Thomas is goin' to realise that friendship is very expensive in runs, and somebody will have to put them on."

Manners came towards him.

"That's a rotten lie, Cardew," he said breathing hard.

"Dear me! Did you hear what I said?"

"You know I did."

"There's an old proverb," remarked Cardew musingly. "Something to the effect that listeners never hear any good of themselves. Ever hear of it?"

"You meant me to hear," said Manners, "And if you say that Tom Merry is playing me on anything but my form, it's a lie."

"On your form?" repeated Cardew.

"Yes!" snapped Manners.

"But you haven't any!" argued Cardew, "If you have, I've never noticed it, old bean, and I've seen you fumblin' at the nets often enough. If you have any, why haven't you shown a spot of it up to now?"

Manners clenched his hands.

Clive and Levison grasped Cardew by the arms, and barged him away towards the waiting brake. Manners was left staring after them with glinting eyes. But no doubt he realised that punching the head of a fellow-member of the team was not a useful preliminary to cricket, and he turned away with knitted brows.

Cardew was laughing as he went with his friends.

"You cheeky ass," muttered Levison, "Do you want a row just before starting for Carcroft?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, don't be a goat! What the thump are you always girding at Manners for lately?" snapped Levison, "What has he done to you, I'd like to know."

"Well, we had an argument the other day, and we couldn't agree on the subject under discussion," said Cardew, airily.

"What rot!" said Clive, "What was the subject, then?"

"It was about a quid pro quo."

"A quid pro quo," repeated Clive, staring at him, "And what do you mean by that, if you mean anything?"

"Guess!" said Cardew. "Hallo, there's the bell! Be good little boys in class, my young friends, and don't get a detention from Lathom. I want you to buzz over this afternoon and watch my centuries and hat tricks and things."

"Well, good luck," said Levison and Clive, and they departed for the form-room, leaving Cardew with the cricketers.

"Bai Jove! there's that wotten bell," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was still limping, not looking his brightest, "It's wathah wotten to stick in form, while othah fellows are playin' cwicket. Fwightfully wotten."

"Come over in the afternoon," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Hard luck, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "But if naughty little boys in the Fourth-form will slide down banisters——."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——."

"Better cut in," said Monty Lowther, "The bell's stopped, Gussy."

"Bothah the bell! Well, aftah all, you have a vewy good man in Mannahs, Tom Mewwy, and I shall hope for the best," said Arthur Augustus.

"Do!" said Tom, laughing.

Arthur Augustus limped away to the House. The cricketers packed in, and the brake rolled away with the eleven, and Herries and Digby, who were going with the team. From the doorway of the House, Arthur Augustus waved his eyeglass in farewell, and then betook himself to the fourth-form room, where he arrived several minutes late for third school.

Arthur Augustus could not help feeling a little disconsolate that morning. But one fellow's loss was another fellow's gain: and Manners of the Shell looked very cheery in the brake. Cardew of the Fourth was the merriest and brightest of the

whole party, confident that it was going to be his lucky day. If a dark misgiving lurked at the back of his mind, he drove it away: and he was still looking, and feeling, on top of the world, when the St. Jim's cricketers arrived at Carcroft, and were greeted by Harry Compton and Co.

Chapter XXIII

THE CARCROFT MATCH

"First over?" asked Cardew airily.

"No: Wynn."

"Why not begin with your best man?" suggested Cardew, in the same airy tone, "Pour encourager les autres, as jolly old Voltaire put it?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Exactly what I'm going to do," he answered.

Harry Compton, the junior captain of Carcroft School, had performed the first duty of a cricket captain—winning the toss! Carcroft had elected to bat, and were ready to go in and take the first knock. Tom Merry was quite pleased to have so useful a man as Cardew in the field, and so useful a bowler to knock off Carcroft bails: but the ball was assigned to David Llewellyn Wynn to bowl the first over. Cardew was good, but everyone but Cardew knew that Fatty Wynn was better. Tom rather hoped to see a Carcroft wicket go down in the first over, which would "encourage the others" more than anything that the dandy of the Fourth was likely to do."

Cardew gave a whimsical sigh.

"Only second-best, what?" he said.

"Just that," agreed Tom.

"Floored again!" sighed Cardew, "No good telling you that this is my lucky day, and that I feel like bowling half-a-dozen Bradmans one after another?"

"Bradmans?" repeated Tom, puzzled for a moment, "Oh, you ass! Well, if you can bowl half-a-dozen Don Bradmans, you'll have your chance in the second over."

Figgins of the New House gave a snort.

"If you think you're up to Fatty's form in bowling, Cardew ——!" he said.

"I don't think so, old bean. I know!"

"Cheeky ass!" said Figgins.

"School House swank!" said Kerr.

"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall!" remarked Manners.

Cardew gave him a glance.

"My dear man," he said, "I've screwed myself specially up to concert pitch, to make up for our skipper playing a man short."

"What the dickens do you mean?" asked Tom, staring at him, "We're all here."

"Isn't it usual to play eleven cricketers in a cricket match?" asked Cardew.

"Well, we're eleven, aren't we?" said Tom blankly.

"Can't you count?"

"No—ten cricketers and Manners," answered Cardew, and he lunged away into the field before Tom could make a reply to that.

Tom knitted his brows for a moment, and Manners' cheeks burned. Monty Lowther touched Tom on the arm.

"Think the Carcroft men would stare, if I kicked Cardew across the pitch?" he murmured.

"Oh, come on," said Tom, "Let's get into the field. Don't mind that chattering ass, Manners—Cardew can't help being a cheeky fool."

Manners nodded, but did not speak.

St. Jim's went into the field. Carcroft were opening their innings with Compton and Drake. Both of them, as Tom knew well, were good men with the willow—and there were good men to follow—Vane-Carter, Lee, Talboys, Scott, Drummond, Carr, and the rest. Good bowling was needed for St. Jim's: and Tom hoped that Cardew would be able to make his words good —though feeling quite as much inclined as Monty Lowther to land a foot on his spotless flannel bags. He expected good work from Cardew, though no more than from Talbot, and certainly not so much as from Fatty Wynn.

Fatty rolled on to bowl, and Compton of Carcroft, who had

faced Fatty's bowling before, took guard very carefully. Three successive balls produced no results, Compton contenting himself with cautious play: but he hit the fourth, and the batsmen ran.

And as they ran, a nimble figure leaped, a sweeping hand met a flying ball and closed on it, and Cardew held it up, and chirruped:

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"By gum!" breathed Tom Merry, his eyes dancing, "Good man, Cardew! Well caught!"

Harry Compton of the Carcroft Fourth was a good loser. His face retained its cheery expression as he went back to the pavilion with a bat he had hardly used. But it was easy to guess that his feelings were not so cheery as his looks.

Cardew smiled serenely as he tossed the ball to Fatty Wynn, who gave him a fat and cheery grin.

He had not been given the first over. But he had taken the first Carcroft wicket all the same. More than ever he was feeling on top of the world. It was his lucky day—success seemed to him to be in the atmosphere about him. He was going to play the game of his life—and while he was playing it, Plum Cake was going to win for him at Cranford, washing out all the worries and troubles and perils that his sporting speculations had brought upon him. He was sure of it—almost as sure as if he had already received Bill Lodgey's 'phoned message "Grandfather better," the code message for a win. His only regret was that he had not been able to put a "tenner" instead of a "fiver" on that dark horse, which would have left him cash in hand as well as clearing off his debt to Bill. Still, it would be a tremendous relief to be square with Bill.

Dudley Vane-Carter came in to take Compton's place. V.C. of Carcroft was a very good man with the willow, and he had a wary eye on Cardew. The remainder of that over gave him two.

Cardew gave Tom Merry a look, as the field crossed. Tom nodded. And Cardew gripped the round red ball with a business-like grip. He was full of beans, sure of what he could do—was it not his lucky day?

Whether it was or not, he certainly had luck to go on with. Bob Drake, a mighty hitter for Carcroft, drove the first ball to the boundary. The second ball had the same fate. Manners, looking on from his place in the field, saw the glint that came

into Cardew's eyes, and smiled sarcastically. After all his big words, what was the fellow doing, after all? A lucky catch—but his bowling did not seem much to write home about! And then——.

Clack!

How the next ball eluded his bat, Bob Drake never knew. But he knew that it did, for there was his leg stump leaning over at an angle of forty-five, and his bails on the earth.

"Oh!" said Drake.

And he suppressed his feelings, and like the weary ploughman in the poem, homeward plodded his way.

Dick Lee came out for Carcroft. He stayed at the wicket just long enough for Cardew to send down a fast one. Then, after a rueful glance at a missing middle stump, he returned.

"Look out for that man, Drum," he said to the next man in. Drummond nodded, and went on, resolved to look out very warily for "that man."

Looking out, however, did not seem to help the Carcroft batsman much. He knew no more than Bob Drake how it happened: but he knew that it did happen, as his wicket was suddenly spread-eagled. He stared down at it with a look of surprise that made the St. Jim's field grin.

"Oh, gum!" said Drummond.

"Good man, Cardew!" exclaimed Tom Merry. All the irritating ways of the dandy of the Fourth were forgotten. Every St. Jim's face beamed—even Manners forgot his desire to punch Cardew's head. The "hat trick" atoned for everything. Three Carcroft wickets down was certainly something "pour encourager les autres," as Cardew had expressed it.

Cardew grinned in sheer enjoyment. He had felt like doing it—he had even said that he could do it—and he had done it! Somehow it seemed to him that good fortune on the cricket field meant good fortune elsewhere. It was his lucky day, and everything was going his way.

Scott came on for the last ball of the over, and stopped it dead. Talbot of the Shell bowled the next, to Vane-Carter.

Talbot was a good bowler, but he made no impression on V.C. of Carcroft. That over gave the home team nine, and left Vane-Carter at the batting end to take the next from Fatty Wynn.

"Still second-best?" sighed Cardew, in Tom Merry's ear, as he went to his place in the field.

"Exactly," said Tom.

But he was not feeling so sure about it now. Fatty Wynn was the champion junior bowler of St. Jim's: and by and large he was streets ahead of Cardew in that line. But this certainly did seem to be Cardew's day: and, in point of fact, Fatty Wynn found that Dudley Vane-Carter was able to put "paid" to him.

Figgins and Kerr watched him quite anxiously. Their fat chum, as they had not the slightest doubt, was worth half-a-dozen of Cardew with the leather: also, he was New House, and Cardew was School House. They would have given much to see Vane-Carter's wicket go to pieces, apart from considerations of cricket.

But they did not have that satisfaction. Fatty was good, but V.C. of Carcroft seemed a little better. The over gave him six runs, with a narrow escape at the last ball, which whizzed just out of Manners' reach in the field. It almost touched his finger-tips, and Manners felt a pang as it escaped him.

"Butterfingers!" floated softly to his ear, from the direction of Cardew.

Manners affected not to hear: but his cheeks burned. Manners really was a good man in the field: but he could not help feeling that Cardew, in his place, would have had that ball. Cardew evidently thought so, and, in his malicious mood, he was the fellow to rub it in.

Cardew bowled the next over, and Scott's wicket went down. Lord Talboys came on, and stood manfully up to the bowling. He even snicked the ball away for two, but the last ball of the over scattered his sticks, and his lordship departed for the pavilion.

"That School House tick can bowl!" muttered Figgins. And Kerr nodded. There was no doubt that, for once in a way, a School House man was out-shining Fatty Wynn of the New House on the bowling-crease

The Carcroft men were not looking their bonniest by this time. There were runs but the wickets seemed to be going down faster than the runs went up. Their chief hope was in Dudley Vane-Carter, who had hitherto seemed able to handle the St. Jim's bowling with success.

V.C., at least was taking the runs. Another over from Fatty Wynn gave him eleven, and left him at the batting end to face Cardew. Cardew put all he knew into it, but V.C. lived through the over, adding six. It looked as if he would stay in so long as there remained a Carcroft batsman to keep him company.

And so it proved. The Carcroft score was at fifty when the

last man was called. Vane-Carter was taking the bowling from Cardew. Perhaps V.C.'s good luck so far had made him a little over-confident, and if not careless, possibly a little less careful. Anyhow his bails went down to a ball that came down like a bullet, and last man in was not out.

"All down for fifty," said Tom Merry, cheerily, "We shall beat that! Good man, Cardew."

"Not too bad, what?" smiled Cardew.

"Topping! If you take runs as fast as you take wickets, we're all right," said Tom, laughing.

"Rely on me, if——."

"If what?"

"If Manners doesn't run me out," said Cardew, affably, and he walked away laughing, leaving Tom Merry frowning, and Manners setting his lips.

The Carcroft innings was over in good time for lunch. And Tom Merry and Co. had the cheeriest anticipations of the afternoon's play. Cricket is an uncertain game: but prospects certainly looked good: and no member of the St. Jim's eleven, least of all Cardew, could foresee what was to come.

Chapter XXIV

THE ST. JIM'S INNINGS

"Cardew!" Tom Merry called.

"Adsum!" answered Cardew, as if he were answering to his name at roll, and there was a chuckle among the St. Jim's cricketers at the pavilion.

Stumps were pitched for the next innings at two-fifteen. Cardew looked as bright and cheery as ever—indeed, he seemed more gay and airy than ever. He was not, like the others, thinking wholly of cricket, however.

He was thinking of the race run at Cranford at two o'clock, in which Plum Cake—he had no doubt—had romped home at three to one! And he was thinking of the 'phone call he was to receive from Bill Lodgey, confirming that of which he was already certain.

The gambler's spirit was strongly developed in the scapegrace of St. Jim's. He had a doubting and mocking mind: but he believed in luck, and he believed in "hunches": and somehow or other, he felt and believed that this was "his day"—as in cricket at least it had proved, so far. Nothing could go wrong to-day—he had a serene assurance of it. Plum Cake had won—he was out of the hole—and he was going to pile up runs, perhaps even make his century—everything was going his way.

Possibly, deep down at the back of his mind, there was a lingering, lurking fear. If so, he would not, and dared not, let it come to his conscious thoughts.

For if Plum Cake let him down again, he was lost. He could not pay Bill Lodgey, and no excuse would serve him further: the sharper would know that he had been out-sharped—by a schoolboy! Only too well he knew what the racing man's savage resentment would be like. It meant exposure and disgrace at the school—it meant that he would be "sacked"—it meant utter ruin. It meant so much that Cardew, with all his nerve, dared not think of it. And no doubt that was partly the reason why he believed, and was determined to believe, that this was his lucky day, on which nothing could go wrong. The alternative was too terribly overwhelming. There was, possibly a spot of "nerves" in his high spirits and gay self-confidence.

Certainly the other fellows never dreamed of what was in his mind: though Manners gave him more than one curious, and perhaps sour, glance. Manners had not forgotten what he had heard, just before the St. Jim's men started for Carcroft. And Manners, too, knew that the dandy of the Fourth was deep in difficulties, as he could hardly fail to know, after Cardew's "quid pro quo" proposition. Manners could not help reflecting rather sourly that, had he accepted that proposition, Cardew would not have been at Carcroft that day at all.

Cardew's face was cheery and smiling, as he answered Tom Merry, and Tom smiled at his answer. Tom, at all events, had no doubt or suspicion.

"I've got you down sixth on the list," said Tom. "But——."

"Any old thing," drawled Cardew, "That is, any old thing

except last man. I wouldn't dispute that place with Manners. He has the right to it."

"Don't be a cheeky ass," said Tom, gruffly, "Look here, you've shown such topping form, that I'm going to shove your name up the list. I was going to open the innings with Talbot——." He paused, and glanced round at Talbot of the Shell. "You wouldn't mind, old chap——."

Talbot smiled.

"Not in the least, Tom! Cardew's at the top of his form to-day, and if I were in your place, I should put him on to open the innings."

"Done, then," said Tom, "You go in with me, Cardew. So shove on your pads and get ready."

"Oh!" said Cardew.

For one moment his eyes danced. But the next moment he remembered. On his form, and in his present mood, he would have been glad to open the innings for St. Jim's, nothing doubting that he would put up a big score—indeed, he was prepared to believe that he would be not out as well as first in. But there was a lion in the path, so to speak.

Precisely when Bill Lodgey would be able to put through that 'phone call to the porter's lodge at Carcroft, Cardew did not know. It might be at any time after the race. And the race was over. Cardew wanted to put up a great game—but he did not want to be at the wickets when that message came. He wanted to get that message at the earliest possible moment.

The unconscious misgiving at the back of his mind came very near the surface, at the thought of delay in getting that message. He was feverishly anxious to be assured of what he was determined to believe was quite assured already!

"Oh!" he repeated.

The smile faded from his face.

Manners' eyes were on him, and Manners smiled—sarcastically. Manners knew that Cardew was expecting a 'phone call at Carcroft, and from Cardew's hesitation, he could guess that Cardew was expecting it during that innings. Cricket took a second place to his racing stunts. Manners could have told the cricket captain that Cardew would refuse the offered distinction, before the refusal came from Cardew. And his lips curled with contempt.

"Well?" said Tom, puzzled by Cardew's look and silence, "Don't you like the idea, Cardew?"

Cardew laughed lightly. For a moment he had been disconcerted: but he was quick to recover. Certainly he was not going to open the innings—he was going to get Bill Lodgey's message before he went to the wickets. He would rather have been last man in, than have risked delay.

"Wash it out, my dear chap," he said, "You don't make due allowance for my natural modesty. Leave my name where it is. I'm not shovin' myself in front of men like Talbot and Figgins and Noble. You'd hardly expect me to own up to it, but they're better men than I am."

Tom stared at him.

"You don't mean that," he said, "But it's quite true—as a rule! I'm making the change because you're in such topping form to-day. And as I happen to be skipper, you'll get your pads on now, see?"

Cardew shook his head.

"I've only bowled so far, and made a catch or so," he said, "You don't know what my battin's goin' to be like."

"You can leave that to me," said Tom sharply. He paused, and gave Cardew a sharp look, "If you mean that you don't feel fit, Cardew——."

"I mean that I don't feel like openin' the innings. You had me down for sixth man—leave me there," said Cardew, "If I make a good show, you can put me on first in our second knock, if you like. You don't want to drive a man, Tom Merry."

"Certainly I don't," said Tom. "Leave it at that, then—you go in with me, Talbot."

The batsmen waiting at the pavilion eyed Cardew curiously, when Tom and Talbot went to the wickets. So far, his self-confidence had carried to the length of swank, and he had been expected to jump at Tom's offer. His refusal was a puzzle to all but Manners.

Cardew, lounging, easily at the pavilion rail, gave them no heed. He watched Tom Merry and Talbot dealing with the Carcroft bowling, for a few overs. Then he strolled away, with a careless air, his hands in his pockets. With Tom Merry, Talbot, Figgins, Kangaroo, and Jack Blake ahead of him on the batting list, he was not likely to be wanted for some time, and there was no reason why he should not saunter off, if the spirit moved him so to do.

In their own keenness in watching the play, the other batsmen

forgot him in a few minutes. Tom Merry and Talbot were putting on the runs, and that was enough to occupy the minds of the St. Jim's fellows. Manners cast a glance of mingled dislike and scorn after him as he went, and then he, too, forgot Cardew. And Cardew, quite content for once to be forgotten, sauntered off the cricket field, and, with an air of casual unconcern, made his leisurely way to the porter's lodge.

Chapter XXV

THE K. O.

"Mr. Cardew?"

Cardew nodded, with a smile.

Old Cuttle, the school porter at Carcroft, seemed to be expecting him. That meant that he had already received the telephone call for a member of the visiting team from St. Jim's.

He touched his hat to the handsome schoolboy in flannels who sauntered to the lodge. His manner was respectfully sympathetic. Old Cuttle was regarded by the Carcroft fellows, as rather a hard nut to crack. But he could be sympathetic in a case of family trouble: which he naturally supposed this to be. A schoolboy who, while engaged in cricket, was anxious for news of a sick relative, seemed to old Cuttle a proper object of respectful sympathy.

Certainly, if the Carcroft porter had had the remotest suspicion of the real nature of that 'phone call, he would never have passed it on to Cardew, or even listened to it at the 'phone. But there was nothing in the message to indicate its real meaning to anyone unaware of the "code." Cardew had been very careful about that.

"Grandfather better" meant that Plum Cake had won at

Cranford: "Uncle worse" meant that Plum Cake had lost. In either case, there was nothing to hint that the message had anything to do with a race-horse.

It was the former message that Cardew hoped, and expected, to hear. He was certain—quite certain and assured. His high spirits that day had come of his certain assurance. Yet he was conscious of a slightly unpleasant beating of his heart, as he stood at the door of the porter's lodge. If anything had gone wrong——.

But it hadn't—it couldn't have! He was all right! He was going to learn as an absolute fact that Plum Cake had won, and then go back to the cricket like a giant refreshed with wine, as it were, and play a tremendous game. That was the programme.

Still, his heart beat quickly and unpleasantly.

"A message came through on the 'phone a few minutes ago, sir," said old Cuttle, "The man said for Mr. Cardew from St. Jim's——."

"That's right," said Cardew, with a pleasant smile, "Aw'fully good of you to take the message for me. I'm very much obliged."

"Not at all, sir," said old Cuttle, "Very glad to oblige, sir, and if I may say so, sir, very sorry to 'ear that your Uncle's worse, sir."

Cardew's heart stood still.

He could not speak. He stood looking at Cuttle, the smile and the colour both fading from his face.

Old Cuttle's respectful sympathy intensified. He concluded that this young gentleman must be very fond of his Uncle, to look so knocked over on hearing that he was worse!

"Very sorry I was to 'ear it, sir," said old Cuttle, "I 'ope, sir, that the old gentleman ain't very bad, sir."

Cardew tried to speak. He stared at the porter with almost unseeing eyes. It was impossible—impossible! Plum Cake had won—he must have won—the message must be "Grandfather better." What did the man mean?

He found his voice at last.

"What was the message exactly?" he asked. His voice was calm.

"Only jest the two words, sir," said old Cuttle, "Man rings me up, and says, will you please take a message, he says for

Mr. Cardew, one of the young gentlemen over from St. Jim's playing cricket. It's about a sick relation, he says. So of course I says, I'll take the message and pleased, I says. So he says, "Tell the young gentleman, he says, that his Uncle's worse. That's all he says, jest tell him 'Uncle's worse," and I says, sorry to 'ear it, I says, and I'll tell the young gentleman as soon as I see him, I says."

"Oh!" breathed Cardew.

He put his hand to the door-post. It seemed for a moment that he would fall. Old Cuttle made a step towards him.

"P'raps you'd like to step in, and sit down a bit, sir," he said.

"Oh! No thanks! I'm all right," said Cardew. He pulled himself together, "Thank you very much!"

He walked away quickly.

Old Cuttle's glance followed him sympathetically. Nice young gentleman, old Cuttle thought: quite sick at hearing that his Uncle was worse!

Cardew's brain was in a whirl as he went.

Plum Cake had lost the race!

Bill Lodgley had put on a fiver for him. He was not going to win fifteen pounds on that race. He had lost the fiver. Added to what he already owed Lodgey, the debt now amounted to twenty pounds. He had, perhaps, as many pence!

It was too overwhelming for belief. But he had to believe it. Old Cuttle had repeated Bill Lodgey's message as he had received it: there could be no mistake about that! Plum Cake had lost—just as he had lost the previous week—he was not the "dark horse" Cardew had fancied him—it was not a stable "wangle" as he had suspected—Plum Cake had lost simply because he couldn't win—at Cranford as at Abbotsford. Those long odds had been available for a very simple reason—the bookmakers knew that Plum Cake was an outsider with little or no chance of passing the post. Cardew, like many a hapless Turf speculator before him, had fancied that he knew better.

He had been so certain. In his mind's eye, he had seen Plum Cake's colours flashing past the winning post—almost as if he had watched the race. And—the wretched brute had lost! It was the knock-out for him!

"Oh!" breathed Cardew.

He walked unseeingly under the old Carcroft oaks, his hands driven deep into his pockets, trying to think it out.

But his brain seemed numb.

He had banked everything on that last chance. He had descended to lie to Bill Lodgey, to keep him quiet, and to get his bet on Plum Cake for that last chance. He would not be able to keep Bill quiet now. Bill would want his money, and when he found that no money was forthcoming, what would he do? Unless Cardew saw him at the Green Man that night, or the next day at the latest, to settle up. Bill would know that he had been deceived and "diddled"—taken in like a "mug" by a mere schoolboy! He would know that that schoolboy had intended to take his money in case of a win, and to pay him nothing in case of a loss—and his fury could easily be imagined.

What was he going to do?

He had friends—Levison and Clive would help him out of a hole if they could, little as they liked his ways. He shrugged his shoulders savagely at that thought. They might be able to raise a pound or two—what was the use of that? His friends were no use to him.

Manners could help him if he liked—he had a ten-pound note locked in his desk. Likely! He laughed at that thought. There was no help, least of all from the fellow of whom, in his careless malice, he had made an enemy. What was he going to do?

The cricket match had utterly vanished from Cardew's mind. He forgot that he was at Carcroft to play cricket—indeed, he forgot that he was at Carcroft at all. With his hands driven into his pockets, his brow black with miserable thoughts, his eyes on the ground, he walked to and fro under the oak tree, oblivious of everything but the terrible disaster in which he had landed himself—and the disgrace and ruin that must follow.

He started, like a fellow from a dream, as he heard his name suddenly called.

"Cardew!"

He stared round savagely.

Jack Blake was coming towards him at a run. He came up breathlessly.

"Oh, here you are! We've been looking for you, Cardew! What the dickens have you wandered off for like this?"

"Oh, leave me alone!" snapped Cardew.

Blake stared.

"You're wanted to bat!" he rapped, "What the thump's the matter with you The field's waiting."

"Let them wait."

"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Blake.

"Leave me alone, I tell you."

"You mad ass!" roared Blake, "I tell you you're next man in, and the field's waiting! Do you want me to tell Tom Merry you won't come?"

"Tell him anything you like," snarled Cardew.

Blake gave him a look—a very expressive look—turned and cut back to the cricket-field. Cardew stared after him, scowling.

Cricket—what did cricket matter now? He was going back to St. Jim's, after that game, to be shown up and sacked! There was no hope—his last hope had failed him. Cricket! He laughed savagely.

But, after Blake had disappeared, he turned his steps in the same direction. It was not much use pacing there, trying to think out a solution of a problem that was not to be solved: the game was up for him, and he had to take it, if he could, with a stiff upper lip. Letting his skipper and his comrades down would not help. With a clouded brow, a heavy heart, and a savage temper, Cardew followed Blake, and was only a few minutes after him at the pavilion.

Chapter XXVI

BOWLED FOR A DUCK!

Tom Merry gave Cardew a rather grim look as he came. Other fellows looked at him, none too pleasantly. Manners eyed him sarcastically. Manners fancied that he knew why that batsman had not been ready to bat, and had had to be looked for and fetched back to the field. Manners had no doubt that he had had the expected 'phone call, and that that was the cause of the delay.

"Look here, Cardew——!" grunted Tom.

Cardew, with a tremendous effort, had pulled himself together. He drove, or tried to drive, the haunting fear and misery from his mind, and assume his old manner. He had courage, and he had nerve, and he was not a fellow to wear his heart upon his sleeve. His look and tone were light as he answered the St. Jim's junior skipper.

"Sorry! Am I wanted yet?"

"You know you were sixth on the list," growled Tom, "I couldn't keep the field waiting for ever—I've put on Kerr."

Cardew glanced at the game. Kangaroo of the Shell, and Kerr of the New House, were at the wickets. Tom Merry, Talbot, Figgins, and Blake, were out. The score stood at thirty. Evidently, the Carcroft bowling had been good.

"Oh!" said Cardew, "Sorry—I rather expected such mighty men to last a little longer, or I'd have been here, of course."

"Perhaps you'll do better," growled Jack Blake.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast," remarked Cardew. "They've got that man they call V.C., and you'll find him hard to beat."

"The bowling's pretty good, Cardew," said Talbot, quietly.

"Well, you're going in next, Cardew," snapped Tom. "Get ready."

"To hear is to obey!" smiled Cardew. "I'm your man."

He donned his pads: but, as he stood watching the game, with his bat under his arm, his thoughts wandered. Instead of the white figures on the green, he seemed to see the beery face of Bill Lodgey, with a threatening angry scowl on it.

What a fool he had been—what a priceless fool! He had fancied himself so knowing—and what a fool he had been! From bad to worse—till the crash was inevitable—and now the crash was coming.

The other fellows, watching the cricket, did not heed him—excepting Manners. Manners of the Shell had his eyes on him, and he noted how the light carelessness faded out of his face, like a mask dropping: and how that handsome face set in an almost haggard expression. Cardew was unconscious of it—but if ever a fellow looked as if he had "taken the knock"—he did in those moments.

Manners' lip curled with bitter scorn and contempt.

He knew now, not only that the delay had been caused by that 'phone call, but that the 'phone call had not been what Cardew had hoped and expected that it would be. It had brought, not good news, but bad. And the scapegrace of St. Jim's was thinking of that, not of the game.

That was the fellow who had been put over a decent fellow's head—that was the cricketer chosen when Manners was left out—a fellow who could not keep his mind clear of his rotten racing stunts while a cricket match was on!

Cardew was not aware of the Shell fellow's disdainful scrutiny—he had forgotten Manners' existence. Indeed, he had forgotten everything else, for he came out of a moody reverie as if out of a dream, as Tom Merry suddenly clapped him on the shoulder. A wicket was down, and Kerr was coming back to the pavilion, and Cardew had not even seen what had happened!

"Ready?" grunted Tom.

"Eh—what——?" Cardew collected his thoughts.

"Man in!"

"Oh!"

"Gone to sleep standing up like a horse?" asked Blake, sarcastically, "Better try to keep awake when you get to your wicket."

Cardew did not heed him—he hardly heard him. He went out to his wicket as Kerr of the New House came in.

It was Dudley Vane-Carter, of the Carcroft Fourth, who had sent Kerr bootless home. There were two more balls to the over, so Cardew had to take the bowling. Kangaroo, from the other end, gave him a cheery grin as he came on. The Australian junior was doing well—the best so far for St. Jim's—and he expected good backing from a batsman like Cardew. Cardew, on his day was a brilliant bat—and so far it had looked as if this was his day. Kangaroo, in his mind's eye, saw the runs piling up between them—but he was not destined to see it with any other eye!

Tom Merry's face brightened as he watched Cardew take his stand. He too expected big things of the dandy of the Fourth. As yet, St. Jim's had not put up much to write home about. Tom had had poor luck, and Talbot had been caught out by Harry Compton for only four. But Cardew was going to set all that right—with the sturdy Cornstalk at the other end.

"Now look out for the fireworks!" remarked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry nodded cheerily.

"We can do with some," he said, "that man Vane-Carter is hot stuff, but he's no better than Fatty Wynn——."

"Not so good," said Figgins.

Tom laughed.

"Well, Cardew can handle Fatty's bowling all right," he said, "So I fancy he will put paid to that Carcroft man."

Manners opened his lips, and shut them again. The look he had seen on Cardew's face, when the fellow was off his guard, was not so reassuring. Manners had very strong doubts about that batsman in his present mood. But he watched, and said nothing.

The ball went down from Dudley Vane-Carter. The next moment the St. Jim's men at the pavilion were fairly jumping.

"Out!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Oh, great Scott!"

"Cardew—out first ball!" said Monty Lowther, blankly, "Oh, holy smoke."

Cardew stood staring at his wicket, the colour flooding his face. He hardly knew how it happened. He was hardly conscious that the shock of Bill Lodgey's 'phone message, and the stress of mind that followed, had put him hopelessly off his form. He had intended to play up for his side. But he had played that ball as a fag of the Third Form might have played it, which was not of much use against a bowler like V.C. of Carcroft. His off stump was out of the ground, his bails down, and he was out—bowled for a duck!

"Out!"

"Oh!" breathed Cardew.

With a crimson face he walked off. Monty Lowther, the next man in, gave him a curious look in passing. What was the matter with Cardew was a mystery to him, if not to his chum Manners. He had been at the top of his form—all or almost all the team had had great hopes of him, his skipper had relied on him: and he had been bowled by a ball that Wally of the Third might have played successfully. Cricket, undoubtedly, was a most uncertain game!

"Sorry," muttered Cardew to Tom Merry, as he came in.

"Rough luck," said Tom, as cheerily as he could. Tom was not the skipper to rag a man. His brilliant batsman had conked out, utterly and ingloriously, but it could not be helped, and that was that.

Cardew threw down his bat, his face dark and sullen. Cricket mattered nothing, in comparison with the leaden trouble that weighed on his mind, but he hated to put up so rotten a show, all the same. This was his "lucky day"—and he was no more than a rabbit in the team.

He moved away from the others, dispirited, sullen, his face clouded. Monty Lowther had stopped the last ball of the over, and now Kangaroo had the batting again, and the runs were going up. Then there came a cheer from the Carcroft crowd round the field, as a palm suddenly smacked on leather, and Bob Drake held up the ball.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

Kangaroo came off, and Owen of the New House went to take his place. In the next over, Monty Lowther came home, and Fatty Wynn went to the wickets. Manners, the last man, prepared to follow. Fatty was a bowler and not expected to last long with the willow—neither did he! Vane-Carter dismissed him for two. The score was at forty-six.

"This is the last over," muttered Blake.

"Thanks!" said Manners, sarcastically.

"Man in," said Tom, "Stick it out as long as you can, old chap! Best of luck."

Manners nodded, and went out to his wicket. Vane-Carter was bowling, and rather to the surprise of the watchers at the pavilion, Manners stopped ball after ball, and the last gave him two. Owen, as he took guard for the next over, rather congratulated himself that Vane-Carter no longer had the ball—but it booted not—V.C. was as dangerous in the field as on the bowling-crease. The ball, hot from the bat, met V.C.'s ready hand—and he held it up, and there was a cheer from the Carcroft crowd.

"Well caught!"

"Good old V.C."

"All down for forty-eight," said Tom Merry, "Pity old Gussy couldn't be here. But we'll pull up in our second knock."

Manners came off, not out. Last man could hardly expect much of a show, though a steady stone-waller like Manners might have been very useful with a top-notch batsman at the other end. Manners had to derive what satisfaction he could from the fact that two was, at any rate, two more than a duck, which was all that stood to Cardew's credit.

Chapter XXVII

THE RABBIT!

"Tom Mewwy——."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——."

"Fathead!"

"Bai Jove! What——?"

"Chump!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his celebrated monocle in his aristocratic eye, and gazed at Tom Merry.

Gussy had arrived in a car, with as many other St. Jim's fellows as the car would hold—Levison, Clive, Wildrake, Lumley-Lumley, Hammond, and two or three more. Gussy's damaged leg did not allow him to bike it: but a crowd more St. Jim's juniors were coming over on their jiggers, and St. Jim's caps seemed almost as numerous as Carcroft caps round the field. Why Tom Merry greeted him with such personal and painful remarks, the swell of St. Jim's did not know. He gazed at him, with the assistance of his eyeglass, in surprise.

"Is anythin' the mattah, Tom Mewwy?" he inquired.

"Yes, ass! We're all down for forty-eight," growled Tom, "And if a howling ass hadn't played monkey on a stick on the banisters——."

"Bai Jove! I uttahly wefuse to be compared to a monkey on a stick, Tom Mewwy," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. "I wegard such a compawison as oppwobwious in the extreme."

"You see, we wanted your runs, Gussy," said Talbot of the Shell, with a smile.

"Yaas, wathah, I undahstand that," assented Arthur Augustus, "But I suppose Cardew has put up a pwetty good score."

"Oh, fine!" said Blake, with deep sarcasm, "Duck's eggs are cheap to-day."

"Gweat Scott! Did Cardew bag a duck's egg?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Just that!" said Monty Lowther.

"Conked out somehow," said Kangaroo, "He was topping in the Carcroft knock—taking wickets almost with his eyes shut! But he went right off his form for our innings."

Arthur Augustus shook his noble head sadly.

"I wegwet to say it, as the chap is a distant welation of mine," he remarked, "But he weally is not vewy weliable. You will wemembah, Tom Mewwy, that I expwessed the opinion that Mannahs was a bettah man for the team. Mannahs is slow but suah, and a vewy weliable man in my opinion."

"Well, we've got Manners, owing to your playing monkey on a stick on the banisters," said Tom, "And he's done better than Cardew, at any rate. Last man in doesn't have too much chance, but Manners put on two not out."

"Pewwaps you will allow me to wemark that it is wathah a mistake to put Mannahs on last," said Arthur Augustus, cheerfully, "Why not give him a shove up, deah boy, in the second knock, and give him a chance."

Tom Merry looked thoughtful. But he made no reply. It was time now for the St. Jim's men to go into the field, for the Carcroft second innings, and he looked round for Cardew.

Cardew's unaccountable collapse in the St. Jim's innings had worried him: the fellow seemed to have gone completely off colour, all of a sudden. Tom hoped that it would not, at all events, affect his bowling, but he was feeling a little anxious. He went over to Cardew, who was leaning on the rail with his hands in his pockets and a moody look on his face.

"Feeling fit?" he asked.

Cardew started a little. Once more he had been buried in troubled thought, thinking of things far removed from Carcroft and cricket.

"Eh! Oh! Yes," he stammered, "Quite."

Tom gave him a sharp look.

"No good feeling down on a duck," he said, "Might happen to any man—don't let it worry you and spoil your form."

Cardew laughed. He could not help it! He was troubled about something a little more overwhelming than a "duck" in a cricket match.

"I'm not worrying about that," he said.

"O.K., then," said Tom, "You looked rather down, that's all. Look here, Cardew, we want to beat Carcroft if we can, but we're for it if we don't pull up a bit. I'm giving you the first over this time. Give us the mixture as before, old man."

"I'll try," said Cardew lightly.

Figgins shook his head when the ball was given to Cardew for the first over. It was true that Cardew had done wonderfully well in the first Carcroft innings: but Figgy pinned his faith to his fat chum, David Llewellyn Wynn. It was too thick, in Figgy's opinion, for anyone to suggest that any School House man could possibly be ahead of the Falstaff of the New House in that line. However, Figgy would have been very glad indeed to see Cardew repeat the "hat trick"—and the man was, he admitted, a good bowler.

All eyes were alert when Cardew sent down the ball to Harry Compton. The Carcroft junior captain was very much on his guard, after what he had seen of that bowler's quality in the first innings.

But he need hardly have been. The ball trundled down, and Compton, stepping out to it, sent it on its travels with ease. There was no need for the batsmen to run—it was a boundary.

That was not a very encouraging beginning: but what followed was no better. The second ball was stopped dead: the third gave Compton three, and brought Bob Drake to the batting end. Drake in his turn ran three after the next ball, and Compton came back to the batting. The fifth ball produced another boundary for Carcroft. And the St. Jim's fieldsmen exchanged expressive looks, and Tom Merry set his lips a little. Something, it was very clear, was wrong with that member of the St. Jim's eleven: whatever had put him off his batting form, had put him off his bowling form too.

Cardew's cheeks were flushed, as he took the ball again for the last shot in the over. He had fully intended to do the best he could for his side—to drive away haunting fears and apprehensions, to forget the pit he had dug for his own feet and into which he had fallen: and to devote himself to his bounden duty as a member of the eleven, picked for his form, and trusted by

his captain. But try as he might he could put no sting into his bowling—he could not keep his thoughts on the matter in hand, and the beery face of Bill Lodgey seemed to come between him and the wicket he was trying to take.

He was, as he now realised, utterly off his form—he could not help it, and it was useless to strive against it. He was simply no good.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked to other fellows at the pavilion, "If that's Cardew's bowlin' style, Tom Mewwy might as well have played Twimble."

The last ball went down: a ball that a Second-form fag could have played. Bob Drake knocked it away for four.

Tom Mewwy drew a deep, deep breath.

He did not speak to Cardew: it was useless to rag a man who had gone utterly, hopelessly, and rottenly off his form. He could guess, too, that Cardew was feeling rotten enough about it himself. But he made up his mind that that was Cardew's last over, as well as his first. Eighteen runs for an over was a little too expensive.

He hardly hoped now that Cardew would be any use in the field. And he was right. In the next over, from Fatty Wynn, Bob Drake mistimed a stroke and handed a perfect sitter to Cardew at point. Cardew did not seem even to see it. The field could scarcely believe their eyes when it fell at his feet.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, at the pavilion. That was all that the swell of St. Jim's could say. Words failed him.

When the field crossed for the next over, Manners spoke to Cardew, in a low voice, his eyes glinting.

"You rat!" he muttered.

Cardew gave a violent start, and stared round at him.

"You rat!" repeated Manners, "You said that there were ten cricketers and a passenger in this team. Who's the passenger now?"

"Oh, leave me alone, you fool!" muttered Cardew.

"Pull yourself together, can't you?" said Manners, in a low, savage voice, "You're letting the side down, with your filthy betting, you rat."

Cardew gave another start. Did Manners know?

"What do you mean—what——?" He stammered.

Manners gave him a glare of scorn.

"Tom Merry doesn't know—or he'd boot you off the field!

Not that it would make much difference to lose a rabbit! Did that 'phone call tell you that your rotten horse had lost?"

Cardew breathed hard.

"Can't you shove that tripe out of your mind, when you're playing cricket?" hissed Manners, "Can't you pull yourself together, and play up for your side, you rat?"

Cardew, with a white face, clenched his fists. Manners gave him another scornful glare, and left him.

Cardew did not handle the ball again. The bowling was shared by Fatty Wynn and Talbot, with changes from Blake and Kerr. Tom Merry half expected Cardew to ask to be put on again: he was not the fellow to take a back seat meekly. If he did, Tom had a curt refusal ready. But Cardew did not ask—in point of fact, he was glad to be relieved of the bowling. A "rabbit" was less conspicuous in the field than on the bowling-crease: and Cardew was only too well aware, by this time, that he was simply no good.

It was a prosperous innings for Carcroft School. The loss of Cardew was a heavy one to his side Fatty Wynn delighted Figgy's loyal heart by putting up a hat trick in one over: but it was a flash in the pan. The other bowlers, even Talbot, had little luck with the Carcroft wickets, which went down slowly, while the runs went up fast. Carcroft were exactly 100 for the innings when it ended, and Harry Compton and Co. were feeling extremely pleased with themselves and things in general—a feeling not at all shared by Tom Merry and Co.

Levison and Clive, who had been watching Cardew with rather glum faces, joined him when the field came off.

"Rotten luck, old man," said Clive.

Cardew made no reply.

"What's up, Cardew?' asked Levison, quietly.

"My number!" answered Cardew, flippantly: and he walked away before either of his friends could make any rejoinder to that.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked to Blake, "I have always wegarded that chap Cardew as vewy unweliable, but who would have dweamed that he would turn out such a wabbit! And such a vewy wotten wabbit!"

Tom Merry was making a little change in his list. Cardew's name was put down next to Manners. The scapegrace of St. Jim's had counted on winning distinction in that game: and he was to have the distinction of going on, in the St. Jim's second knock, almost at the tip of the tail.

Chapter XXVIII

MANNERS MAKES GOOD!

After tea, Tom Merry opened the second innings for St. Jim's with Talbot at the other end. The first ball, from Dudley Vane-Carter, gave him a single: and Talbot took the next—with his middle stump! It was sheer ill-luck: and Talbot's feelings were rather deep, as he gave his dismantled wicket a stare.

George Figgins came on in his place, resolved to show Carcroft, and the wide world, that New House men, at all events, did not capture ducks for St. Jim's.

But alas for Figgins! Figgy could have sworn that the next ball from Vane-Carter was a wide—till his bails went.

"Oh, gum!" said Figgins.

"Oh, holy smoke!" murmured Tom Merry, at the other end.

And Arthur Augustus, at the pavilion, murmured "Gweat pip!"

New House, apparently, had no better luck with the Carcroft bowling than School House. Kangaroo came on next: and Harry Noble of Australia was a mighty man with the willow. But his luck was out, and Vane-Carter's was in. St. Jim's could hardly believe their eyes when Kangaroo's wicket crashed.

Kangaroo, breathing hard, took home an unused bat. He gave Blake, the next man in, a word of warning.

"Look out for that chap they call V.C. He's mustard, fresh from the pot."

Jack Blake did look out. The Carcroft crowd were cheering the hat-trick, and the field were all smiles. But Blake, playing the most careful game of his life, lived through the over.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the scoreboard, and sighed.

"Bothah those banistahs!"

Never had Gussy so heartily regretted breaking a rule of the House! He had a persuasion that, at the wickets, he could have

stopped the rot. Undoubtedly St. Jim's did want runs: though whether Arthur Augustus could have supplied them, was not to be put to the test.

Blake, however, held his own, though he did not score, and the next over, from Dick Lee of Carcroft, gave Tom Merry six.

The hat-trick at the other end certainly had not had an exhilarating effect on Tom. But he was feeling at the top of his form, and playing a good game, and still hoped that fortune would smile.

St. Jim's had an uphill journey before them—they had to get a hundred and three to win: and they had started their second innings with three down for a single run: which even a born optimist could not have considered encouraging. Still, in cricket you never could tell!

Tom, at all events, was a tower of strength to his side. He captured runs off every bowler but V.C.—and even V.C., was quite unable to send him home. Runs went up, rather slowly: still, they did go up. Blake had fifteen to his credit when he departed, and Monty Lowther added twelve, and in the meantime, Tom's individual score had jumped to thirty. There was a chance yet.

Batsmen came, and batsmen went, and the score crept slowly up. It stood at 65 when Fatty Wynn came on: and Fatty made it sixty-six before Vane-Carter spreadeagled his wicket.

"Might as well call it a day," murmured Blake, "It would save time to make Carcroft a present of it."

"A game is nevah lost till it is won, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, sapiently, "And it is not won yet."

"All over bar shouting, Gussy. There's a couple of rabbits left——."

"Mannahs is not a wabbit, Blake."

Cardew went out, last but one. Levison and Clive watched him anxiously—so did the others. But the fellow who had looked like being the star player of the team had quite gone to pieces: he knew that his wicket was going down—and down it went. He came back with a flushed face, the happy scorer of a "pair of spectacles."

Manners went out.

"May as well get home now," grunted Blake.

"Nil despewandum, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, encouragingly, "Tom Mewwy is set for the day—they can't touch him. Mannahs will have a chance this time. I wathah hope it will turn out all wight."

"What a hope!" jeered Cardew.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass reprovingly on the dandy of the Fourth.

"Weally, Cardew, you had bettah wait and see," he said.

Cardew laughed.

"We shan't have long to wait, and we know what we're going to see," he snapped. "Duck's eggs are cheap to-day."

"And pairs of spectacles cheaper," growled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

Cardew's eyes were on Manners, at the wicket, with almost an evil look in them. That was the fellow who could have saved him from the pit he had dug for his own feet—if he had chosen. Probably, at that moment, Cardew would have been glad to see Manners' wicket crash at the first ball—and it seemed likely enough, as he was taking the bowling from Vane-Carter, whose bowling had knocked out batsmen like Talbot and Figgins and Kangaroo.

But it did not happen.

Manners knew what he had to face, but he was not in the least flustered. He played his steady game, as calmly and methodically as if he had been at practice at the nets. He did not take a run: but his sticks were intact when the over finished. Then Lee bowled to Tom Merry, adding six to his score.

Then Manners was batting again, and after stopping two balls dead, he stole a single. He gave Tom Merry a cheery grin as he passed him on the pitch. Tom, at the batting end, added four for the rest of the over.

Arthur Augustus glanced round at Cardew.

"Did I wemark that you had bettah wait and see, Cardew?" he inquired.

Cardew made no reply to that.

"By gum," said Levison, "If that man can't score, he can keep his sticks up—and they can't touch Tom Merry."

"First in and not out, I'll bet a doughnut," said Monty Lowther, "Good old Manners! Keep it up!"

"Manners is the man, after all," remarked Talbot.

Arthur Augustus smiled serenely.

"Yaas, wathah," he said, "Mannahs isn't the man to play to the gallewy, deah boys. It's no good askin' him for fireworks. I weally had to wag Tom Mewwy into playin' Mannahs, but look at him now! Isn't he the wight man in the wight place?"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Blake.

"A Daniel come to judgment!" said Talbot, laughing.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, innocently.

There was no doubt that Arthur Augustus was right. Manners of the Shell, in these particular circumstances, was undoubtedly the right man in the right place. Tom Merry, between good play and good fortune, had lived through the whole innings, and looked like being not out as well as first in. With Tom in such tremendous form, putting up the runs, it was not a firework-merchant that was wanted at the other end—it was a steady, reliable, impregnable stone-waller like Manners, keeping the game alive for him, content to back him up, and take second place to his more brilliant partner. Tom Merry was good for runs—but the game depended on Manners: if Manners went, the game would go. And Manners, quiet and steady, was to be depended upon.

"Good old Tommy!"

"That's four!"

"Bravo!"

"By gum, Tom's going it!" said Monty Lowther, "We wanted a spot of luck, and by gum we've got it!"

"Yaas, wathah! Good old Mannahs!" chirruped Arthur Augustus.

Manners had the bowling again, from Lee. Lee was a good man, but nothing like so dangerous as Vane-Carter. Manners could handle him: and perhaps he was tempted to hit out, and show the watching crowd that he could do something a little more pyrotechnical than stone-walling.

But if he was tempted, he did not fall to the temptation as he had done in the House match. He plodded steadily on, taking no chances, satisfied with doing what he could do really well, and what was most needed at the moment.

All eyes were on him—Cardew's with bitter hostility. Cardew was well aware that he could not have done as Manners was doing, howsoever great the necessity. He would have wanted some of the limelight, and would have gone after it: he could never have played second fiddle so long and so patiently. Manners did not seem to care whether he played first or second fiddle, so long as he backed up his skipper and helped the side to a win.

And that he was doing manfully. The score was going up—by occasional one's or two's when Manners had the bowling, by leaps and bounds when Tom Merry had it. Eighty—eighty-six—ninety—and at length the score-board showed 100.

"Bai Jove deah boys," grinned Arthur Augustus, "Two to tie—thwee to win! Did I wemark that a game is never lost till it is won, Blake?"

Blake chuckled.

"You did, old scout. And you were talking sense! First time you've ever done it, so far as I remember——."

"Weally, Blake——."

"Oh, scissors!" said Monty Lowther, as Manners faced a new over from Dudley Vane-Carter, "If old Manners pulls through this over, we're on velvet. Anybody feel on tenterhooks?"

"Yaas, wathah."

They watched, with all their eyes. Vane-Carter was going all out: Harry Compton and Co. watched like hawks in the field. Every Carcroft man was ready to jump at a chance. But Manners was not to be tempted into giving them chances. The bowling was too good for him to take liberties with it. But with almost wooden solidity he blocked ball after ball, and Dudley Vane-Carter put in all he knew, in vain. And there was a gasp of relief from a hundred St. Jim's fellows, when the last ball was bowled, and Manners' sticks were still standing.

"Last over!" said Monty Lowther, as the field crossed.

"What-ho!" said Blake.

And so it proved. The ball came down to Tom Merry, and the willow met it with a smack. One—two—three—the batsmen seemed to flash up and down the pitch. The ball came in from Harry Compton—a second too late! And from the St. Jim's crowd came a roar.

"Hurray!"

Cricket, undoubtedly, is an uncertain game: after all their vicissitudes, Tom Merry and Co. had beaten Carcroft, with a wicket in hand.

Chapter XXIX

A LETTER FROM LODGEY

"Cardew!"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Lathom, master of the Fourth, peered at Cardew, over his spectacles, in the form-room. It was Saturday morning—three days after the cricket match at Carcroft.

Those three days had not been happy ones to the hapless sportsman of the Fourth. Other fellows rejoiced in the victory over Carcroft School. To Cardew, Wednesday was the day on which Plum Cake had lost at Cranford and landed him in irretrievable disaster.

He had not quite forgotten the cricket match. He could not quite forget that, after all his self-confidence, not to call it swank, he had let his side down miserably: and that Manners, after all his jeers and sneers and mockery, Manners, the fellow he had chosen to make his enemy, had saved the game. It was a bitter enough recollection to him.

But it weighed little in comparison with the utter disaster that had befallen him. Plum Cake had lost—and he was lost! He owed Bill Lodgey a total of twenty pounds—and there was no chance of playing again the wretched trick of laying a new bet to cover his losses—Bill was not likely to fall for that a second time. He lived in momentary dread of what Lodgey would do.

He would wait—but how long would he wait? Not very long—and then? Then it was the crash.

As Mr. Lathom spoke to him in the form-room on Saturday morning, Cardew felt as if his heart missed a beat. Had it come?

"Cardew, your house-master desires to see you in his study after third school," said Mr. Lathom.

Cardew caught his breath! It had come, then! But somehow he answered casually.

"Yes, sir."

"You will go to Mr. Railton's study when the form is dismissed, Cardew."

"Very well, sir."

Cardew answered quite calmly. But Levison, whose eyes were upon him, saw his face whiten.

Third school proceeded. They were doing geography in the Fourth in that lesson: but Cardew could hardly have said whether they were doing geography or geology, or anything else. He sat with his mind in a whirl.

Railton wanted him after third school. Why? What had come out? What had Lodgey done? Had the racing man realised how the matter stood—that he had been "diddled" by a schoolboy: that he had been dealing with a "sportsman" who was prepared to pocket his winnings, but not to pay his losses? That was how the matter stood—and if that became clear to Bill Lodgey, only

too well Cardew knew what to expect from his rage and resentment. And it could not take Bill long to "tumble," if Cardew did not settle up—as he could not. He had waited three days—what had he done now?

"Cardew, deah boy——." Arthur Augustus gave him a gentle poke.

Cardew stared at him fiercely.

"You fool! What——."

"Weally, Cardew——."

"Leave me alone, idiot," breathed Cardew.

"I will leave you alone with gweat pleasuah, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I was simply drawin' your attention to the fact that Mr. Lathom is addwessin' you, and that you have not answahed him."

"Oh!" stammered Cardew.

He had forgotten that he was in the form-room!

"Cardew!" Mr. Lathom's voice was stern, "I have spoken to you three times, Cardew. If you do not give attention, Cardew——."

"Oh! Sorry, sir," muttered Cardew. He could almost have laughed, in his bitterness. He was expected to give attention to Lathom's droning, when he had to go to his house-master, probably to be taken to the Head and sacked. As likely as not that was what it meant—more likely than not.

"Bai Jove, you know," Arthur Augustus whispered to Blake, "Cardew's mannahs are detewiowatin' fwightfully. Pewwaps he is still wowwyin' ovah that paih of spectacles at Carcroft. I suppose it is enough to wowwy any chap. But weally, you know, callin' a fellow an idiot——." Arthur Augustus shook his noble head seriously. He could feel for a fellow who had scored a "pair of spectacles" in a cricket match: but really, there was a limit. It did not occur to Gussy that Cardew had something on his mind even more serious than a score of two big round noughts in a cricket match.

Cardew hardly knew how he got through that lesson. But it ended at last, and the Fourth came out. Levison and Clive remained with Cardew in the corridor while the rest of the form streamed out into the sunshine.

"What's up with Railton?" asked Clive.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Is it a row?" asked Levison.

"I wonder," drawled Cardew.

He had no intention of telling his chums anything. They could not help him: and he had no special use for sympathy, especially sympathy tinctured with disgust.

They would know soon enough, when the crash came. He had little doubt that that summons to his housemaster's study portended the crash. But until the very end he was going—if he could—to keep up his air of nonchalant indifference. If he had to take it, he would take it—but nobody was going to hear him whine.

"We'll wait for you in the quad," said Clive.

His face was cool and calm as usual, and did not betray the unpleasant beating of his heart.

Cardew nodded, and walked away to his house-master's study.

He tapped at Mr. Railton's door, and entered.

The School House master was seated at his writing-table, where an unopened letter lay before him. Cardew's eyes were on that letter at once, and he caught his breath for a moment.

"Mr. Lathom told me you wished to see me, sir." Cardew's voice was cool, though the sight of that letter on the table had sent an icy chill to his heart.

He knew what it was, now! Lodgey had written to him! The game was up. He could see that the letter was addressed to himself, in a rough scrawl. As soon as Railton saw what was inside——!

"Yes, Cardew." The house-master's eyes fixed on him keenly. He tapped the letter with his forefinger, "This letter came for you this morning, Cardew. It is so very out of the common, that I did not give it to the houseporter to put up in the rack with the others."

"Indeed, sir."

"You may open it in my presence, Cardew, and I shall request you to show me the letter."

Cardew took the letter with a steady hand—astonished to find it so steady! It was no wonder that the missive had caught the house-master's attention. The envelope was cheap and dirty, and had a faint scent of tobacco. The writing on it was a clumsy scrawl. It was post-marked Rylcombe. In one corner was a stain of beer.

That it was from Bill Lodgey, Cardew knew. It could be from

nobody else. With all his nerve, he hesitated a moment to open it.

Lodgey knew—he must know—that all letters for juniors at St. Jim's passed under their house-master's eye. Yet he had written! The game was up.

Only for a moment, however, did Cardew hesitate. It was useless to prolong the suspense. He slit the dirty envelope, and drew out a dirty folded sheet of note-paper from within.

He unfolded the note, his heart like lead in his breast. Then he gave a sudden start, and stared.

The sheet was blank.

Cardew's face was as blank as the note-paper, as he stared at it. Not a word was written there.

"Well?" Railton's voice came in a rap, "Have you any objection, Cardew, to placing that letter in your house-master's hands?"

Cardew was well aware that, whatever the letter might have contained, any such objection would not be heeded. But in the circumstances, he had no objection.

He could not understand. Unless Bill had been drunk, and enclosed a blank sheet in mistake for a letter, there seemed no meaning in it. But at all events there was nothing incriminating in a blank sheet of paper. It was not the crash. It was not the end. He still had a respite.

He passed the note-paper to Mr. Railton, who stared at it as blankly as Cardew had done.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, "What does this mean? Nothing appears to be written here, Cardew."

"I can't make it out, sir, unless it's some sort of a practical joke," said Cardew, coolly. "Somebody's sent me a blank sheet of paper. Must be a joke, I suppose."

"An utterly stupid joke, if that is what it is," said the puzzled house-master, "Do you know the hand on the envelope, Cardew?"

"I've never seen it before, sir."

"It is extraordinary," said Mr. Railton, "Very extraordinary indeed! However, I suppose we must conclude that it is some foolish jest. You may go, Cardew."

Cardew left the study.

He left a puzzled house-master behind him. But he was no longer puzzled himself. The meaning of it had dawned upon

his keen mind, even in the couple of minutes since he had opened the letter, and looked at the blank sheet with amazed eyes.

It was a threat! Lodgey wanted his money: and if he did not get his money, he was going to be dangerous. He had waited three days: and intended to wait no longer. That empty letter was sent, to warn Cardew what to expect, if he did not do the right thing!

Cardew did not go into the quad, where his friends were waiting for him. He went up to his study, and fellows he passed noticed nothing unusual in his look. But when the door of No. 9 Study had closed on him, the cool nonchalance dropped from his face like a mask, and left it worn and haggard.

What was he going to do?

Railton was puzzled, dubious, perhaps a little suspicious. That mattered little: for if Lodgey was not paid, his next communication would not be a blank sheet—it would tell the full story, and leave no room for doubt. Cardew had had his warning—and knew what would come next—unless he paid Lodgey. And he could not pay Lodgey!

What was he going to do?

Chapter XXX

COMING TO BLOWS!

Manners' lip curled.

On Saturday afternoon, the "Terrible Three" of the Shell were going their various ways, according to their various tastes. Tom Merry had picked up sides for cricket. Monty Lowther had cycled over to Wayland to the picture palace. Harry Manners was giving attention to his photographic hobby, which he had rather neglected of late in favour of the summer game.

There was bright sunshine in the quad. On one of the old oaken benches under the elms by the school wall, Manners had selected a spot for printing out some of his negatives. Manners generally had a few negatives on hand for printing-out. And he was enjoying life in his own quiet way, when a Fourth-form fellow came in sight strolling on the path under the elms, his hands driven deep into his trousers' pockets, a moody line in his brow, and his eyes on the ground.

And Harry Manners' lip curled as he glanced at him.

Cardew of the Fourth did not look up. He did not see Manners, and was evidently plunged in deep and gloomy thought.

Manners had no doubt of the subject thereof.

He had not forgotten that "quid pro quo" suggested by the sportsman of the Fourth before the Carcroft match: neither had he forgotten the 'phone call at Carcroft, which he knew—if no one else did—had put Cardew off his form, and caused him to let the side down.

Manners had saved the game that Cardew had let down. That slow and steady play of his, which had been the subject of Cardew's malicious banter, had turned out, after all, to be the one thing needful at the finish, and had enabled Tom Merry to put up the winning runs. That was a cause of quiet and unostentatious satisfaction to Manners. And it looked as if he would be more likely to get a show than such a very unreliable man as Cardew, when the Greyfriars and Rookwood fixtures came along.

However, at the moment Manners was thinking, not of cricket, but of photography. He was about to unpack his negatives, to put into printing-frames, when Cardew caught his attention. Evidently, from his look, the "sportsman" was still deep in the tribulations of the Turf: and Manners, kind hearted fellow as he was, could not feel the slightest sympathy for a fellow in such a scrape, or anything but contempt. And that feeling was very plainly indicated in his face, as he glanced across at the moody Fourth-former.

Cardew glanced up and met his eyes.

Manners immediately dropped his glance. He "barred" Cardew, but he did not want trouble with him. All he wanted of a "bad hat" was that the bad hat should keep his distance.

But the dandy of the Fourth had seen his look, and the colour burned in his cheeks. Manners had not said a word of what he knew—but Cardew was aware of what he knew, and Manners'

bitter words on the cricket-field at Carcroft rankled in his mind. He came across to the Shell fellow, his eyes smouldering.

Levison and Clive were on the cricket ground with Tom Merry. Cardew was "on his own," that afternoon. He wanted to be alone. He had to think out how to deal with Bill Lodgey—if he could. This fellow, who turned up his nose at him, was hoarding a ten-pound note that would have saved him! Cardew was feeling very like dashing a clenched fist into the contemptuous face.

He stood looking at Manners, while the Shell fellow took negatives from a cardboard envelope. Manners took no notice of him. Cardew was in a mood for a quarrel with friend or foe—and it was as the latter that he chose to regard Harry Manners.

"You called me some pretty names at Carcroft the other day," said Cardew.

Manners looked at him, at that.

"Tom Merry would call you some, too, if he knew what I know," he answered, "So would all the fellows, I fancy."

"Why don't you tell them?" sneered Cardew.

"I'm going to say nothing. I think Tom will have too much sense to trust you, when we play Greyfriars," said Manners, with cool contempt.

Cardew gave a savage laugh. As matters looked, he was not likely to be still at St. Jim's, when the Greyfriars match was due.

"Mind walking on?" added Manners, "You're in the light—and you can't suppose that I want your company."

"You think you can call a fellow fancy names without getting your head smacked for it?" inquired Cardew.

"If that means that you're looking for a row——."

"It means exactly that," said Cardew, deliberately, "I'm feeling just now that it would do me good to punch a fellow's face—almost any fellow's—and yours is the one I'd most like to punch, you uppish prig. Take that to begin with."

Smack!

It came so suddenly that Manners had no time to guard, and he took it—a smack fairly across his face.

"Oh!" he gasped.

The next moment, he had dropped the packet of negatives on the bench, and was leaping at Cardew.

Cardew was more than ready for him. He grinned savagely

over his fists. A scrap with Manners was not very useful in the matter of solving his overwhelming problem: but it was a relief and satisfaction to him in his bitter mood. In a second they were fighting fiercely.

In that quiet corner behind the trees they were not likely to be interrupted. Cardew attacked with almost savage vim, and so fierce was his attack, that Manners went down with a crash, sprawling against the bench under the elm.

He sprawled dizzily there, and Cardew watched him with a sneering grin, waiting for him to get up and come on again.

Manners rolled over, and got on his hands and knees. He was dizzy from a hefty jolt, and slow to get to his feet.

There was a mocking laugh from Cardew.

"Had enough? By gad, if you won't go on, I'll boot you."

Manners' face flamed. He dragged himself to his feet, and faced Cardew again, breathing hard, his eyes burning.

"Come on, you cad!" he breathed.

"Screwed up a spot of pluck?" jeered Cardew.

Manners did not answer, but he attacked furiously. And this time Cardew was less lucky. The Shell fellow drove him back, and Cardew had to give ground, wincing under lashing blows. He would have been driven past the trees, and out into the full view of the quad: but he side-stepped, and circled round Manners, and backed him towards the bench where the negatives and printing-frames lay.

Cardew's face was almost white with fury by this time. He had looked for some satisfaction in punching the fellow he disliked, and who despised him: in leaving Manners of the Shell breathless and beaten. But it was dawning upon him now that he was not going to beat Manners—it was Manners who was going to beat him!

He fought hard and savagely, but the Shell fellow came grimly on, hitting hard and hitting often: and Cardew, still giving ground, felt the back of his knees touch the bench under the elm, and he could retreat no further. There he rallied, and, heedless of lashing knuckles, sprang at Manners almost like a wildcat, hitting fiercely. Twice his lashing fists came home, and then Manners' right crashed on his chin, and he fairly flew.

Crash!

Cardew went helplessly backwards, and over. His head knocked hard on the oaken bench as he fell, and he lay panting.

He made an effort to rise, but his head was swimming, and he fell back again. Manners dropped his hands.

Cardew could not go on. He could not even get on his feet. But it was not in Manners' nature to repeat Cardew's taunt. He had beaten the adversary who had deliberately picked a quarrel with him: but there was not the slightest sign of vaunting about him. He gave Cardew one glance, and then, picking up his negatives and printing-frames, walked away. He had an eye and a nose that needed bathing, after that fierce fight: and he walked away quietly to the House to attend to his damages.

Cardew cast a look after him—a look that was sheer evil. His cup of bitterness was full—knocked out by the "prig" he had expected to handle without difficulty. But for that bang on his head, from the oaken bench, he could have gone on: but he knew that the result would have been the same. He was beaten—lying there dizzy and breathless while his enemy coolly walked away and left him to his rage and humiliation.

He dragged himself up at last, and sank down on the oaken bench, panting. For several minutes he sat there, thinking of nothing but aches and pains and bitter chagrin. Then, as he was about to rise, and make his way to the House to bathe his damaged face, his eyes fell on something that lay on the ground at his feet, glistening in the sunshine.

It was a small steel key.

Evidently, it had fallen from Manners' waistcoat pocket, when he rolled over close to the bench, at the first onset in the fight. He had not noticed it—Cardew would not have noticed it, had he not been sitting there.

He noticed it now. He knew that key—he had seen it in Manners' hand in No. 10 study. It was the key of Manners' desk in that study.

Cardew rose to his feet.

At any other time, seeing a key that a fellow had dropped, even a fellow he disliked, he would have picked it up, to restore it to its owner. But no such idea was in his mind now.

He gave the key a kick, knocking it right under the bench, quite out of sight. If Manners missed it, guessed where he had dropped it, and came back to look for it, he would not find it in a hurry—if he found it at all!

Then Cardew tramped away to the House. Baggy Trimble met him as he was going in, and grinned at a nose that oozed crimson.

"I say, Cardew, where did you pick up that nose?" squeaked Trimble. "I say, caught it in a door? He, he, he."

Cardew was feeling too utterly spent even to kick Trimble. He tramped into the House with a black brow.

Chapter XXXI

GUSSY IS DISGUSTED

"Hi!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked on.

Certainly, he heard the beery-looking man, who was leaning on a wayside tree within fifty yards of the school gates, call out "Hi!" But it did not occur to Gussy's noble mind that the beery-looking man could possibly be addressing that ejaculation to him. Like Felix, he kept on walking.

Arthur Augustus was taking a stroll out of gates after class on Monday. His damaged knee was not quite mended yet, but it was sufficiently mended for Gussy to take a stroll—and there he was, taking it. Bill Lodgey, leaning on the tree smoking a cigarette, eyed him, and called out "Hi!" And as the swell of St. Jim's neither stopped nor turned his head, Bill repeated, in a louder key:

"Hi!"

And as it still failed to penetrate Gussy's noble brain that he was being addressed by that beery gentleman, Bill went on more explicitly:

"Hi! You with the window-pane in your eye! You in the top 'at! Hi!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He glanced round at last.

His glance at Mr. Lodgey expressed strong disfavour.

"Did you addwess me?" he inquired.

"I did jest that," answered Mr. Lodgey.

"Then pway do nothin' of the kind," said Arthur Augustus, "I do not desiah to hear anythin' fwom you."

Arthur Augustus was unacquainted with Mr. Lodgey. But he remembered that he had seen the man about the neighbourhood, and heard that he was a racing man generally to be found at the Green Man. Indeed, he had an idea that his relative, Cardew, had some sort of connection with the man. That such a disreputable person should have the nerve to address him, and in sight of the school gates, roused Arthur Augustus's ire. It was like his impudence to hang about near St. Jim's at all.

"'Old on," said Mr. Lodgey, as D'Arcy would have passed loftily on his way, "Look 'ere, you're young D'Arcy, ain't you —a relation of Mr. Cardew?"

"I quite fail to see how that concerns you, my man," said Arthur Augustus.

"Not yet it don't," said Mr. Lodgey, "But mebbe as you're a relation of young Cardew, you'd rather tip him to come out and speak to me, than see me walk into the school and look for 'im."

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Bai Jove! If you have the cheek to walk into the school, you will be thwown out on your neck," he exclaimed.

"That's as may be," said Bill, "But I come 'ere to speak to young Cardew, and I ain't going without speaking to 'im, and you can lay to that. If he thinks he's a-going to welsh me, he's got another guess coming."

Arthur Augustus gazed at him.

"I been 'anging about," went on Bill, "I got to see 'im, and I ain't going back without seeing 'im, neither. I give 'im a tip Saturday that there'd be trouble, and he ain't took no notice. I fancy he'll take notice when I walk in—and that's jest what I'm going to do if he don't come out."

"Oh cwikey!"

"I been keeping an eye open for any friend of his to take him word," said Bill. "You're his relation, as I knows: and p'raps you'd rather he didn't see me inside the school, seeing as it'd get him landed in a row with his school-master. Cut in and tell him."

"I shall certainly wefuse to cawwy a message to Cardew, or anyone else, for a person like you," said Arthur Augustus, "You have no wight whatevah to send a message to anyone in the school."

"Not when the young covey owes a man money?" said Mr. Lodgey, unpleasantly, "Not when he pulled a covey's leg to lay a new bet when he couldn't pay what he'd lost already. A

tenner on account, he says, says he, over the telephone—and has he been near me since? 'Igh and mighty, ain't we?" added Mr. Lodgey, sarcastically, "Not too 'igh and mighty to swindle a man."

"Bai Jove!"

"You cut in and tell him that Bill Lodgey is waitin' 'ere," went on Bill, "You tell him I ain't going without my money! And if he wants it all out in front of his school-master, he can 'ave it, and he won't 'ave to wait long."

"You uttah wottah," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly, "If you mean to imply that a welative of mine owes you money and will not pay——."

"Oh, come orf," interrupted Mr. Lodgey, derisively, "Did that young covey lose five quids on Plum Cake week afore last, already owing a man ten quid? Did he lose another fiver on 'im last Wednesday as ever was? Did he, I says! And has he squared?"

"Plum Cake!" repeated Arthur Augustus. The name touched a chord in his memory. "Oh, cwumbs!"

"I ain't a 'ard man," said Bill, "I've gone easy with that young covey. But if he thinks I'm a man to be welshed, why, I'll make his school ring with it from one end to t'other. S'elp me, I will that."

"Oh, deah! You had bettah go away, Mr. Lodgey——."

"I'll watch it," said Bill.

"A mastah or a pwefect might come out and see you hangin' about heah——."

"Wot do I care?"

"You will get Cardew into a feahful wow!" urged Arthur Augustus. He no longer doubted how the matter stood. It made him feel faint to think of a man like Bill Lodgey barging into the school to ask for Cardew. And Bill, in a state of resentful indignation, and after having had "one or two" at the bar of the Green Man, evidently meant mischief. "For goodness sake, Mr. Lodgey, go away."

"Not without my money," said Bill. "And I ain't waiting no longer, neither. If he don't come out, I'm going in."

And Mr. Lodgey detached himself from the tree on which he was leaning, apparently with the intention of being as good as his word.

Arthur Augustus caught his breath.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed, "I—I—I object vewy stwongly to takin' such a message, but—but I—I will do so, if you will wemain heah."

Mr. Lodgey settled back against the tree.

"O.K.," he said, "I'll wait ten minutes more. No longer'n that!" He lighted a fresh cigarette, as Arthur Augustus turned back to the school gates.

The swell of St. Jim's hurried in. His distaste for Cardew's pursuits, his disgust for Mr. Lodgey, his reluctance to be mixed up in such an unsavoury affair, were strong. But such a "show-up" could mean nothing short of the "sack" for Ralph Reckness Cardew: and he was, after all, a relative, though a distant one. Evidently it was best for Cardew to come out, and get rid of the man if he could.

"Seen Cardew, you chaps?" asked Arthur Augustus, as he came on Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther in the quad.

"No!" said Tom, shaking his head.

"And I don't want to!" added Manners.

But Monty Lowther nodded.

"Yes, I've seen him," he said.

"Good! Where did you see him, Lowthah?"

"At Carcroft——."

"What?"

"On Wednesday——."

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus, and he hurried on: not, apparently, in a mood for little jokes from the funny man of the Shell.

"Seen Cardew, Blake?"

"Cardew! I think he went up to the studies after class."

Arthur Augustus cut into the House, and hurried up to the Fourth-form studies. He tapped at the door of No. 9—even in haste, Arthur Augustus was always particular in such little matters—and opened it.

"Cardew——!"

Cardew was alone in the study. He was standing by the window, his hands in his pockets, staring out into the quad, with a dark and gloomy brow. He stared round at the swell of St. Jim's, with a far from welcoming look.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"Nothin'! But——."

"Get out, then, and leave a fellow alone."

"Weally, Cardew——."

"Oh, shut up and cut," snapped Cardew, and he turned his back on Arthur Augustus, and resumed his gloomy stare from the window.

"Bai Jove! I have a gweat mind to take you at your word,

Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard and deep, "Your mannahs are simply wevoltin', Cardew."

"Oh, get out!"

"I would certainly get out, and leave you to it," said the indignant Gussy, "But I do not want to see a welative of mine turfed out of St. Jim's. That is why I am heah—feahfully disgusted as I am."

Cardew spun round.

"What——?" he exclaimed. His eyes glinted at Arthur Augustus, "What do you mean, you fool—what——?"

"A person named Lodgey——."

"Lodgey!" Cardew's face went white. "Lodgey! Here?"

"He is waitin' in the woad, in sight of the gates, and he says that if you do not go out, he will come in.'

"Oh!" panted Cardew.

"I need hardly expwess my disgust at bein' asked to cawwy a message for such a person," said Arthur Augustus, "I should certainly have wefused to do anythin' of the kind, but the man says you owe him money, and appawently he is pwepared to come in and shout it out all ovah the school. I advise you, Cardew, to get wid of him vewy quickly. If Wailton or Kildare saw him —Oh cwumbs! Pway don't push a fellow ovah, you wuff ass!"

Arthur Augustus was left tottering, as Cardew shoved him unceremoniusly out of the way, and cut out of the study. He did not need Arthur Augustus's advice to get rid of the man quickly—if he could! The doubt was, whether he could!

Chapter XXXII

A TERRIBLE TEMPTATION

"Bother it!" said Manners.

"What and which?" asked Tom Merry.

"Which and what?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"That dashed key!" grunted Manners. "I must have dropped

it somewhere, I suppose! I've looked everywhere. I can't use my desk till I find it. Where can the rotten thing be?"

Manners was annoyed. He used that desk in No. 10 Study for many things: but chiefly, his negatives and prints. Manners was a careful and tidy fellow, and disliked leaving things about the study. Also, there were great possibilities that something might happen to them, if he did! But since Saturday, there had been negatives and prints lying about in No. 10, which he had been unable to park in their usual safe spot—having discovered, when he went to his desk, that the key was missing from his waistcoat pocket.

"Oh!" said Tom. "You haven't come across it?"

"No!" grunted Manners.

Tom and Lowther, when they first heard of the loss, had loyally joined up in a search for the missing key. They had rooted all over the study, and scanned the passages, in vain. Truth to tell, they had rather forgotten it since. Now they were reminded of it.

"Sure you haven't got it in another pocket?" asked Lowther.

"Ass!" said Manners, politely. Which apparently indicated that he was sure on that point.

Tom Merry smiled.

"You've looked at the spot where you were scrapping with Cardew on Saturday?" he asked, "That's a likely place."

"I've looked there.'

"Well, let's go and have another look," suggested Tom, "It might have got trodden on, or something."

Manners did not look hopeful. He had searched over the spot where he had "scrapped" with Cardew of the Fourth, and had seen nothing of the missing key there. Certainly it had not occurred to him that it might have been kicked out of sight under the oaken bench. Still, as the key was not to be found, it was worth while revisiting the spot for another look round.

"Come on, then," he said.

The chums of the Shell turned into the path under the elms by the school wall, heading for the tree with the old bench under its shady branches. The sound of voices fell upon their ears as they came.

"Look here, Cardew——." It was Ernest Levison's voice.

"Oh, leave a chap alone."

"But what's the row—," came Clive's voice, "You looked like a sick monkey when you came in at the gates ten minutes ago——."

"I'm feelin' rather like one."

"But what——?"

"I just happen to want nobody's company but my own," came Cardew's drawling voice, "You fellows are borin' me."

"If that means that you want us to clear——.' '

"What a brain! Guessed it in one."

"Oh, rats!"

Levison and Clive passed the Shell fellows, a moment later, their faces expressing a mixture of concern and irritation, leaving their disgruntled chum to himself. Manners glanced at them, as they passed, and paused.

"That fellow's there," he muttered.

"Well, he doesn't bite," said Tom Merry, "Come on."

Cardew was sitting on the old oaken bench under the elm with a dark brow. He had, apparently, sat down in that retired spot from a fancy for solitude: no doubt he wanted to be alone, to think, after seeing Mr. Lodgey so near the school gates. He had got rid of Levison and Clive—and he stared angrily at Tom Merry and Co. as they came up.

"Want anything?" he snapped.

"Not your company, at any rate," retorted Manners.

"Well, get out, then."

"Are you always as polite as that to your elders and betters?" inquired Monty Lowther, pleasantly.

"Oh, don't be a fool!"

"Still thinking about that pair of spectacles?" asked Lowther.

Cardew's only reply to that question was a scowl.

"We're looking for something, Cardew," explained Tom Merry, "I suppose you haven't seen a key lying about here?"

"Eh! what?"

Cardew had utterly forgotten that key, and his malicious action in kicking it under the bench.

"Manners has lost a key somewhere," said Tom, "I thought it might be lying about here, after——."

"I've looked once," grunted Manners, "Let's get out."

"The sooner the better," snapped Cardew. He realised that Manners had not found that key, and he was not in the least disposed to help. The key must, at that very moment, have been lying under the bench upon which he was sitting. As it could not possibly have fallen there, Manners evidently had not thought of exploring the dark and dusty recesses under the bench.

"Oh, let's have a look while we're here," said Tom.

Cardew sat and watched them with a sarcastic grin, as they

searched about under the tree. A word would have enlightened them: but he did not choose to utter that word.

"Nothing doing," said Tom, at last, "Have you looked in the dark-room, Manners?"

"I couldn't have dropped it in the dark-room without hearing it fall."

"Well, have you looked?"

"No."

"Then let's go and draw the dark-room," said Tom.

"Oh, all right."

The three Shell fellows walked away, without another word or look at Cardew. His lips curved in a sneer as they went.

The key was under that bench, he knew that. It could stay there! When Tom Merry and Co. were gone, Cardew plunged once more into the black and moody reverie that had been interrupted.

What was he going to do?

He had seen Lodgey in the lane. The man had blustered and threatened: but he had, at length, agreed to give the wretched sportsman of St. Jim's one more day of grace. It was a respite: and Cardew had breathed more freely when he saw the racing man disappear in the distance down Rylcombe Lane.

But what, after all, was the use? It staved off the inevitable—but the inevitable remained, unless he could raise money in twenty-four hours. And he knew that he could not! The promised "tenner" would have kept Lodgey quiet, and induced him to wait for the rest. But Cardew had had nothing to give him: and the man knew, now, that he had lied on the telephone—a last bitter humiliation that made the wretched fellow writhe. Lodgey, certainly, would prefer his money, to kicking up a row at the scool—if only he could raise the wind in time! But if the man was not paid on the morrow, it was the end. Lodgey had been deceived, deluded, and in fact "diddled" by a schoolboy—that was what it came to, and Cardew could hardly wonder that he was savagely resentful and revengeful.

What was he going to do?

He sat thinking it out, in utter misery. How easily and carelessly he had entered on that path that led downward, never dreaming of what it might lead to. One step led inevitably to another, he reflected bitterly—a Latin tag came into his mind—"facilis descensus Averno." The descent was facile—only too facile. From incurring losses he could pay, to incurring losses he could not pay, had been a step—and then came the next, to

lying and shuffling and deception—and what was the next? To using money not his own, if it had been possible—he felt, with a shudder, that he would and could have come even to that, to save himself from utter disaster, had it been possible.

It was not possible! But—he gave a sudden start as it flashed into his mind—was it not?

A tenner would keep Lodgey quiet. That prig Manners had a tenner in his desk, hoarding it there. And the key of that desk lay under the bench on which he was sitting.

"Oh!" panted Cardew. His brain seemed to whirl. The colour faded from his face, leaving it a chalky white.

It was possible! He could save himself, if he could sink to that last and lowest depth: if he could filch and pilfer, and become a thing unclean. He half rose to his feet, as if to hurry away from temptation. But he sank back again. The thought of it hammered in his mind. If he did not pay Lodgey, he was a swindler already—it was only one degree worse. And if the crash came—as it must come—shame—disgrace—expulsion from his school—to face shocked, disgusted, contemptuous relatives—could he face that, when——!

"Oh!" he breathed again.

For long, long minutes he sat there, trying to think. He was lost—nothing could save him but that. The last dreadful step on the downward path—but had he not already gone too far to retreat?

He moved at last.

His face was white and set as he rose from the bench. Quietly, with a strange calmness, he bent, and groped under it.

What was he going to do with that key?

He hardly knew, as yet. Perhaps hand it to Manners, and tell him that he had found it. Or——!

He groped. The bench backed against the trunk of the elm, and there was a good deal of space under the low, wide seat. His hand came into contact with something that rustled—paper of some kind that the wind had blown into that dusky, dusty recess. That was not what he wanted. He groped on—his fingers found a key.

There was a momentary glistening of bright steel in the sunshine, as it vanished into his pocket, and he rose to his feet.

For a full minute he stood there, motionless. Then he walked away: and when he appeared in the quad, under many eyes, he was his usual calm nonchalant self, walking with an easy saunter.

He passed Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther as he went into the House. Manners was frowning.

"I knew it couldn't be in the dark-room," Cardew heard him say.

"Looks as if it's a goner, old man," said Monty Lowther.

"Must be somewhere," said Tom Merry.

Manners gave Cardew a glance of dislike as he passed. Cardew's lip curled sardonically as he noted it. Had he thought of handing that key to Manners, and so saving himself from the abyss that had opened under his feet? He hardly knew. But if he had thought of it, he was not thinking of it now.

Chapter XXXIII

THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS!

"Coming down?"

"No!"

Prep was over, in the Fourth. In No. 9 Study it was over for Levison and Clive: it had not started for Cardew, and was evidently not going to start.

While his study-mates worked, the dandy of the Fourth loafed about the study: sat in the armchair, and rose again: stared from the window into the dusky quad: picked up a book and threw it down: took out a cigarette, and threw it away unlighted: and generally displayed a restlessness that was more than a little irksome to fellows who were trying to concentrate on Latin.

But he did not speak. Whatever thoughts were in Cardew's mind, that made him so ill at ease, plainly he did not intend to communicate them to his friends.

Neither were Levison and Clive at much loss to guess their nature. They had no doubt that his sporting speculations were Cardew's trouble. They knew that "Plum Cake" had lost twice

in succession, and that Cardew had pinned his faith to that unreliable "gee."

In such a matter they could neither help nor advise him: and could indeed feel little sympathy. Once or twice Clive glanced at him, with his quiet steady glance: several times, Levison gave him impatient looks. But nothing was said till prep was over, when the books were put away, and two of the three were ready to go. Then Levison asked Cardew if he was coming down—to receive a curt negative in reply.

"Look here, Cardew——" said Levison, abruptly.

"Lookin'," drawled Cardew.

"Can't you chuck that rot out of your mind? You've mucked up your cricket over it already—I've a pretty good idea what made you conk out like that at Carcroft."

"Was that it?" grunted Clive.

"Shouldn't wonder," yawned Cardew.

"Then you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself," said Clive, gruffly.

"Quite!" agreed Cardew.

"I suppose all this means that you're in a hole," growled Levison.

"Sort of."

"If a quid's any good——."

"It isn't."

Clive went to the door. Levison followed him, but paused and looked back.

"If there's anything I can do, Cardew——."

"There is, old bean."

"What is it?"

"Give a fellow a rest."

Levison made no rejoinder to that. He followed Clive from the study, and they went down, leaving the dandy of the Fourth to his own devices.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders. He was attached to his friends, in his own way. But he had no thought or consideration to waste on them now. He was too deep in the mire to have a single thought to spare for anyone or anything else.

He had made up his mind. The little steel key was in his pocket. That key would open the desk wherein lay the solution of his difficulties. Manners could have helped him, if he had liked. He was going to help himself. He was not going to be sacked from the school, if any desperate expedient could save him. He

was in a hole—and there was one way out. That way he was going to take—deliberately shutting his mind to the vileness of it. The wretched scapegrace, having sunk so far, was going to sink deeper, to save himself—deeper into irrevocable shame. His mind had tossed to and fro in tormented doubt—but it was savagely and cynically made up at last.

A little later he left his study, and strolled on the study landing. Fellows were going down from the Shell and the Fourth. Cardew lounged by the big landing window, looking out into the quad in the glimmering stars.

He was waiting till the coast was clear.

With the corner of his eye, he noticed Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther come away from the Shell studies, and go along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth—no doubt for a chat with Blake and Co. before going down.

His eyes glinted for a moment.

No. 10 Study was deserted now. None of the Terrible Three were likely to return to it. If he could slip in unnoticed——.

He left the landing, and strolled along by the Shell studies. Anyone who saw him could only have supposed that he was going to speak to some fellow in the Shell. But his luck was in—there was nobody in the pasage. All or almost all the fellows had gone down after prep now.

He gave one swift and searching glance about him, as he came opposite the door of No. 10. The next moment he had whipped into the study, and shut the door silently after him.

He stood in the darkness in the study, his heart beating faster, a spot of perspiration on his brow.

For one moment he stood still.

But it was only for a moment. He knew what he had to do—what he was going to do—and he dared not waste time.

He did not need a light: and he would not have dared to turn on the light, which would have glimmered under the door. Silently and swiftly he crossed the study to the corner where Manners' desk stood.

The little steel key was in his hand now.

It was the work of only a couple of minutes—then he would be gone again, with what he needed to save him in his pocket.

He groped, and in a moment more the desk was unlocked. Leaving the key in the lock, he whipped a tiny flash-lamp from

his pocket—he needed just a spot of light, now, to find the banknote.

He peered into the desk. It did not take him long to find what he wanted. The flash-lamp was shut off, and dropped back into his pocket. The banknote was in his hand.

There was the faintest of clicks, as the desk was re-locked. He drew out the key.

It had been easy!

He stood there, in the dark, with the key in one hand, the banknote in the other. But his hands were shaking now.

Even in the darkness of the study, his face glimmered white. It was like chalk. His heart seemed to beat to suffocation.

It was done—and swift retreat from the scene of a theft was his cue. Yet he still stood there—as if rooted to the floor!

He seemed unable to stir. He had done what he had come to do, yet he did not move. He could not.

What had he done? Right up to that moment, his determination had been fixed: savagely, cynically fixed. He was going to save himself, at any cost—even at this dreadful cost. And then, it was as if a mist had cleared from his brain, as if the scales had fallen from his eyes, enabling him to see, with sudden clearness, the black abyss into which he was stepping.

Suddenly, clearly, overwhelmingly, he realised that he could not do this thing. Standing there in the dark by Manners' desk, the banknote in his hand, he knew that he could not do it—not to save himself from disaster, not to save himself from death. Better disgrace, better ruin, than to become a thief, an object of contempt and loathing in his own eyes for the remainder of his days.

How had he fancied that he could do it? He hardly knew. But he knew now that he could not—he could not.

Step after step on the downward path—to this! No, never to this—never—never! Anything—anything but this!

Lodgey, and what Lodgey would do, he had to disregard.

That was ruin—but it was not such ruin as this!

He panted for breath, there in the dark! He had reached the edge of the gulf—but he had stopped in time! There was yet time—to unlock the desk again, to replace the banknote in the drawer from which he had taken it, lock the desk once more—get rid of the key——.

There was yet time!

He stirred at last. With the banknote in his left hand, the key in his right, he groped for the keyhole of the desk with the key—his mind made up to undo his own act, to save himself from this last and shameful degradation, whatever else he had to face.

And even at that moment, there was a sound at the door of the study, and with his heart leaping into his mouth, he spun round, his starting eyes fixed in terror on the door as it opened.

Chapter XXXIV

TWO IN THE DARK!

Baggy Trimble looked this way, and he looked that way. Up the Shell passage he looked, and down the Shell passage he looked.

And the coast was clear.

And having ascertained beyond doubt that the coast was absolutely clear, Trimble of the Fourth put out a fat paw to the door-handle of Tom Merry's study.

In Tom Merry's study in the Shell, Trimble of the Fourth had—or should have had—no business at all. But Baggy was often found in places where he had no business.

Certainly, he was not paying a friendly call on the "Terrible Three." Baggy was not "persona grata" in that study, and had the owners thereof been at home, would probably have been told to travel, with more brevity than politeness.

But nobody was at home in No. 10. The study was in darkness. That was why Baggy was there! Baggy had wind of a cake in the study cupboard. And with great astuteness, after prep, he had watched Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, go along to No. 6 in the Fourth, where they were chatting with

Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy before going down to the day-room. Nobody was likely to spot Baggy.

A week or two ago, Tom Merry and Co. had been the means of depriving Baggy of a cake annexed from Study No. 6. Baggy had not forgotten that plum cake. Though lost to sight, it was to memory dear! But for Tom Merry and Co. Baggy would have had that plum cake. Perhaps Baggy felt justified in indemnifying himself for the loss of that plum cake, by bagging the cake that had arrived for Tom Merry by post that day from his old guardian, Miss Priscilla. Or perhaps he did not bother about justification. Certainly he was going to have the cake, if he could get his podgy paws upon it.

And it looked as if he could.

Having assured himself that the chums of the Shell were safe off the scene after prep, having scanned the Shell passage and found it deserted, Baggy opened the door of No. 10 and rolled in.

He shut the door after him, softly.

Safe inside, he grinned.

That cake from Laurel Villa was as good as his now. Very likely Tom and his friends had sampled it at tea-time. But they couldn't have finished it. Baggy was going to finish it for them.

He did not switch on the light. He had to be cautious. Fellows might pass the study, and the light would show under the door: and if Tom Merry and Co. were supposed to be at home, Talbot, or Kangaroo, or Glyn, or Skimpole, or anybody, might drop in.

Baggy did not need a light. He knew his way about. And there was a glimmer from the summer sky at the window.

Grinning, Baggy trod softly across to the study cupboard. Then, suddenly, he stopped, his fat heart jumping.

There was a sound in the study. It was like a startled, gasping breath. In the dim glimmer from the window, something shadowy moved, in the corner where Harry Manners' desk stood.

"Oh!" gasped Trimble.

There was somebody in the study—in the dark!

Baggy was quite startled. It couldn't be Tom Merry or Manners or Lowther: he had seen them in Study No. 6 with Blake and Co. Besides, fellows wouldn't be in their study in the dark. Who was it—and why?

"I—I—I say, who's that?" gasped Baggy.

There was no reply. He heard a sound of hurried breathing:

that was all. He peered in the gloom. Baggy felt a vague sensation of uneasiness creep over his fat limbs.

It couldn't be a burglar, that was certain. But who was it—and why? For what imaginable reason could any fellow be lurking there in the dark—in another fellow's study?

Then Baggy thought he understood. Some other fellow was after that cake! That, indeed, seemed the only possible explanation. Obviously the fellow must be after something—and what but the cake?

"I—I say," whispered Baggy, peering, "I say, halves, you know! I say, is that you, Mellish? I say, halves, old chap! What?"

Still no reply. But the shadow moved again, and Baggy heard a light footfall. The next moment a pair of strong hands fell upon him in the dark.

"Yoo-hoooop!" yelled the startled Baggy, "I say—yarooop! Leggo! I say, you can have the cake—whoop!"

Bump.

Baggy Trimble, suddenly up-ended, bumped on the floor. He landed with a bump that knocked most of the wind out of him.

"Urrrrggh!" gasped Trimble.

He struggled frantically in the strong grasp of unseen hands, frightened almost out of his fat wits.

It was not Mellish—it was not some fellow like himself after Tom Merry's cake. He realised that. It was some fellow who had been lurking in the study in the dark, who had been startled by his surreptitious and unexpected entrance, and who was desperate. But who—what——? In his terror, Baggy opened his mouth for a yell. He had been very anxious not to be caught in Tom Merry's study: but he had forgotten that now. He forgot the cake. He forgot everything but his terror in those grasping hands in the dark.

But before he could yell for help, his fat face was jammed into the rug, did not know that his assailant was gone.

were ground into the dusty rug. He gurgled and guggled and wriggled like a fat eel.

Then suddenly he was released.

He was too dizzy and confused to hear a door that opened and shut swiftly. There was a light in the passage, and for a second it glimmered in. His assailant was gone. But the drastic measures he had adopted with Baggy prevented that fat and frightened youth from seeing him as he went. Baggy was still gurgling into the rug, and did nit know that his assailant was gone.

But he realised that he was no longer grasped by those unseen hands, and he dragged his fat face out of the rug, and yelled. He could yell now—and his yells awoke the echoes of the Shell studies.

"Oogh, Ow! Help! I say, you keep off! Lemme alone! Help! Help!

Baggy fairly roared.

Every moment he dreaded to glimpse that shadowy figure looming over him again, and to feel that savage grip in the dark. He yelled and yelled and yelled.

There was a patter of footsteps in the passage, and the door of No. 10 Study was pitched open. Five or six startled fellows stared in.

"What's up?"

"Who's that?"

"What happened?"

"Ow! Keep him off! Help!" yelled Baggy, "I say—help! Oh, crikey! Help! Keep him off! Yaroooh!"

A hand reached in and switched on the light. Light suddenly flooded No. 10 Study. It revealed Baggy Trimble sprawling on the rug, yelling, to the startled eyes that stared in from the passage.

"It's Trimble," exclaimed Talbot of the Shell.

"That fat ass——" said Kangaroo.

"What's the matter?"

"Ow!" yelled Trimble, "Keep him off!"

"Keep who off?" asked Talbot, in wonder, "There's nobody here. And what are you doing here, anyway?"

"Ow! He grabbed me, in the dark! Oh, crikey! Ow! Oh, crumbs! Oooooogh!"

"What on earth's the row?" Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came up the passage, followed by Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy. They had been on the study landing, about to go down, when the wild uproar from the Shell studies reached their ears.

"Bai Jove! It's Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus, "Whatevah is the mattah, Twimble?"

"And what are you doing in our study?" demanded Tom Merry.

Trimble tottered to his feet. He cast uneasy glances round the study. Nobody was to be seen there, apart from the startled fellows staring in at the door. Baggy realised that his assailant must have darted out while he was gurgling into the rug.

"Oh!" he gasped, "He—he—he's gone."

"Who?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I—I—I don't know! He—he—he was! Oh crikey! Oh, lor. in the dark. He grabbed me—oh, dear! Oh, lor'! Oh, scissors! He was here—in the dark——."

"Who was?" yelled Tom.

"I—I—I don't know! He—he—he was! Oh, crikey! Oh, lor, He—he—he's gone! Oh, scissors!"

"You fat villain!" said Tom Merry, "There's nobody here—I suppose you stumbled over something in the dark. And what were you doing in our study in the dark, you pilfering octopus? Did you know there was half a cake in the cupboard?"

"Oh!" gasped Baggy, "No! I mean—I—I—haven't touched the cake! He—he—he grabbed me, and—and—and——."

"The uttah ass," said Arthur Augustus, "He was fwightened in the dark, and it serves him wight for comin' aftah a fellow's cake. I wecommend you fellows to boot him!'

Arthur Augustus's recommendation was acted upon at once. Nobody was impressed by Trimble's tale of having been grabbed in the dark: but it was clear that Baggy had been after the cake. And the Terrible Three promptly booted Baggy—and as Baggy, yelling, dodged out of the study, Blake and Co. added a few: and it was a breathless and much-booted Baggy that escaped from the Shell passage and bolted for his fat life.

Chapter XXXV

THE TEN-POUND NOTE!

Ralph Reckness Cardew gave a sudden start, and thrust something hastily into his pocket, as his study door opened.

He stood by the study table, his hands resting upon it, as if for support, his face strangely white, his eyes fixed and staring. He looked like a fellow who had had a shock—a terrible shock.

Seldom, or never, was the cool, nonchalant dandy of the Fourth thrown off his balance. But he was utterly off his balance now.

It was Levison who came into the study. Cardew made an effort to pull himself together, under the eyes of his chum. But he could not quite succeed. Levison gave him a startled look.

"Cardew, old chap! Are you ill?" he exclaimed.

"Am I ever ill?" drawled Cardew.

"You look it."

"Too many smokes, perhaps," said Cardew. His ease of manner was returning. "Take warnin' by me, my young friend, and steer clear of the wild and woolly Woodbine."

"Aren't you coming down? What are you sticking in the study for?" asked Levison, eyeing him uneasily.

"Meditatin' in solitude," explained Cardew, "And you're interruptin' my meditations."

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"Why not?" drawled Cardew. "Is anythin' goin' on, Ernest? I heard some sort of a hullabaloo——."

"Only that ass Trimble," said Levison. "He seems to have sneaked into Tom Merry's study in the dark, to pinch a cake, and stumbled over something, and fancied that somebody was there grabbing him, and yelled for help, the fat ass."

Cardew laughed.

"Did somebody grab him?"

"Of course not. I daresay he walked into a chair. He didn't see anybody, at any rate."

"Oh! He didn't see anybody? Nobody to be seen, I suppose?"

"Well, there could hardly be anybody in the study, in the dark," said Levison, "The fat ass was scared, that's all. Look here, Cardew, won't you come down?"

"Haven't I told you that I'm meditatin'——.'

"I suppose you can't talk sense," said Levison, impatiently.

"I don't really know—I've never tried. You cut down, old man—Thomas will be talkin' cricket: he's full of the Greyfriars match now: and go and listen-in."

"You've chucked away your chance of playing at Greyfriars, I'm afraid."

"Yes! Dear old sobersides Manners will barge into my place, and I shall be left out in the perishin' cold!" sighed Cardew, "How lucky that I don't care a boiled bean."

"Well, you ought to care," snapped Levison.

"I know! But how often do I do as I ought? Cricket's a bore, like everythin' else. Even you bore me sometimes, Ernest, old bean. You're borin' me now."

"Oh, rats," said Levison, and he left the study, shutting the door after him hard. A light laugh from Cardew followed him as he went.

But when the door was shut, and Cardew was alone again, he did not look like laughing. His face changed automatically, a worn and haggard look coming over it, that made him look years older.

"By gad! If he knew!" muttered Cardew. The colour flushed into his face for a moment. "If he knew—if Clivey knew!" He shivered, "So that idiot Trimble saw nobody—I fancied he couldn't, with his ugly mug grindin' into the rug. But what a jolt! If he'd seen——."

He moved restlessly about the study. Trimble had had a fright in the dark study—but not so terrible a shock as the wretched fellow who had dreaded, for one terrible moment, to be seen standing at Manners' desk, with a key in one hand, and a banknote in the other!

He had escaped that—he was safe. But——.

He put his hand into his pocket, and drew out a flimsy strip of engraved paper, which he had thrust hurriedly out of sight when Levison came in.

It was a Bank of England note for £10.

He held it in his hand, looking at it, for a long moment. Then, with a shudder, he thrust it back into his pocket.

He drew a long, deep, quivering breath. It was a sufficient sum to keep Bill Lodgey quiet: to save the scapegrace of St. Jim's from what impended over him.

And there was no risk.

He had thought all that out. Banknotes were numbered: and no doubt Manners had, or could ascertain, the number of that note, when he discovered that it was gone. But in Lodgey's hands, it would be passed on some racecourse distant from the school: probably passed from hand to hand a dozen times before it was paid into the bank. It might be months before it was checked and identified—if ever! It would never be traced back to Lodgey, much less Cardew. There was, and could be, nothing to connect him with it.

He had had a narrow escape in Tom Merry's study, when

Baggy Trimble had so unexpectedly and startlingly blundered in, in the dark. But he had escaped—unseen, unrecognised, unsuspected. All was safe.

On the morrow, if he kept that banknote, he could see Lodgey, and hand it over to him, and all would be well in that quarter. No exposure in the school—no call to the Head's study to be sacked! He would be safe, carefree to devote himself to cricket, and cut that prig Manners from the eleven picked for the Greyfriars match.

That was how he had mapped it all out.

And he could not do it!

He could not do it, and he had to face what was coming to him, because he could not. Somehow, he had to get that banknote back into the drawer in Manners' desk from which he had filched it. But for that fat blundering fool Trimble he would have done it then—but he had had no chance—he had been lucky to escape unseen, as it was. Somehow it had to be done. He had to find an opportunity—somehow.

And he realised that he had to find it soon: for it was quite on the cards that the next day might be his last at St. Jim's. He knew what to expect from Lodgey, if he did not pay him—and he could not pay him, unless——!

He had to get rid of that banknote. Once it was safely locked up again in the desk, the key could be thrown back, under that bench by the old elm, where he had picked it up. And he would give Manners the tip where to look for it, lest temptation should assail him again: his lips curled in cynical self-derision at that thought!

He left his study at last.

He had pulled himself together, and his manner was careless and casual as usual. He strolled across the study landing, and ago, when he had crept into Tom Merry's study: and fled from it, leaving Baggy Trimble gurgling in the rug. If nobody was about now——!

At the corner of the passage a group of fellows stood—Kangaroo and Gore of the Shell, Roylance and Dick Julian and Wildrake of the Fourth—talking and laughing. He caught Trimble's name: they were talking of Baggy's alarm in No. 10 Study.

Cardew compressed his lips.

The coast was not clear now. He had to wait—to wait, with a filched banknote in his pocket. Back into his mind came that

Latin tag—facilis descensus Averno, sed revocare gradum—easy the descent, the return how difficult! On the very edge of the abyss he had drawn back shuddering—but the filched banknote was in his pocket, and unless he could restore it, he was a thief! But the way that had been clear for his desperate act, was not clear for him to undo it. Like Aeneas of old he found the descent facile, the return steep and hard.

He leaned idly on the banisters, hoping that the juniors would go. But when the group broke up, five or six other fellows were on the landing: and Gore of the Shell went to his study, which was next to Tom Merry's, and left the door open. It was useless—the opportunity was not yet!

Cardew strolled away to the stairs. He had to wait—wait and watch for a chance! There was a smile on his face, as he strolled into the junior day-room, but his heart was like lead.

There was a buzz of cheery voices in the junior room. Tom Merry and Co. were talking cricket—the Greyfriars match the topic. Cardew threw himself into an armchair, and looked at them with an ironical grin. Care-free schoolboys talking cricket—and he might have been one of the cheery group, as care-free as the rest, but for that kink of blackguardism in him, which he had carelessly indulged, and which had led him—to this!

"Oh, here you are." Levison and Clive joined him.

"Yes, here I am," drawled Cardew, "I've been meditatin'——."

"Oh rot," said Clive.

"Honest Injun, old bean. There's a passage in jolly old Virgil that's worth meditatin'——."

"Fat lot you care about Virgil!" grunted Clive.

"Well not as a rule," admitted Cardew, "But the old boy spills a spot of wisdom here and there. Let's see—how does it go——

Facilus descensus Averno.

Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras, hoc opus, hic labor est.

Levison and Clive started at him. His whimsical smile gave no clue to the leaden heaviness of his heart.

"Which bein' interpreted," went on Cardew's careless drawling voice, "Means, my beloved 'earers, that it's dashed easy to amble on the downward path, but no end of a spot of bother to get back again. Useful warnin' words, my young friends, if ever you feel like lookin' upon the wine when it is red, or the racing paper when it is pink! Take warnin'——."

"Oh, don't be a goat, old man," said Clive, and he walked away. Cardew laughed, and Levison eyed him sharply.

"What are you talking rot for?" he asked.

"Don't I generally talk rot?"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"What I say! Havin' tumbled down the giddy slope into Avernus, "I'm strugglin' on the way back, and, as dear old Virgil puts it, hic labor est, there's the pinch," yawned Cardew, "Am I borin' you? Well, let's talk cricket, then, and you can bore me instead."

And he laughed again, while his hand, in his pocket, crumpled a £10 note.

Chapter XXXVI

AFTER LIGHTS OUT!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy awoke.

The hour was late—all was dark and silent in the Fourth-form dormitory in the School House. It was a twinge in his noble knee that had awakened the swell of St. Jim's

"Wow!" murmured Arthur Augustus, sleepily.

Gussy was no longer limping with that damaged knee. Every day and in every way it was getting better and better! But reminiscent twinges reminded him at frequent intervals of his exploit on the banisters.

He had turned in his bed, and the result was a sharp twinge in his knee which, like Mabeth, murdered sleep!

"Wow!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

He sat up in bed, and rubbed that knee.

But he gave it only one rub. The next moment he forgot his knee, as he uttered a startled exclamation.

"Bai Jove! Who's that?"

The summer starlight streamed in at the high windows of the dormitory. It made a wide silvery patch on the old oak floor. And Arthur Augustus's startled eyes fell on a shadowy figure crossing that patch of light.

He jumped and ejaculated: and his startled ejaculation awakened three or four fellows in adjacent beds.

"Hullo, what's that row?" came a sleepy voice from Jack Blake's bed.

"That Gussy?" yawned Herries.

"Nightmare?" asked Dig.

"There is somebody heah," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "There's somebody in the dorm, deah boys——."

"Rot!" grunted Blake.

"Weally, Blake——."

"Go to sleep, fathead," came Levison's voice.

"Weally, Levison——."

"And let other fellows go to sleep, image!" said Digby.

"Weally, Dig——."

"By gum, though!" Blake sat up in bed, staring, "There's somebody—who the dickens is that—what——?"

"Don't wake the House!" came a cool, drawling voice.

"Bai Jove! Is that Cardew?"

"That goat Cardew!" growled Herries, "Breaking bounds again, you dingy tick? Pah!"

"Cardew!" exclaimed Levison.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, half seen in the glimmer of the stars, breathed hard and deep. For a moment, his eyes blazed at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. At that moment, he could have found satisfaction in planting an angry fist in the aristocratic countenance of his noble relative.

He had left it late—and he had not made a sound in turning out. Arthur Augustus had awakened at an unlucky moment for him. But he was quite cool.

"You men mind shuttin' up?" he drawled. "Go to sleep like good little boys, and don't bring Railton up here to find me with my trousers on."

"Bai Jove! I wegard you as an absolute wottah, Cardew!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly, "Aftah what happened that aftahnoon, you are bweakin' bounds aftah lights out——."

"Speech may be taken as read."

"Look here, Cardew——!" exclaimed Levison.

"Et tu, Brute!" sighed Cardew, "You too, Levison! Leave it to Gussy, old man! Gussy can put in all the necessary jaw, and a little over."

"You're going down?" asked Levison, quietly.

Cardew laughed mockingly.

"In a way, yes—in another way, no," he answered. "I'm on my way up, really. Up out of Avernus, old scout—remember what I was tellin' you this evenin'——?"

"Is that a riddle?"

"It's one you won't guess, old bean—I shouldn't propound it, if you could," chuckled Cardew. "Go to sleep."

"Bai Jove! I wegard you with uttah despision—I mean contempt, Cardew," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "I have a good mind to turn out of bed and give you a feahful thwashin'. I wepeat that I have a good mind——."

"You have?' ejaculated Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah."

"News to me," said Cardew, "I never knew you had a mind, Gussy, let alone a good one. Aren't you exaggeratin'——?"

"Bai Jove! That does it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus throwing aside his bedclothes, "I am goin' to thwash you, Cardew——."

There was a swift footfall, and the faint sound of a door that opened, and shut cautiously. Arthur Augustus jumped out of bed too late.

"Was that the dooah?" he asked, "Is that wottah gone? Bai Jove! I should not be vewy sowwy if old Wailton copped him, though he is a welative of mine. If evah a wegulah wottah deserved to be sacked——."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"He will be copped and sacked one of these days, and the sooner the better," grunted Herries. "Serve him jolly well right when it happens."

"Yaas, wathah."

Cardew was gone. Arthur Augustus, wrathy as he was realised that there was nothing doing, and went back to bed. He sat there, rubbing his twinging knee, and still wrathy: regretful that he had not bestowed that fearful thrashing upon his relative—which, doubtless, would have made Cardew disinclined to get on with breaking bounds that night. It was not likely to occur to

Arthur Augustus that the scapegrace who had left the dormitory had no intention of breaking bounds: but had in his mind quite another intention, of which the swell of St. Jim's could never have dreamed. While Arthur Augustus sat and rubbed his knee, Cardew was stealing by dark stairs and passages, not to an outlet from the House, but to a certain study in the Shell.

"The uttah wottah!" said Arthur Augustus, "I wegard him as a disgwace to the House! I have a gweat mind to stay awake and thwash him when he comes back."

"He won't be back in a hurry," snorted Herries, "It's a good step to the Green Man."

"The uttah wapscallion——."

"All that and more," yawned Blake, "But shut up now, old chap, and let's go to sleep."

"Weally, Blake——."

Blake laid his head on the pillow again, and closed his eyes. The other fellows settled down to sleep: and Arthur Augustus, having given his noble knee a final rub, followed their examples.

But just as his aristocratic eyes were closing, there was a faint sound in the stillness of the night. It was the sound of an opening door.

Arthur Augustus sat up again.

"Bai Jove! Is that you, Cardew?" he ejaculated.

"Still awake, and still wagging your chin?" came a drawling voice from the shadows.

It was Cardew! He had been absent hardly ten minutes. Arthur Augustus peered at him, as he went to his bed, and began to throw off his clothes.

"You've come back?" came Levison's voice.

"Sort of," agreed Cardew.

"So you have changed you mind aftah all, Cardew! I am vewy glad that you have changed your mind," said Arthur Augustus.

"I'd be glad if you'd change yours, Gussy! The one you've got doesn't seem to work, does it?"

"You uttah ass! I was goin' to turn out and thwash you when you came back, Cardew——."

"Help!"

"Howevah, as you have changed your mind and not gone out of bounds, I shall wefwain fwom doin' so."

"I breathe again!" said Cardew.

"Oh wats!"

Arthur Augustus laid his noble head on the pillow again. Cardew turned in—but it was long before sleep visited his eyes.

The fellows who had awakened had no doubt that he had intended to "break out," but had changed his mind and returned. He was quite content to let them think so.

He had done what he had left the dormitory to do: the £10 note was back in the drawer of Manners' desk in No. 10 Study in the Shell. That crushing weight was off his mind at last. So far, he had clambered back from the pit he had dug for his own feet.

But what was to happen on the morrow?

Chapter XXXVII

CARDEW'S LAST DAY!

"Manners!"

"Well?"

"Found that key yet?"

Manners' answers were brief and dry.

"No!"

He had no use for Cardew of the Fourth, or for conversation from him: and he made that unmistakably clear.

It was after third school the following day—and a glorious summer morning. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had come out into the sunny quad with cheerful faces. Tom had just expressed a hope that the weather would continue just like that, for the Greyfriars match next week: and Monty Lowther had rejoined with a question as to whether Tom could, by any remote possibility, think or speak about anything but cricket. Manners was not thinking about either weather or cricket, but about his missing key, not yet having been able to open his desk in No. 10 Study to pack away films and prints.

Cardew of the Fourth came sauntering towards them, and, rather to their surprise, stopped to speak.

His manner was quite amicable. He seemed to have forgotten how recently he and Manners had been punching one another.

"I suppose you want to find it," he remarked.

"Yes!" Manners was still monosyllabic.

"Perhaps I could help!" suggested Cardew.

Manners stared at him, and his lip curled.

"I can see you helping!" he snapped.

"Don't you want me to?"

"No!"

"Oh, go easy, Manners, old man," said Tom Merry, "If Cardew's got any idea where the dashed thing may be——."

"Cough it up, if you have," said Monty Lowther, "Manners is leaving his things all over the study till he finds that key—and yelps like a scalded cat if a fellow goes near them."

Cardew laughed.

"Oh, dry up, you two!" said Manners, "Cardew doesn't knew anything about it, and he wouldn't help, if he did. Chuck it."

"But I do," said Cardew.

"You do?" exclaimed Tom.

"Exactly! That's why I'm wastin' my conversation on an unappreciative audience," drawled Cardew, "You see, Manners dropped that key out of his pocket when he was scrappin' with me on Saturday."

"You saw it?"

"Oh, yes: I spotted it lyin' there after he had gone."

"That's rot," said Manners, curtly, "We've searched all round that tree, and it's not there. If you saw it there, we should have seen it."

"You didn't look under that old bench, did you?" asked Cardew.

"Of course not. It couldn't have dropped under the bench, could it?"

"Oh, no! But it might have been kicked there.'"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Will you fellows be too terribly shocked if I confess that, not bein' in a good temper at the time, I kicked it out of sight under the bench?" yawned Cardew.

"You did!" roared Manners.

"You saw Manners' key lying there, and kicked it out of sight under the bench," exclaimed Tom Merry, blankly.

"Just that!"

"And why?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Sheer ill-temper," said Cardew, airily, "Punchin' a fellow's face doesn't make him good-tempered or obligin'. At least, it doesn't me. So I just kicked that key under the bench! Naughty, wasn't it?"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther looked at him very expressively. Manners shut his lips hard. Cardew smiled at all three.

"Well," said Tom, with a deep breath, "I needn't tell you what I think of such a rotten trick——."

"Not at all—I'll take the speech as read," said Cardew.

"So the key's under that bench now," said Manners, through his set lips.

"You get me, exactly," assented Cardew, with a cool nod.

"You rotter," said Manners.

"Thanks!"

"You worm!"

"Thanks again."

Manners clenched his hands. Cardew, with his hands in his pockets, smiled at him amiably. No one could have guessed, from his easy manner and careless face, the crash that was coming that day—the day that was to be his last at St. Jim's. Certainly Tom Merry and Co. did not dream of guessing it. The end had come—but the reckless scapegrace of St. Jim's was game. Nobody was going to see a sign of the black care that was eating into his heart.

"And why are you telling us now, after keeping it to yourself for two or three days?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, it's occurred to me that that key ought to be found," said Cardew, gravely, "It might be picked up by anybody, you know. Suppose it fell into unscrupulous hands?"

"What rot!" snapped Tom.

"Well, you never know," said Cardew, shaking his head, "There are black sheep in every flock. I've heard that Manners is hoardin' that tenner he got the other day——."

"You've heard nothing of the kind," said Manners, "I'm keepin' that ten-pound note for the holidays, and there's no secret about it. It's locked up in my desk."

"Exactly! And the key of the desk strewn about the school!" said Cardew, with another shake of the head, "It's not safe. Just

imagine some unscrupulous fellow comin' across it—some shady character who backs the geegees not wisely but too well! There are such fellows at St. Jim's."

"As you know better than anyone else," said Manners contemptuously.

"Quite!" assented Cardew. "Just think of some such bad character comin' across that key, and perhaps bein' badly in want of a tenner! Placin' temptation in his way, what?"

"Rot!" said Tom.

"Well, it might happen," drawled Cardew, "And as I was remarkin' to old Levison last evenin', facilis descensus Averno—such a shady character might fall for it. On the whole, it seems to me that the sooner you collect that key, Manners, the better. That's why I'm tellin' you about it."

"You're talking rot," said Tom, "But I'm glad you've told us, at any rate. Come on, you fellows—let's go and look."

And the "Terrible Three," turning their backs on Cardew, walked away, to search once more under the old elm, and this time to explore the dusky and dusty recesses under the old oaken bench.

Cardew watched them, with a sarcastic smile, as they went.

They were going to find that key now: and certainly they would never guess, or dream, the use to which it had been put while it was missing. He had told them the truth—that he had kicked it out of sight under the bench after the scrap on Saturday afternoon. They were not likely to surmise that he had used it since—twice! in the dark, in No. 10 Study: or that he had thrown it back under the bench during "break" that morning!

"That's that!" murmured Cardew.

He shrugged his shouders, and went slowly into the House. In the doorway he came on Levison and Clive, and paused to speak.

"Got a time-table, Levison, old bean?" he drawled.

"There's one in the study." Levison stared, "What the dickens do you want with a time-table?"

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"What does a fellow generally want with a time-table?" he queried, "Not for light readin' sittin' in a hammock! I've got to look out a train."

"Going somewhere?" asked Clive, puzzled.

"The object in takin' a train is generally to go somewhere. The fact is that as I haven't heard from my grandfather for so long, I'm goin' to pay a visit home—cuttin'-off right now."

"Oh!" said Levison, "And when will you be back?"

Cardew smiled.

"That's a bit uncertain," he said, "'Fraid I couldn't say." He gave his chums a nod, and went up the stairs.

In No. 9 Study with the door shut, he sorted out a time-table. Quietly and coolly he made a note of a train at Wayland Junction.

"No good stayin' over tiffin!" he murmured, "The knock's comin'—what's the good of waitin' for it? Bike to Wayland—and the train! What a surprise for them at home! Oh gad, what a fool—what a fool I've been."

He threw himself into a chair. He was not looking cool and unconcerned now. His face was harassed, almost drawn.

"Fool! Fool! What a finish! Better get out while the going's good—no use goin' up to the Head to be sacked! Will they sack a fellow after he's gone, I wonder, or leave it at that? I wonder if they'll miss me—Levison and old Clivey! Better this way—no good waitin' to be bunked! But—oh gad, what a priceless fool I've been!"

And, alone in the study, safe from observing eyes, he leaned his elbows on the table, and his face sank into his hands—utterly down and out!

UNEXPECTED!

Chapter XXXVIII

"Wharrer you want?" squeaked Baggy Trimble.

A podgy figure was sitting, or rather sprawling, on the old oaken bench under the elm, when Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther arrived there. That comfortable low seat under shady branches was rather a favourite spot with Baggy Trimble.

The fat Baggy, leaning back against the trunk behind the bench, with his little fat legs sprawling, was chewing toffee. His

fat fingers were sticky: and he turned a sticky face inquiringly towards the Shell fellows as they came up.

"Shift," said Manners, laconically.

Baggy gave him an indignant glare.

"There ain't room for the lot of you on this bench," he retorted, "And I was here first, wasn't I? Go somewhere else, can't you?"

"You fat ass, get out of the way," said Manners, impatiently, "I want to look under the seat."

"Wharrer you want to look under the seat for?" Baggy seemed disinclined to heave his plump person out of the way. "Look here——."

"Shift!" snapped Manners.

"We want to look for something that's lost, Trimble," said Tom Merry, "Get out of the way, fathead."

"We didn't boot him enough, yesterday," remarked Monty Lowther, "Let's give him a few more now."

"Here, you keep off!" exclaimed Baggy, in alarm. And promptly, though unwillingly, he lifted his fat person from the bench, and moved out of the way, still chewing toffee.

Manners dropped on his knees in front of the bench, and groped under it. Tom Merry and Lowther watched him, and Baggy Trimble blinked on curiously.

Manners' groping hand contacted a heap of fallen leaves that had blown into the dusky recess under the low wide seat, and there was a rustle as of paper as he groped. Something else, it seemed, had blown there, along with the dead leaves. Manners gave a grunt.

"Plenty of rubbish here, at any rate! I suppose the key's among it, if that grinning monkey wasn't pulling our leg."

He dragged out handfuls of dead leaves, among them an old stained envelope, and something that glistened in the sunshine.

"Oh!" he exclaimed.

It was a bright steel key! Manners pounced on it, and clutched it up. Cardew, evidently, had not been leg-pulling: it was the lost key. Manners was glad enough to have found it: but there was a frown on his brow.

"The rotter!" he muttered.

"Well, you've found it now, old chap," said Tom, soothingly.

"Dirty trick, kicking it under the bench, and leaving me hunt-

ing for it," growled Manners, "I've a jolly good mind to punch his head again."

"My dear man, thank goodness he tipped you where to find it," said Monty Lowther, "Now you won't have to leave those beastly films——."

"What?"

"I mean those precious films, all over the study——."

"Fathead!" was Manners' rejoinder to that. He slipped the key into his pocket.

"Better kick this rubbish back under the bench," said Tom.

"Hold on a minute," said Manners. He was glancing at the stained old envelope among the dead leaves, "That looks like a letter——."

"Only an old envelope blown in the wind," said Lowther. "Nothing in it, I suppose."

"Looks to me like a letter." Manners picked it up. "It's a letter—it's never been opened. Some ass must have dropped it about. That ass Cardew——."

"Cardew!" repeated Tom and Monty.

"It's Cardew's," said Manners, "Look!"

He held up the letter, and Tom and Monty Lowther looked at it. The envelope was damp and stained and smudged, from having lain among the dead leaves under the bench for a good many days. But it was unopened, and it was addressed to R. R. Cardew, School House, St. James's School Sussex, in a thin, delicate, rather shaky hand.

"Oh, crikey!" It was a sudden, startled ejaculation from Baggy Trimble. The Shell fellows glanced round at him.

Baggy was staring at the letter in Manners' hand with eyes that almost popped from his podgy face. He fairly goggled at it.

That letter was familiar to Boggy's eyes. Baggy had seen it before! Baggy had wondered what might have become of the letter that had slipped through the hole in the lining of his jacket. Now he knew!

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Baggy, "Under that bench all the time! Oh, scissors!"

"What do you know about it?" asked Manners.

"Oh! Nothing! I—I mean——."

"It's Cardew's," said Monty Lowther, "That's his grandfather's fist—I've seen it before. And he's never even opened it!" Lowther whistled.

"Must have dropped it when you were scrapping here on Saturday, just as you did your key," said Tom Merry.

Manners shook his head.

"The postmark's nearly a fortnight old," he said, "And if Cardew dropped it at that time, he would have seen it, as he saw my key that I dropped."

"How the dickens did it get here, then?"

"Perhaps Trimble knows," said Manners, drily, "He seems jolly interested in it, at any rate."

"Oh! No!" stammered Baggy, "I—I ain't interested at all. But I—I say, Manners, gimme that letter——."

"It's Cardew's."

"Oh! Yes! But—I—I say, I—I want to put it back in the rack for him, see? He—he—he'll find it there next time he looks——."

Baggy stretched out a fat sticky hand for the letter. That fat sticky paw was unheeded.

"Look here, will you gimme that letter?" yapped Trimble.

"No," answered Manners, "I won't! I shall take it to Cardew, as it's his."

"But I—I say, I—I want to stick it in the rack, urged Trimble, anxiously.

"You fat ass," said Tom Merry, "Cardew mayn't look in the rack again to-day—I saw him looking over the letters in break this morning——."

"Well, he'll look again to-morrow," urged Trimble, "That's all right! Better stick it in the rack, and——."

"Fathead!" said Tom, "What's the good of sticking it in the rack, instead of taking it to Cardew?"

"Well, if he found it in the rack, he would think it had just come, see? If—if he knew it was lying about, he—he might think that some fellow had taken it out of the rack, and—and lost it—and—and he would be jolly shirty about it."

"You fat villain!" roared Tom, "Did you take that letter and lose it?"

"Oh! No! Nothing of the sort! I've never seen it before, of course. But—but I think it had better be stuck up in the rack again! Gimme that letter, Manners."

"Kick him!" said Monty Lowther.

"Look here, you know! Yaroooh!" roared Baggy Trimble, "Wow! You kick me again, and I'll—yaroooop! Wooooh!"

Baggy Trimble dodged a lunging boot, and flew. Baggy was very anxious for that letter to be put back in the rack, for Cardew to find there the next time he looked for letters. Baggy

had quite forgotten the existence of that lost letter, in the days that had elapsed since he had lost it. But now that it had come to light at last, Baggy did not want the dandy of the Fourth to learn that some person unknown had abstracted that letter, and might guess who that person was! But there was no arguing dropped it about, over a week ago. It was possible that Cardew might guess who that person was! But there was no arguing with a lunging boot: and Baggy Trimble departed in haste, leaving the disputed letter in Manners' hand.

"Come on," said Tom. "I believe Cardew's been rather anxious about a letter from home. The sooner he gets that, the better."

"Serve him jolly well right to kick it under that bench and leave it there for two or three days, as he did with my key," grunted Manners.

"My dear chap——."

"Oh, don't be an ass—I'm not going to! Think I'd take a leaf out of his book? Come on, and let's get shut of it."

The three juniors looked for Cardew in the quad, but he was not to be seen there, and Manners went into the House. Levison and Clive were talking in the doorway, but Cardew was not with them.

"Seen Cardew, Levison?" asked Manners.

"Gone up to the study," answered Levison.

"O.K."

And Manners, with the lost letter, so strangely recovered, in his hand, went up to the Fourth-form studies, tapped at the door of No. 9, and opened it.

Chapter XXXIX

AT THE ELEVENTH ROUR!

"Cardew!" exclaimed Manners.

He stared into the study, startled.

Ralph Reckness Cardew was there. Manners stared at him blankly. Cardew was seated at the study table, on which his

elbows rested, his head sunk in his hands, his attitude one of utter and hopeless dejection—so deep and overwhelming, that evidently he had not heard the tap on the door, and was unaware that it had opened.

But as Manners spoke, he gave a start, and lifted his head. Manners, for a moment, stared at a white, almost haggard face, as Cardew looked round. The next moment, a flush of crimson came into the pale face, and Cardew leaped to his feet, his eyes glinting.

"You!" he snapped.

"Yes! I——."

"Get out!"

"But I——."

"Get out!" Cardew made a step towards the Shell fellow in the doorway, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing. He knew what Manners had seen, and it was the last bitter blow to his pride. "What do you want here? You've found your rotten key, I suppose."

"Yes, I've found it. And——."

"Get out, I tell you! Are you waiting for me to knock you through the doorway?" shouted Cardew.

"Don't be a fool, Cardew." Manners spoke very quietly. If ever a fellow had looked utterly down and out, Cardew had: and Manners, little as he liked him, could not help feeling an impluse of compassion, and even sympathy. It was plain to him that the scapegrace of St. Jim's was in very deep waters. "Keep your temper! I've come to bring you a letter——."

"A letter? There's no letter for me—I looked, in break—what do you mean, you fool?"

"Here it is!"

Manners held up the letter. Cardew stared at it.

"I picked it up," said Manners, "It was under that bench under the elm—we found it when we found my key there—somebody must have taken it from the rack, and dropped it about——."

"Oh!" gasped Cardew.

"If you hadn't told me where to find my key, we should never have found it. Here you are."

Cardew took the letter in a shaking hand. He gave it a dizzy glance, and recognized the hand-writing on the envelope. Heedless of Manners, he tore it open. From the letter inside, as he

unfolded it, a strip of paper dropped. He caught it, and stared at it.

"Oh!" he panted.

Manners quietly drew the door shut, and walked away. Cardew did not heed him: he seemed to have forgotten his existence.

He stood with the letter in his hand, staring at it.

The date on it was more than a week old. It was the letter from his grandfather, old Lord Reckness, for which he had waited so long and so anxiously: and of which he had given up hope. And it had been at the school all the time—some fool, some blockhead, had taken it from the rack, and dropped it about. And Manners had found it!

Manners, the fellow of whom he had chosen to make an enemy, the mark of his jeers and mockery—Manners had saved him, at the last moment.

For he was saved.

An hour more, and he would have been in the train, quitting the school from which he could only expect to be expelled if he remained—going while the going was good! And now—he was saved! Manners had found that lost letter, and, instead of acting as Cardew had done had brought it to him at once——.

"Oh!" breathed Cardew.

His eyes were blurred, as he read the letter. It was kind and indulgent, as he had always expected from the kind old man. There were a few gentle words on the subject of extravagance: but the old Lord had done as he had asked—more indeed than he had ventured to ask. For the strip of paper in the letter was a cheque—an open cheque for twenty pounds! He had only to walk across to Wayland to the bank——!

He was almost giddy with the relief.

It was not, after all, his last day at St. Jim's. He could settle with Lodgey now, and once free of him, he would have sense enough to keep clear of him. He was fed up with "gees": fed up to the back teeth! Back into his mind came the remembrance of No. 10 Study, in the dark—of what he had so nearly done! He shivered. Facilis descensus Averno——.

But he had stopped, on the edge of the abyss. And now——.

The time-table caught his eye, lying open where he had looked ata it. He laughed. He would not want that train now! No train home—he would go into form that afternoon, as usual: the dusky old form-room he had never expected to enter again—

and no one would ever know of his narrow escape: no one but himself, and it would remain in his memory as a lesson and a warning. And cricket—he would be able to think of the cricket again now—but no more rivalry with old Manners—that old sobersides who had saved him at the eleventh hour!

He put the letter and the cheque into his pocket, at last, and left the study. He had gone to the study with a heart like lead. He left it like one walking on air.

On the study landing, he passed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's glanced at him.

"Bai Jove! You're lookin' feahfully bucked, Cardew," he said.

"That's how I'm feelin', old top," said Cardew. He chuckled, "'Member that good advice you gave me in my study the other day?"

Arthur Augustus frowned slightly. He remembered the good advice: he also remembered the sticky chair in which he had sat, and the dire damage to his trousers.

"Weally, Cardew——," he began.

"I've been thinkin' over it," said Cardew, gravely, "And I'm goin' to act upon it, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"Bai Jove! I am vewy glad to heah it, Cardew," he said, cordially, "That is vewy good news. Always come to me for

"I will—when I want it," assented Cardew.

advice, deah boy, when you want it."

He strolled down the staircase, and met Levison and Clive coming up. They eyed him curiously.

"You look on top of the world," said Levison.

Cardew laughed.

"Just where I am," he answered.

"Found that train?" asked Clive.

"That train? Oh, I shan't want that train, after all. I've changed my mind."

"You're a fellow for changing your mind, aren't you?" said Clive, rather drily.

"That's my way—pretty Fanny's way, you know," said Cardew, lightly, "I'm goin' for a run on my bike after tiffin, instead. Over to Wayland. Like to cut class, and come? It will make us an hour late for Lathom. Coming?"

"No!" said Levison and Clive together.

"Then I shall have to go on my lonely own," sighed Cardew,

"Lathom will be shirty, I suppose, and give me lines! What a life!"

"Look here, don't be an ass," said Clive, "What the dickens do you want to go over to Wayland for?"

"Just must."

"Well, why?" asked Levison.

"Oh, I've got to call on my banker," said Cardew, airily.

"Don't be an ass."

"Can't help it, old bean—asses are like poets, born, not made! Seen Manners about?"

"He went out into the quad! For goodness sake, don't start ragging Manners again."

"Dear man! I'm not goin' to rag him! I'm goin' to kiss him on his baby brow!"

"Fathead!"

Cardew laughed, and went down the stairs. In the quad he found Manners of the Shell, and tapped him on the arm. Manners looked round.

"Thanks," said Cardew.

Manners nodded. And he stared a little. Cardew's face was very unlike the face he had seen in No. 9 Study.

"And thanks again," said Cardew, "You're a decent sort, Manners, old man. I'm sorry for a lot of things."

"You've a lot to be sorry for," said Manners, drily.

"Oh, quite! I've been rather a beast, haven't I?"

"You have!"

"I'm goin' to try to be not quite so beastly! And—I'm really sorry! Honest Injun!"

And Cardew walked on before Manners could reply, leaving the Shell fellow staring.

Harry Manners was in the St. Jim's junior eleven, when Tom Merry and Co. played Greyfriars School the following week. Manners was in, and Cardew was out—as the result of what had happened at Carcroft.

But, to the surprise of his friends, and a good many other fellows, Cardew did not seem to mind.

He was keen enough on cricket: and for the present, at least, "gees" were no longer in his thoughts, and he devoted himself

to the summer game instead of the elusive task of spotting winners. And the Greyfriars match was the biggest in the list, in which every junior cricketer at St. Jim's was eager to shine. Nevertheless, when Cardew read Manners' name in the list posted up before the match, he did not make a single one of the remarks naturally expected from him. Instead of a sarcastic smile, or a jeer, or a gibe, he strolled over to Manners, smacked him on the shoulder, and said, amicably:

"Gratters, old bean!"

"Thanks," said Manners. And for once there was a cordial note in his voice as he spoke to the Scapegrace of St. Jim's.

THE END