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## GORDON GAY'S COMPANY

BY  
P. M. GAY  
EDWARD



### A COMPLETE STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE

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"THE EMPIRE LIBRARY" NEXT WEEK: "GORDON GAY'S  
NEW PART."

# THE EMPIRE LIBRARY

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## Gordon Gay's Company

A Tale of  
Rylcombe  
Grammar School.

By PROSPER HOWARD.

### CHAPTER I.

#### Introducing Gordon Gay.

"I'M going to start a proper theatrical company!"  
The curly-haired, sunny-faced boy who was sitting on the edge of the table in the Fourth-Form common-room at Rylcombe Grammar School swung his legs and looked intensely earnest as he made this momentous announcement.

The buzz of talk in the common-room ceased suddenly.  
"Eh? What's that, Gay?"

A pleasant-looking, rather lanky fellow, seemingly a year or so older than the first speaker, looked up and put the query.

Gordon Gay looked at him and smiled.

"I say, I'm going to start a proper theatrical company, Monk!"

There was a moment's silence as the eyes of the entire common-room were turned on the speaker in a stare which might have abashed a statue, but did not seem to have the slightest effect on its cheerful objective.

"You're going to what?" inquired Frank Monk at last, in measured accents.

Gordon Gay laughed in the light-hearted fashion that was peculiarly his own.

"You heard what I said; I'm going to start a proper theatrical company of my own, and make this dull old place wake up a bit!"

There was a general sort of gasp in the common-room at this calm assertion.

Frank Monk himself seemed hardly able to believe his ears.

For Gordon Gay had been at Rylcombe Grammar School but three short weeks, and by the unwritten law of schools should have been content to be seen and not heard in his Form until at least half term. But not so Gordon Gay.

From the day of his arrival he had taken an active part in the affairs of the Fourth Form, in spite of the disapproving attitude of his elders in the Form, and, as they considered themselves, his betters.

His audacity was attributable partly to the fact that Gordon was an Australian boy, fresh from the land of his birth, whence he had arrived in England for the first time but a few weeks ago.

February 19th, 1910.

GREETINGS  
to all  
SONS AND  
DAUGHTERS  
of the  
EMPIRE.

Editor, E.L.

After a short stay in London, he had been sent off to the Grammar School, where Dr. Monk, the headmaster, found that his education had been so far attended to in Australia that he had been able to put him into the Fourth Form at once. Gordon had quickly adapted himself to his new surroundings, and in the three short weeks during which the Fourth Form had known him when this story opens, he had left them in a constant state of uncertainty as to what he would be up to next.

His elaborate schemes, mostly in the form of weird and startling experiments in aid of the various school funds, had caused the Fourth considerable uneasiness, owing to the amount of comment and criticism, not unaccompanied with ridicule, they had attracted from other Forms.

But his latest announcement, with which this chapter opens, struck them as almost reaching the limit; while the avowed object of it "to make this dull old place wake up a bit" coming as it did from a "new kid," fairly made the Fourth gasp.

Dull old place!

Why, was it not the first duty of every Grammarian, from the head of the Sixth down to the smallest frog, to maintain by word and deed that the Grammar School was the finest school in England or the world—at any rate, in public?

Privately, there might sometimes be a grumble or two about some small matter among the old, and therefore privileged, stagers.

But for a new boy to publicly designate the school a "dull old place" was unheard of, and the Fourth felt that such things must not be.

That is why there was a curious expression on Frank Monk's face as he looked from the bland face of Gordon Gay to the group of his horrified Form-fellows.

"What's up with you chaps?" asked Gordon cheerfully, swinging his legs to quicker time as he noticed the shocked expression of the Fourth-Formers. "Don't you like my idea?"

Frank Monk, who was the recognised leader of the Form, gave a gulp of indignation, and then felt inclined to laugh.

Gordon's "nerve" was so amazing for a new boy that he felt quite taken aback.

Also, he had already learned that the sunny irresponsibility of Gordon Gay's nature had a fascination peculiarly hard to resist.

His name fitted him to a T.

His whole temperament was so unaffectedly gay that no one could be angry or annoyed with him for long.

But Frank Monk was a great stickler for etiquette, and he pulled himself together.

As Form captain it was up to him to teach Master Gay his place—or try to.

He frowned portentously.

"We think your idea is a blessed rotten one," he said deliberately. "And, besides—"

"You mean you do," put in Gordon, in nowise abashed by this candid criticism of his idea.

Monk frowned again.

"I mean we all do," he said with emphasis, looking round at his Form-fellows.

A growl of assent went up.

"And, what's more, we think it's like your check—"

began a tall, rather aristocratic-looking youth.

But Gordon Gay interrupted again.

"It's jolly nice of you to say so, Van-boy," he said sweetly. "I thank so, too."

The aristocratic-looking youth turned red, and a subdued chuckle ran round the common-room. The aristocratic one's name was Carboy—and very proud of his name he was.

It was, as he was always ready to inform anyone who would listen, one of the oldest names in England, and Carboy did not appreciate Gordon Gay's version of it at all.

The Form, knowing it, chuckled. They could not help it. Carboy glowered round the common room, and the chuckle subsided.

"Look here—" he began angrily.

"Certainly!" said Gordon Gay blandly.

Carboy chuckled.

The chuckle broke out afresh.

Frank Monk came to his chum's rescue hastily.

"Look here, Gay—"

Gordon looked at him with a twinkle in his blue eyes, but Monk went on hastily before he could be interrupted.

"We think your idea's absolutely rotten, all of us, but that's not the point."

"The point's the thing!" murmured Gordon, as Monk paused for breath before going on.

"The point is, that for a new kid to call the Grammar School a 'dull old place' is beastly, blessed cheek," continued Monk warmly—"beastly, blessed cheek, that's what it is! And we're not going to stand it!"

Gordon Gay glanced expressively at a form—a glance that spoke for itself.

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"GORDON GAY'S NEW PART."

which was not lost on the common-room—but said he had only listened, with an air of resignation, to Frank Monk's glowing indignation.

The serious air of the Form leader did not seem to impress the lad from Australia. He glanced calmly at Monk as the latter was clearing his throat preparatory to uttering his wily remark.

"Well, and what are you going to do about it, Monkey?" he asked encouragingly.

Frank Monk gave a gasp like escaping steam.

But as quickly recovered himself. He was a born leader, and although, as he confided to Carboy afterwards, he felt like having a fit on the spot, he saw that the only thing to do was to meet Gordon Gay with his own weapons, as it were.

So he controlled himself with an effort, and turned to his Form-fellows with an assumption of carelessness.

"Do we know what we are going to do about it, chaps?" he asked.

Instantly there was a yell.

"Yeh!"

"We do!"

"Bump him!"

A rush was made towards the table, but Gordon Gay was too quick.

He was, fortunately for him, nearer to the door than anyone else in the room. He was also on the alert, though he did not look it. He stopped the careless swinging of his legs, and with one bound was out of the common-room, banging the door to after him.

There was a shout from the Fourth.

"After him!"

"Seize the rotter!"

"Stop the villain!"

Frank Monk reached the door first of the pursuers.

With a wrench he dragged it open, and flung it back on its hinges, catching Carboy, who was just behind him, a terrific crack with it, and sending him flying.

There was a howl of anguish from Carboy as he went down; but Monk, in his excitement, paid no heed.

The next instant, however, Carboy's lamentations were completely drowned by the terrific uproar which burst forth.

After he had slammed the door to, Gordon Gay had just had time to hurl one of the passage chairs upside down in the doorway, in the hope of its impeding the pursuers somewhat.

And his hope was fully justified.

Impelled by his own eagerness and the rush of junk behind him, Frank Monk crashed straight into the upper chair, and went flying, and in a few seconds the door of the Fourth-Form common-room was chock-a-block with a weight mass of struggling, yelling juniors.

Gordon Gay, as he fled down the passage, heard a turned behind him, and guessed what had happened.

And Gordon Gay chuckled!

## CHAPTER 2.

## The Gordon Gay Company.

GORDON GAY chuckled as he slackened his speed, and proceeded down the passage at a more sober rate.

Judging by the row that came from the Fourth-Form common-room, he guessed that he was safe for a time at least.

"Help!"

"Ow!"

"I'm being squashed!"

"Yow-wow!"

"Lemme zerrup!"

These and many kindred exclamations were wailed down the passage with the greatest distinctness, which was surprising considering how much youthful lung-power was used in uttering them.

"I shouldn't be surprised if these noisy chaps are pushing someone," murmured Gordon Gay to himself, as he strolled along.

Nor was he mistaken.

Half-way down the stairs leading to the lower of the two where the Sixth-Form studies were situated, Gordon Lawson, the captain of the school, coming upstairs at the time, looking very wrathful, and clenching his fists in a businesslike grip.

Gordon glanced at him innocently.

"What on earth is that infernal row, Gay?" he asked Lawson.

"Has the roof fallen in, or what?"

"Row, Lawson!" said Gordon, with a slightly puzzled expression.

"Did you say row?"

"Yes, row—din—shanty!" roared Lawson.

"What a dinkens is that ghastly noise, you young ass?"

Lawson came to a standstill, and put out a hand to

Gordon by the shoulder. But the nimble Australian dodged past him down the stairs—  
"I—I think I do hear something, Lawson," he acknowledged mockly, when at a safe distance below the intruder. "I think it's the Fourth, Lawson!"

Lawson stared, and seemed uncertain whether to make a dash at the mysterious Gordon or not. Finally, however, with a snort and a muttered "cheeky young sweep!" the captain turned and strode on upstairs, wishing his cane viciously as he went.

Gordon Gay chuckled, and continued his leisurely way downstairs. And when he heard the shouts and yells behind him change into a shriller note, and then subside perceptibly, he chuckled again.

He could imagine the effect that Lawson and his cane would have on the struggling mass of juniors wedged in the common-room doorway.

And the thought seemed to amuse him.  
"I'd better keep clear of the common-room for a bit," he murmured to himself. "They may be a little huffy with me after this. I think I'll go along to the study."

He turned his steps towards the back staircase by which he could regain the Fourth-Form passage, and slipped into his study unobserved.

The Fourth-Formers at the Grammar School were allowed to have studies, three or four in each. They also shared a common-room with the Fifth.

The latter Form, however, considered it rather infra dig. to use the common-room, so that the Fourth usually had it to themselves.

For the present, Gordon Gay was sharing a study at the end of the passage, No. 13, with one other junior—a youth named Tadpole.

It was generally understood that the next new boy that came to the Grammar School would be put in with them; otherwise, the idea of a new fellow sharing a study with one other fellow only would have caused great indignation in the Form.

Tadpole was in the study when Gordon Gay slipped in. Tadpole was a remarkable youth in many ways. Many of the Fourth-Formers openly declared that they would not be in the same study as Tadpole for untold gold. But this was no doubt an exaggeration.

Nevertheless, Horace Tadpole was certainly peculiar. So much could at once be read from his appearance. He was a thin, scraggy youth of about fifteen, with long, straight hair and a very long nose. He was imbued with the idea that he was a great artist, and wherever he went he was always accompanied by an immense sketch-book, which he carried clutched tightly under his arm.

In pursuance of this idea he wore a huge bow tie. But it was as an arguer that Horace Tadpole was chiefly notorious. He would, as the Fourth put it, "argue the hind leg off a donkey."

There was, in fact, nothing that he was not prepared to argue about, anywhere or at any time.

Consequently, he was generally avoided as a fearful bore. But with all this, Tadpole was the most good-natured and simple of fellows.

He was always ready to lend a helping hand, at his own or anyone else's expense, to anyone in distress, and as a champion of the oppressed, or those whom he imagined, often quite wrongly, to be oppressed, he was positively in his element.

Consequently no one could possibly dislike him, and he was usually treated by his fellow-Grammarians with a good-natured tolerance.

When Gordon Gay quietly entered his study, Tadpole was seated at the table with his back to the study door, deeply engaged in some evidently absorbing task.

He did not turn round as Gordon came in, and the latter grinned as he noticed that he had evidently not been heard.

He tipped up to the absorbed figure, and glanced over its shoulder.

He watched for a moment, grinning silently. Tadpole, as Gordon had expected, was sketching. Against the wall underneath the window the enthusiastic artist had arranged a kind of trophy consisting of a muddy football, a pair of equally muddy football-boots, a dilapidated hockey-stick, and an old cricket-bat. These beautiful objects, all of which belonged to Gordon Gay, he was busy depicting in his enormous sketch-book.

At the foot of the page was the touching legend:  
"Well-tried Friends!"

As Gordon Gay's eyes fell on this last artistic touch he could contain himself no longer.

He burst into a roar right in Tadpole's ear, at the same time giving the amateur artist a terrific slap on the back.

The effect of the roar and the slap together was electrical.

Tadpole gave a smothered yell, and leapt up in the air with a start so violent that his chair went flying over backwards, and his pencil scored a jagged line right across his valuable drawing.

"Ow! Help! Good gracious!" he gasped.  
"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Gordon.

"Good gracious! What on earth was that?"  
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon again. "It's all right, Taddy! It's only me!"

Tadpole stared at the convulsed Gordon Gay, gazing in helpless bewilderment.

The amateur artist did not seem to know for the moment whether he was on his head or his heels.

"I—er—really I—I was very much startled," he gasped.  
"Really, Gay—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You seemed to be a bit," grinned Gordon.  
"Yes, indeed, Gay! And I regard it as extremely idiotic and reprehensible on your part to censure me to be so startled."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I regard you as an ass, Gay!"  
"And I think you're a dummy, Taddy!"

"I was engaged in making a sketch which would undoubtedly have turned out to be a real work of art."  
"Work of what?" shrieked Gordon.

"I say that the sketch would without doubt have turned out to be a real work of art," repeated Tadpole severely.  
"I regard you as an irresponsible ass to interrupt me as you did! The sketch is ruined!"

"Rats! It's as good as it was before, Taddy!"  
"Nonsense, Gay! Look at that great jagged line running right across it."

Gay glanced critically at the sketch.  
"Didn't you make that on purpose, Taddy?" he asked gravely.

Tadpole gave him an indignant glance.  
"Of course not, you ass! You made me do that when you startled me. You've ruined the sketch!"

Gordon looked again at the sketch, which was an extremely bad one.  
"Can't you rub the line out, Taddy?"

"Certainly not! At least, the sketch would never look the same. You would rub a lot of the drawing out with the line."

"Would that matter much?" asked Gordon innocently.  
"Of course!" replied the artist indignantly. "Anyone can tell you're not artistic, Gay. I tell you the drawing's ruined."

"Well, it doesn't matter much, anyway," said Gordon consolingly.

"Doesn't matter!" almost shrieked the amateur artist.  
"Why, you ass, I've taken an hour and a half over that sketch! I should have had it finished in another couple of hours probably. And it would have been a masterpiece, too, I'm convinced. I should probably have made my name over that sketch."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon Gay. "Why, you can hardly tell what the thing's supposed to be, anyway!"

"Why, you inartistic ass!" exclaimed the indignant artist, snatching the precious sketch up and blinking at it in the light; for Tadpole was somewhat short-sighted, and had a habit of constantly blinking, though he did not wear spectacles. "What do you mean, you—you fearful Philistine?"

"Why, look at this thing, for instance!" grinned Gordon, pointing with his forefinger over Tadpole's shoulder.

"That's meant to be the hockey-stick, I suppose. It doesn't look a bit like a hockey-stick."  
"Really, Gay, do not be absurd! That is a hockey-stick to the life!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Why, you duffer, it looks more like a cricket-bat than a hockey-stick!"

A flash of triumph came into Tadpole's eyes.  
He peered at the sketch more closely.

"On second thoughts, Gay," he said, "I think that you are right. That is the cricket-bat, and not the hockey-stick at all."

"Then what's this?" shrieked Gordon, almost hysterical with laughter. "What's this, you shrieking dummy, if that other thing's the cricket-bat?"

Tadpole stared at the object Gordon was pointing to for a minute or so.

"I—I suppose that must be the hockey-stick," he said at length, rather feebly.

Gordon Gay gave a roar.  
"That a hockey-stick, you—you duffer! Why—"

But Tadpole could stand it no longer. He glared at the hilarious Gordon, and snapped the huge sketch-book shut.

"I regard you as an inartistic ass, Gay," he remarked, in freezing tones; "and I object to my sketches being criticised by inartistic asses!"

Gordon Gay wiped his eyes, and shook a warning forefinger at the offended Tadpole.

"You must be careful, you know, Taddy, and you sharing the same study with me, too. You'll be the death of me one day. I know you will."

Tadpole sniffed.

"Really, Gay, I refuse to remain in the company of such an absurd and inartistic person."

And giving the sketch-book under his arm a hitch, Tadpole walked towards the study door with an air of offended dignity.

But Gordon Gay ran after him, and grasping him by the shoulder, spun him round before he could reach the door.

"Steady on a minute, Taddy, old chap," he said cheerfully. "Don't go. I want to speak to you."

Tadpole gazed as he was whisked round, and his large sketch-book almost slipped from his grasp.

"Really, Gay—" he began indignantly.

Gordon grinned cheerfully.

"That's all right, Taddy," he interrupted. "Don't begin again, for goodness' sake! Sit down here and listen to me a moment."

He righted the chair which Tadpole had overturned when he had been started from his sketching, and dumped the amateur artist down into it.

Tadpole sat there obediently, looking rather dazed, while Gordon Gay seated himself on the table opposite him.

"Now, look here, Taddy," he began; "as I announced a little time ago in the common room, I'm going to start a proper theatrical company."

Tadpole opened his eyes in astonishment.

"A— a theatrical company?"

"Yes, a theatrical company!" repeated Gordon, rather impatiently.

"Start a theatrical company—you!" said Tadpole incredulously.

Gordon Gay gave a snort.

"Yes, me, and! Why not?"

Tadpole blinked at him.

"Nonsense, Gay! You require to be artistic to start a theatrical company. Your idea is ridiculous."

Gordon Gay looked indignant, and for a second a dangerous gleam came into his usually laughing eyes.

But it was only for a second. The next minute he burst into a cheery laugh.

"Well, all right, Taddy, you differ, we won't argue about it at present! But the fact remains that I'm going to start a company—Gordon Gay's Theatrical Company—and what I want to ask of you is, will you join it?"

Tadpole considered a moment.

"I presume you would want me to manage the scheme for you?" he said hesitantly. "It would naturally require a person of unusual—I might almost say phenomenal—artistic talents to manage a theatrical company."

Gordon Gay coughed.

"Yes, of course, but—"

"Well?"

"You—you see, Taddy—"

Tadpole looked at him with an air of mild surprise.

"You surely do not mean that you don't wish me to manage the company for you, Gay?"

Gordon coughed again.

"It's—it's awfully good of you, Taddy, and all that," he said, "but the truth is that I've already decided that someone else shall be the manager."

Tadpole frowned slightly.

"Ah, that is awkward, Gay! Still, I have no doubt that if you explained to him that it was I who was to take his place, he would have no objection to standing down."

Gordon Gay grinned slightly.

"But that's just it, you see, Taddy. The chap won't stand down under any circumstances. He is determined to manage the company himself."

"Dear, dear! I am sorry to hear that. And who is this obstinate and doubtless inartistic person who has such an inflated idea of his own capabilities?"

Gordon coughed behind his hand.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it—it's—"

"Yes?"

"Well, it's—"

"—Yes! Go on, Gay. Do not hesitate to tell me the name of this stupid and ignorant person. I will endeavour to curb my criticisms of the cross blunders he will doubtless make in his laughable attempts to manage the company."

"Why, you—you see!" shouted Gordon Gay. "It's myself! Do you think I'm going to allow anyone else to manage my company?"

"Really, Gay—"

"I'm jolly well going to manage my own company myself, Taddy, so don't you make any mistake about that!"

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For the Empire

"I regard you as an unrepentable person, Gay!"

"Rats! Now, will you join my company, Taddy?"

"In the position of manager, I—"

"Oh, ring off about that, Taddy! I tell you I'm going to be manager. Will you join the company as one of the actors, or not?"

"Well," said Tadpole, with an air of resignation, "I suppose I'd better. You are sure to call me in as manager sooner or later, when you have made a hash of the whole affair—that's one comfort!"

"Good!" said Gordon Gay heartily. "I hope it will comfort you then, Taddy. Now for the rest of the company. Who else do you suggest?"

Tadpole considered carefully.

"Well, there's O'Donnell and Morgan and Donaldson. They have always appeared to me to be fairly intelligent through lamentably inartistic."

"Good! They'll do fine! I'll just go along and see if they're in their study now, at once. Coming?"

"I will accompany you if you like, Gay," replied Tadpole promptly.

"Then come on!"

## CHAPTER 3.

Frank Monk &amp; Co. Decline.

GORDON GAY and Tadpole went along the passage together to the other end, and the former tapped lightly at the door of No. 2, where Morgan the Welsh lad, Nelsy O'Donnell the Irish lad, and Donald Donaldson, the lad from Scotland, dwell together in more or less amity.

The Co. in Study 2 was generally referred to as the Triple Alliance, and the juniors which comprised it were three of the soundest and best fellows at the Grammar School, and among the finest of the junior athletes.

Gordon Gay tapped at the door, and there was a peep from within.

"Come in!"

The Australian opened the door and marched coolly in, followed by Tadpole.

The owners of the study stared at Gordon Gay pointedly.

They had been in the squash in the common-room door just before, and they were then busy writing out the lines which the inconstant Lawson had dashed out, together with penance down of his cane, to the disturbers of the peace of the great and reverend signors of the Sixth Form passage.

Gordon Gay, however, met their stony stares with the most cheerful countenance.

"Doing lines, you fellows?" he remarked carelessly. "Sorry to interrupt you, but I want to ask you something. It won't take a minute!"

The stony stares relaxed somewhat under Gordon's old cheerfulness. Few people were able to resist the charm of Gordon's frank manner.

"Well, and what do you want?" asked Morgan, rather ungraciously however.

Gordon calmly dumped down into the one and only empty chair the study boasted of, and proceeded to explain—

regarding the fact that the Triple Alliance had been present in the common-room when he had first announced his grand idea.

Gordon had a silver tongue, and his persuasive eloquence added to the natural charm of his manner, generally proved irresistible.

In five minutes Donaldson cut short his stream of eloquence with a wave of his hand.

"Ye can clear out, laddie. We're busy the noo. We join you," was his dry remark. And Morgan and Nelsy O'Donnell—no mean talker himself the latter—nodded their heads in assent.

That was all Gordon Gay wanted.

"Good! You're booked!" he said brightly. "We'll meet in the Fourth Form room directly after tea. It'll be easy then. Come on, Taddy. So-long!"

And he marched out of the study, followed by Tadpole who had not been able to get in one word during the whole time he had been in No. 2 study.

"I think we'll tackle Monk & Co. next. What do you say?" said Gordon lighly, when they had regained the passage.

"Very well, Gay."

"They'll be in the common room, then, I expect—the study's empty. Come on!"

And he marched boldly into the common-room, with Tadpole drifting after him like a shadow.

Frank Monk & Co. were in the common-room, with every other of the Fourth.

NEXT WEEK: "GORDON GAY'S NEW PART."

There was a general exclamation as Gordon Gay entered.

"Here he is!"

"Don't let him escape again!"

"Collar the bounder!"

"Seize him!"

Gordon Gay held up his hand in his best theatrical manner.

"Peace, friends!" he exclaimed solemnly. "Peace! In

other words, pax!"

"Oh, rats to pax!" said Frank Monk, stepping forward.

"You're just the man we're looking for! What do you

mean by—"

"Will you join my theatrical company?"

Gordon Gay saw that he might be in for trouble, so he thought he would spring the question on Monk as soon as possible. For a moment Monk was too taken aback to say or do anything. Gordon Gay saw this and endeavoured to press home his advantage.

"Do," he said persuasively. "The Triple Alliance have

joined, and—"

But Monk was not long in recovering himself.

"Join your theatrical company?" he roared. "No, we

won't, you cheeky bounder! Here, Lane—"

"Hallo!"

"Carboy—"

"Eh?"

"Bump him!"

"What-ho!"

Lane and Carboy sprang to their leader's side, and the

three grasped hold of the audacious Gordon.

He struggled furiously, but he had no chance against the

three sturdy chums.

"Bump him!"

"What-ho!"

Gordon Gay went to the floor with a heavy bump, send-

ing the dust in clouds up from the floor.

"Ow!"

"Another one!"

"Right-ho!"

Bump!

"Ow! Wow!"

"Another one!" grinned Monk.

But Gordon Gay had had enough. He began to struggle

so furiously that the three chums laughingly let go of him,

and he rolled on the floor in a state of great heat and

dust.

"Ow! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Monk & Co.

"Wow! You rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Monk & Co., still chuckling, strolled out of the

common-room, leaving Gordon Gay to stagger to his feet

in a great state of indignation.

"The—the rotters!" he growled, dusting himself down as

best he could with his handkerchief. "The—the bounders!"

"I certainly regard their proceedings as having been

unnecessarily rough," assented Tadpole, blinking at

Gordon. "However, there is no harm done."

Gordon Gay glared.

"No harm done, you say! I'm hurt!"

"Really Gay—"

Gordon Gay burst into a laugh.

"Oh, well, there isn't much harm done after all, though I

Now, you claps!"—he turned to the grinning Fourth-

Formers who still remained in the common-room—who's

going to join my theatrical company!"

A tall, fair-haired junior, with a good-looking but weak

face, looked across at Gordon Gay, and laughed.

"Well, you are a persistent chap, Gay, I must say!" he

exclaimed. "Blessed if I don't feel inclined to join your

old company myself!"

"Good idea, Carpenter!" said a dark boy with a rather

unpleasant face.

"We all three might," added a third junior, whose sallow

countenance was still more unprepossessing than the dark

boy's.

"Right ho, man! We will!" said the junior who had

been addressed as Carpenter, exchanging a peculiar look

with the other two speakers who were his cronies. "It'll be

rather fine, I should think."

Two or three others in the room expressed their willing-

ness to join, and Gordon Gay seemed satisfied.

He had his doubts about Carpenter and his cronies, but

he did not like to say so.

He noticed, however, that Tadpole was blinking rather

doubtfully at the same three.

He hesitated a minute, but finally turned towards the

door of the common-room with the air of one who had made

up his mind.

"All those who have joined please turn up at the Fourth-

Form classroom directly after tea," he called over his

shoulder. "Only members admitted, of course."

## CHAPTER 4.

## A Disunion.

NO sooner was tea over than the chosen few who had volunteered for Gordon Gay's company assembled in the big, empty Fourth-Form classroom, as arranged.

Gordon Gay ordered the door to be locked, and he was just looking over his company to see that they were all present, when there was a loud knock on the door.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, with a grin. "That'll be Taddy!"

The door of the Fourth-Form classroom rattled violently, and Snipe jumped from the desk he was sitting upon.

"I'll let him in," he said.

Gordon Gay nodded, and the juniors, standing in a small knot round him, stared to the door, as some impatient person in the passage without continued the rattling.

"Come in, see!"

Snipe turned the key, and opened the door just wide enough to permit Tadpole and his sketchbook to squeeze through.

"Hallo, Taddy!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "We've been waiting for—"

Tadpole blinked at the juniors.

"I'm a bit late, I know," he interrupted, "but it stands

to reason—"

"Don't start making excuses, you duffer!" laughed

Gordon Gay. "You chaps must down and then we can get

to business."

"I was only just going to say that it stands—"

"Oh, shut up, Taddy!"

"Sure, and come and sit down!" said Nicky O'Donnell,

catching hold of Tadpole's arm, and leading him to a desk.

The juniors sat down in the front row of desks and looked at Gordon Gay expectantly, as the originator of the theatrical "whereas" took his place on the Fortinbras's table.

Gordon Gay frowned as he ran his fingers through his curly hair.

"It's like this," he said, after a pause, "if we're going to have a proper theatrical company, what kind of play ought we to have?"

Snipe mused.

"I remember three or four terms ago, Monk—"

"Phew!"

Gordon Gay blew out his cheeks with a look of astonishment on his handsome face, and Snipe wriggled uncomfortably.

"Hamlet's only 'bat!" gasped Gordon Gay.

The juniors grinned.

"What's up, instead!"

Gordon Gay stared at Larking, and then at each of the juniors in turn.

"Why, Frank Monk, of course," he said at last. "Isn't it funny no hasn't come along? I know he said he wouldn't, but he meant to."

"That's just what I was going to explain to you," said Tadpole. "I was going to say that it only stands to reason if Monk and Carboy stopped me in the passage and inquired—"

"Hallo!" interrupted Carpenter. "That's Monk & Co's trap!"

There was a shuffling of feet in the passage, and the next

moment there was a violent thump on the classroom door.

Bang!

"S-s-s-s-s-s!" whispered Gordon Gay.

Bang! Thump! Bang!

"Oh, shut up!"

"Is that you, Gay?" came Frank Monk's voice from the

passage.

"Yes," shouted Gordon Gay, "and shut up, making that

chindy, or there'll be someone along!"

"Right ho, kid, open the door!"

"Can't, we haven't finished yet!"

"Don't suppose you have, my son. I told Taddy to tell you—"

"Oh, go away!" interrupted Gordon Gay.

There was a muttering of voices on the other side of the door, and then a partly-suppressed laugh.

The juniors in the classroom waited.

"Gay!"

"Hallo! What is it?"

"Are you going to let Carboy, Lane and myself in?"

"You're too late, old son!"

"Thank you, we shan't miss much! Ta-ta!"

Gordon Gay exchanged a significant glance with the juniors before him, and then smiled at Monk & Co's feet

steps dead away.

"Good! Now we'll get on with the business."

"Rather!"

Daval Morgan, the Welsh junior of the Fourth Form, jumped to his feet excitedly.

"I have an idea, whatever!" he said  
"Let's have it, then, Taffy."  
Gordon Gay drew out a notebook, and waited for Morgan  
to commence.

"Go on, Taffy," he said, after a pause, "get it off your  
chest?"

"It's a Welsh opera instead of a beastly play!"

"An opera!"

"Yes, it's composed by a miner, and I've got the score in  
my study. Shall—"

"Ah!"  
Gordon Gay snapped the notebook to, and glared at the  
Welsh junior.

"Fatehead!" he added. "D'you think we're going to  
have a lot of screaming! Fancy Snipe and Teddy at the  
rehearsal! We should probably get expelled, and—"

"Really, Gay," interrupted Tadpole. "I think there is  
something in Taffy's idea. If we considered the suggestion  
in a proper manner, I think we might have a show of hands  
to see who's agreeable. It only stands to reason—"

"Oh, shut up!" howled Donald Donaldson excitedly.

"I was only going to say that it stands—"

"Dry up, Taffy!" interrupted Gordon Gay. "Now, you  
chaps, all those in favour of a Welsh opera, composed by a  
miner, shove up your fists!"

"What's the alternative!" asked Carpenter.

"A play, of course!"

"Good!"

"Go on, then," said Gordon Gay. "Shove up your  
fists!"

"Not me. If Snipe starts warbling we shall get chucked  
out of Study 10. I remember when an aunt of his sent  
'Daffodils' he nearly—"

"He nearly killed you, I suppose!" interrupted Gay, with  
a grin.

Snipe jumped to his feet.

"Look here, Gay. If you're going to prejudice this meet-  
ing by saying I haven't got a good voice, it isn't fair. I  
know how ripping those Welsh operas are, and—turning  
round on the rest of the juniors—I bet these chaps have  
the sense to vote for Taffy's wheeze."

Gordon Gay smiled.

"Go on, then," he said. "Shove your flappers up,  
chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
The juniors broke into a roar of laughter at Morgan, Snipe,  
and Tadpole flung up their hands.

"Go on! Put 'em up!" said Snipe.

"Ha, ha! Not for me!"

"Oh, shut up, Ireland!"

"Three in favour of David Morgan's suggestion for us to  
have an opera!" shouted Gordon Gay. "Those not in  
favour, hold up their hands."

Gordon Gay put his hand up, and the rest of the juniors  
followed suit.

"Thanks! That's knocked that on the head. Now let us  
get on to something sensible. I think we might do some-  
thing from Shakespeare."

"Shake what?" gasped Larking.

"Shakespeare, fathead!"  
Tadpole jumped to his feet.

"I think there is something to be said in favour of  
Shakespeare," he commenced. "In fact, if we decide to  
adopt Gay's suggestion, it stands to reason that a play like  
'Charley's Aunt'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It stands to reason—"

"Oh, dry up, you duffer!" shrieked Gordon Gay.

"Shakespeare didn't write 'Charley's Aunt'!"

Tadpole blinked indignantly at his study-mate.

"Surely you don't think I thought that 'Charley's Aunt'  
had anything to do with Shakespeare? I was only going to  
draw the comparison between such a play as 'Julius Cæsar'  
and 'Charley's Aunt'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I vote we have 'Charley's Aunt'!" shouted Larking,  
when the laughter had subsided somewhat.

"I say a Shakespearean play!"

"'Charley's Aunt'!"

"Shut up, Larking!" shouted Gordon Gay. "I vote we  
have 'Hamlet,' or something like that."

"'Charley's Aunt'!"

"Rate!"

"I still stick out for opera!" shouted Morgan. "I'll let  
you have the opening of it now."

Nicky O'Donnell clutched hold of Taffy, and pulled him  
out of the desk, and in a moment the two juniors were  
struggling furiously. Nicky was the bigger of the two, but  
the Welsh junior seemed nothing daunted.

"Sure, and ye say ye'll sing now, will ye?" gaped the  
lad from Ireland.

"When I've finished with you, whatever!"  
Gordon Gay and Larking were facing one another now,  
each one shouting out the play he thought should be adopted  
by the theatrical company.

"'Charley's Aunt'!"

"'Hamlet'!"

The Fourth-Form class-room was in an uproar.

Horace Tadpole edged away from the struggling juniors,  
and watched the proceedings from a point of safety. He still  
clung to his massive sketch-book.

Snipe did not feel anxious to join in the fray, but he smiled  
amusingly as he caught sight of Tadpole. Dangling Gordon  
Gay and Larking, who were now rocking about dangerously  
in one another's grasp, he glided up to Tadpole.

"Give me that book, Taffy," he said, "and I'll whack  
Gordon Gay, so that Larking can get away."

Horace Tadpole blinked in amazement.

"You surely don't think I shall allow you to do anything  
of the kind?" he said.

"Give it to me!"

"I sha'n't!" shouted Tadpole, raising his voice, for now  
the uproar in the class-room was terrific.

Snipe made a grab at the huge book, and clutched hold of  
it and desperately.

"Come on, you ass!" he roared. "Hand it over!"

"Let go, Snipe!"

The two juniors tugged furiously, and Tadpole feared  
every instant that his precious book would be rent in two.

"Give it to me!" granted Snipe. "I won't hurt the  
beastly thing!"

"Help! Rescue, Gay!"

Tadpole hung on tenaciously, but his high, speaking voice  
could be heard above the din of the fighting juniors as he  
yelled for help.

"Rescue, Gay!"

"Shut up, confound you!" hissed Snipe, as, after a  
moment or so, the noise behind him subsided somewhat.

"Help! Rescue! He's getting it!"

Horace Tadpole yelled at the top of his voice, and Gordon  
Gay flung his opponent aside, and dashed across the Form-  
room.

"What is it, Taffy?"

"Help! Rescue!"

Snipe made a final effort to get the sketch-book, but  
Gordon Gay reached him just in time. The Australian  
junior clutched hold of Snipe's collar, and gave a violent  
tug.

"Ow!"

Tadpole, in his anxiety not to leave possession of his  
property, retained his hold, and as Gordon Gay jerked Snipe  
backwards, Taffy followed, and the two fell with a bump to  
the floor.

"Ow, you beasts!"

"My sketch-book!"

Gordon Gay laughed aloud as he looked down at the two  
juniors rolling on the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure, and what are ye laughin' at, fathead?" shouted  
Nicky across the room.

The fight was forgotten now, as also was the reason for it,  
and the untidy juniors scrambled over the desks to where  
Tadpole and Snipe were sitting up glaring at one another.

The scene seemed to tickle Gordon Gay, and when Tadpole  
at last scrambled to his feet, he gave his study-mate a re-  
sounding thwack on the back.

"What's all this about, you duffer?" he said.

"Snipe tried to grab my sketch-book, and it only stands  
to—"

"Oh, shut up, you duffer!"

"Yes; but don't you see—"

"No; I don't," interrupted Gordon Gay, "after that am  
Larking has banged his head on my forehead!"

Larking glared at the originator of the theatrical com-  
pany.

"Didn't you punch me on the nose?" he roared.

"No, you—"

"I didn't, you—"

The two juniors advanced on one another once more, but  
Carpenter sprang between them.

"For goodness' sake don't start all over again!" he ex-  
claimed. "What it was all about, in the first place, I don't  
know."

"I know yerra well," said Donald Donaldson. "It was the  
Taffy lad who was goin' to inflict an opera on us, or some-  
thin', and I—"

"Shall I give it you now?" interrupted Morgan.

"No; shut up for a second!" said Gay, with a smile.

Gordon Gay once more resumed his position on the Form-  
master's platform, and the would-be actors seated themselves  
in different parts of the class-room.

Bang, bang!

Gordon Gay brought his fist down on the table, and the muttering of voices ceased.

"Look here, chaps," he said, "we must put it to the vote as to what play we're going to produce. I don't want any foolery, for I can tell you that I have quite made up my mind to have a proper theatrical company."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Tadpole.  
"I think our first production can be either 'Hamlet' or 'Charley's Aunt,'" continued Gordon Gay. "For myself, I think 'Hamlet' is—"

"Absolutely rotten!" interrupted Larking.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors broke into a roar of laughter, but settled down when Gordon Gay held up his hand.

"It is like this, chaps," he continued. "If we have a play like 'Hamlet,' it might please the Head, more so than if we did 'Charley's Aunt.' Of course, if you have any suggestions to make, get 'em off your chests!"

Tadpole sprang to his feet.

"We shall only have trouble if we vote, Gay," he said, "so I suggest we adopt a plan which I have just conceived. It stands to—"

"Dry up, Taddy!"

Tadpole blinked indignantly at the interruption, but, after a moment's pause, he cleared his throat and continued:

"There is no reason why there should be all this controversy over such a small matter as choosing two plays—both thoroughly inartistic, I might add—"

"Ha, ha! Do you call 'Hamlet' inartistic, Taddy?"

"Yes, Gay; I'm sorry to say I do. Shakespeare, you know—"

"Oh, get on with the washing, Taddy!"

"Very well, Gay, I will explain my idea to you. Instead of having all this voting trouble again, I suggest that we forcibly stop the first person who passes this classroom door."

"My only hat!"

"We shall hear their footsteps coming down the passage," continued Tadpole, "and immediately the person reaches this door we will pounce out upon him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tadpole blinked at the laughing Fourth-Formers, and Gordon Gay watched him in amazement.

"What happens when we pounce on him, Taddy?" he said.

"If he yells, we'll do 'Hamlet'; but if he doesn't I suppose we shall have to do 'Charley's Aunt.'"

"No-o; not that, Gay. It only stands to reason that no such inartistic suggestion would be made by me."

"Then what on earth are we going to pounce on him for?"

"To get the name of the play."

"You—you dummy! What are you talking about!"

"Don't you understand, Gay," replied Tadpole, "that when we have forcibly detained the first passer-by, we can ask him what play he would recommend us to perform?"

"Whatever play he first mentions we must perform."

"What a wheeze!" gasped Gordon Gay.

"Jolly good!"

"Ripping!" shouted Nicky O'Donnell, giving Tadpole a hearty slap on the shoulders.

"Well, come along, chaps!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "I think we'll adopt Taddy's idea on the spot, and see how it works."

"It's all right, Gay; I'll take over the little affair now. It only stands to reason that a spokesman will be wanted, and—"

"Oh, dry up, you Juffer!" interrupted Gordon Gay, walking to the door. "Now, come on, chaps, and don't make a shindy!"

The Triple Alliance from Study No. 2 crowded round the Australian junior, and in a moment they were all packed closely by the door.

"Keep quiet," whispered Gordon Gay, taking a firm grip of the door handle, "and spring out when I give the word."

"Right!"

The juniors had not long to wait before they heard the patter of footsteps coming along the passage. They were not very distinct, and they concluded that it was someone with rubber heels to his boots.

"Are you ready, chaps?" whispered Gordon Gay.

The Fourth-Formers grinned.

"Not half!"

Patter, patter, patter!

The footsteps were almost immediately outside the classroom now, and Gordon Gay turned the handle.

"Come on!" he shouted the next moment.

And, pulling the door wide open, he sprang out into the passage, followed by the crowd of juniors.

"Got you!" they shouted in chorus.

## CHAPTER 5.

## A Pantomime.

"Oh!"  
"My only aunt!"  
Gordon Gay staggered back and gasped.  
"Oh, really, Master Gay, you've frightened the life out of me!"

Mrs. Meadows, the Schoolhouse dame, leant against the wall of the corridor, and looked ready to collapse.

"Mrs. Meadows!" gasped the astonished juniors.

"Oh, really, young gentlemen—"

"I—I'm—or—I mean, we're awfully sorry, Mrs. Meadows!"

fattered Gordon Gay. "It—it was quite a mistake!"

The kindly looking dame smiled at the juniors.

"That's all right, young gentlemen," she said; "but all of you rushing out of the classroom like, and then flying at me, gave me quite a shock!"

And the old lady gave a deep sigh.

"We—we're jolly sorry!"

"Don't you worry, Master Gay!"

Tadpole clutched hold of his study-mate's arm, and blinked in surprise at Gordon Gay.

"I say," he exclaimed, "don't forget what we pounced out for! She looks as—"

"My only hat!" interrupted Gordon Gay. "I'd quite forgotten. I say, Mrs. Meadows, we—we wanted to ask you something—something rather important!"

"Well, what is it, Master Gay?"

"We are getting up a theatrical company, but we don't know what to do."

Mrs. Meadows held her hands up in alarm.

"Do!" she said. "I'll tell you what to do, Master Gay, and that is give up the idea."

"But—"

"You give it up, young gentlemen. All them that go in for the stage as a business—"

"But we're not going in for the stage," interrupted Gordon Gay. "We're amateurs!"

"You're what, Master Gay?"

"But you said you were going to be actors, Master Gay, and I was just giving you a word of advice."

Gordon Gay smiled.

"Thank you, Mrs. Meadows!" he said. "It's jolly ripping of you; but I wish you would just say what is the best play you've seen?"

"What is the best play?" murmured the old dame. "Well, let me see. There was 'Cinderella,' I—"

"Cinderella!" shouted the juniors.

And Mrs. Meadows nearly jumped into the air in alarm.

"Yes, young—"

"Jolly good!"

"A pantomime!"

"Ripping!"

The juniors all started chattering away together, and after making one or two attempts to make her voice heard above the uproar, Mrs. Meadows continued her way down the corridor.

"Shut up, howling, you duffers!" shouted Gordon Gay.

"And get back into the classroom!"

"I vote I'm the Prince, Gay!"

"Dry up, Sarge!"

"Really, Gay, I bet I should make a jolly fine Prince. You know, he's the chap that picks up Cinderella's boot—or—I mean her slipper when she hanks downstairs. I should say that—"

"Shut up!" interrupted Gordon Gay.

And the originator of the Theatrical Company strode into the Fourth-Form classroom. The rest of the juniors followed him, and Donaldson, being the last, closed and locked the door.

Bang!

Gordon Gay brought a ruler down on the Form-master's table, and the talk subsided.

"Now then, chaps," said Gordon Gay, "I think Mrs. Meadows' suggestion must be adopted by—"

"Rather!" came in a chorus from the seated juniors.

"Then you all want 'Cinderella'?"

"Not half!" shouted Sarge. "Don't forget you've promised to let me do the Prince, Gay!"

Gordon Gay stared in surprise.

"I didn't promise, you sweep!" he exclaimed. "And, anyway, you wouldn't be any good for that part. Your dial would give the show away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay held up his hand for silence.

"Look here, you chaps," he said, "I think we ought to pick the principal parts now! I've got the score for 'Cinderella' in my playbook in Study No. 13, and we can give out the minor parts later on."

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"I think you're right, Gay," said Horace Tadpole, rising to his feet.

"That decides it, then!" replied Gordon Gay, with a grin. "If you think it is all right, Taddy!"

Tadpole blinked round at all the juniors as they broke into a laugh.

"Of course," he said, after a moment's pause, "it stands to reason that you want a decent-looking chap to take the part of Cinderella, and, after looking round, I have only one fellow to suggest."

"Who do you mean, fathhead?"

"Me, of course!" shouted three or four of the juniors.

Tadpole adgedged on his feet, and blinked across the room at Gordon Gay.

"Shall I tell you who I've decided to let perform the part of Cinderella?" he said.

"Who you've decided?" growled Gordon Gay. "What do you mean, you duffer!"

"Really, Gay, you must know that I'm the only chap who could perform the part of Cinderella! As the play shows, she was an artistic character, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it's no good you chaps laughing!" continued Tadpole. "If you only realised how an audience appreciated art on the stage you—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Taddy as Cinderella!"

Tadpole blinked angrily at the laughing juniors.

"It stands to reason that—"

"Oh, dry up, Taddy!" interrupted Gordon Gay.

As long as Tadpole remained on his feet the laughter continued; but at last he sat down, and then Gordon Gay was able to make his voice heard.

"I'm arranging this theatrical company," he said, "and I'm going to give out the parts!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Carpenter should be able to make a good girl, so he can act the part of Cinderella."

"Carpenter—Cinderella?"

"Yes; he hasn't got a bad face, and he ought to make a passable Cinderella."

Carpenter went crimson as he was thus discussed, but there seemed to be no disagreement to Gordon Gay's suggestion, so his name was entered in the notebook by the side of Cinderella.

"I really think you are making a grave error, Gay, in delving out characters in this haphazard—"

"Shut up, Taddy!" interrupted Gordon Gay. "I'll give you your character now. You can guess what it is if you like."

A smile spread over Tadpole's face.

"The Prince, of course!" he said. "Perhaps, after all, that is the best—"

"You're wrong, Taddy! You can be one of the sisters!"

"Oh! One of the—the ugly sisters, do you mean, Gay?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes!" shouted Gordon Gay. "You and Snipe can be Cinderella's two ugly sisters!"

Snipe's usually sallow-complexioned face went a brilliant hue as the juniors greeted Gay's announcement with a renewed burst of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Snipe and Tadpole jumped to their feet simultaneously, and attempted to make their voices heard, but in vain.

Gordon Gay held up his hand for silence once more, but it was some time before the juniors stopped chiding Snipe and Tadpole.

"You two chaps have got jolly good jobs," said Gay. "And the success of the whole thing almost entirely rests with you. Now, the next principal part is the Prince. You know, he's the chap who falls in love with Cinderella, and he finds her shoe, you know. I've decided to take the character of Prince."

"You!"

"Yes, Nicky dear!"

"Sure, but ye want a chap with a decent face, an' all that!"

"Yea, Nicky dear!"

"It's all right!" growled Larking. "Let him do it, chaps. The audience might see the humour of it, and take him for one of the comedians!"

"Dry up, Larking, or I sha'n't let you take the part of the Fairy Godmother!"

"Oh, I should be jolly good at that!" exclaimed Larking. "Doesn't the Fairy Godmother have to turn a pumpkin into a coach and an old pair of trucks into a silver dress or something?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I'm awfully good at conjuring—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That I don't quite know where I'm going to get a coach and eight cream horses out of a pumpkin."

"Yes!"

"Well, I'm awfully good at conjuring—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That I don't quite know where I'm going to get a coach and eight cream horses out of a pumpkin."

"Yes!"

"Well, I'm awfully good at conjuring—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That I don't quite know where I'm going to get a coach and eight cream horses out of a pumpkin."

"Yes!"

"Well, I'm awfully good at conjuring—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That I don't quite know where I'm going to get a coach and eight cream horses out of a pumpkin."

"Y-you fathhead!" exclaimed Gordon. "We can easily avoid that by pretending to do it off the stage."

Larking grinned.

"You don't know Monk & Co. evidently," he said, "They'll pull out for me to do it on the stage on the night we give the show, or I'll eat my hat!"

"We'll bump them if they do! Hallo, Taddy! What'n up?"

"Nothing, Gay!" replied Tadpole. "I've only got a jolly good suggestion to make to you."

"Oh!"

"Yes; it's about the scenery. You know, you'll want something extra, and I'm prepared to paint you some."

"Good wheeze, Taddy," said Gordon Gay; "but we must talk that over later! I think we've got the principal parts all set now; but there'll be plenty for you chaps to do to make the thing a success. Of course, I shall want a good many more in it. For instance, there's the ball-room show, heralds, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"The Triple Alliance will make three good heralds!"

Gordon Gay grinned.

"Right-o, Taddy; I'll remember that!"

"I say, Gay," shouted Carpenter, "I hope you don't expect me to buy a glass slipper, do you?"

"No, of course I don't, ass! You can paric some silver paper over an old foster boot or something. I shall be able to get a lot of things from the theatrical agents through my patter, so you chaps won't have to fork out anything."

"Good egg!"

Horace Tadpole jumped to his feet again, and blinked across at Gordon Gay.

"If I paid the scenery, Gay," he said, "it only stands to reason that—"

"Clang, clang, clang!"

The school bell of Rylcombe Grammar School tolled out, and Tadpole's voice was drowned as the Fourth-Form juniors scrambled out of their desks.

"Hang it!" growled Larking. "That's the bell for evening prep."

"Chaps!" Gordon Gay raised his voice as a rush was made for the door, and the juniors stopped.

"Back up, fathhead! What is it?"

"We'll have a rehearsal after dinner to-morrow in the common-room."

"Right-ho!"

The Fourth-Form classroom door was flung open, and Gordon Gay smiled with satisfaction as the juniors went scrambling out into the corridor.

"I say, Gay!"

"Can't hang about now, Taddy!" said Gordon Gay, as Horace Tadpole caught hold of his sleeve. "Bell's gone for prep, you know."

"Y-yes, I know that, Gay; but I just wanted to see you about that scene painting, you know!"

"Well, get it off your chest, Taddy!"

"I think that if I went and took a few sheets away—say a dozen—off the Fifth-Form beds, they would be—"

"Anxious to give you a jolly good licking, Taddy!" interrupted Gordon Gay, with a laugh. "If you think you can go and sneak a dozen sheets out of their dormitory without there being a beastly shindy about it!"

Tadpole blinked in astonishment.

"Oh, really, Gay!" he said. "It only stands to reason that I must do something like that. I'm awfully anxious to help you with your theatrical idea, you know; but I'm afraid I can't afford any money for scene canvas."

Gordon Gay put his arm through Tadpole's, and left the classroom. He was smiling—a very pleasant smile, for he appreciated fully what had prompted Tadpole to make the remark about being anxious to help in the theatrical company.

"It's jolly ripping of you, Taddy," he said, as they went arm in arm up the stone stairs to Study No. 13. "Jolly ripping, really, you offering to paint that scenery."

Tadpole blinked with satisfaction.

"That's all right, Gay," he said. "If you give me time I shall be able to turn you out something extra good. Of course, it only stands to reason—"

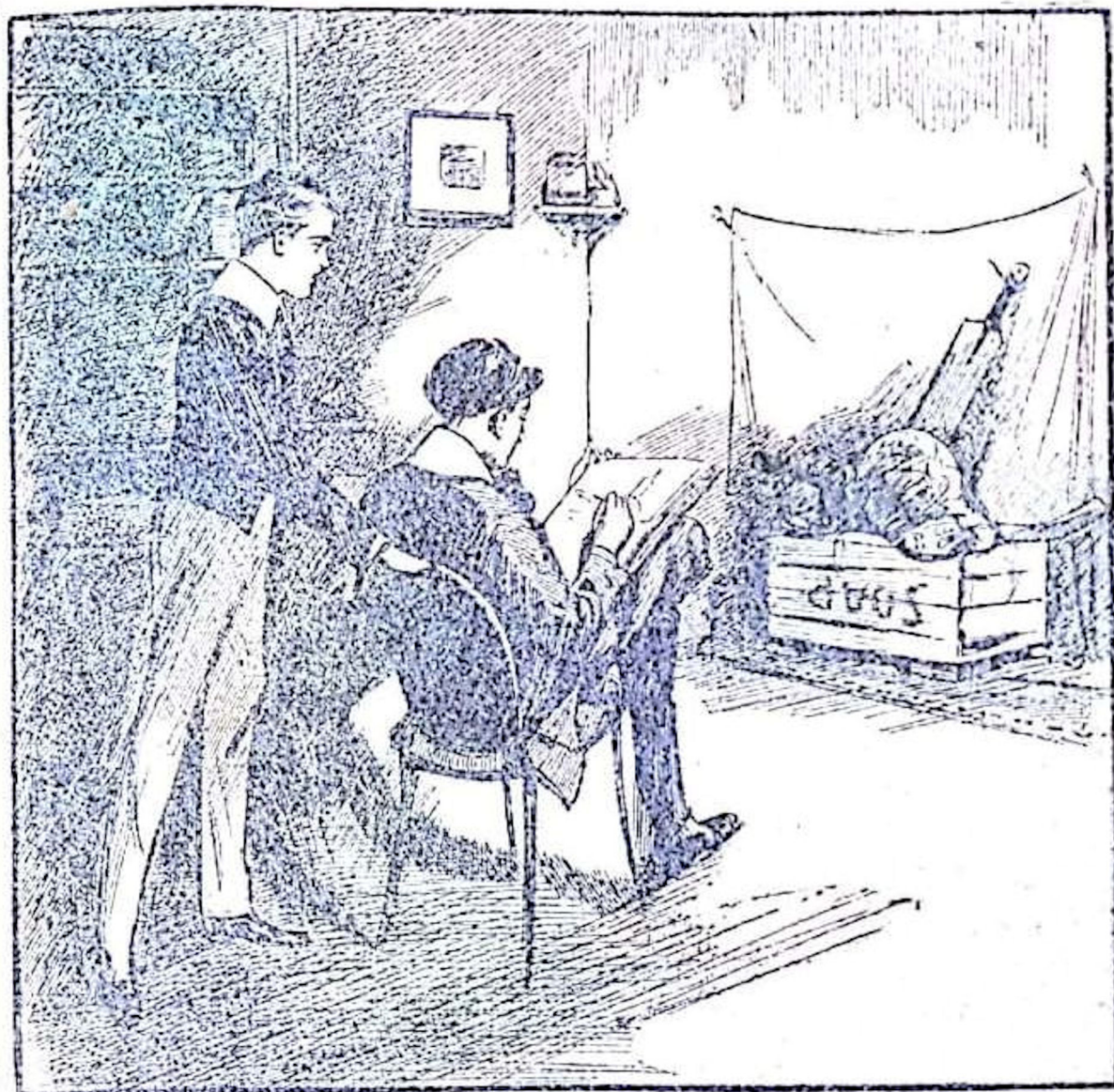
"Here we are!" interrupted Gordon Gay, flinging open the door of Study No. 15. "The sooner we get our prep done the sooner we can make arrangements for my theatrical company."

"Y-yes; but as I was going to say, it only stands to reason that—"

"Dry up, Taddy!" laughed Gordon Gay. "Let's get to work!"

And in a few moments nothing but the scratch, scratch of two pens hard at work could be heard in Study No. 15.

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Gordon Gay looked up to the absorbed figure of Tadpole, and glanced over his shoulder. The amateur artist, as usual, was sketching.

## CHAPTER 6

## The First Rehearsal.

THE juniors at Rylcombe Grammar School never sat a minute longer than was necessary at the dinner-table, for the sooner they were able to get away, the sooner they were able to get out into the playing-field and practise shooting the leather into goal.

If the weather was at all fine, this was their usual programme; and to-day the weather was grand—one of those beautiful days in the football season we sometimes get; but in spite of this inducement a number of the Fourth-Formers made their way straight to their common-room instead of to the playing-field.

Gordon Gay was one of these, and just as he reached the common-room, which was shared by the Fourth Form and the Fifth, he received a resounding thwack on the back.

"Ow!"

"Sure, and here's the stage-manager!" cried Nicky O'Mull's voice. "How are ye, me darlin'!"

"You—you duffer, Nicky!" laughed the Australian junior. "You've nearly broken my back."

"And we didn't know before that Study No. 13 had any backbone, whatever!"

Gordon Gay grinned.

"You just wait until we get somebody else in our study, Taffy!" he said. "You can't expect Tadpole to help me much in ragging the kids of other studies; but I don't

suppose it will be long before we get somebody else landed in Study No. 13."

Donald Donaldson turned the handle of the common-room door, and grinned.

"Ay, then," he said, "I guess we're quite ready for them."

The four juniors entered the room, which was a large one—intended, as has already been mentioned, for the use of the Fourth and Fifth-Formers. The Fifth-Formers thought it rather undignified to make use of the room; but just now French and Ross—two of the most dignified dandies of the Fifth—happened to be standing by the fire.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Nicky O'Mull, with a laugh. "What are these two tailors dummies doin' here? Sure, if they're left so close to the fire they'll melt!"

"Yes; they're looking pretty waxy, I must say!" said Gordon Gay.

French and Ross raised their heads, and stared superciliously at the four grinning juniors.

"Are they Fourth-Formers, Froggy?"

"Yes, Ross, I think so."

French—he was dubbed Froggy by his intimates—put his arm through Ross's.

"Come on, Ross," he said. "It's time we cleared out."

"I think so, Froggy."

And the two Fifth-Formers strutted past the four juniors with an air of dignity which made Gordon Gay burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Juniors!"

Rosa banged the door so violently as they gained the passage, and it was a moment or two before the Fourth-Formers were able to restrain their laughter.

"Wishy did they get the giddy goat like that?"

"They always do, Gay," replied David Morgan. "It's a habit the Fifth have got. They call it dignity."

"Ha, ha! Jolly funny! If you chaps will wait, I'll just knock along and get my playbook!"

"Back up, then," said Nicky O'Donnell.

Gordon Gay hurried along the passage to Study No. 13, and by the time he returned, the full company were gathered together in the common-room.

"Come on, fathhead!" shouted Larking, as Gordon Gay staggered into the room, carrying a huge volume, which was said by the owner to contain the score of nearly every play and pantomime ever staged. "You've been keeping us waiting half the night."

"Sorry, chaps!" And Gordon Gay banged the play-book down on the table. He turned over the leaves until he came to "Cinderella," and the juniors crowded round excitedly.

"Now then!" exclaimed Gordon Gay. "All got to the sides of the room, and I'll let you have some idea of what you have got to do."

The juniors lined the walls on each side of the room, and Gordon Gay explained briefly the plot of the well-known story.

Cinderella was to be the ill-treated motherless girl of a stern, relentless father, who had married again, and who now was blessed with two very ugly step-daughters.

The daughters hate their step-sister, Cinderella, and when at last a prince comes along and falls in love with the poor girl, the step-sisters set to work to ruin Cinderella's chances of ever being wedded to the charming prince.

Fortunately for Cinderella, however, a fairy godmother comes along, and on the night when the two ugly sisters are going to a ball which the prince is giving, she sends as well, through her magic skill, Cinderella, who is to leave the dance sharp at twelve midnight.

Cinderella, however, so enjoys herself—in fact, is overjoyed at once more meeting the prince, that she forgets the time.

Twelve hours out—and she remembers!

Rushing from the ball-room, she tears down the stairs as fast as she can go, and in her haste loses one of her slippers—a glass one!

She arrives home, and her fairy godmother allows her to resume her labours in the kitchen.

The prince finds the wonderful crystal shoe, and the heralds go to the four corners of the earth to find the lady who can put it on.

The ugly sisters make valiant attempts to claim ownership; but Cinderella is found—and as the story ends, she lives "happily ever after!"

The Fourth-Form juniors gave Gordon Gay a good hearing; but the lad from Australia had to put up with one or two interruptions in the course of the story, and everybody seemed glad when he had finished.

"Now then!" said Gordon Gay. "Let's get to business, and see how things will go."

"Rather!"

"Back up!"

Gordon Gay smiled.

"Come on then, Carpenter!" he said. "Squat down in that chair in the middle of the room. You are Cinderella, and the scene is in the kitchen. You are sitting among the cinders when your two ugly sisters come into the—"

"What do you mean?" snapped Carpenter, glaring ferociously at Gordon Gay. "You shut up talking about my sisters!"

"Oh, shut up," exclaimed Gordon Gay, "and get on with it!"

Carpenter squared up to the Australian lad, and Gay's look of astonishment made the rest of the juniors grin.

"Look here, Gay!" muttered Carpenter seriously, "if you don't apologise in half a second, I'll punch your head!"

"What are you talking about, ass?"

"Your remark about my two ugly sisters, you cad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay leant against the table, and doubled up with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carpenter clutched hold of Gay's collar fiercely.

"Look here," he roared, "are you going to apologise?"

"Ha, ha! You fathhead! I didn't mean your own sisters, ass!"

"Yes, you did!" roared Carpenter. "You said most distinctly 'my two ugly sisters!'"

"I didn't! I meant Taddy and Snips!"

TAS EMPIRE LIBRARY.—No. 1.

For the Empire

NEXT WEEK: "GORDON GAY'S NEW PART."

Carpenter's face went crimson as he saw the juniors round the room gradually break into a broad grin.

"What do you mean, Gay?" he faltered.

"I tell you I meant Tadpole and Snips, who're goin' to be your two ugly sisters."

A titter went round the Fourth-Form common-room; but Gordon Gay held up his hand to suppress it in time.

"Don't be an ass, Carpenter!" he said. "And let us get on with the washing."

Carpenter hesitated for a moment or two, and then a cunning smile spread over his handsome face.

"I believe the cad meant my two sisters," he muttered to himself; "and I'll pay him for it!"

"Come on, Carpenter!" broke in Gordon Gay. "You sit down on that chair, and then we can get on!"

Cinderella—in the shape of Carpenter—humped down into the chair with a sulky look. But Gordon Gay, who was anxious to make headway, ignored it, and refrained from making any comment.

"Now, then, Taddy and Snips!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, looking down at the score. "You two will have to come on now, and taunt Cinderella about her not having had an invitation to the ball!"

"Come on, ugly!" growled Carpenter. "Don't keep me sitting on this beastly hard chair all right!"

Tadpole and Snips shuffled away from the wall, and stood in the centre of the room, looking very sheepish.

"I'll let you have the words this afternoon," said Gordon Gay, "but go on now. You can taunt Cinderella and shove in some of your own patter."

Snips looked obviously uncomfortable; but Tadpole blinked in his characteristic way at Carpenter.

"Really, Cinderella," he exclaimed, "it only stands to reason that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the juniors.

"Oh, shut up, Taddy! Say something sensible!"

"But you told me to taunt Carpenter, Gay," faltered Horace Tadpole.

"Yes, I know, fathhead. But can't you say something a bit funnier than that?"

"Funnier than what, Gay?"

Gordon Gay blushed and hesitated.

"Ask her—oh, ask her if she isn't jealous, or something like that."

Tadpole and Snips looked extremely funny as it was; but Gordon Gay pictured the scene far funnier still when the two ugly sisters would be dressed up and painted for the occasion.

The two juniors simultaneously opened their mouths to speak to Cinderella, who was looking at them both with a broad grin.

"Aren't you beastly jealous——" they began; but a roar of laughter from the juniors interrupted them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, chaps!" roared Gordon Gay.

After a few moments the juniors quietened down again, and Gordon Gay beckoned to Tadpole to proceed.

"Very well, Gay," replied Taddy. "I have thought of something to say. It only stands to reason——"

"Get on with it!"

Tadpole blinked at the interruption, and then turned to Carpenter. All went well for a time, and Gordon Gay smiled with satisfaction.

"You can finish off with something funny now, Taddy," he said. "And pretend that someone is calling you to get dressed for the ball."

"Very well, Gay," replied Tadpole, and then turned to Carpenter.

"Good-bye, Cinderella!" he concluded. "Good-bye, you slut! Ha! No wonder you weren't asked round to grubber—I mean to the dance, with those big feet of yours, you——"

Carpenter went crimson, and tucked his feet away under the chair.

"You shut up, Tadpole," he growled, "unless you want a licking!"

Tadpole blinked in amazement, and then continued.

"Good-bye, Cinderella," he said. "Get on with the washing-up!"

Snips grinned.

"Oh, yes," he added. "Don't forget to wash that mug! There's plenty of soap in the sink, and——"

Carpenter jumped to his feet as the juniors broke into a roar of laughter.

"I'll bump you two for your beastly cheek!" she shouted.

He dashed forward to clutch hold of Snips's collar, but Gordon Gay stepped before him in time.

"Shut up, Carpenter!" said the Australian lad sharply.

"You know that it is only petting, and we don't want to fool about like this!"

There was a note of command in Gordon Gay's voice, and the refractory Carpenter let his hands fall to his side. He

wasn't keen now to go through with the principal part, and Gordon Gay saw that this was so by the disconcerted curl of his lips. However, Gay was keen enough, and he thought to infuse enthusiasm into Carpenter.

"Come on, now!" said the stage-manager. "The next scene is where the Fairy Godmother arrives."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Larking. "This is where I bring down the house!"

Gordon Gay smiled. "Well, as a matter of fact, I don't think we need go through the scene now, as you will have to learn your part," he said. "What we will just go through now is the act where Cinderella does a scot when she hears the clock go."

Carpenter grinned round at the juniors in anticipation. "Huck up, then, Gay," he said. "Come on, Cinderella, stand in the middle of the room, and I'll pretend to make love to you. Nicky can bang the coal scuttle, and when he has had twelve whacks, you must bunk out of the door, and trip down the stairs."

"Right-ho!"

Gordon Gay, who was able to rattle off prose of the pantomime variety easily enough, made violent love to Cinderella, and then signalled to Nicky O'Donnell to strike twelve.

"Just make an exclamation of surprise, and then scot, and pretend to trip down the stairs," Gordon whispered to Carpenter.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang—  
The Irish junior crashed the poker on to the scuttle mercilessly, and the juniors put their hands to their ears.

"Dry up!" shouted Donald Donaldson, and on the tenth stroke he gave the scuttle, which Nicky was clutching, a violent kick.

Crash!  
Carpenter had got confused in the counting, and, with a shout of pretended surprise, he made for the common-room door.

"Come back, fathand!" shouted Nicky O'Donnell. But he was too late, and the next instant Cinderella flew out into the passage.

Gordon Gay was not feeling satisfied with Carpenter or Snipe—Carpenter burlesqued his part too much, and was inclined to sulk; but a grin spread over his handsome face as he saw Cinderella's legs disappear round the door. The grin disappeared in an instant, though, as a fearful yell went up from the passage.

"Ow-w-wo!"

The juniors in the common room stared at one another stupidly.

Bump, bump, bump!  
"Oh-h-h-h!"

"My only hat!" gasped Gordon Gay. "What on earth is that awful row?"

He made a dive for the door, and the rest of the juniors scrambled after him.

Bump, bump, bump!  
The forms of two juniors in a wild mix-up of legs and arms were rolling down the stairs, and as Gordon Gay flew through the common-room door, he saw the two juniors land at the bottom of the flight with a final thump.

"It's Carpenter!"

"And Monk!" added a chorus of voices.

"My only aunt! So it is!"

The mix-up at the bottom of the stairs sorted itself out, and Carpenter and Frank Monk now sat up glaring ferociously.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Shut up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up!" shouted Monk and Carpenter, in chorus.

"Cinderella's great scene where she trips with light fantastic toe down the carpeted—"

"Shut up, Larking, or I'll give you a licking!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Monk and Carpenter rose to their feet, and dusted themselves down without speaking a word; but at last the laughing juniors "fairly got on his nerves," as Monk expressed it later, and in spite of the bruises, he made a dash up the stairs, and faced the grinning juniors at close quarters.

"What's up with your face?" he growled, glaring ferociously at David Morgan.

"Nothing whatever!"

"Then shut up!" shouted Frank Monk, as Carpenter joined him.

"How did it all happen, Carpenter?"

"It was Monk's fault!" growled the disconsolate Cinderella.

"Yes; but how—"

The fathand was standing just outside the door, and when that—that ass Nicky dropped the coal-scuttle, of course, I scototed!"

"Go on," said Gordon Gay, with a smile.

"Well, you told me to trip down the stairs and drop a shoe, but I should think I've dropped a few limbs instead."

Frank Monk edged away.

"Well, I must be going along to Study 7, chap," he said.

Gordon Gay looked at him uncertainly.

"Right-ho, Monk," he replied. "Good-bye!"

The captain of the Fourth Form grinned.

"Heavily cheek for a kid to talk like that to his uncle!"

And he turned on his heels and walked off down the corridor.

"I'm going to my study, too!" growled Carpenter. "I can hardly move for bruises."

"I'm going as well," added Snipe.

"So am I!" came in a chorus.

Gordon Gay looked round him a moment or two later, and he was alone—excepting for Tadpole.

"Really, Gay, it stands to reason that—"

"Oh, I'm off to No. 13!" interrupted Gordon Gay; and after a moment's blinking up and down the deserted passage, Horace Tadpole followed Gordon Gay.

## CHAPTER 7.

## Gordon Gay's Bright Idea.

GORDON GAY sat in his study and pondered dependently.

There was no getting away from it, the rehearsal had been a failure, and Gordon Gay felt it very much.

He felt that he, personally, had done as much as was humanly possible to make it a success, and one or two other members of the company had done their level best.

It was those asses in the girls' parts, he thought almost savagely, who had spoilt it all.

That is, all except Tadpole.

As one of the ugly sisters, Tadpole had really been very good. He was so unconsciously funny.

At the thought, in spite of the worry on his mind, Gordon Gay involuntarily burst into a laugh.

Tadpole, who was busily engaged in sketching, for about the thousandth time, the view from the study window, looked up at the sound of the laugh.

"Why do you laugh, Gay?" he inquired in surprise.

Gordon Gay chuckled.

"Well, as a matter of fact, Taddy, I was laughing at you—or, rather, at the remembrance of you as Cinderella's sister."

"Is that so?" said Tadpole, blinking at him.

"It is," said Gordon solemnly.

"Ah, you think I was good in the part, Gay?"

"Jolly good!"

Tadpole blinked with satisfaction.

"I made a—a blow, eh?"

"A what?"

"A blow."

Gordon Gay looked puzzled.

"What the dickens do you mean by you 'made a blow'?"

Tadpole blinked at him severely.

"Really, Gay, I am surprised at your ignorance! I understood you were well up in theatrical matters."

"So I am, us! My father's an actor."

"Well, surely you ought to know then, that when an actor or actress achieves a striking success, he or she, as the case may be—"

"Oh, get on with it, Taddy!" murmured Gordon impatiently.

"He or she," repeated Tadpole, unheeding, "is said to have made a blow. It stands to reason, Gay, that—"

Gordon Gay gave a roar.

"You ass! You mean a bit, I suppose! Ha, ha! You ass!"

"Really, Gay—"

"A blow, indeed! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Gordon.

Tadpole blinked at him severely.

"I fail to see any cause for your unseemly merriment, Gay. The difference between a blow and a hit appears to me to be almost negligible. Of course, I do not say the words are identical in meaning."

"Of course not!" grinned Gordon. "I wouldn't mind letting you have a blow at my mouth-organ, for instance, but I should strongly object to your having a hit at it, though you would probably miss it, anyway!"

"Really, Gay, your example is ridiculous! Nevertheless, there are some faint glimmerings of sense in some few of the things you say."

"Thanks!"

"You understand? It stands to reason—"

But Gordon Gay cut his long-winded study-mate short.

"Oh, rats!" he said, none too politely. "Ring off, Taddy!"

Gordon saw that Tadpole was beginning to mount his hobby-horse, and must be stopped at any price.

Tadpole doted on argument.

He was never so happy as when he had been able to start an argument with some unsuspecting person.