




a brand-new adventure of the
Chums of St. Jim's

TOM MERRY'S RIVAL



Martin
Clifford

1/6

a House Election brings
a daring challenge to Tom Merry & Co.

Tom Merry's Rival

by Martin Clifford

St. Jim's was buzzing with excitement Tom Merry, junior cricket captain of School House, had resigned because he wouldn't swallow the everlasting excuses of Cardew the Cad for dodging games-practice.

So an election for the new captain was to be held straight away, and that's how Cardew, the Dandy of the Fourth, tried to get even with Tom—by standing for election himself!

Cardew would use any trick to get votes, while Tom Merry refused to stoop to electioneering. It looked as if Ralph Reckness Cardew was going to be the new captain of cricket—and he would have been, but for the monocled swell D'Arcy, and a new boy who was surprised by the popularity he achieved on his first day at St. Jim's.....

Our Cover Picture

"Welease me, you uttah wufflans, will you—yawoooooh!"

Arthur Augustus sat on the carpet in Study No. 6. It was an old carpet, and rather dusty.

Arthur Augustus had meant well—he always meant well. But there was no doubt that this time he had put his noble foot in it....

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Martin Clifford



Hamilton & Co. (Stafford) Ltd.
LONDON

By special arrangement with Frank Richards
(Martin Clifford), also creator of Billy Bunter
and the Chums of Greyfriars.

*All characters in this story are imaginary and no reference is
intended to any living person.*

Gold Hawk Books are printed in Great Britain
and published by Hamilton & Co. (Stafford) Ltd.,
1 & 2 Melville Court, Goldhawk Road, London, W.12.

1

Chucked!

"NO!" Tom Merry spoke quietly, but very firmly.

There was a glint in his eyes, and a faint flush in his cheeks, which showed that his temper was rising. But he was keeping cool. He did not want to lose his temper: though it was not always easy for a cricket captain to keep his temper with a member of the team like Ralph Cardew.

Cardew of the Fourth might be one of the best junior cricketers at St. Jim's: but he somehow contrived to give his skipper more trouble than all the rest of the House team put together.

"Look here, Tom Merry——!" he began.

"I said no!" interjected Tom Merry, briefly, "You can cut."

Tom was seated at his table in his study, No. 10 in the Shell. There was a paper before him containing a list of eleven names. It was the cricket list for the junior House match. One of the names in the list was R. R. Cardew.

R. R. Cardew was standing just inside the doorway, looking across the table at Tom. He had strolled into the study with his hands in the pockets of his elegant trousers, and the air of easy assurance that often irritated other fellows in the School House. Evidently he was not prepared to take "no" for an answer, for he did not "cut." He remained where he was, not in the least daunted by Tom Merry's frowning face—indeed, apparently a little amused thereby.

"You see——!" he began again, in a drawing tone.

"All I want to see is your back," said Tom.

Tom Merry's chums, Manners and Lowther, were in the study. They looked on in silence: but they both nodded assent to Tom's words. All No. 10 Study wanted to see of Cardew was his back! However, they were not to see it just yet.

"Do have a little sense," urged Cardew, "I simply can't play this afternoon, Merry. I wouldn't take the trouble to ask you for leave, only it's compulsory practice this afternoon. You can let me off, if you like, as junior Captain."

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"Now, look here, Cardew," he said, "You're down to play in the House match next Wednesday. They beat us last time and we're going to beat them this time, if we can. I've had rotten luck with the team, and it's all at sixes and sevens with some good men left out. You're one of the best that's left——"

"Thanks," said Cardew, sarcastically.

"But if you fancy you don't need to keep up games-practice like other fellows, that's your mistake," said Tom, "I've fixed up a practice game this afternoon, the House junior eleven against a scratch team, and every man in the eleven is going to play. You can't play fast and loose with cricket."

"It's rather a special occasion today——"

"It always is, when you want to slack at games-practice," said Tom, scornfully.

"My Uncle Lilburn is down at Wayland, and he wants me to tea with him at the Rialto there. I can't refuse. Besides, I've left it too late to refuse."

"You shouldn't have—if it's true."

"He will be expecting me."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"Uncle Lilburn this time, is it?" he said, "Last time you wanted to cut games-practice it was your aunt Alicia who was ill, and you got off: and half-a-dozen fellows saw you, afterwards, in the lane at the back of the Green Man."

Manners and Lowther grinned. Monty Lowther interjected a remark,

"Better think up a better one than that, Cardew," he advised, "That one hath an ancient and fish-like smell—Shakespeare."

"It happens to be true," said Cardew.

"Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction," remarked Manners, dryly.

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"That's enough," said Tom.

"I tell you——"

"You can tell me anything you like," said Tom, "But you can't quite expect me to believe a word of it."

"My uncle Lilburn——"

"Oh, bother your uncle Lilburn," exclaimed Tom Merry, impatiently, "I don't suppose he's within a hundred miles of the school."

You can cut all that out. You're wanted to play this afternoon, and that's that."

Cardew's lips set.

"I can't," he said.

"You can, and will!"

"Well, I can't, and won't!" said Cardew, "I've got to cut games-practice this afternoon, and if you won't let me off——"

"I won't!"

"Then I shall manage without it," said Cardew, "You can report me to Kildare if you like, for cutting."

"Any fellow cutting games-practice on a compulsory day has to be reported to the Head of the Games, you know as well as I do," said Tom, "But that isn't all. You've always been an unreliable sort of fellow, Cardew. There's nothing the matter with your cricket, but there's a lot the matter with you. If you can't be relied on, you can't play. Now get this clear—if you don't turn up for games-practice this afternoon, you don't play in the House match. I shall take your name out of the list."

Cardew's eyes glinted.

"Some of the other fellows may have something to say about that," he said.

"Possibly! They can say what they like—but I mean every word of it."

"You've got so many players on hand, that you can afford to chuck out a man who can play your head off?" sneered Cardew.

"We're in a jam for men to play next Wednesday, as you know. But that won't make any difference. If you let us down this afternoon, you'd be just as likely to let us down next Wednesday in the match with the New House."

"My uncle won't be wanting to see me next Wednesday——"

"Oh, cut out your uncle!" snapped Tom. "Sure it's your uncle?" he added, sarcastically, "Not your aunt ill again?"

Chuckle, from Manners and Lowther!

"I'm going over to Wayland this afternoon," said Cardew, very distinctly, "You can do as you like about it."

"If you do, you'll be reported, and that means six from Kildare for slacking. And your name goes out of this list."

"I'm going!"

"Don't be an ass, Cardew," said Manners, quietly, "You're as keen to play in the match as any man at St. Jim's. Chuck up your rot for this afternoon, and play up."

"I'm going over to Wayland."

"Give our kindest regards to your sporting pals at the Green Man," said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus Means Well!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, of the Fourth Form, beamed. His friends, Blake and Herries and Digby, gazed at him inquiringly. What Arthur Augustus was beaming about, they did not know. But he was beaming almost like the sun at noonday as he walked into Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage in the School House.

Blake and Herries and Dig were not beaming by any means. They had been talking cricket, but not quite with their usual cheery fervour. Cricket in the Lower School at St. Jim's was, just then, rather at sixes and sevens, as Tom Merry had told Cardew. Owing to circumstances over which nobody had any control, quite a number of men were unavailable, and what sort of team was going to be scratched up the following week was a troublesome question. That responsibility lay heavily on Tom's shoulders, as junior captain: but all the cricketing fellows felt it more or less.

So there was, so far as Blake and Co. could see, nothing for anybody to beam about: least of all D'Arcy who owing to a crooked wrist was out of the cricket for some time to come. The School House was losing his valuable services.

However, he was beaming. His aristocratic countenance was full of smiles. Apparently he was the bearer of good news.

"Anything happened?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah," answered Arthur Augustus.

"Your wrist mended?" asked Herries. "Think you'll be able to play next week after all?"

Arthur Augustus's face clouded for a moment.

"I feah not, Hewwies," he answered, "I am wathah afwaid that I shall be out of the game. It is feahfully wotten, but there it is."

"Is that what you're grinning like a Cheshire cat about?" asked Digby.

"Weally, Dig, I was not awah that I was gwinnin' like a Cheshire

cat," said Arthur Augustus, stiffly.

"Well, what is it?" asked Blake, "I could jolly well kick young Tompkins for landing that cricket ball on my knee yesterday. I jolly well did kick Trimble as we came up——"

"Bai Jove! What did you kick Twimble for, Blake?"

"Well, he's a worm, and I wanted to kick somebody," explained Blake, "I'm out of the cricket, ain't I?"

"Weally, Blake, I do not wegard that as a weason for kickin' Twimble. Howevah, I have not told you the news yet."

"Cough it up, fathead."

"I have just been to see Wailton."

Three fellows stared at Arthur Augustus blankly. Mr. Railton, house-master of the School House, was a popular house-master. But nobody particularly wanted to go and see Railton. Going to see Railton was quite an unexpected and surprising explanation of Arthur Augustus's beaming satisfaction.

"Wandering in your mind?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, what the dickens do you mean, then?"

"I will explain, deah boy, if you will give a fellow time to speak. You wemembah you mentioned that you have a welation comin' to the school?"

"Eh? Oh! Yes! Chap named Ridd," said Blake, "What about him?"

"He is coming into the Fourth."

"I suppose so! He was in the Fourth at his last school, up north, and now his people have come to live in Sussex, they're sticking him in here, and I suppose he will come into the same form. What about that?"

"That is why I have been to see Wailton, Blake."

"About young Ridd?" asked Blake, blankly.

"Pwecisely. I meant it as a vewy pleasant surprisew for you, old boy," explained Arthur Augustus, "I think you told me that he is comin' next week?"

"So I was told. End of the week, I think. They'll stick him in a study along this passage—No. 4, I expect, as there's only one fellow there at prèsent—Tompkins has had it to himself since Mulvaney minor left. I hope Railton won't think of sticking him in here because he's a relation of mine."

"Eh?"

"Oh, that's all right, he wouldn't be such an ass," said Blake, "We never go more than four to a study, and that's a crowd, especially when one of the four has fancy waistcoats and toppers all over the shop."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well," said Herries, "I've never seen that relation of yours, Blake, but we certainly don't want him crowding us out in here."

"Rather not!" concurred Digby. "I daresay he's quite a nice chap, but four in a study is quite enough for me."

"Weally, Dig—!"

"He's not a bad chap, I believe," said Blake, "He's got ginger hair, I remember—"

"Ginger for pluck, Blake."

"Oh, he's plucky enough," said Blake, "I had a fight with him last time I saw him, and he stood up all right."

"Bai Jove!"

"I daresay he won't do any harm here," said Blake, tolerantly, "It's a bit of a swizz having relations at one's own school—you ain't too jolly pleased to have that relation of yours, Cardew, Gussy—"

"Yaas! No! But—"

"We can bar him, if we don't like him," said Blake, "Bother him, anyway. Never mind him now—"

"But weally, Blake—"

"Oh, let him drop," said Blake, "Blessed if I see why they couldn't bung him in at Carcroft instead of St. Jim's."

"As he is your cousin, Blake—"

"He isn't! Sort of second cousin twice removed, or something," said Blake. "You two had better get down and change for cricket," he added, to Herries and Digby. "If you're late, you'll have Tom Merry after you with a big stick. I hear that he's had a spot of trouble with Cardew already."

"He is your relation, Blake—"

"Cardew? He isn't—he's yours."

"I am not speakin' of Cardew, Blake—I am speakin' of Widd. I wathah thought that you would like to have him in your study, and we would make woom for him somehow."

"Think again then," grunted Blake, "Think we want five fellows in here falling over one another?"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his celebrated monocle in his eye, and gazed at his study-mates. The bright beam had faded out of his noble countenance. He looked worried.

"Come on, Dig," said Herries, "We'd better get changed."

"Ready," said Dig.

"I'll come down to the field with you," said Blake, "Rotten to have to be left out, but a fellow can't play cricket dot-and-carry-one. I'll look on and count your ducks, anyway."

"Pway hold on a moment, deah boys." Arthur Augustus looked

quite distressed, "Do you weally mean, Blake, that you don't want Wailton to put the new fellow Widd in this study?"

"Of course, I do, ass," grunted Blake, "If Railton shoves him in here, I'll jolly soon boot him out again."

"Oh, cwikey."

"But Railton wouldn't," said Blake, "He's got too much sense."

"He—he—he might if he were specially asked, Blake."

"Oh, I daresay! Nobody's going to ask him, I know that."

"I feah that I have acted undah wathah a misappwchension," said Arthur Augustus, slowly, "I thought it would be a pleasant surpwise to you, Blake, if I awanged it, so I went to Wailton, and asked him as a special favah to let the new chap come into this study——"

Jack Blake jumped.

"What?" he roared.

"Pway do not wear at me, Blake! I have told you vevy many times that it throws me into a fluttah to be woared at."

"You asked Railton to shove that new tick into this study, where we're four already, without counting your silk hat!" yelled Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"And what did Railton say?" exclaimed Herries.

"He said yes, Hewwies, if we particulahly wished it. So I told him that we particulahly wished it, speakin' for the study, you know——"

"You ass!" roared Blake.

"You chump!" said Herries.

"You dithering duffer!" said Dig.

"Weally, you fellows, I was actin' for the best all wound, as I thought," protested Arthur Augustus, "I thought you would like your wrelation in this study, Blake, and that it would be a vevy happy surpwise when I told you——"

"You—you—you—!" said Blake, "You ass! You cuckoo! You've landed that ginger-mopped image on this study——!"

"I thought you would be pleased, deah boy."

"You thought?" hooted Blake, "What did you do that with, I wonder? Go back to Railton and tell him it won't wash!"

"Weally, Blake, as Mr. Wailton gwanted it as a favah, it would be extremely ungwacious to do anythin' of the kind. You can go and tell him, if you like."

"How can I go and tell him I don't want my relation here?" bawled Blake, "I jolly well don't, all the same. Cut back to Railton and tell him you're a blithering idiot and didn't know what you were talking about."

"Weally, Blake——"

"If Railton's fixed it, it's fixed," said Herries, "We're landed with five in the study! Bump that silly ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Bump him!" agreed Digby.

"Weally, Dig——!"

"He ought to be boiled in oil," said Blake, "He ought to be scragged! He ought to be lynched! Five in a study! Oh, bump him!"

"Bai Jove! If you are goin' to take it like that, Blake—Pway stand back, Hewwies—welease me, Dig—Bai Jove! You uttah wuffians, will you—yawoooooh!"

Arthur Augustus sat on the carpet in Study No. 6. It was an old carpet, and rather dusty. Quite a cloud rose round Arthur Augustus as he sat.

"There!" gasped Blake, "Now go back to Railton and tell him it won't wash, or we'll bump you again when we come in."

"Wow! Ow! Oh, cwumbs! Ow!"

Blake and Herries and Dig left the study to go down to the cricket. Arthur Augustus sat on the dusty carpet, spluttering. Arthur Augustus had meant well—he always meant well. But there was no doubt that he had put his noble foot in it. But to go back to Railton and ask him to call it off was obviously out of the question. When Arthur Augustus recovered his breath, and got into motion, he did not go anywhere near Mr. Railton's study; he followed his friends down to the cricket field. It looked as if Study No. 6 was irrevocably landed with the new fellow when he came to St. Jim's.

3

Adamant!

TOM MERRY cast a quick glance over the cricketers when he came down with Manners and Lowther. Perhaps he expected, or hoped, to see Ralph Reckness Cardew there after all. But there was no sign of him, and Tom set his lips. Cardew's friends, Levison and Clive, were there: but Cardew evidently had gone out for the afternoon, as he had said he would.

Ernest Levison came over to Tom.

"Cardew's not here," he said, rather awkwardly, "I daresay he told you that his uncle wanted him at Wayland this afternoon——"

"He told me so," said Tom, dryly.

"He couldn't very well cut that out, could he?" Levison wanted to say all he could for his wayward chum.

"Couldn't he?" said Tom, "No more than he could cut out his aunt Alicia last week, what?"

"Oh!" said Levison, "Well, it's true this time, Tom—really—his uncle is coming down to Wayland——"

"How do you know?"

"Cardew said so."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"I should want a spot more evidence than that," he said, "Don't talk rot, Levison. Cardew would spin any yarn when he wants to cut, and you know it as well as I do. But even if he has an uncle running loose in Wayland, he's not his own master so long as he's a member of the team. Not that I believe a word of it."

"After all, it's only a practice game today," said Clive.

Tom looked at him.

"You agree with Cardew that he doesn't need any practice like other fellows?" he asked, "Such a champ that he doesn't need to keep in form?"

"Well, no. But—but he will be all right for the match on Wednesday," said Clive.

"He won't be playing in the match on Wednesday," said Tom, grimly, "I told him plainly that if he did not turn up today, he was out of the team. That goes."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Levison.

"Is it? You'll find it quite possible! I've had just about enough of Cardew's airs and graces," said Tom, "If the men like to elect him junior captain, he can run the show: so long as he's not skipper, he'll toe the line, or get out. He's got out, and he stays out."

"But—we're short of men already——"

"I know that! So does Cardew!" said Tom, bitterly, "But I'd rather see the New House win the match by an innings, than see Cardew throwing his weight about."

"Other fellows won't agree to that," said Levison, tartly.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"Cardew simply must play next Wednesday," said Clive.

"Not if I'm still captain," answered Tom, briefly: and he turned away to put an end to the discussion.

Levison and Clive were looking rather grim. They had trouble sometimes with their wilful chum in No. 9 Study: and in fact, there was not uncommonly a row in that study. Other fellows wondered sometimes how and why serious fellows like Clive and Levison chummed up with a wilful, wayward scapegrace like Cardew. But they did, and the bond of friendship in No. 9 Study was strong, notwithstanding many disputes. And in this matter, at least, Clive and Levison were disposed to back up their chum—though it was true that they were also feeling rather like kicking him for walking off without leave. Perhaps he deserved a kicking: but chucking him out of the eleven seemed to them altogether too drastic a step.

For the fact was that Cardew was wanted. He was volatile, he was unreliable: even his own friends could hardly rely on him. But there was no doubt that he was a brilliant cricketer, on his day. Sometimes he slacked, even at cricket: he had been "whopped" for slacking, by the Head of the Games. But he could, when he chose, put up a great game: and of late he had been at the top of his form, both in batting and bowling. And the team was now specially weak in bowlers.

"Cardew's not turned up?" asked Jack Blake, speaking to Tom as he left Levison and Clive.

Tom shook his head.

"Leave off?" asked Blake.

"No! He's out of his own accord."

"Cheek!" said Blake, frowning, "That fellow wants kicking. Still, even Cardew won't let us down next Wednesday."

"He will!" said Tom, "I told him that if he didn't turn up to-day, he goes out of the eleven. And he hasn't turned up."

"My dear chap, you can't leave him out on Wednesday," said Blake, blankly, "Why, he's our only bowler, with Talbot away, and me on the crooked list. You must play Cardew."

"He's chucked," said Tom, and he turned away again, leaving Blake staring, and Herries and Dig looking very serious.

The practice game began, and Tom Merry would willingly have dismissed Cardew from his mind. But he couldn't quite. It was true, as Blake said, that Cardew was the only really dangerous bowler left in the team: and Tom had specially wanted to see his bowling that afternoon. Little as he liked Cardew, he liked his cricket. That Saturday afternoon, Tom had planned to see how his depleted team shaped—including Cardew. And Cardew, against strict orders, had coolly walked off and left him in the lurch.

Not only Tom Merry but all the School House men were very keen to give Figgins and Co. of the New House a beating on the following Wednesday if they could. The New House men had won the last House match, and all the School House agreed that they couldn't possibly be permitted to get away with it again.

But there was no doubt that the School House team was rather at "sixes and sevens." Talbot of the Shell was away—one of the very best. Kangaroo of the Shell had gone up to London to stay for a time with visiting relations from Australia. And as if the loss of two good men was not bad enough, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a crooked wrist, and Jack Blake a crooked knee. Really it made Tom feel rather like the Raven's unhappy master, whom unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster!

And now Cardew, whose batting was as good as Tom's own, and whose bowling was as good as Talbot's, had let him down.

True, Cardew was willing, or rather he was keen and eager, to play in the House match next Wednesday. He liked to show off his cricket, which really was worth showing off, and he liked an audience. He loathed games-practice, and even on compulsory days he cut if he could. He was never without an excuse, but his excuses were wearing rather thin. He was in fact a fellow who was determined to go his own wilful way, whithersoever it might lead him, quite coolly regardless of others.

Tom Merry certainly wanted him in the team. But what he had said, he had said! Cardew was "chucked," and he was going to stay "chucked."

The practice game was not very cheering.

The junior House eleven, with the places of four good men filled by players much less good, did not find it too easy to beat even a scratch eleven which included even such rabbits as Croke and Racke.

Tom was rather glad when it was over. His usually sunny face was a little clouded as he changed out of his flannels.

He knew very well what was in the minds of most of the other fellows—that School House had a very healthy chance of being licked again by the New House: after which there would be no holding Figgins and Co. They would crow their heads off, so to speak. In such circumstances, to leave out a brilliant player like Cardew was asking for it. Tom could see that even Manners and Lowther thought that he had better stretch a point, and swallow Cardew's "cheek" for the sake of the House.

"Tom, old man," murmured Manners, when they went in to tea. "Well?"

Tom rather shot that monosyllable at his chum. He knew what was coming.

"I know Cardew's a cheeky fool, old chap—but couldn't you stretch a point for once?"

"I've stretched a good many points for Cardew."

"I know! Just one more——"

"And then one more, and one more, and one more after that!" said Tom, "No!"

"We want him next Wednesday, Tom!" said Lowther.

"How do we know we should get him, even if we did want him? His pals at the Green Man may want him too."

"He wouldn't let down a House match."

"He would if he fancied it."

"Oh rot," said Manners, "Look here, Tom——"

"Keep it till tea," said Tom, "I've got to go in and speak to Kildare." And he left his chums, to go to the study of the captain of St. Jim's.

When he came away from Kildare, Manners and Lowther had gone up to No. 10 Study. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy met him in the passage. The swell of St. Jim's was looking very serious.

"I'm fwightfully sowwy that I'm cwocked for next week, Tom Mewwy," he began.

"Same here," agreed Tom, "What did you want to go and get clobbered for, you ass? Last House-match you got stuck in Extra. This time you get clobbered!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I did not get clobbered on purpose! But what is all this I heah about Cardew?"

"Ask me another," said Tom, "Have you heard that he's been spotted at the Green Man, and taken to the Head to be sacked? Is that it?"

"Nothin' of the kind, Tom Mewwy. I have heard that you have clobbered him out of the House team."

"That's right!"

"But we weally can't spare him next Wednesday, old chap, with Talbot and Noble and Blake and myself out of the game."

"We shall have to, Gussy."

"I know he is a vewy iwuitatin' fellow, although he is a wrelation of mine, Tom Mewwy. But I weally think you had bettah think again, deah boy. Evewybody will be down on leavin' him out."

"Then everybody can get on with it," said Tom, "He's chucked."

"But weally, Tom Mewwy—Bai Jove! Pway don't walk away befoah I have finished my wemarks, Tom Mewwy."

But Tom did walk away: apparently having had enough of Gussy's remarks on the subject of his relative, Ralph Reckness Cardew.

As he went up the stairs, Jack Blake tapped him on the arm.

"Just a minute, old chap," said Blake, amicably.

"Two if you like."

"You can't really chuck Cardew for next Wednesday——"

"Speech taken as read!" said Tom Merry: and he went on up the stairs, leaving Jack Blake staring after him with a frown.

Levison and Clive were on the landing. Apparently they were waiting there for Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom, about Cardew—!" began Levison.

"Pack it up at that!" said Tom, "I've heard enough about Cardew."

"He's my pal," said Levison, sharply.

"I don't envy you your pals."

"You needn't," snapped Levison, "But I can tell you that if you chuck him out of the eleven for the House match——"

"No 'if' about it; he's chucked." Tom Merry walked on across the study landing.

"Look here—!" exclaimed Sidney Clive, rather heatedly.

Tom did not "look there." He did not even seem to hear. He walked on into the Shell passage, and went into No. 10.

Manners and Lowther were rather silent over tea. But before that meal ended, they came to the subject that was uppermost in their minds.

"About Cardew next Wednesday, Tom—!" said Manners.

"No good talking about Cardew," answered Tom, "You were here when I talked to him this afternoon. He was told that if he cut, he would be chucked. Do you want me to eat my words?"

"We want to beat the New House," said Monty Lowther, a little tartly, "We don't want Figgins and Co. telling the world that we can't play cricket, and that they walk over us every time. Cardew ought to play."

"Pass the honey," said Tom.

T O M M E R R Y ' S R I V A L

"I was speaking about Cardew——"

"And I was speaking about the honey."

Monty Lowther looked at him, seemed to swallow something with difficulty, and passed over the honey jar in silence. And that silence lasted till tea in No. 10 Study came to a rather uncomfortable end.

Many fellows had often thought Tom Merry too easy-going a fellow for cricket captain. Evidently he was far from easy-going now. On the subject of Ralph Reckness Cardew, at least, he was adamant.

4

Six for Cardew

BAGGY TRIMBLE, of the Fourth, put a fat face into No. 9 Study in the Fourth-Form passage, and squeaked:

"Cardew here?"

Two fellows were in No. 9—Levison and Clive. They were getting rather late tea, after the cricket; and not looking too happy. The vagaries of their volatile chum, Cardew, exasperated Tom Merry; and certainly were a worry to his own friends.

Cardew had been out of gates, without leave, during the games-practice that afternoon. It was a compulsory day, when no fellow was allowed to "cut" without leave. Even slackers like Racke and Crooke and Baggy Trimble had turned up at the nets. Cardew, a law unto himself, had walked off. That meant trouble with the Head of the Games, as well as with the junior captain of the House. Cardew did not seem to care—but Levison and Clive cared a good deal.

Both of them looked round, frowning, at Trimble as he stared in. They were rather anxious for Cardew to come in; but certainly they did not want to see Trimble.

"No!" snapped Levison. "Can't you see he isn't?"

"Cut!" added Clive.

"Oh, I'll cut all right," said Baggy, "Think I want to see that swanking smudge, or you either? It's a message from Kildare of the Sixth."

"Oh!" said Levison and Clive together.

"Cardew's to go to his study," said Trimble, "I expect he's going to get six for slacking! Yah!"

And with that, Baggy Trimble departed, leaving Levison and Clive looking a little more glum than before. The Head of the Games had to be given a list of absentees from games-practice on com-

pulsory days: so it was easy to guess why Cardew was to go to his study.

"The silly goat!" muttered Clive, "He's always asking for trouble in one way or another."

"Tom Merry could have let him off," muttered Levison. "After all, he had to see his uncle at Wayland."

"Is his uncle really at Wayland today?" grunted Clive, "Cardew would spin any yarn to get off."

"I—I think it's all right this time."

"Well, if we can't be sure, we can hardly blame Tom Merry for not believing him," said Clive, dryly. "Still, as he's going to get a prefect's whipping, I don't see that Tom need chuck him out of the eleven as well."

Levison knitted his brows.

"That's got to be forgotten," he said, "We're not going to let the New House walk over us again as they did last time. I daresay Tom will come round before next Wednesday—after all, he's an easy-going chap as a rule."

"When is that silly ass Cardew coming in?" growled Clive. "Whether he's gone to see his uncle or not, it's time he was back. The fathead——!"

"Thanks!" said a drawling voice at the doorway: and Ralph Reckness Cardew walked into the study. "Nice way to speak of absent pals, Clivey."

"So you've got back," grunted Clive.

"Looks like it! Here I am, as large as life and twice as natural," drawled Cardew, "I hope you haven't waited tea for me. I've had no end of a spread with nunky Lilburn at the Rialto."

"So you've really seen your uncle today?"

Cardew looked at him.

"Didn't I tell you——?"

"Yes, you did!"

"If that means that you can't take a fellow's word, Clive——"

"Oh, don't be a goat! You spun Tom Merry a yarn about your aunt, a week or two ago, and he let you-off. Was that spoof or not?"

"Oh, quite! Anythin' for a quiet life," yawned Cardew, "Honest Injun this time, anyway. I think you fellows might be sympathetic, too," went on Cardew, "I've had a royal jaw from Uncle Lilburn on the subject of extravagance—me, you know! If he hadn't stood me such a jolly good feed at the same time, I couldn't have sat it out. Still, the feed made up for the jaw—or almost! And now I've come back to a sea of troubles. Is Tom Merry's back still up?"

"Very much so," said Levison.

"Dear me! How lucky that I don't care a bean," smiled Cardew.

"Well, you ought to," growled Clive.

"My dear man, if a fellow always did as he ought, he would never have time for doing as he oughtn't," expostulated Cardew.

"A fellow ought to care what other fellows think of him."

"Well, I should worry!" grinned Cardew, "Do you expect me to weep briny tears because I've been nicknamed Cardew the Cad in the House? Let them get on with it. What is it that jolly old Frenchman said—'They say? What say they? Let them say! Such, my young friend, is my philosophy.'"

"Kildare's sent for you," said Levison, abruptly, "You're to go to his study."

"Always a pleasure to see old Kildare," said Cardew, "More trouble, I suppose? Well, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. What a life!"

He strolled out of the study, evidently not in the least perturbed by his coming interview with the captain of the school.

He passed Baggy Trimble on the study landing, and the fat Baggy gave him a grin.

"You're for it," grinned Baggy.

"How kind of you to sympathise!" yawned Cardew.

"He, he, he! Hadn't you better pack?" said Baggy, "Kildare had his ashplant on the table. Better shove a sweater into your bags. He, he, he."

Cardew walked on without heeding that. Baggy, certainly, would have "packed" for such an interview, squeezing his thickest sweater into his podgy trousers to take the edge off the whopping. But the dandy of the Fourth disdained such measures.

His face was quite calm and cheerful as he tapped at Kildare's door in the Sixth. "Cardew the Cad" might be, in some respects, a fitting name for him: but he had unlimited pluck and unlimited nerve. He was the man to hunt for trouble: but he was also the man to face it coolly when it came.

"Oh, you!" Kildare glanced round at him in the doorway, "Come in! I hear that you cut games-practice today, Cardew."

"Sorry, yes," admitted Cardew.

"I suppose you hadn't forgotten that it was a compulsory day?"

"I've a good memory, Kildare."

The Sixth-Form man reached out to the ashplant on his table.

"Anything to say before I whop you?" he asked.

"Well, yes! I really had to cut today," explained Cardew, "My uncle was in Wayland, and made a special point of seeing me."

"Oh!" Kildare paused, "Did you tell Tom Merry so?"

"I did."

"You asked for leave, to see your uncle?"

"Certainly."

"I don't quite see why he didn't give you leave, in that case." Kildare withdrew his hand from the ashplant, "Go and fetch Tom Merry here."

"Pleased!"

Cardew left the study, smiling. It was some minutes before he returned with Tom Merry. Tom's face was flushed, and his brow clouded, as he came in with Cardew. Evidently he was not pleased by this summons from the Head of the Games.

"Cardew says you wished to see me, Kildare," he said, abruptly.

"Oh! Yes!" Kildare had picked up Thucydides while he waited. Now he laid it down again, and looked across his table at the two juniors, "Cardew was reported as absent from games-practice this afternoon."

"Don't I have to give you a list of absentees?" said Tom, "That has always been junior captain's duty. If you want me to stop it, I'll be glad to oblige."

Kildare raised his eyebrows.

"Don't be a young ass!" he said, gruffly, "Cardew says that his uncle was in the neighbourhood, and specially wanted to see him. A fellow can be let off for a good reason. Didn't you think that a good reason?"

"I did not believe a word of it," answered Tom, very distinctly.

"Oh!" said Kildare, rather taken aback. "You think it was untrue?"

"I am quite sure of it."

"That alters the case," said Kildare, "In a word, you believed that Cardew was simply spinning a yarn to cut games?"

"Yes!"

"You still believe so?"

"Yes!"

"That's all," said Kildare, "You can cut." Tom Merry left the study without another word, and Kildare picked up his ashplant, "You cut games this afternoon, Cardew, without leave. Bend over that chair."

"Any old thing," drawled Cardew.

He bent over the chair. Kildare rose, ashplant in hand. There was a sound of steady swiping, and Cardew, tough as he was, was hard put to it to keep back a yell. But he did not utter a sound, all the same, though his handsome face was a little pale as he rose after the "six."

"You can cut," said Kildare, throwing the ashplant on the table again, and picking up Thucydides.

"Thanks!" drawled Cardew.

He went very quietly from the study. Several fellows glanced at him, as he went to the stairs, and he went rather quickly up. On the study landing he came on Baggy Trimble again, and was the recipient of another fat grin from the plump Baggy.

"He, he, he! Had it bad?" inquired Trimble, "Did Kildare lay it on? Did he—ooo-Hoooooop!"

Cardew kicked him in passing, and, leaving Baggy yelling, walked on to his study. Levison and Clive eyed him as he came in.

"Licked?" asked Levison.

"Kildare wasn't asking me to tea."

"Had it bad?" asked Clive.

"Oh! No! I've enjoyed it," said Cardew, "Nothing like six on the bags to make a fellow really enjoy life!"

"Sorry," muttered Levison.

"Oh, don't you worry." Cardew's eyes glinted, "It's Tom Merry who's going to be sorry for landing me in it."

"That's rot," said Clive, "You have to be reported if you cut games. You'd have to do the same if you were junior captain. No good feeling sore with Tom Merry about it."

"None at all," said Levison.

Cardew's eyes flashed at them.

"I've had six, and I don't want any pi-jaw over and above," he said, "You'd better pack it up."

"Look here, Cardew——"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Cardew.

Levison and Clive looked at him, and left the study without speaking again. Cardew kicked the door shut after them.

Lowther, Too!

TOM MERRY came into his study, after class on Monday. Manners was standing by the table, cutting films and carefully packing them into a little cardboard envelope. Manners, apparently, had been giving his camera a run. Manners was in the junior House eleven, and quite keen on cricket; but there was no doubt that photography was his first love.

Most School House juniors were thinking of the House match on Wednesday, and of the House's dubious prospects; and there had been warm arguments in the day-room and the studies over the "chucking" of Cardew, but Manners was able to forget such matters when he had his camera in hand. Tom glanced round as he came in.

"Where's Monty?" he asked.

Manners gave a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"He's got a jape on," he answered, "Something to do with Knox of the Sixth, I believe—some jape in his study."

Tom gave a grunt.

He did not seem to be in his usual placid temper. He had heard a good deal of the talk about Cardew, and criticism of his decision to "chuck" that rather exasperating member of the junior House eleven; and no doubt it had ruffled his accustomed serenity.

"Anything up?" asked Manners.

"Oh! Nothing," said Tom, "Only the cricket! Half the fellows seem to think that I ought to swallow Cardew's cheek somehow, and play him after all."

"Well—!" began Manners, slowly.

"Oh, don't you begin on the same tack," said Tom, interrupting, "I've got bother enough on my mind without jaw in my own study. Anybody would think that a House match didn't matter a bean,"

he added, sourly, "with one fellow thinking of nothing but japing, and another buried in photography."

"Well, it wouldn't help if I chucked taking photographs," said Manners, "You don't want help from me."

"I certainly don't want you to advise me to eat my own words, and play Cardew after I told him he was out of the team."

"Right!" said Manners, "Then I won't advise you, old chap! Have you fixed up the team yet?"

"The best I can do, with Talbot and Kangaroo away, and Blake and D'Arcy on the crooked list," grunted Tom, "I hope you won't forget the House match on Wednesday, and go out with your camera."

Manners smiled faintly. Tom was evidently a little on edge: but Manners was a tactful fellow. A cricket captain's life, like a policeman's, was not always a happy one! Manners was sympathetic: though he did not see quite eye to eye with his chum in the affair of Cardew.

"Rely on me," he said, "and on Monty too."

"If he doesn't cut the match for a jape on Knox of the Sixth!" said Tom, sarcastically.

"Um!" said Manners. He changed the subject, "I see you've got your list there—how does it go?"

Tom Merry read it out.

"Merry, Manners, Lowther, Herries, Digby, Levison, Clive, Glyn, Julian, Wilkins, Wildrake," he recited.

"Um!" said Manners, again, "Some jolly good men, and some not so jolly good. Still, I don't see why we shouldn't beat the New House. Pity we're so weak in bowlers. I wish we had a man like Fatty Wynn over the way."

"I wish we had," said Tom. He frowned, "Don't tell me that Cardew is nearly as good as Wynn of the New House."

"I won't," said Manners, quietly.

"That's what you're thinking."

"Well, look here, Tom, I know Cardew's an irritating and cheeky smudge, and a good bit of a cad in a good many ways, but he can bowl," said Manners, "And cricket's cricket."

"He can bowl," said Tom, "and he can let his skipper down. A man who lets you down is a man who lets you down."

"Oh! Yes! But——"

"Give us a rest."

"Oh, all right."

Manners devoted his attention to his films. Tom Merry sat on the corner of the table, knitting his brows over that cricket list. It was a good team, considering that he had lost four of his best

men: but there was no doubt that it would have been very considerably strengthened by the inclusion of Ralph Reckness Cardew. All the more, because Cardew of late had developed a skill in bowling which put him almost on a par with Fatty Wynn of the New House. But at the thought of Cardew, Tom's face became hard and grim. Cardew was out of the eleven, and he was staying out.

There was a step in the passage, and Monty Lowther came into the study.

He came in very quietly.

Tom gave him a careless glance: Manners looked at him more attentively. Monty did not look like a fellow coming back after a successful jape on an unpopular man in the Sixth. He looked very subdued. Monty Lowther lived, and moved, and had his being, in japing: and his japes did not always turn out winners. Manners wondered rather sarcastically whether something had gone wrong this time: as something so often did.

"That the cricket list, Tom?" asked Lowther.

"Yes! Such as it is," said Tom.

"Oh!" said Lowther.

He moved about the study, restlessly and uncomfortably. Manners eyed him inquiringly. He was not thinking only of cricket like Tom. He could see that Monty Lowther had something on his mind, and that he had something to say, which he did not find it easy to get out.

"I—I say, Tom——!" stammered Lowther, at last.

"Yes?" Tom looked up.

"I—I—do you specially want me to play on Wednesday?" stammered Lowther.

Tom stared at him.

"You know I do," he answered, tersely, "Don't tell me you're going to visit some dashed relation like Talbot and Noble, or that you've gone and got yourself crooked like Blake and D'Arcy."

"Oh! No! But——"

"But what?" Tom almost snapped, "Do you want to cut the House match, and leave me in the lurch, to play some fatheaded jape on the New House?"

"Of course not. But——"

"But what?"

Monty Lowther did not reply, but he coloured uncomfortably. Tom Merry stared at him.

"What's happened, Monty?" asked Manners, quietly, "Didn't your jape on Knox work out? Did he come in while you were putting the gum in his inkpot?"

"Oh! No! But——"

"Lucky for you," said Tom, "What the dickens are you always ragging for? Have you landed in a row?"

"Well, yes. Railton came to the study to speak to Knox," said Lowther, reluctantly, "Knox was out all right—I'd made sure of that—and how was I to know that a dashed house-master would barge in?"

"He copped you?" asked Manners.

"Just as I was pouring the gum into Knox's inkpot," said Lowther.

Snort, from Tom Merry.

"I hope he gave you six!" he said.

"Thanks," said Lowther, tartly, "Well, he didn't! He gave me Extra School for Wednesday afternoon."

Tom Merry jumped off the table.

"Extra on Wednesday!" he roared.

"Yes! I—I'm sorry, old chap——!" faltered Lowther.

"You fathead!" roared Tom, "You ass! You know how I'm fixed for the House match on Wednesday, and you go and ask Railton for Extra! That means looking for another man, and where am I going to find one?"

Manners whistled.

"You dummy!" gasped Tom, "You unmitigated lunatic! Couldn't you chuck your silly japing till after the House match?"

"I've said I'm sorry——"

"What's the good of that?" hooted Tom, "I shall have to play Gunn. Is Gunn anything like your form? Oh, you make me tired."

"Not much good playing Gunn, against the new House," muttered Lowther, "Look here, Tom, I shall have to stand out—no help for that. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. But there's a better man to take my place, if you choose——"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Are you going to suggest Cardew?" he exclaimed, "If you are, you can save your breath. I'd rather play Baggy Trimble than Cardew."

"He's a good man, so far as cricket goes——" persisted Lowther, "I can tell you that most of the fellows think he ought to be played—and I jolly well do, and so does Manners."

"You can leave me in the lurch with your idiotic japing, Monty Lowther, but you can't run the eleven," said Tom.

"I don't want to. But——"

"Oh, chuck it! I'd better go along and speak to Gunn," growled Tom, and he went out of the study with that.

TOM MERRY'S RIVAL

Manners and Lowther looked at one another.

"You must have been an ass, old chap," said Manners, "You and your japing!"

"Oh, rats," grunted Lowther.

"I've a jolly good mind to go along to the Fourth and kick that cad Cardew," said Manners, savagely, "He likes putting fellows' backs up—and he seems to have put Tom's up for keeps this time. I'm jolly glad Kildare gave him six for cutting on Saturday."

"He ought to be played, all the same."

"Well, I think so—but Tom doesn't, and I don't know that I can blame him, either. Anyhow, what he says, goes, and that's that."

Lowther nodded, rather dismally. There was no doubt, at all events, that that was that!

6

Tom Merry's Last Word!

"**B**AI Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was looking at the cricket list, posted up in the junior day-room. Having looked at it, he screwed his celebrated monocle into his noble eye, and looked at it again. His survey did not seem to afford him satisfaction.

Neither did it seem to afford satisfaction to a crowd of other fellows who were staring at it.

Levison and Clive frowned as they read it down. Cardew shrugged his shoulders. His manner was indifferent: but his feelings were by no means so. Probably, up to the very last moment, Cardew had expected to find his name in that list—in spite of what had been said in No. 10 Study on Saturday, and in spite of the adamant attitude of the junior captain since. But the name of R. R. Cardew, taken out of the list on Saturday, was still absent from it on Tuesday evening. Tom Merry had not changed his mind. Public opinion in the House was very strongly against him: but he seemed impervious to it.

Fellows who had always considered him easy-going, in fact too easy-going, wondered what had come over him. Cardew had given offence, in one way or another, time and again, and Tom had kept his temper and his patience. They did not realise that what had happened on Saturday was the last straw, which had caused the junior captain finally to make up his mind on the subject. Having made it up, Tom was not the fellow to change. He believed that he was right: but right or wrong, the matter was settled.

Tom, after posting up the list, had strolled across to an arm-

chair and sat down, and picked up a book. Manners and Lowther were with him: the "Terrible Three" were as inseparable as ever, in spite of differences of opinion. But the three seemed to be rather left to themselves.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus, "That weally won't do, deah boys. The New House will walk wight ovah that lot."

"Oh, Tom Merry won't mind that," said Levison, sarcastically, "So long as he has his way, what does cricket matter?"

"It won't do," said Clive.

"My dear men," drawled Cardew, "It will have to do! The Great Chief has spoken! It only remains for common mortals to bow and submit."

"Weally, Cardew, it is all your fault," said Arthur Augustus, "You weally cannot expect a cwicket captain to put up with your cheek. All the same, I think Tom Mewwy ought to stwetch a point in this case."

"He's got to," growled Levison. "We're not going to have the New House winning all the matches, and yowling out that we can't play cricket."

"Wathah not," said Arthur Augustus.

Two or three dozen voices joined in the chorus. There was now a total of six good men out of the eleven. Talbot and Kangaroo, Blake and D'Arcy and Monty Lowther, were unavailable, from one cause or another. But Cardew was available—and Cardew, as it happened, was the man who was most wanted, for his bowling. In any case it had to be an uphill fight against Figgins and Co. of the New House, with the result on the knees of the gods: but with Cardew in the team, the School House could at least hope for victory, or at the worst keep down the margin of defeat. Without him, hardly a fellow in the day-room believed that they had a chance: indeed, some envisaged a defeat by an innings. And the general consensus of opinion was that Tom Merry had to think again.

Tom, in his armchair, seemed to be reading. Probably he was not very interested in his book. He could hardly fail to hear the remarks that were floating on the air.

Manners and Lowther were dismal and uneasy. They, if not Tom, could see that there was going to be a row: and they were not so indifferent to it as Tom appeared to be.

"Tom, old chap—!" murmured Manners.

Tom looked up from his book.

"There's a spot of excitement yonder," said Manners.

"Is there?" said Tom.

"Looks like a row," said Lowther.

"Well, if anybody wants a row, he can get on with it," said Tom.

"Don't you think you'd better think again, old fellow—about Cardew, I mean," muttered Manners.

"No!"

That reply was short and clear.

"They're coming over here," said Lowther.

"Let them come," said Tom.

He seemed quite unmoved.

There were two or three dozen juniors in the day-room. And they all came over to the Terrible Three, in a body. Tom Merry laid his book on his knee, and met them with a calm gaze.

"Look here, Tom Merry—!" began Levison.

"Anything to say to me?" asked Tom.

"Yes!" snapped Levison.

"Go ahead, then! No charge!" said Tom, amicably.

"That's a pretty weak lot to put up against the New House," said Levison, "But you know that as well as I do."

"Well, I don't claim to know so much about cricket as you do in No. 9 Study," said Tom, thoughtfully, "But I'm always willing to learn. Any improvements to suggest from your stores of superior knowledge?"

Ernest Levison flushed angrily.

"The team's at sixes and sevens anyhow," he snapped, "You're making it weaker than it need be by your grudge against Cardew. Every man in the House excepting you thinks that he ought to play tomorrow."

"But I've no grudge against Cardew," said Tom, mildly, "I don't like him—and I rather think I'm not alone in that. There's no grudge—he doesn't matter one way or the other."

"Thanks," drawled Cardew.

"He's wanted in the game tomorrow," said Clive.

"And he's jolly well got to play!" exclaimed several voices, "You can't leave a good man out because you don't like him, Tom Merry."

Tom's face flushed a little.

"That isn't the reason, as you all know, or ought to know," he answered, "And I'm not going to argue about it. Cardew was warned on Saturday that if he walked out on us, he would walk out for good. He did walk out, and that settled it."

"I told you I had to see my uncle," said Cardew.

Tom looked him in the face.

"I didn't believe you then, and I don't believe you now," he answered, coolly, "You can cut that out."

"I can prove it if you like——"

"Do you mean that you can back up one lie with another?" asked Tom, scornfully. "You can save your breath. I want to hear nothing from you."

"You want to make the New House a present of the match to-morrow?" asked Cardew.

"If that's what you want, the House won't stand for it, Tom Merry," said Levison, "All the fellows here are cricketers, and every one of them is against you." And a deep murmur of support came from the whole crowd.

"Is that the verdict?" asked Tom.

"That's it," said a dozen juniors at once.

"Now what have you got to say?" asked Levison.

"This!" said Tom, with a gleam in his blue eyes, "I've stood more cheek from Cardew than I believe any other skipper would stand. He's gone over the limit now, and that's the finish. So long as I am junior captain of the House, Cardew doesn't play for the School House. That's final."

There was another angry murmur.

"You won't stay skipper long, at that rate," said Wilkins.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not specially keen on staying skipper," he answered, coolly,

"The fellows can turn me out any time they like."

"We don't want to do that," muttered Clive.

"I do!" drawled Cardew.

"Oh, you shut up!" exclaimed Jack Blake, "You're the cause of all the trouble, anyhow, with your dashed cheek."

"Yaas, wathar!"

"Nobody wants to turn you out, Tom Merry," said Levison, biting his lip, "But if the New House lick us again to-morrow—and with that team there's not much doubt about it—I can tell you we shall all feel pretty fed up with you."

Tom Merry set his lips.

He looked round over a crowd of excited faces, and seemed to reflect. A good many fellows fancied, or hoped, that he was about to make a concession; and a smile of triumph was already dawning on Cardew's face. But they soon learned that nothing was further from Tom Merry's thoughts.

"Most of you seem to be against me," said Tom, at last, very quietly, "I stick to what I've said—so long as I'm skipper, Cardew won't play for the House. We're playing the New House tomorrow without him. I hope we shall beat them. If we don't——!"

"No 'if' about it," grunted Clive.

"If we don't," Tom Merry resumed, calmly, "I shall resign the captaincy, and there will be a new election. If the fellows want me, they can stand by me—if they don't, I'm quite ready to stand down, and hope that you'll find a better man. That's all I've got to say. Leave it at that."

And with that, Tom Merry rose, put his book under his arm, and walked out of the day-room: leaving that apartment in a buzz behind him.

No Luck!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW stood, the following afternoon, with his hands in his pockets, watching the cricket.

He lounged along to the pavilion after the game had started. School House were in, and were putting up a good show. Fatty Wynn, the demon bowler of the New House, was at the top of his form, and few doubted that he was going to make "hay" of the School House tail: but Tom Merry and Manners, at least, were keeping their end up to begin with.

Even Cardew, at his best, was not the equal of Tom Merry with the willow, and Tom was in great form. Fatty Wynn so far had made no impression on him: and Manners, at the other end, though by no means a brilliant bat, was a steady and reliable stonewaller, backing up his chum quietly and loyally without thinking of fireworks on his own account.

The waiting batsmen, and other fellows looking on, gave Cardew glances as he came. Every fellow there knew that Cardew ought to have been playing: and whether his exclusion was more his own fault than Tom Merry's, or more Tom's than his own, was an arguable point. One thing, however, was sure: Cardew ought to have been batting for his House that afternoon: and still more important, bowling when the New House took their knock.

"How's it goin', Ernest?" drawled Cardew.

"Twelve for no wicket," answered Levison.

"Not too bad for a start."

"Wathah not," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "Tom Mewwy is knockin' them all ovah the shop. But I feah that there will be a different tale to tell when the wabbits go in. Bothah my beastly w'ist."

"And bother my beastly knee!" sighed Jack Blake.

"And bothah that ass Lowthah, getting himself detained when he's wanted heah!" said Arthur Augustus.

Cardew laughed.

"Didn't you get yourself detained last House match?" he asked. "I seem to remember that you were missing."

"Oh, wats!" was Arthur Augustus's reply to that unwelcome reminder: and he turned his back on his irritating relation.

Cardew looked on at the game, his manner one of easy and indifferent negligence, but with an unpleasant glint in his eyes.

There was little doubt that, almost up to the last minute, he had counted on playing in that game. Almost every fellow in the House thought that Tom Merry ought to have "stretched a point" to that extent: and Cardew had expected him to yield to public opinion. The fact that the junior captain would have had to eat his own words only amused Cardew.

But Tom had been adamant: and Cardew did not find it amusing to look on with his hands in his pockets.

He was not always keen on games: but he was keen now, and he knew that he was in great form. He had had bad luck in the last House-match, and he wanted to show what he could do. Above all, the humiliation of being turned out, when he had taken it for granted that he was indispensable and that his skipper would never dare turn him out, was very bitter to him. He had to stand looking on, while fellows like Wilkins and Gunn and Glyn, not a patch on him at cricket, went out to the wickets. He was going to have the consolation, such as it was, of seeing their wickets go down for next to nothing: but the defeat of his House was not much of a consolation to any School House man, even to "Cardew the Cad." Yet as he watched Tom Merry hitting balls from a bowler like Fatty Wynn all over the field, he could have found it in his heart to wish that the New House bowler would send him back to the pavilion.

"Man down!" muttered Herries.

Manners was out, to a catch in the field by Kerr of the New House. Herries was third on the list, and he went in next.

"Now look out for the pyrotechnics," murmured Cardew, sarcastically.

Jack Blake gave him a glare.

"Old Herries will put up a show," he snapped, "At any rate he hasn't got himself kicked out of the game for cheek.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus.

Old Herries did not put up the show that Blake hoped to see. The last ball of the over, from Fatty Wynn, sent him home for a duck. Digby went out to take his place.

Cardew's lip curled in a sneer. George Herries was by no means a "rabbit": he was head and shoulders above some that were to follow. So the further prospect was not exhilarating for the School House.

But Tom Merry, taking an over from Kerr of the New House, was still going strong. Runs were going up, at any rate, whenever Tom had the bowling. Digby came out to a catch by Figgins, and Levison went in.

"Things will look up a bit now," remarked Clive.

And they did: for the score stood at forty when Levison came back to the pavilion, clean bowled by Redfern of the New House. Sidney Clive went out to replace his chum.

"Tom Merry looks jolly well set!" remarked Manners, with great satisfaction, "They won't shift Tom in a hurry."

"No fear," agreed Blake.

"First in and not out, vewy likely," said Arthur Augustus, hopefully, "But he wants a weally good man at the othah end you know. Bothah my beastly w'ist!"

"Bother that cheeky ass Cardew!" growled Blake.

"Bother Tom Merry too, if you're bothering," said Levison, "Cardew ought to be playing."

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Cardew, "There goes old Clivey."

Clive came out with four to his credit. Gunn of the Shell was next man in and he did not look too happy as we went out to face Fatty Wynn's bowling. He was aware that he was not so good a man at the sticks as Clive: and the others, still more keenly aware of it, did not expect him to last long.

However, William Gunn contented himself with defence, and lived through the rest of the over, and Tom Merry had the bowling again, this time from Redfern. And the New House field again had all the leather-hunting they wanted, and a little more.

"Tom's all wight!" said Arthur Augustus, "But—bothah my w'ist!"

It really began to look as if Arthur Augustus's hopeful prediction might prove correct, and that Tom might be not out after being first in. But it was not to be. A three brought Gunn to the batting end, and then it happened. Gunn knocked the ball, misjudged it, and ran—and Tom, who could see that there was no run in it, waved him back. But Gunn, unseeing, charged on, and Tom, with

deep feelings, ran, and passed him on the pitch. The ball was coming in to the wicket Gunn had left, and Tom Merry put every ounce of speed into his dash, and fairly flew. But it was too late—the wicket-keeper knocked off the bails, his bat still a yard from the crease.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

Tom Merry walked back to the pavilion. He was run out, and his feelings could hardly have been expressed in words.

"Man in, Julian."

Dick Julian went out to his wicket.

Cardew smiled.

The skipper who had "chucked" him, had been run out by one of his own selected team! Tom Merry saw his smile, and had hard work to keep from wiping it off his face with a smack. However, he restrained that impulse, and turned his back on Cardew.

"All over bar shoutin'," murmured Cardew, and the New House men will be doing the shoutin'."

"Hard luck, Tom, old man," muttered Manners.

Tom nodded: he did not feel like speaking. Hardly a fellow hoped now that the game would be pulled out of the fire. Only the "tail" of the School House team remained, and they were evidently down for execution. And as the junior game was single-innings, there was no chance of setting things right in a second knock. The game, in fact, was up.

The "tail," certainly, did not last long. What remained was rather like a procession: and School House were all down for fifty. That the New House would exceed that total, unless School House put up some remarkably good bowling, was a foregone conclusion: and the only available first-class bowler was out of the team, lounging with his hands in his trousers pockets. Even Tom Merry, perhaps, felt a twinge of doubt, whether he had been a little too adamant. But it was too late to think of that now. If old Talbot, or Blake or D'Arcy, or even Monty Lowther, had been available—but they were not, and Cardew, who was available but discarded, was a better bowler than any of them. Tom's feelings were very deep.

Cardew looked on, with a mocking smile he did not take the trouble to conceal, when the School House men went into the field. He was bitterly hostile to Tom Merry: and he reflected cynically that the junior captain was riding for a fall. After what he had said in the day-room, he could scarcely fail to resign the captaincy:

indeed it was likely that he would be left with no choice about that. And that possibility was food for thought for Ralph Reckness Cardew. Cardew was not thinking only of cricket as he lounged there watching Figgins and Co. pile up runs. He was thinking also of a new election, and wondering whether, with luck, he might be able to push his triumph over Tom Merry to the extent of taking his place as junior captain of the House. Why not?

Nobody was much surprised when the New House batsmen passed School House total with five wickets still in hand. Figgins and Co. rejoiced in a victory by five wickets: but there were glum and angry faces among the School House men. Tom Merry, once the most popular fellow in his House, seemed to be at the nadir of his popularity now.

8

Unexpected !

TOM MERRY smiled.

There were few smiling faces among the School House juniors just then: and Tom's face had been grave, as he came up to his study.

But he smiled, as he glanced at Manners and Lowther.

Both of them were looking glum and gloomy—looking, indeed, as though they found life, even at St. Jim's, weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.

They gave him glum looks as he came in. There was a roll of films on the table, but Manners seemed to have forgotten it—actually forgotten his darling hobby of photography. Monty Lowther would never have been taken for the funny man of the Shell: he looked as if he had never dreamed of a jape, or even remotely meditated a jest.

"You've done it?" asked Manners.

"Yes."

"Resigned?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"Seen Kildare?"

"Yes."

"Did he think you an ass?"

"He didn't say so."

"Must have thought it all the same," said Lowther, "You've let a tricky cad like Cardew hoof you out of the captaincy. I'll bet he's grinning over it like the mischievous monkey he is."

"Not exactly that," said Tom, mildly, "A chap isn't captain by divine right, you know, like a jolly old Stuart king. When the men are fed up with him, it's time for him to retire gracefully."

"Who's fed up?" growled Manners.

"Everybody, I think," answered Tom, "You two, among others—"

Manners and Lowther gave him rather exasperated looks.

Their own opinion had been against Tom's in the matter of Cardew: and so had that of most of the cricketering men. But they, certainly, did not want Tom to lose his position as junior House-captain, and they did not think that other fellows did. There was plenty of angry and resentful feeling at the moment: but it would pass away in time, and probably before long. All the House knew that Tom was the fittest man for the job, if it came to that.

"Pretty ass, I should look, standing for re-election, and getting voted down," said Tom, "That's cut right out."

"If the election was left over for a few days, everybody would come round," said Lowther, "It only needs a little time."

"Perhaps! But the election's tomorrow—the House can't be left without a junior captain, simply to give fellows time to change their minds. Besides, I don't particularly want them to change their minds."

"You mean you've got your back up," grunted Lowther.

"I shouldn't wonder." Tom's face set a little, "I've done what I thought right. A man in the eleven refused to toe the line—cut a game against his skipper's direct orders—might have cut another game when he was specially wanted—no relying on him at all. Such a fellow can't stay in the eleven, in my opinion. The next skipper may play him if he likes—I wouldn't! I'm turned out because I wouldn't take such chances—and I'm staying out."

"You've turned yourself out."

"It comes to the same thing."

"It doesn't!"

"Well, we're not going to agree, so let's chuck it," said Tom, "I hope old Talbot will stand. If he does I shall vote for him. But I won't stand for re-election at any price."

"Even with the election so soon, half the fellows would back you up, I'm sure of that," said Manners.

"More than half," said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!" came a voice from the doorway: and the "Terrible Three" looked round as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ambled gracefully into the study, "I wegard you as wathah an ass, Tom Mewwy, if you don't mind my sayin' so."

"Not at all," said Tom, laughing.

"I hear that you have already wesigned, Tom Mewwy. Did I heah awright?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Nothing at all the matter with your ears, old man! You've got it right."

"Lots of the fellows are wathah watty," said Arthur Augustus, "But of course you will be we-elected, Tom Mewwy."

"The silly ass says he won't stand for re-election," growled Manners.

"That's wot, Tom Mewwy."

"Rot or not, there it is," said Tom.

"I have come along heah to advise you to do that vewy thing, deah boy."

"Sorry—nothing doing."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy "

"Speech taken as read," said Tom, "Chuck it, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to chuck it," said Arthur Augustus, warmly, "We are not goin' to lose you, Tom Mewwy. I wegard it as your duty to stand for we-election, and we shall all back you up."

"A good many wouldn't," said Tom, "A good many would, I daresay, and it would be touch and go. Not the sort of thing I want."

"Nevah mind what you want, Tom Mewwy. You have to think of the good of the House, not of what you want personally," said Arthur Augustus, severely.

"The House will totter along somehow without me," said Tom, "It's no good, Gussy—save your breath."

"Weally, deah boy—Bai Jove! Did you ask that chap heah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as Cardew of the Fourth appeared in the doorway. And he gave Ralph Reckness Cardew a glance of the strongest disfavour.

Tom Merry frowned. He had had enough, and more than enough, of Ralph Reckness Cardew. "Cardew the Cad" certainly was not *persona grata* in No. 10 in the Shell.

"I did not!" he said, very distinctly, "What do you want, Cardew?"

Cardew, in the doorway, smiled.

Three hostile stares, from Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, added to the scornful glance of Arthur Augustus, did not seem to disconcert him in the very least. He was cool and amused.

"Only a word, if you can spare a minute of your valuable time," he drawled. "Or are you very busy, organisin' victory for the House?"

"That will do," said Tom. "Cut!"

"Yaas, wathah, and the soonah the bettah."

"Hook it," said Monty Lowther.

"Shut the door after you," said Manners.

Nobody in No. 10 Study, evidently, had much in the way of politeness to waste on the dandy of the Fourth.

Cardew smiled, unperturbed.

"I don't seem to be fearfully popular here," he remarked, "Even

my dear relation doesn't seem pleased to see me. Speakin' of relations," went on Cardew, blandly impervious to hostile glares, "I hear that Blake's got a relation coming to St. Jim's, and that you've landed him on your study, and your pals are kicking up a row about it."

"That does not concern you, Cardew! Pway mind your own business," snapped Arthur Augustus.

"Look here, Cardew, if you've come here to say anything, say it and cut," exclaimed Tom Merry, "You're not wanted here, as I daresay you know."

"It was sort of dawning on me," admitted Cardew, "I wanted to know whether you're keepin' your word, and chucking the captaincy."

"My word's a bit more reliable than yours," snapped Tom, "I have resigned, and there's a new election tomorrow, if that's what you want to know."

Cardew's eyes gleamed. He had hoped so, believed so: yet he could hardly believe that his rival was playing into his hands to such an extent. The way was clear now.

"Yes, that's what I wanted to know," he assented, "Candidates have to give in their names to Kildare, I suppose."

"Yes: any time tomorrow up to the election."

"Good egg!" said Cardew, "May as well strike the jolly old iron while it's hot, though. I'll trot along and see Kildare now."

Tom stared at him.

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"Any man in the Lower House can put up, can't he?" asked Cardew, "Baggy Trimble could put up if he liked. Why not little me?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry jumped.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"You!" repeated Manners and Lowther, like an echo.

"Why not?" drawled Cardew, "Without bein' a conceited chap—I'm sure you must have noticed the absence of conceit in my make-up—I rather think that I could handle the job. And I'd rather like to get you six from a pre, Tom Merry, if you cut games-practice," he added, with a chuckle.

"You!" repeated Tom.

"Bai Jove! You cheekay ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "You juniah House-captain—the ideah is widiculous."

"Dear me!" said Cardew.

"If you mean that, Cardew—!" said Tom, with a deep breath.

"Why not?"

Tom looked at him. There were plenty of reasons why not,

though Cardew did not seem aware of them:

"I think a good many fellows will vote for me, especially as the election comes so soon after our recent glorious experience on the cricket field. Every man in the House knows that you chucked the game away, Tom Merry, and that I could have saved it. And fellows like a change, too," went on Cardew, meditatively, "Like the jolly old Athenians, you know, always running after somethin' new. I really think I've got rather a healthy chance—I'm tryin' it on, anyway. If I get in —"

"You'll fix up a match with your friends at the Green Man?" asked Monty Lowther, sarcastically. "Are you going to put up as the Pub-Crawling Candidate?"

Cardew laughed.

"I'm goin' to put up, anyway," he declared, "And if this study doesn't like it, this study can lump it!"

"Weally, Cardew——"

"Same applies to you, Gussy! Like it or lump it!" said Cardew. And with that, he turned, and lounged away down the passage.

Tom Merry stood silent, his brows knitted, half-consciously clenching his hands. Not for a moment had it crossed his mind that Cardew might think, or dream, of putting up as a candidate for the vacant captaincy. He had thought of Talbot, of Harry Noble, of Jack Blake, and one or two other fellows, as possible and desirable candidates: not of Cardew. If there was one fellow in the School House utterly unsuitable for such a position, it was "Cardew the Cad." Keen and slack by turns, variable as the wind, following every impulse, wise or foolish, careless of others and of the opinion of others, addicted to surreptitious smoking in his study and to "breaking out" after lights out: known to keep a racing list in his study and to back horses with a frowsy book-maker at Rylcombe—what sort of a junior House-captain would he make? As likely as not, if he gained the position, he would tire of it in a few weeks, and neglect every duty he was called upon to perform. It would be like him to tire of it like a child of a toy. Was it possible——?

"Well, that beats it!" said Manners, after a long silence.

"Bai Jove! He won't have a chance in the election," said Arthur Augustus.

Manners shook his head.

"Forget that," he said, "He's got a chance, and a good one—while the fellows have got their backs up against Tom, at least."

"He's got friends who will vote for him," said Lowther, sardonically, "Every bad bat in the House will plump for Cardew, and we've got some—Racke, Croke, Mellish, Trimble—Clampsc—yes, and more——"

"The cwicketahs won't, Lowthah."

TOM MERRY'S RIVAL

"I don't know! He's a good cricketer, whatever else he is—and everybody believes he could have saved the game today."

"If there is the wemotest chance of Cardew gettin' in——"

"More than a remote chance," said Manners.

"In that case, there is only one thing to be done," said Arthur Augustus, firmly, "Tom Mewwy must stand again. You must stand for we-election, Tom Mewwy, and keep that wottah out, and save the House fwom goin' to wack and wuin."

Tom did not speak.

"Oh, no good talking to him," said Lowther, tartly, "He's got his back up, and the House can go to pot."

"Obstinate as a mule," grunted Manners.

Tom coloured.

"Not quite," he said, "If the men want Cardew, they can have him—but I'd go a long way to keep him out of a position he's utterly unfit for, and won't value a penny-piece after he's had it a week or two. I'll stand, if you like."

"That's all wight, then," said Arthur Augustus, "I'll twot along and tell the fellows you're standing again. We'll get you in all wight, Tom Mewwy, wely on that."

And Arthur Augustus ambled out of No. 10, to spread the news that Tom Merry was standing for re-election. He left two fellows in the study feeling very much relieved—and one in a very doubtful frame of mind. But the die was cast now: and the junior election in the School House was going to be a struggle between Tom Merry and "Cardew the Cad."

Votes Wanted!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW stretched elegant limbs in his armchair in No. 9 Study in the Fourth, with a due regard to the crease in his well-fitting trousers, and groped in his pocket for a cigarette. Then, meeting the glances of Levison and Clive, he laughed, and drew out his hand empty.

"Oh, don't mind us," said Clive, sarcastically.

"I won't!" agreed Cardew, "But I must mind my step, dear man. No more smokes in this study for the present."

"Turning over a new leaf?" asked Levison, also sarcastically.

"Exactly."

"For how long?" asked Clive.

"Twenty-four hours, dear man."

Levison and Clive stared, at that reply. They had been discussing the cricket match of the afternoon, when Cardew strolled into the study, with a cheery grin on his face. It was easy to see that he was in great spirits, and enjoying life: though what could have happened to brace him so, his friends had no idea.

Cardew looked at them with an amused smile, from the armchair.

"Life's a jolly old proposition, when you can get a spot of excitement into it," he drawled, "And we're goin' to have quite a big spot to-morrow, my beloved 'earers. You've heard that Tom Merry's kept his word and resigned?"

"Yes," said Clive, "and if that's what you're looking so bucked about, I don't see why. Tom Merry was a good skipper, and we're not likely to get a better man in his place."

"Cardew wouldn't care much about that," said Levison, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"That's where you guess again!" grinned Cardew, "I care a

lot, Ernest, old bean—so much so that I'm goin' to take measures to see that we get a better skipper than the late-lamented Thomas."

"And how?" grunted Clive.

"I've just been along to see Kildare——"

"Had another six for slacking?"

"Dear man, no! I've put down my name as candidate for the junior captaincy. Now I'm waitin' for you fellows to be wildly enthusiastic about it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Levison.

"Oh!" repeated Sidney Clive.

They looked surprised—certainly not wildly enthusiastic. Cardew grinned at them.

"Like the idea?" he asked, "Thomas is out—he's kicked himself out before the men could kick him out—takin' time by the forelock. We're going to have a junior captain from the Fourth instead of the Shell—a change for the better, I'm sure you'll agree. You two are goin' to back me up, of course."

"If you mean it—!" said Levison, slowly.

"Quite!"

"If you don't get some other idea into your head by this time tomorrow—" grunted Clive.

"I'm fixed on this! I'm goin' all out to pull off the election tomorrow, and I think I've got a jolly good chance, after Tom Merry's chucked away a House match, and left the New House men crowing over us." Cardew opened a little notebook, "I'm makin' a list of supporters. Your names go down?"

"I—I suppose so," said Levison.

"Um!" said Clive, "I suppose we're bound to back up a man in our own study. But——"

"That isn't the wild enthusiasm I was expectin'," said Cardew, amiably, "But it will do—so long as I get your votes. Every junior in the House has a vote, and every vote may count. There's bound to be a rival candidate—I hope there'll be two or three, to split the voting. Did you know that at the present moment there are precisely ninety-six juniors in the House?"

"Have you counted them?"

"Exactly—I've been over the lists and counted every man. Two at least will be candidates—my noble self, and some johnny at present unknown. That leaves ninety-four voters. Out of ninety-four I've got to get forty-eight for a majority. One vote would turn the scale—though of course I'd like to get in by a bumping majority."

"That's not likely," said Clive, dryly.

"*On ne sait jamais!*" said Cardew, lightly, "Which bein' interpreted means, one never knows! Anyhow one extra vote will serve

my turn, the odd one for me, and against the enemy, will make a majority of two. I could manage on that.

"I suppose you might pull it off," said Levison, thoughtfully, "with Tom Merry a bit unpopular at the present moment. You couldn't if the election was left over till next week.

Cardew laughed.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said, "But it can't be left over till next week, so that jolly old question doesn't arise. As the matter stands, I shouldn't be surprised at a two-thirds majority. Lots of the cricketing men are fed up with Tom Merry, though it mayn't last. And the other sort will be for me to a man."

"Fellows like Racke and Crooke?" grunted Clive. "Fellows who sneak into the box-room to smoke, and cut games practice whenever they can."

"Votes are votes, old man, and never mind the voters," yawned Cardew, "It's votes that count in an election. A good many fellows don't like Tom Merry——"

"Not the decent sort."

"How particular you are, old bean! I'm goin' to so some electioneering, and you fellows are goin' to help me. The Third Form fags vote for House-captain—and you've got a minor in the Third. Ernest—you're goin' to get young Frank to rally the fags to the good cause."

Levison nodded.

"We'll get you through if we can," he said, "You can rely on us to back you up. That's so, Clive?"

"Oh, yes," assented Clive, "Why shouldn't there be a junior captain from this study? And Cardew's a cricketer."

"One of the best!" said Cardew, gravely, "and if I skipper the side, old beans, I shan't forget my friends."

Clive frowned.

"Cut that out," he said, "If you play a man on anything but his merits, you ought to be kicked."

"But you've got lots of merits, old chap—tons!" said Cardew, grinning, "But if you want me to be particularly impartial, I'll leave you right out of the cricket, if that's what you want."

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"I've got a few names down already," said Cardew, referring to his notebook, "Racke, Crooke, Clampe, Mellish, and I think I can add Trimble. He would vote for anybody who stood him a dough-nut."

"Are you going to get votes by handing out dough-nuts?" grunted Clive.

"Electioneering is electioneering," said Cardew, coolly, "I wonder

if Study No. 6 would stand by me. They all seemed pretty fed up with Tom Merry today. Gussy didn't seem to enthuse, when I mentioned it—but after all he's a relation of mine, and blood's thicker than water. I daresay I could pull his leg and bring him round—"

"So leg-pulling's the method, is it?"

"The end justifies the means, old boy. I wonder who will put up against me?" said Cardew, musingly. "A man like Talbot would get a lot of votes—and I'll bet Tom Merry would push him in if he could. Um! Isn't there some old story about Talbot, before he came to St. Jim's, that could be raked up, if he stands as a candidate? I've heard of something—"

Levison and Clive glared at him.

"You're rather a rotter, Cardew," said Levison, "And I can tell you if you drag up that old yarn about Talbot, you won't get a single vote in the House. I'd be against you, from the start."

"Same here," growled Clive.

"I stand corrected," said Cardew, meekly, "Or to be more exact, I sit corrected. Not a word about Talbot's past, if he's got any. After all, he's not likely to stand—he's too pally with Tom Merry to think of taking his place. That Australian chap Noble—old Kangaroo—he might—"

Tap!

"Come in!" called out Cardew, in his most cordial tones, as there came a tap at the study door. Cordiality to everybody who had a vote in the junior House election was Cardew's cue now. He was prepared to make any number of new friendships; and to forget them all after the election. Even Baggy Trimble would have had a gracious welcome in No. 9 Study, at the moment!

But it was not Trimble—it was the most elegant junior in the School House who opened the door and walked in.

Cardew gave Arthur Augustus D'Arcy a smile and a nod.

"Trot in, old chap," he said, "Glad to see you! You don't look us up in this study as often as we should like."

"Bai Jove! I am sowwy, deah boy," said the unsuspecting Gussy, "I had no ideah you specially wanted me heah."

"That was your mistake," said Cardew, gravely, while Levison and Clive exchanged rather expressive glances, "The fact is that you're the very fellow I'd like to advise me, at the present moment."

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"My deah chap, you cannot do bettah than ask advice fwom a fellow of tact and judgment, if you are in a jam," he said, "Pway go ahead."

"Well, this is how it is," said Cardew, with great gravity, "I'm standing for election as junior House-captain, as you know. I'm

sorry to say, that I've been rather an ass about cigarettes, I think I ought to chuck that entirely in the circumstances. What do you think?"

"I certainly agree with you, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, at once, "It is a wotten bad habit, and vewy much against the wules, and might get you into a wov at any time. Pway chuck it wight up."

"Done!" said Cardew. He extracted a carton of cigarettes from his pocket, and tossed it into the empty grate, "That's that!"

"Bai Jove! That's vewy wight and pwopah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "Stick to that, deah boy. I am vewy glad to see such a sign of weform in you, Cardew, as you are a wewation of mine. You will wemembah that I have often advised you to do that vewy thing."

"I'm sorry I didn't take your advice earlier," said Cardew, with undiminished gravity, "And if I get in as House-captain, Gussy, I hope you'll stand by me, and help me with advice sometimes, to make things easier."

"I should certainly be vewy pleased to do so, Cardew, if you become juniah captain of the House."

"I shall rely on that," said Cardew, "I'm goin' to do my best, and with help and advice from you, I don't see why I shouldn't make a success of it."

"Yaas, wathah. But——"

"Look here, Cardew——" began Levison, restively.

"Don't interrupt D'Arcy," said Cardew, chidingly, "D'Arcy was just going to say something. Cut ahead, old bean."

"I should certainly be vewy glad to back you up with help and advice, if you became House-captain, Cardew. But as a mattah of fact, I am supportin' Tom Mewwy in the election, and I came heah to ask Levison and Clive for their votes.

Cardew almost jumped out of the armchair.

"Tom Merry!" he repeated.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Do you mean that that smudge is standing for re-election, after the fellows have practically booted him out?" exclaimed Cardew, furiously.

"I certainly mean that he is standin' for we-election, Cardew, and I twust that he will pull it off. My study is votin' for him, and we are goin' to get all the fellows to wally wound that we can——"

"You silly ass!"

"Weally, Cardew——"

"Oh, get out!"

Arthur Augustus looked at him. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked at him again. Then he turned to Levison and Clive, who were grinning.

TOM MERRY'S RIVAL

"What about you fellows?" he asked, "Can I put your names down on my list for Tom Mewwy to-mowwow?"

"We're backing up our study's candidate," said Levison, laughing, and Clive nodded. Cardew, from the armchair, scowled. As Arthur Augustus was collecting votes for the rival candidate, he had no further use for him: and had no hesitation in making that clear.

"Get out!" he snapped, again.

"Wats!" retorted Arthur Augustus. He got out, and shut the door after him with a bang.

Levison chuckled.

"Pulling Gussy's leg doesn't seem to have got you much forrarder," he remarked.

"The silly owl!" grunted Cardew, "Hand me that packet of fags, will you?"

"Better leave them there. Aren't you taking Gussy's good advice after all?" chuckled Clive.

"Oh, don't be a goat!"

Cardew got out of the armchair, and retrieved the packet of cigarettes from the grate. However, he refrained from smoking one. Other fellows might look into the study, and it was judicious for his reform to last till after the election!

10

Electioneering !

"TRIMBLE!" said Monty Lowther, thoughtfully.

Tom Merry glanced at him.

"What about Trimble?" he asked.

"Let's go and speak to him."

"What on earth for?"

Manners grinned.

The Shell had come out, the following morning, in break. Among the many fellows in the quad, in the summer sunshine, was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth—leaning up against the trunk of an elm, slowly but surely travelling through the contents of a packet of toffee.

Trimble liked toffee. He ate toffee on every possible occasion. He did not mind much whose toffee it was, so long as he ate it. Deeply absorbed in toffee, Baggy did not waste a glance on the Shell fellows. He was quite concentrated on toffee.

Baggy looked happy and sticky. But Tom Merry was not in the least interested in Baggy and his absorption of toffee. He would have passed the fat Baggy by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"Oh, don't be an ass, old man," said Monty, "Trimble's got a vote in the election, hasn't he?"

"What about it?"

"What about it?" almost shrieked Lowther, "You're standing for re-election, and that's what about it! Come on and speak to Trimble, and be civil, too."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom.

"Man standing for election has to do some electioneering, you know," remarked Manners.

"I'm not doing any," answered Tom. "If the fellows want me,

they can vote for me—if they don't, they can vote for somebody else. That's all there is about it, so far as I can see."

"Which isn't very far," snorted Lowther, "Baggy's got a vote——"

"He's rather a toad."

"A toad's vote may turn the scale. Will you come along and speak to him or not?" hooted Lowther.

"Oh, all right," said Tom, resignedly. "Any old thing."

They bore down on the fat and sticky Baggy. He gave them a stare, but did not speak—his mouth being full of toffee at the moment.

"Turning up for the election after class, Baggy?" asked Lowther, affably.

Baggy nodded; still too busy with toffee to speak.

"Voting on our side, what?" asked Lowther.

Baggy shook his head.

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's that," he said, "Come on."

"Do shut up a minute," rapped Lowther, "Look here, Trimble, I'd like to see you roll up for our candidate. Why not?"

"No fear!" said Baggy, clearing the impediment of toffee, and speaking at last, "Cardew's my man."

"Let's talk it over, old chap," said Lowther amicably. "Tom Merry's the man the House wants—you can see that."

"Is he?" said Baggy. "Fellow who takes a cricket stump to a chap if he wants to cut games-practice! Yah! Only last week he rooted me out of my study and chivvied me down to the nets."

"Well, House-captain has to, you know," said Lowther, persuasively, "Cardew will have to do the same, if he gets in."

"He jolly well won't," declared Baggy. "He's said quite plainly that he ain't going to be a slave-driver like Tom Merry. He told me so, and he told Racke and Crooke and Mellish, and some other men. See?"

Tom Merry's lip curled. Evidently, Cardew was getting on with his electioneering, and—as might have been expected of him—was not over-particular in his methods. The slackers in the House were looking forward to a slack time if Cardew took control.

"Cardew's all right," went on Baggy. "He's my man, I can tell you. Look at this toffee he gave me."

And Baggy re-filled his capacious mouth.

"You fat slug!" growled Lowther, giving up all hope of Baggy as a voter, and he walked on, frowning, while Tom Merry grinned. The prospect of slacking was attractive to Baggy: and the packet of toffee had quite decided the matter. No doubt, too, he was expecting more toffee to come!

"I say, Tom Merry!" Tompkins of the Fourth came up to the Terrible Three, and they stopped. Lowther assumed his most amiable smile, and Manners gave Tompkins a friendly nod.

"Cut on," said Tom, cheerily. Tom did not often come across Tompkins of the Fourth, but he was always kind and civil when he did, which many other fellows were not.

Clarence York Tompkins was just nobody. Most fellows hardly remembered that he was in the House at all. He had No. 4 Study in the Fourth to himself: nobody was anxious to share it with him. He was likely to have it to himself till a new fellow came. He was a rabbit at games, and did not compensate for that by zest in the form-room: for he was one of Mr. Lathom's densest pupils. Hardly a fellow either liked or disliked him: he was just nobody: but Tom Merry, who had a kind heart for "lame ducks," had always made it a point to be decent to poor old Tompkins, and certainly he had made his life at St. Jim's brighter than it would otherwise have been. And if they came in contact he had always a civil and cheery word for him, as on the present occasion.

Tompkins eyed him rather uneasily and dubiously.

"I—I'd like to speak to you—!" he said, hesitatingly.

"No charge," said Tom, smiling, "Carry on."

"About the cricket, you know," said Tompkins, "You don't think much of me as a cricketer, Tom Merry."

"Well, you see—!" said Tom, slowly. Really he hardly knew what to say in reply to that. It was scarcely possible to "think much" of Tompkins' cricket, a game at which he was the veriest rabbit.

"I've never had a chance in the matches," said Tompkins, "I don't see that I'm so bad as all that."

"Well, that has to be left to the skipper's judgment," said Tom, gently.

"A skipper may make mistakes."

"Oh, quite!"

"You made a mistake yesterday, in not playing Cardew against the New House," said Tompkins, "All the fellows say so."

"Perhaps!" said Tom, "We won't talk about it."

"I don't want to, but you see, you do make mistakes," said Tompkins, "Perhaps you're mistaken about me."

"Nobody's infallible," said Tom, smiling.

"Well, then, look here, suppose you get in again as skipper, am I going to have a chance in the matches?"

Tom Merry looked at him directly.

"No!" he answered. "I'll do all I can for you in practice games, but you're not up to junior eleven form."

A slightly sullen look came over Tompkin's face.

"Everybody doesn't think so," he said, tartly, "I fancy Cardew knows as much about the game as you do, Tom Merry. Cardew told me only last evening that he'd had his eye on me, and thought me a coming man, so there!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Manners.

"Cardew told you that, did he?" said Tom, quietly.

"Yes, he did: and if he gets in, he's going to give me a chance," said Tompkins, "A fellow wants to play for his House. I'd like to vote for you, Tom Merry, because you've been jolly decent to me: but if you're never going to give me a chance in the matches, that settles it. That's all I wanted to say."

And Clarence York Tompkins walked away.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "We couldn't beat Cardew at electioneering. Tompkins a coming man at cricket! Oh, ye gods!"

"The cad!" muttered Tom, "If he became skipper, he'd no more play Tompkins than he'd play Baggy Trimble, or Taggles the porter. Just pulling his leg for his vote! The cad!"

Monty Lowther sighed.

"Cardew's got us, there," he said, "You can't promise the slackers a slack time, or the rabbits a chance in the House-matches."

"He won't keep his word," said Tom. "In fact, he couldn't."

"They won't know that till after the election," sighed Lowther, "Looks as if this isn't going to be an easy thing. But we've got to beat him somehow."

"We've got to, if we can!" said Tom Merry, between set lips.

"A fellow who would use methods like that ought to be kicked out of the House, not made captain of it. The worm!"

The chums of the Shell walked on, not in the most hopeful mood. They passed Cardew, talking to Grundy of the Shell, and his voice floated to their ears as they passed.

"I liked that late cut of yours, Grundy. I rather wonder that Tom Merry didn't put you in the team yesterday, when he turned me out and had a place to spare. We needed a good man——"

The Terrible Three passed on out of hearing. Tom Merry's face was dark, and Lowther made a comical grimace.

"What did you think of old Grundy's late cut, Tom?" he asked.

"All his cuts are late—too late for the ball," answered Tom. "Cardew knows he's no good."

"He's getting his vote all the same," said Lowther, "I fancy Grundy's picturing himself in the House eleven if Cardew gets in."

"He will wake up later," said Manners.

"Only after the election," said Lowther. "Cardew's laying up

some spots of trouble for himself, if he does get in as House-captain—and he doesn't care a boiled bean, so long as he does get in. Tom, old man, you were an ass to resign, and give him a chance."

"Rot!" said Tom, "If that's the kind of man the House wants, the House can have him, and I wish them joy of him."

"They won't want him, after they've got him," said Lowther. "It will be a near thing, but we're going to beat him. Thank goodness old Talbot and Kangaroo will be back in time to vote—we can bank on them anyway. But you'll have to do some electioneering, Tom."

"No fear!"

"Now, look here, old chap——"

"Not a spot!" said Tom, firmly, "I'd like to keep Cardew out, for the good of the House—but I'm not going to ask any man for his vote. And I don't want you fellows to do it, either."

"Rats!" said Manners and Lowther, together.

The bell rang for third school, and there was a move back to the form-rooms. After third school, Monty Lowther and Manners set forth again on an electioneering tour of the School House. But they set forth without Tom Merry this time! Tom was, undoubtedly, a good junior House-captain: but equally undoubtedly, he was no good at all at electioneering.

11

Friends Divided !

WALTER ADOLPHUS D'ARCY, younger brother of the great Arthur Augustus of that ilk, came into the locker-room after third school, with a paper and pencil in his hand, and a very serious and intent expression on his face. Wally of the Third looked as if he had serious business on hand: as, indeed, he had—nothing less than rallying the fags of the Third Form for the captain's election.

Arthur Augustus had been talking to his minor on that subject. D'Arcy minor did not always agree with his major's opinions—in fact he seldom did. But on the subject of Tom Merry he was in full agreement, and he had promised Gussy his support. And as Wally was cock of the walk in the Third, there was no doubt that he would rally votes.

It was fine weather, and sunny in the quad: but quite a number of the Third were gathered in the locker-room, which was the apartment in the School House where the fags most did congregate. It was in fact an election meeting, and D'Arcy minor not only hoped, but expected, to carry that meeting his way.

His inseparable friends, Levison minor and Manners minor, were there. Frank Levison, like Wally, had a pencil and paper, no doubt to make a list of voters. Reggie Manners had his hands in his trousers' pockets, and rather an expression of lofty indifference on his face. If he was, like Wally, backing up his major, he was not displaying much enthusiasm about it.

"All here?" said D'Arcy minor, looking round, "By gum! No! I'll kick young Piggott—I told him everybody was to turn up. Never mind him now—if he votes on the wrong side, I'll bung his head in the rain-barrel. I say, my major's jolly keen on getting Tom Merry back again——"

"He was slanging him yesterday for leaving Cardew out," said Manners minor.

"That makes no difference," retorted Wally, "You can slang a man, without wanting to change him for a smudge like Cardew."

"Well, my major's been talking to me," said Reggie Manners, "But I ain't going to be given orders by my major if you are, young D'Arcy."

"Who's been given orders?" demanded D'Arcy minor, belligerently, "Old Gussy put it to me that Tom Merry's the best man, and so he is. If you're not going to vote for Tom Merry, young Manners——"

"I haven't decided yet!" drawled Reggie, "May not have time to turn up for the election at all. Other things to do."

"If you don't turn up, I shall punch your head afterwards."

"I'll be there when you do it!" said Reggie.

"By gum! If you want it punched now, Manners minor——"

"Don't rag, you chaps," said Frank Levison, hastily, "Kildare came in with his cane last time there was a shindy here. We don't want him calling again."

"Well, young Manners had better not be cheeky," said Wally, darkly, "Anyhow you've got more sense than he has, Franky. You're backing me up."

"Well—!" said Levison minor, hesitating.

Wally gave him a glare.

"Aren't you?" he demanded.

"I'm backing up my major," said Frank. "Ernest asked me, and of course I said I would."

"No 'of course' about it," snapped Wally, "A chap isn't bound to take his major's advice."

"You have!" said Reggie Manners. "Why shouldn't Frank?"

"You can shut up, if you're not going to talk sense, young Manners. Now look here, Frank Levison, Tom Merry's the man," said Wally, positively, "Mean to say you think Cardew's a better man?"

Frank Levison hesitated again.

"Well, my major in the Fourth is backing him," he said.

"That's because they're in the same study, and pals. Clive is backing him too, like your major, for the same reason. You needn't."

"I've told Ernest I'm going to."

"Then you can jolly well go and tell him you're not!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor, indignantly, "Call yourself a pal, and setting yourself up against me like this."

"You're setting yourself up against Frank, aren't you?" said Manners minor.

Wally gave him a look.

"I've told you to shut up!" he said, "You're asking for a punch on the nose, young Manners. Now, look here, Frank Levison, this won't do. We three always stick together, and we've got to stick together in this, see?"

"Well, if you vote for Cardew—!" suggested Frank.

"I wouldn't be found dead voting for Cardew," snapped Wally, "What I want is your vote for Tom Merry."

"Nothing doing," said Frank, shaking his head, "I've promised my brother, and Ernie knows best——"

"Ernie doesn't know a thing," said D'Arcy minor, "You think an awful lot of your major, young Levison, but I can jolly well tell you that nobody else does or is likely to."

"Don't you slang my major," exclaimed Frank Levison, hotly.

"Blow your major!" said Wally, crossly, "Like his cheek to butt in and tell you how to vote."

"Hasn't your major—?" began Reggie Manners.

"Haven't I told you to shut up?" hooted Wally, "You're asking for it, young Manners. You're a young rotter not to back up your major's candidate. Why, old Manners is always helping you with your Latin. He keeps you out of a lot of rows with Selby. Now you let him down——"

"You let Reggie vote as he likes, Wally," interjected Frank Levison, "You're voting for Cardew, aren't you, Reggie?"

"Haven't decided yet," yawned Reggie Manners, "I don't care a boiled bean about either of them. I'm going to vote as I jolly well like, and if I don't jolly well like, I shan't vote at all. You fellows can let your majors decide for you, if you like—I ain't going to."

"My major says——" began Frank Levison.

"Never mind what your major says," interrupted Wally, "Nobody wants to hear from Levison of the Fourth. My major says that Tom Merry is the man, and I think so, too."

"Well, I think——"

"No, you don't," Wally interrupted again, "You couldn't, not if you put a wet towel round your head. The less you say the better, young Levison, if you're backing up Cardew the Cad. Now keep quiet, I'm going to make a speech."

"Look here, I'm going to make a speech," exclaimed Levison minor, "It won't be long before the dinner-bell——"

"Look here, young Levison——"

"Look here, D'Arcy minor——"

Nobody would have supposed, at the moment, that Wally of the

Third and Levison minor were close chums. They were exchanging belligerent looks, and Wally was pushing back his cuffs, as if in preparation for more active measures. Manners minor chimed in.

"Why not both of you speechify at once?"

"You young ass, who's going to hear us, if we speechify at the same time?" hooted Wally.

"Does anybody want to hear you?" asked Reggie.

There was laughter among the fags collected in the locker-room. Most of them, no doubt, were interested in the election. But they seemed more interested in the dispute among the three minors. It began to look as if that election meeting might end in a scrap: which most of the Third, probably, would have regarded as more entertaining than election speeches.

Wally, with a final glare at Frank Levison, the most unchummy he had ever given him, mounted on a chair.

"Gentlemen," he began.

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Wally!"

"Gentlemen of the Third, this meeting has been called in support of Tom Merry, of the Shell, the best cricketer in the House, and the most decent fellow of St. Jim's all round——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen!" Frank Levison had mounted on another chair. "This meeting has been called in support of Cardew of the Fourth——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Levison mi!"

"Go it, D'Arcy mi!"

"Get off that chair, Frank Levison!" roared Wally.

"Rats to you!" retorted Frank, "You shut up while I'm addressing the meeting. Gentlemen, I'm asking for your votes for my major's candidate, Cardew of the Fourth——"

"Are you getting off that chair, young Levison?"

"Cardew's a jolly good cricketer. You all know that he was barred from the House match yesterday, and the New House walked all over us. Tom Merry's a back number, and Cardew is the man——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Rot!"

"Go it!"

"Ring off!"

"If you don't get down and shut up, Frank Levison, I'll jolly well lug you down and shut you up!" bawled Wally.

"Shut up yourself!" retorted Frank, "Now, you fellows—here, you keep off, Wally—oh, crikey!"

Wally of the Third was as good as his word. He jumped down, rushed across to his rival speaker, grabbed him, and Levison minor came down on the floor with a bump and a yell. He grasped Wally as he crashed, and D'Arcy minor went down too, and they rolled on the floor in excited combat. Wally, getting the upper hand, proceeded to tap Levison minor's head on oak planks. Reggie Manners rushed in to pull him off: Joe Frayne interposed, and grabbed Reggie Manners: and five or six other fags joined in on one side or the other.

The rest crowded round, laughing and cheering them on. The din in the locker-room was terrific. Often and often was there a din in that apartment, making it necessary for a prefect to step in. But never had there been such a din as now. In the midst of it the door suddenly opened, and Kildare of the Sixth stepped in, his ashplant in his hand.

"Stop that row!" shouted Kildare.

The excited combatants did not heed his voice, if they heard it. But they heeded the ash, when the St. Jim's captain proceeded to bestow impartial whacks on all of them. Swipe! swipe! swipe! swipe!

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Ow! wow! Oh, crikey!"

Breathless fags dodged frantically out of reach of the swiping ash. The election meeting in the Third broke up quite suddenly. In a couple of minutes the locker-room was deserted, and Kildare tucked his ash under his arm and walked away. Electioneering in the Third was unavoidably postponed!

Gussy All Over !

"D'ARCY!"

"Oh! Yaas, sir!"

"You will go on, D'Arcy."

"Oh!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

The Fourth Form were in class with Mr. Lathom.

Many, if not most, of the Fourth—at least the School House section of that form—were thinking more of the coming election than of the pious Aeneas and his adventures as chronicled by Virgil. The New House men, who were not concerned in the internal politics of the School House, were quite indifferent. But it was a matter of the keenest interest to all School House men. And Arthur Augustus was perhaps keenest of all. Gussy, no doubt, had "slanged" Tom Merry for what he considered his mistake the previous day in the affair of Cardew and the House match. But that made no difference at all to his loyal support of the junior captain. Gussy was going to get Tom in, if he could; and he was considerably more interested in a paper he had under his desk, containing a list of names of promised voters, than in "con."

The Fourth-Form master, on the other hand, though no doubt he had heard of the impending junior election, had the idea, common to schoolmasters, that fellows were at school to learn things; and he expected attention in his form-room. Which unfortunately, Arthur Augustus had been quite unable to give him.

So far from being ready to "go on" when called on to construe, Arthur Augustus did not even know where they had arrived. Several fellows had been on con in turn, but Gussy had heard hardly a word of it.

But he had to go on, and it was dismaying not to know the place. Kerr of the New House whispered.

"Get on from '*cernitur ulli*'."

Which useful tip enabled Arthur Augustus to find the place. But having found it, he stared at the next line rather blankly. He had to begin with "*Lucus in urbe fuit media*," which really was not very perplexing, if his thoughts had not been full of other things.

Mr. Lathom blinked at him over his glasses.

"You are wasting the time of the form, D'Arcy!" he rapped. "I told you to go on! Go on at once."

"Oh! Yaas, sir!" Arthur Augustus had to make a shot at it. "*Lucus in urbe fuit media*—the light in the city was wathah dim—"

"WHAT!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom.

"Oh, cwikey!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I—I mean, there was a middling light in the city—"

"Oh, gad!" murmured Cardew, and there was a grin on many faces in the Fourth. No doubt Arthur Augustus had "*lux*," a light, in his noble mind, and did not remember for the moment that "*lucus*" was a grove!

"Kerr!" rapped Mr. Lathom.

"Yes, sir!"

"You may tell D'Arcy the meaning of that verse, as he appears to be quite ignorant of it."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"There was a grove amid the city," said Kerr. Kerr of the New House had never been known to perpetrate a "howler" in connection in which respect he differed considerably from the swell of the School House, whose howlers were frequent and many.

"You may go on, Kerr. D'Arcy, you will remain in the form-room and write out the lesson after class."

"Oh, cwumbs!"

"What? What did you say, D'Arcy?"

"Oh! Nothin', sir! But—"

"That will do! Go on, Kerr."

Kerr went on: while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat in dismay. The election was to be held in the junior day-room after class, and whether he would get that wretched lesson written out in time to attend and record his vote, Arthur Augustus did not know.

Cardew smiled. Nobody knew quite how the voting was likely to go, but Cardew's idea was that it would be about fifty-fifty. It

was certain to be quite close: and nothing could have suited Cardew better than for one of Tom Merry's most enthusiastic supporters to be detained while the election was on. He, at least, hoped that Arthur Augustus would not get through in time. A single vote might turn the scale, if it was very close.

He winked at Levison and Clive—without drawing a smile from either of them. They were backing up their chum in the election: but they did not pretend to approve of his methods: and certainly they did not want any man to lose his vote owing to a detention. Neither shared in the least Cardew's satisfaction: for which Cardew the Cad cared little or nothing. All Cardew cared for was beating Tom Merry at the poll.

School was over at half-past three that afternoon: and when the Fourth crowded out, Arthur Augustus was left in solitary state, with P. Vergilius Maro to keep him company. Blake gave him a whisper in passing.

"Buck up with it, old man."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Election's at four-thirty," whispered Herries.

"For goodness sake don't be late!" muttered Dig.

"I will twy my vewy hardest, deah boys——"

"Blake! Herries! Digby! Leave the form-room!" came from Mr. Lathom.

And the three followed the rest of the form out, leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to his dismal fate.

Wally of the Third met them in the passage.

"Where's my major?" he asked. "Ain't he out yet?"

"Oh, Gussy's got a detention!" groaned Blake, "He would, of course."

"Gussy all over!" sighed Dig.

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" said Wally, "Isn't that just Gussy! I say, I've got a lot of the Third. That young ass Levison minor has been canvassing for Cardew, just to please his major, you know—I jolly well punched him in the locker room, anyhow."

"Is that what's the matter with your nose?" grinned Herries. Wally's nose, like Marian's in the ballad, was red and raw.

Wally rubbed that glowing nose.

"Well, there was a bit of a scrap," he said, "But I've got most of the Third—you can bank on that."

"Mind you get them along to the day-room in time," said Blake.

"They jolly well know that I shall boot them, if they don't turn

up on time," assured Wally. "We're getting old Tommy in, I can jolly well tell you."

Blake and Co. went out into the quad. They were not feeling quite so sure as Wally of the Third seemed to feel, though they hoped for the best. In the quad they came on the "Terrible Three," in a group with Talbot and Harry Noble.

"Oh, here you are," said Blake, "You're voting for Tom, of course?"

"Of course," said Talbot, with a smile.

"Tom was an ass to resign," said Kangaroo, "But we're bunging him back again all right! Who wants Cardew the Cad?"

"A good many fellows seem to," remarked Tom Merry.

"They'll be sorry if they get him!" grunted the Australian junior, "Look here, what about holding a meeting and making them a speech?"

Tom shook his head.

"No speechifying for me," he said.

"But look here—!" said Blake.

"Oh, it's no good talking to Tom!" said Monty Lowther, "He's going to do his best to lose the election, and all we can do is to stop him if we can. Where's Gussy?"

"Sitting in the form-room writing out the lesson—he landed one of his best howlers on Lathom."

"Oh, the ass!"

"The chump!" said Manners.

"What about a spot at the nets?" asked Tom Merry.

"The nets!" repeated Lowther, "Are you thinking of cricket now, with the election due in less than an hour?"

"Lots of time before the election," said Tom, cheerily, "We've nothing to do except trot into the day-room at half-past four."

"Nothing to do?" repeated Lowther, "Oh, you ass! We've got less than forty names down—we've got to talk to all the fellows—we've got to get you in, you howling ass! Nobody's coming down to the nets with you, I can tell you that—we're going to be busy every minute till half-past four."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'll get the groundsman to bowl me a few," he said: and he strolled away to change into flannels: his friends casting rather expressive glances after him as he departed. Certainly, a candidate like Tom Merry did not make things particularly easy for his supporters!

During the next hour, very many fellows were very busy indeed.

Tom Merry's friends were quite indefatigable in electioneering: and Cardew and his supporters were at least equally busy. Doubtful voters were argued with—the arguments sometimes getting a little exciting. But for the unlucky affair of the House match the previous day, there was little doubt that Tom Merry would have secured an easy majority: but that affair was still too fresh in many minds to fail to have its effect. Each side counted on at least forty certain votes: but how the remaining handful of votes would go, was still a question on the knees of the gods—and that handful, evidently, was going to decide the result. As half-past four drew near, excitement was at its highest—only two fellows being left out of it: Tom Merry, cheerfully knocking the ball about at the nets, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sitting in a deserted form-room sadly and sorrowfully writing lines of Latin.

The Election !

KILDARE of the Sixth glanced round the crowded day-room.

"All here?" he asked.

"Well, not quite all," said Talbot of the Shell, "We've got a few minutes yet, Kildare."

"Better hurry up!"

The room was swarming. If not all, at least nearly all the School House juniors were present. It was not quite half-past: a few minutes remained for late comers. It was not likely that a single fellow would miss the election, after so much vigorous electioneering and canvassing for votes: and the election was, of course, an extremely important matter in junior eyes. But fellows might easily be late: and at half-past four the door was to be closed and locked. Later comers would not be permitted to interrupt the proceedings: after four-thirty, any fellow who had not turned up would be locked out.

Two very prominent members of the junior community were conspicuous by their absence—Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. As Tom Merry was standing as a candidate, his tardiness was much noticed and commented on. It made Cardew smile. He was himself as keen as a razor, determined to swing the election in his own favour if he could, by hook or by crook—and a careless opponent was just what he wanted.

Cardew, of course, was there, in very good time. His chief supporters, Levison and Clive, came in with him: and quite a crowd gathered round them. Clearly Cardew had a good many in his favour.

Some of them, certainly, were not fellows whose support was much of a credit to him. Racke and Crooke and Clampe of the Shell, Trimble and Mellish of the Fourth, were well-known slackers.

Others, like Grundy and Gore of the Shell, and Tompkins of the Fourth, were fellows who believed they played better cricket than Tom Merry knew, and hoped for a better chance under a new captain. But there were a good many more, who had once been solidly behind Tom Merry, but were now dissatisfied with him. No doubt they would have come round, given time: but the election followed the House-match defeat too soon for that.

On the other hand, there was a good crowd round Lowther and Manners and Talbot, including Blake and Herries and Dig, Kangaroo and Glyn and Dick Julian, Wildrake and Roylance and Lumley-Lumley.

A little apart from these two crowds, were the heroes of the Third Form: divided into two mobs. Wally of the Third had rallied quite a horde of fags in favour of Tom Merry: but Frank Levison had done yeoman service for his major's candidate, and the two mobs seemed about equally divided. Reggie Manners strolled about with his hands in his pockets, not adhering so far to either side, and indifferent to expressive glances from both. Reggie hadn't made up his mind yet whether he was going to vote for his major's candidate, Tom Merry, or whether he would throw in his lot with Frank's mob. Perhaps Reggie rather liked to keep up his importance till the latest possible moment.

Kildare, Darrell, and Langton were there, to superintend the proceedings and count the votes—also to keep order if excited juniors got out of hand, as was not improbable. The three big Sixth-Form men stood in a little group together, chatting while they waited for the half-hour to boom from the clock-tower. But they were not chatting about the election, which to the great men of the Sixth was not the tremendous affair it was to the juniors. They were discussing senior cricket, and selections for the team when St. Jim's First Eleven went over to play Greyfriars.

"Where on earth's Tom?" Manners whispered, anxiously, "He can't have forgotten that the election's on, I suppose."

"He went down to the nets," said Talbot.

"He couldn't be sticking there now," muttered Lowther.

Jack Blake looked round at them.

"Where's that champion chump?" he asked. This description, apparently, referred to Tom Merry, "Does he expect fellows to vote for him when he doesn't even take the trouble to turn up?"

"The ass!" murmured Manners.

"Hallo! Here he is!" exclaimed Lowther, in great relief, as a figure in flannels came in at the door. Tom Merry had arrived. He was still in flannels, and certainly he looked very handsome and fit in them, every inch a cricketer. He gave his friends a smile and a nod.

"Here we are!" he said, cheerily. "Not quite half-past, is it?"

"You've cut it pretty close," grunted Lowther. "Do you want to make the fellows think that you don't care a bean whether you're elected or not?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, I don't care an awful lot, except that I don't want to see the House landed with a captain like Cardew," he answered.

"Oh!" said Wilkins of the Shell, warmly, "If you don't care for a fellow's vote, perhaps you'd like me to walk over to Cardew's gang."

Tom glanced at him.

"Walk anywhere you like, old bean," he answered, "I'm not stopping you."

"I've a jolly good mind—!" said Wilkins.

"Stick where you are, old man," said Gunn, "We're voting for Tom Merry—we don't want Cardew, if Grundy does."

Wilkins grunted, but he remained where he was. Talbot smiled; and Manners and Lowther exchanged a rather hopeless look. Tom Merry certainly was a rather troublesome candidate to support. Evidently Cardew's blandishments were not in his line.

"I think we're all here now," said Kangaroo, looking round, "No—where's that goat Skimpole? Nobody here in specs—"

"Oh, blow him!" breathed Lowther, "I told him a dozen times not to forget—but I'll bet he's forgotten. Sticking his silly head in some scientific book, I expect—I'll get him."

"Hurry up, for goodness' sake," whispered Manners, "They'll be shutting the door in a minute or two."

Lowther nodded, and ran out.

"Gussy hasn't turned up," said Herries.

"The ass!" said Blake, "Any other fellow could have written out that stuff and got here on time. I daresay Gussy's not half through yet."

There was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It looked as if that noble youth was likely to miss the election.

A gasping voice was heard in the doorway.

"My dear Lowther—ow! I am quite breathless—wow! Do not push me about like that, Lowther—wow!"

Skimpole of the Shell came bundling in, spluttering for breath, his glasses sliding down his nose. Behind him was Monty Lowther, propelling him forcibly into the room. Skimpole, who hardly knew one end of a cricket bat from the other, was a youth of scientific proclivities, and when he got into geology or biology was lost to the world. He had quite forgotten the election. Monty Lowther had reminded him by grabbing his collar and dragging him headlong

down from the studies. A laugh greeted his breathless arrival.

"All here now, excepting Gussy!" said Blake, "I believe every man in the House has turned up, excepting that prize ass. He would go and get himself detention, of course."

"Gussy all over!" growled Herries.

"May be here any minute!" said Dig, hopefully. "He simply can't be all this time writing out the lesson."

"Won't I boot him!" breathed Blake.

It was almost time now. But still there was no sign of the swell of St. Jim's. D'Arcy was far from being a quick worker: but even D'Arcy should not have required more than an hour to write out the lesson.

Ralph Reckness Cardew glanced at his expensive wrist-watch. It was a matter of seconds now. And it was quite likely that the election might be a matter of a single vote. Cardew was anxious for the door to be shut before Arthur Augustus could trickle in.

"Every man here except one," he said to Levison and Clive, "It's goin' to be jolly close—if that ass D'Arcy is late——"

"Might wait for him," said Clive.

Cardew stared at the South African junior.

"Mad?" he asked, "You know he's backing up the Merry gang."

"Fair play's a jewel," retorted Clive.

"Oh, can it! Two or three seconds now," breathed Cardew.

Ernest Levison frowned. From the distance, a chime was heard. Kildare looked round.

"There's the half-hour," he said, "Shut the door, Darrell, will you?"

Levison of the Fourth stepped out of his group. Cardew gave him an uneasy stare, but he did not heed it. Levison shared Clive's opinion, that fair play was a jewel!

"Could you hold on a minute or two, Kildare?" he asked.

The St. Jim's captain looked at him.

"Half-past four's the time," he answered, briefly.

"There's a man late——"

"He shouldn't be late if he wants to vote."

"He's in detention."

"Oh!" said Kildare. He paused. "I'm afraid we can't wait for one of your voters, Levison, unless the other side agree."

"He's not one of our voters—it's D'Arcy, and he's on the other side" answered Levison.

"Oh!" Kildare stared at him for a moment, and then smiled, "All right—we'll give you an extra five minutes. Leave the door open till twenty-five to, Darrell."

Cardew's face was a picture of angry resentment as Levison re-

joined his friends. He clenched his hand as if he could have struck him.

"You fool!" he breathed, "You fool! You meddlin' fool! Why, one vote may turn the scale, it's goin' to be so close! You fool!"

"Fair play—" began Clive.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Cardew, savagely.

"By gum, that's jolly sporting of Levison," said Jack Blake, "But look at Cardew's face! Does he look pleased?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" grinned Monty Lowther, "I fancy Cardew would be better pleased with a less sporting pal."

"If Gussy doesn't blow in, after that, we'll boil him in oil," muttered Herries, "He simply can't be in the form-room all this time."

"Trying on a new topper, perhaps, and forgetting all about the election," suggested Dick Julian.

"I'll topper him!" breathed Blake.

Anxious eyes were on the door, as the minutes ticked away—Cardew's most anxious of all. He was eager for the door to be shut, shutting Arthur Augustus out if he came. His feelings towards his pal Levison were deep and bitter. Fair play did not seem to have much appeal, at the moment at least, to Cardew the Cad.

Kildare was looking at his watch, when there was a step outside. The most elegant figure of St. Jim's appeared in the doorway.

Arthur Augustus was not hurrying. As usual, his manners had the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere! Apparently he did not realise that he was late! His leisurely manner caused ferocious glares to be cast at him from Tom Merry's band of supporters.

Darrell of the Sixth had his hand on the door. Kildare called out to him.

"Time's up! Shut that door!"

"Are you coming in, you young ass, D'Arcy?" asked Darrell.

"Eh? Yaas, wathah!"

"Buck up, you image!" yelled Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Hurry up!"

"Bai Jove! Am I late?"

"Will you move on?" roared Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—wow!" howled Arthur Augustus, suddenly. Darrell of the Sixth, perhaps tired of holding the door, reached out his foot, and landed it on the best-cut trousers at St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus, with a startled howl, tottered into the room, amid laughter.

"Ow! wow! Weally, Dawwell—!" he gasped.

Darrell drew back his foot, evidently to deliver another, and Gussy, forgetting for a moment the repose of Vere de Vere, jumped out of reach. The door closed and Darrell turned the key. Any later comers were barred out—but in point of fact there were no more to come: every junior in the School House was now gathered in the day-room. Arthur Augustus was last, though not least.

"You blithering owl!" hissed Blake, as he joined the group, "Just done it—only just! I'd have scragged you if you hadn't."

"Weally, Blake, I should wefuse to be scwagged! I considah——"

"Where have you been?" growled Herries, "You can't have taken all this time to write out the lesson in the form-room."

"My fingahs were wathah inky, Hewwies——"

"What?"

"I had to go and wash them," explained Arthur Augustus, "A fellow could hardly turn up at a meetin' with inky fingahs."

"You—you—you—!" hissed Blake.

"Scrag him!" hissed Dig.

"Weally, Dig——"

"All right," said Tom Merry, laughing, "Gussy's in time, thanks to Levison. We're all here now. You can't help being an ass, old chap."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Silence!" called out Kildare, "Now, then, get on with it."

And something like silence having been obtained in the crowded day-room, they proceeded to get on with it.

No Result !

TOM MERRY stood, a handsome figure in his flannels, with an expression of mild interest on his face. He was not indifferent to the result: but he was very far from sharing the almost feverish eagerness of Ralph Reckness Cardew. His view was that, if the House wanted him, there he was: if they wanted Cardew the Cad, there he was too: and that was all there was to it. Which was not wholly gratifying to his supporters: for a good many fellows—important for once in their lives, when every vote counted—took the view that a fellow's vote was worth asking for, and might as well be given to the man who did ask for it. Tom, as an electioneerer, was nowhere near Cardew's form, and it was fairly certain that it cost him votes. For which he cared little or nothing.

Cardew's feelings were very different.

He had set his heart on winning the junior election. There was little at which he would have stopped, to gain his end.

It was quite probable that, if he did gain his end, he would tire of his new position and cease to value it. His nature was volatile and inconstant. But all the more because of his inconstancy, when he was keen on anything he was tremendously keen on it, and put every ounce into it. Tom Merry had "chucked" him from the House eleven: he was going to beat Tom Merry and take his place: he hardly thought further than that. Usually Cardew was calm and cool: but now he could not keep his feelings out of his face: he was almost pale with excitement.

Tom Merry was proposed by Monty Lowther, seconded by Manners. Cardew, in his turn, was proposed by Levison, seconded by Clive. Then Kildare called for a show of hands for Tom Merry.

A forest of hands went up.

Out of ninety-four voters, it was plain at a glance that Tom had

over forty supporters. How many more, required counting. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's elegant white hand was up—Wally D'Arcy's rather grubby paw was up—others followed fast. Reggie Manners had his hands in his pockets, and he kept them there, heedless of an expressive look from Manners of the Shell, and a menacing glare from D'Arcy minor. Reggie wasn't going to be "chivvied"—not Reggie. But as Kildare began to count, the lordly Reggie at last detached a hand from a pocket, and held it up—deciding, at last, to vote for his major's candidate. And Wally of the Third revised his intention of banging Reggie's head on the wall immediately the election was over.

Kildare counted, and Darrell counted, and then they compared notes. The voting was evidently going to be very close: very close indeed, and no room was to be left for errors.

The two Sixth-Form men having agreed their total, Kildare announced it.

"Tom Merry, forty-seven votes."

There was a buzz in the crowded room.

"Now hands up for Cardew!"

"Oh, that's wathah wotten!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"A tie!" muttered Lowther.

The counting of Cardew's votes was hardly necessary, for every fellow in the room knew that there were exactly ninety-four voters, and that Tom had polled half that total: obviously leaving exactly the same number for his opponent.

Cardew's face was white and set.

It was going to be a tie. One vote would have turned the scale—had not Levison asked that five minutes' grace for D'Arcy—!

The counting was now merely formal. It resulted, as a matter of course, in forty-seven votes for Cardew.

Kildare looked puzzled. He consulted with Darrell and Langton, and they both looked a little perplexed. So did many of the voters. With the poll equally divided, neither candidate was elected. Wally of the Third shook his fist at Frank Levison, hitherto his best pal. Frank gave him a glare, far from pally. But for the presence of the prefects, probably war would have broken out among the fags. But under the eye of the captain of the school, and two other prefects of the Sixth, the Third had to restrain their feelings.

"Forty-seven votes for Tom Merry, forty-seven for Cardew!" announced Kildare, "The votes tie!" He glanced over the excited crowd, "I suppose there will have to be another election—"

"Hold on, Kildare!" interjected Cardew, "I call for a re-count."

Kildare looked at him.

"There was no error in the counting, Cardew," he said, gruffly, "The voting ties."

"I have a right to ask for a re-count," said Cardew, obstinately, "That's in the rules, and I demand it."

"Very well!" said the St. Jim's captain, quietly, "We will take a re-count, if you want it."

"I do!" said Cardew, "A fellow may change his mind. And as you took the count for Tom Merry first, I have a right to have the count taken for me first, this time."

"No objection to that, that I can see," answered Kildare, "If any voter chooses to change sides, that will settle the matter." He looked over the crowd again, "Hands up for Cardew!"

Up went forty-seven hands, as before. No fellow had changed his mind—which, really, was not to be expected. Cardew stared over face after face—he counted more rapidly than the less interested prefects: but if he hoped that some supporter of Tom Merry had come over to his side, he had to abandon that hope. But he was not at the end of his resources. Slowly, but with set determination, he raised his own hand. If one more would not vote for him, there was his own vote!

Levison and Clive nudged him together.

"Cardew! What——?" breathed Levison.

"A fellow can vote for himself!" whispered Cardew, "There's nothing in the rules against it. If one fellow had changed over—but nobody has—so——"

"But—but—for goodness sake, Cardew, be decent——"

"I'm voting!" hissed Cardew. "One more is wanted——"

"You can't——!" muttered Clive.

"I can—and will!"

"Can't you see it's as broad as it is long!" muttered Levison, "If you vote for yourself, Tom Merry can, and it's the same as before." Cardew sneered—a bitter sneer!

"Dear old Thomas is too high-and-mighty!" he answered, "He wouldn't be found dead voting for himself! Don't I know him?"

"Oh!" muttered Levison. He knew that Cardew was right. Tom Merry would have utterly disdained to vote for himself. Even Cardew had not come down to it, except as the last desperate resource.

"Forty-eight!" said Kildare to Darrell, "Some fellow changed over——"

Darrell gave a sniff.

"No—young Cardew's voting for himself!"

"Oh!" Kildare looked grave, "That's—a bit unusual! But—he can't be stopped, if he chooses, I suppose."

"I suppose not."

"If Merry does the same, we're where we were before."

"Looks like it."

"Take the count, anyway." And Kildare called out, "Hands up for Tom Merry."

Up went the hands.

"That rat!" breathed Lowther, "that—that slug!—that smudge—that worm—he voted for himself, Tom. You'll have to do the same."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"No fear!" he answered.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I disapprove vewy stwongly of a fellow votin' for himself: but if Cardew plays such a twick, you can't let him walk off with the election."

"You've got to vote, Tom," hissed Manners.

Tom shook his head.

"Tom, old chap—!" muttered Talbot.

"I can't, and I won't!" said Tom Merry, firmly, "If Cardew thinks it's all right, let him—I can't."

"You pudding-headed chump!" breathed Monty Lowther, "Can't you see that that's what he's banking on—he knows you're too decent to vote for yourself if you could help it—but you can't help it now—sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Put up your hand."

Tom shoved his hands into his pockets.

"Bai Jove! You can't let Cardew get away with that, Tom Mewwy! If you don't vote I will jolly well punch your head."

"Vote, you ass!" said Kangaroo.

"I won't!"

"You will!" said Lowther, "Get hold of him, you chaps—drag his paw up if he won't put it up—he's going to vote."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry, "Hands off—chuck it—you'll have the pre's down on you in a minute—stop it—"

"You're going to vote!"

"I tell you I'm not."

"And we tell you that you are!"

There was a little scuffling in the crowd. No doubt it was a proper feeling of pride on Tom's part to refuse to vote for himself. But to let Cardew walk off with the election, by so easy a trick, was not to be thought of. Tom Merry's right hand was dragged forcibly out of his pocket, and pushed up into the air by Manners and Lowther. Two or three other fellows were grasping Tom.

"You silly asses!" breathed Tom, "The pre's can see all this—the vote won't be counted."

Kildare's voice came the next moment.

"What's that row there? Stop that scuffling."

Cardew smiled.

Levison and Clive, and some other fellows, gave him grim looks. He did not care. His vote had been counted: and Tom Merry's was not going to be given, as he had calculated. The result was going to be forty-eight votes to forty-seven: and Ralph Reckness Cardew elected junior captain by a majority of one. Cardew had no doubt that it was now fairly in the bag.

"Tom, you ass—!" whispered Lowther. Under Kildare's stare, and rapping voice, Tom had to be released by his excited friends: and his hand went back into the pocket of his flannel bags again.

"Tom——"

"Nothing doing!"

"You've got to do as Cardew did!"

"Take that cad as an example?" said Tom, scornfully. "Thanks! I'd as soon take Baggy Trimble."

"He will beat you by his own vote——"

"Let him!"

"They're counting—put up your hand——"

Tom shook his head.

Monty Lowther's face was almost white with excitement and anger. He was very angry indeed now.

"Listen to me, Tom," he said, in a low tense voice, "We've been pals, and you're letting us down. You'd rather let us all down, than put your pride in your pocket. I'll never speak to you again if you let Cardew get away with this."

"Nor I," said Manners. He was as angry as Lowther.

It was not till then that Tom hesitated.

"Look here—!" he muttered, "I—I can't do it—it's rotten—it's one of Cardew's mean tricks—I can't——"

"Do as you like," said Lowther, savagely, "You know better than the lot of us, I suppose. Leave me alone afterwards, that's all."

"Monty, old man——"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Lowther, and he turned away.

Tom Merry breathed hard. On his own account, he would never have descended to Cardew's level. But the look on the faces of his best chums showed how deeply they were taking it to heart. They were more to him than the election—more than the pride which prevented him from following Cardew's example. He made up his mind.

Slowly, his hand went up!

There was a gasp of relief from his followers. Cardew stared across, hardly believing what he saw. He had calculated well. It

T O M M E R R Y ' S R I V A L

had been touch and go. But Tom's hand was up in time, and it was counted with the rest. The cad of the Fourth had not scored.

"Forty-eight!" announced Kildare, after comparing the result with Darrell, "The votes tie as before."

Cardew's face was a picture. He could not control his rage and disappointment. His last trick had failed, and the election was still undecided.

"The election will be held again on Saturday," said Kildare, "If the votes tie again, the house-master will be called on to decide. Open that door."

The crowded meeting broke up, in a buzz of excitement.

15

Arthur Augustus Knows How!

“**B**AI Jove!”

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation suddenly. Quite an excited look came over his aristocratic countenance as he uttered it.

“Bai Jove!” he repeated, “Wippin'! Toppin'! Top-hole, deah boys! In fact, wizard! Bai Jove!”

Which caused Blake and Herries and Dig to glance at him inquiringly. It also caused Ralph Reckness Cardew to turn his eyes on the excited face of the swell of St. Jim's.

It was the day after the election. The tied vote had left the School House still without a junior captain; and the outcome, so to speak, still on the knees of the gods.

Cardew was thinking it over, with a knitted brow, as he sat on one of the benches under an old elm, his hands driven deep into his pockets. He took no notice of the chums of Study No. 6 as they came sauntering along the path under the elms, and they took no notice of him.

All of them were thinking about the second election, which was to take place on Saturday. Blake and Co. were hopeful—Cardew less hopeful.

He had nearly pulled it off. By methods which, to say the least, were not to be boasted about, added to the sore feeling left over from the House match, he had scored as many votes as Tom Merry. One more would have done the trick—but one more was not granted him.

Saturday's election depended on some fellow changing his mind. But it was a point of honour for a fellow to stick to the candidate for whom he had voted. Not a man on Tom Merry's side, at least, was likely to change. Every fellow who was amenable to bribery of any kind, whether in the form of dough-nuts and toffee like Baggy Trimble, prospects of slacking like Crooke and Racke, or false promises of chances in cricket like Gore and Grundy, was already on Cardew's side—corrupt methods could serve him no further. It seemed that at the best he could only hope for another tie in the voting—and then, according to what Kildare had said, the house-master would decide the matter. And Cardew knew only too well that if Mr. Railton had to give his casting vote, he would not give it for Cardew the Cad.

Indeed, he had no doubt that Railton, though he did not think of intervening in a junior election, would have been considerably perturbed, had Cardew gained the upper hand over Tom Merry. Cardew would have cared nothing for that if he had succeeded! But he had not succeeded, and if the decision was left to Railton, he could hardly doubt how it would go.

One more vote—just one more vote! That was his problem, and he realised that it was a rather hopeless one, as he sat there under the shady tree, thinking it out. And then that sudden gleeful exclamation from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy caused him to look up, with a scowl on his face. It was D'Arcy who had saved the election for Tom Merry—and Levison, that meddling fool, with his notions of fair play, who had given him the chance to save it. Cardew was feeling that he would willingly have landed one fist in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face, and the other in Ernest Levison's.

"I wondah I nevah thought of it before," Arthur Augustus was going on, his noble face beaming, "It's a winnah, deah boys."

"The election—?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Cough it up, then! Blessed if I see it! Nobody's going to change sides, and it will turn out tomorrow as it did yesterday," said Blake, "Then it will be up to the house-master, from what Kildare said."

"Railton would rather have Tom in than Cardew," said Herries.

"Bank on that," agreed Digby.

"Well, very likely!" admitted Blake, "But that isn't what we want—we want Tom properly elected, or fellows will be carping. But I'm dashed if I see how we're going to work it—unless we offer Baggy Trimble twice as much tuck as Cardew has stood him, to come over to our side."

"That is where I come in, deah boy," smiled Arthur Augustus, serenely. "It flashed into my bwain all of a sudden."

"What did?"

"That wrelation of yours, Widd——"

"Eh? What?" In the excitement of the election, Jack Blake had forgotten all about that relative who was coming to the school at the end of the week. He was reminded of him now, "Young Ridd? Jimmy Ridd? What about him?"

"He's comin' to St. Jim's!" breathed Arthur Augustus, excitedly. "He will be in our form: and owing to my wequest to Wailton, in our study——"

"Yes, you ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"We'll jolly soon shift him out," said Herries. "If he can't understand that fellows can't go five to a study, we'll bang his head on the table till he does see it——"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Oh, we'll shift him all right!" concurred Dig. "I daresay he's quite a nice chap, but he's not going to crowd us out of our study."

"Weally, Dig——"

"That will be all right," said Blake, with a nod. "I'll explain to him that there's lots of room in Tompkins' study, No. 4, and if he don't agree I'll punch his head——"

"Will you fellows let a fellow speak?" hooted Arthur Augustus. "Is young Widd comin' heah today or tomowwow, Blake?"

"Dunno—Railton would know," answered Blake. "I know he's coming about the end of the week, that's all."

"I suppose he will come by twain?"

"Shouldn't wonder—unless he feels up to walking thirty miles."

"Then he will change at Wayland for Wylcombe, and we can walk down to Wylcombe to meet him at the station."

"I can see myself walking down to Rylcombe to meet him at the station!"

"I don't think!" said Herries.

"Hardly!" said Dig.

"Appawently you fellows do not see what I am dwivin' at," said Arthur Augustus. "We are goin' to walk down to Wylcombe Station to meet Widd, and bwing him to the school, and walk him into Study No. 6, and make him feel at home, all vewy pleasant and fwierendfy——"

"Are we?" said Blake.

"We are, deah boy! Widd will have a vote!" said Arthur Augustus, "Ewevy man in the School House has a vote, and a new man as much as any othah man. Now do you see?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Blake, Herries, and Digby, all together.

They saw!

"Widd is our man," continued Arthur Augustus, "As a welation of yours, Blake, he will natuwally oblige you, I twust. As I have asked specially for him to be put in our study, he will natuwally feel like obligin' me! He will hardly feel like backin' up against his own study, in any case. Meetin' him at the station, we can explain the whole thing to him even befoah he awwives heah, and make him see that Tom Mewwy simply must be elected, and that wottah Cardew kept out—that uttah wottah—"

"There's Cardew listening-in!" grinned Dig, with a glance at the junior on the seat under the elm.

"I have no objection to Cardew hearin' what I think of him, Dig! If Cardew does not like it, he can lump it. I did not notice him there, but I am not sowwy to let him heah what I think of him."

"By gum!" said Blake, "Gussy, old man, you're a genius—when you're not a blithering idiot! I'd forgotten all about Ridd. But, of course, he will have a vote—and only one vote's wanted. I'm jolly glad they didn't bung him in at Carcroft instead of sending him here! Ridd's vote is going to pull Tom Merry through to-morrow."

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

Herries looked round at Cardew's scowling face.

"Hear that, you smudge?" he asked, "We've got a man, and you're going to be dished! So rats to you!"

Study No. 6 walked on, eagerly discussing that brain-wave of the swell of St. Jim's. Really it did look like, as Arthur Augustus described it, a winner. All objection to Ridd as an extra inmate for Study No. 6 vanished on the spot—temporarily, at least. Study No. 6 were going to welcome the new junior like a long-lost brother: so far from keeping him out of their study, they were going to take the greatest care to get him into it—Jimmy Ridd's vote was going to pull Tom Merry through the election, and all was calm and bright!

Cardew sat staring after them, with a black brow.

He had heard of the new fellow who was coming into the Fourth, but had forgotten all about him. Now he was most unpleasantly reminded.

TOM MERRY'S RIVAL

Ridd undoubtedly, would have a vote: he would be a member of the School House as soon as he arrived, if he came only five minutes before the election. As a new boy, he would not, if left alone, probably think of voting: but he was not going to be left alone. He was going to be in Blake's study—and all four of them were going to be after his vote: and that single vote would decide the disputed election. Cardew breathed hard and he breathed deep. This was defeat—this was the end of his hopes and his ambitions.

But was it?

Cardew did some very hard thinking as he sat there in the shade of the elm. And the outcome of that hard thinking was, that the game was not up yet—he had still a card to play!

16

He Cometh Not !

“ROT!” said Tom Merry, tersely.

Manners and Lowther gave him very expressive looks. Blake and Co. eyed him still more expressively.

It was Saturday afternoon.

That day, the junior election was to be tried out again. So far as anyone knew, nobody had changed his mind in the matter of voting. Each side, no doubt, hoped for a recruit or two from the other side: but it was a very vague hope. The probability was that the election would result in another tie, which was satisfactory to neither.

In these circumstances, the arrival of the new boy, Ridd, was a matter of tremendous importance. Whichever side secured him, secured the election. Only Tom Merry seemed to fail to realise how important it was.

“Now look here—!” said Blake.

“Look here—!” said Monty Lowther.

“Yaas, wathah, look heah, Tom Mewwy——”

“We asked Railton,” went on Blake, “We’ve got it, official, that the new kid is coming this afternoon. The four o’clock train at Rylcombe will cough him up. We’re going to bag young Ridd at four o’clock.”

“Rot!” said Tom.

“I do not wegard it as wot, Tom Mewwy,” said Arthur Augustus, warmly, “I wegard it as a vewy bwiliant ideah.”

“My dear chap——!” said Tom.

“The chap is Blake’s cousin or something,” said Manners, “Just the man we want. He’s bound to listen to Blake.”

“And he’s going into Blake’s study,” said Monty Lowther. “He’s bound to stand by his own study.”

“Yaas, wathah.”

"Chance of a lifetime," said Herries.

"And we're not missing it," said Dig.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't like the idea," he said, "This new chap, Ridd, can't know anything about things here, and he ought not to vote at all."

"Wubbish!"

"He will know all about it when we tell him," said Dig.

"It's rot!" repeated Tom "A new kid, only an hour or two in the school, deciding all on his own who's to be junior captain of the House! That's what it amounts to."

"That's rot, if you like," said Monty Lowther, "Might as well say that a fag in the Third decides who's going to be skipper, if he comes in on one side or the other."

"Well, yes," admitted Tom, "But——"

"If Baggy Trimble happened to be on our side, Cardew could get him over to the other side with a bag of dough-nuts," said Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I suppose he could! But——"

"So you don't like the idea of bagging young Ridd and his vote?" demanded Jack Blake, with a glare at his candidate.

"Can't say I do," answered Tom.

"Well, we're going to bag him all the same. We're going to meet him at Rylcombe Station, and greet him like a long-lost brother, and bag his vote before he gets to the school. See?"

Tom Merry laughed again.

"Suppose Cardew had the same idea?" he asked, "You may find him at the station waiting for young Ridd. He could find out when he was coming, by asking Lathom or Railton, just as you did."

"Oh!" said Blake, "I—I suppose he's capable of it, the smudge. Sort of thing he would think of, I daresay."

"My dear man, isn't it what you're thinking of——?"

"Oh, don't be a goat! Let him turn up, if he likes," said Blake, "We'll jolly well keep an eye open for him, now you mention it, and if we see him within a mile of the station, we'll tip him into a ditch in Rylcombe Lane. That will settle it for him."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"But——!" said Tom.

"You can keep your butting for your pals, who may like it," said Blake, gruffly. "We're going. Come on, you men."

And Study No. 6 settled the argument by walking away to the gates. They left Manners and Lowther telling Tom Merry what they thought of him. Blake's brow was knitted. It had not occurred to him that Cardew might have the same idea of "nobbling" the new voter, till Tom Merry mentioned it. Now he realised that it

was at least probable. The bare idea of Cardew getting hold of his indispensable voter roused Blake's deep wrath.

"Just what the rotter would do, you fellows," he said, "He's mean enough for anything. Let me catch him trying to nobble my cousin——"

"Didn't you say he was only your *cousin once* or twice wemoved, or somethin'?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"He's my cousin," said Blake. "Sort of, anyway, and we're going to have his vote for our man. I wonder whether that cad Cardew is after him? Anybody know where the rotter is now?"

"There's Levison—ask him!" said Herries.

Levison and Clive were in the quad. Study No. 6 bore down on them.

"Where's Cardew?" asked Blake.

"Gone out!" answered Levison.

"Oh! Gone out, has he?" said Blake, suspiciously, "You three are generally together on a half-holiday. Gone out on his own, what?"

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Clive.

"Some special reason, I daresay?" jeered Blake. "He didn't happen to tell you where *has* was going, did he?"

"No, he never mentioned it. What does it matter?" asked Levison.

Jack Blake did not answer that question. It was possible that it might matter a great deal. He tramped down to the gates with his friends.

"Bai Jove! It does wathah look as if the wottah is aftah Widd," said Arthur Augustus, *thoughtfully*, "You wemembah he heard us talkin' about it yestahday——"

"Looks like it," said Herries. "Anyhow he's gone out, without saying anything. Bet you he's ahead of us at Rylcombe."

"That won't help him a lot," growled Blake, "Ridd's train isn't in till four. Keep an eye open for him, and if you see him, just collar him. He won't feel like going to the station to nobble our voter, after being tipped into a ditch."

And the four juniors were very much on the alert as they walked down Rylcombe Lane to the village. Ridd was their man: and he was going to vote for Tom Merry. Tom's lack of enthusiasm on the subject made no difference to that. If the four had sighted Ralph Reckness Cardew on their way to the station, it was certain that the dandy of the Fourth would have been booked for some very unceremonious handling.

But nothing was seen of Cardew in Rylcombe Lane. If he was

on the same road, he was well ahead.

They arrived at the station. Four platform tickets were taken, and they went on the platform. There they scanned it for Cardew—without result. He was still not to be seen.

"Might be skulking in the waiting-room," said Blake. "He's the sort of fellow to skulk. We'd better draw it."

They "drew" the waiting-room: but it was quite vacant. Cardew was not there, and it was clear that he was not in the station at all.

"Tom Merry's an ass!" said Dig, "Cardew's not after Ridd—I daresay he's sneaking in at the back of the Green Man all the time."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Blake. "Anyhow he's not here. If he turns up at the last minute, you fellows scrag him, and sit on him, while I get hold of young Ridd, see?"

"What-ho!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, "He must certainly not be allowed to speak a single word to Widd. Widd is our pigeon."

The four juniors waited for the train to come in: with keen eyes open for Cardew, if he came. But Cardew did not appear. It seemed that he had not, after all, thought of "nobbling" the new boy at Rylcombe. The train from Wayland Junction was signalled at last, and came clattering into the station.

"O.K." said Blake, "We're all right now. You fellows don't know Ridd—but I shall spot him the minute he steps out. If you see anything of Cardew, mind you collar him, while I'm getting Ridd."

"We'll collar him all right," said Herries.

The train came to a halt, and doors were thrown open. Three passengers alighted. Blake, the only member of the party who knew Ridd by sight, watched for him almost like a hawk, ready to pounce. But a rather blank expression came over his face, as the passengers alighted—one was Mr. Sands, the village grocer; another the local doctor; and the third an old lady in a shawl. They went on to the exit, and the old Rylcombe porter slammed the doors again.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, "Where's Widd?"

"He hasn't got out!" said Dig.

"Missed his station," said Herries, "Is your cousin fathead enough to miss his station. Blake?"

"Rot!" said Blake, "He's not on the train. Must have lost the connection at Wayland Junction! Oh, the ass!"

The train rolled on, out of Rylcombe Station. Four juniors were left standing on the platform with blank faces.

"Oh, the chump!" said Dig.

Blake breathed hard.

"The ass!" he said, "The blithering owl! Keeping us hanging about here because he hadn't sense enough to catch the connection

at the junction. Oh, the unmitigated chump! Won't I punch his head."

"Widd did not know we were waitin' for him, heah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, mildly, "As he did not know——"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Blake, crossly.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Give your chin a rest, Gussy! There was five minutes to catch the connection at Wayland, and he's missed it! By gum, if I don't punch his silly head——!"

"Not till after the election," said Dig.

"Oh! No!" Blake called to the porter, "When is the next train in from Wayland Junction?"

"Five o'clock, sir."

"By gum! We've got to wait for it," said Blake, "That won't leave us a lot of time to get the blithering idiot to St. Jim's at half-past, for the election. Oh! The ass!"

"Suppose he misses the next twain too, Blake——?"

"Cheerful sort of idiot, aren't you, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake, there is no occasion whatevah for makin' wude wemarks," said Arthur Augustus, warmly.

"Br-r-r-r! We've got to wait," growled Blake, "And we mustn't even tap his silly head on the platform when he does come—it wouldn't do, in the circs. Blow him."

They had to wait. Ridd had not arrived by the scheduled train, and they could only conclude that he had missed the connection at the junction. They waited, eager for his arrival, but feeling, truth to tell, much more disposed to bang his head on the platform, when he did come, than to greet him like a long-lost brother!

First in the Field !

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW smiled.

He was standing on the platform at Wayland Junction, a couple of miles from St. Jim's.

A train had stopped in the station, and a red head was put out of a carriage, and a pair of pleasant blue eyes glanced up and down the platform: then the door opened, and a youth stepped out.

"Ridd!" murmured Cardew.

He had never seen Jack Blake's relative, and never heard of him till a few days ago. But he guessed that this was Ridd. It was easy enough to guess, for this was the only boy who stepped from the train: the other passengers who alighted were elderly.

Cardew's smile was rather feline.

Blake and Co., he was aware, would be waiting at Rylcombe for Ridd to come on by the local train. It was necessary to change into the local train at Wayland Junction, for Rylcombe and St. Jim's. That was what Ridd would naturally do, unless someone contrived to prevent it. Cardew was at Wayland to prevent it, if he could.

It had occurred to Tom Merry, and it had seemed probable to Blake, that Cardew might think of meeting the new fellow at the station, and getting in first for his vote in the election. But it had not occurred to either of them that Cardew might think of intercepting the newcomer at the junction. That was precisely what Cardew planned to do.

The idea of Blake and Co. waiting at Rylcombe, for a fellow who was not coming there, was amusing to Cardew. If he had turned up at Rylcombe, he could guess what he had to expect from the chums of Study No. 6. But he had no intention of going anywhere

near Rylcombe. He had started early and walked through the wood to Wayland, to catch the new boy at the junction before he changed trains. Now he had caught him! He was first in the field, at all events: and success depended on how he played his cards. It was a chance, and a good chance, of "nobbling" the extra vote that was needed to decide the junior election.

He saw the red-headed youth glancing about him. He had to cross the bridge for the local platform, where the train for Rylcombe was waiting. But he was not going to take that train, if Cardew could help it. Blake and Co. could watch for him at Rylcombe like four Sister Annes, but they would not see him coming.

Cardew sauntered across the platform to meet the new boy, with a pleasant smile on his face. What he was thinking was hidden deep behind that pleasant smile. Cardew could be a very agreeable fellow when he liked—and he was going to be extremely agreeable to Jimmy Ridd.

"Excuse me," he said, gracefully, "You're Ridd, aren't you?"

The red-headed boy looked at him.

"That's my name," he answered. His eyes lingered for a moment on Cardew's school cap. "You belong to St. Jim's?"

"That's it," said Cardew, pleasantly, "My name's Cardew—in the Fourth Form. That's goin' to be your form, I understand. My beak, Lathom, spoke to me about you."

Cardew did not add that he had specially asked Mr. Lathom about the time of Ridd's arrival!

"It's a half-holiday at the school today, as I daresay you know," he went on, "That's how I'm in Wayland. And when I heard about the spot of trouble on the local line, I remembered you'd be changin' trains here, and thought I'd drop in and tip you.

"Trouble on the local line?" repeated Ridd.

"Oh, nothing very serious—one of our local land-slips," said Cardew, airily. "You know these chalk downs—always slippin', or slidin', or somethin'. The line to Rylcombe is blocked—I expect they'll get it clear in a few hours, but you couldn't get through to Rylcombe till then."

"Oh!" said Ridd, "I had to change here for Rylcombe. But if the line's blocked, how do I get to the school?"

There was not the slightest doubt of suspicion in the new boy's mind. He had never seen Cardew before: and Cardew was a St. Jim's man, and seemed very pleasant and polite. That he could have any motive for deluding him, naturally did not occur to the new junior. Indeed he was feeling rather grateful to Cardew for taking the trouble to put him wise.

Cardew's eyes glistened.

There was no block on the Rylcombe line: the whole story was an invention to keep Ridd from taking the local train. "Cardew the Cad" had absolutely no scruple about using such methods. He was going to get that precious voter into his hands: and his view was that the end justified the means.

"Much of a walk?" asked Ridd, doubtfully.

"Well, two or three miles," said Cardew, "But I can give you a lift, if you like. I've got a taxi outside."

"Oh!" said Ridd.

"You see," went on Cardew, in an easy conversational tone, "I came over to Wayland this afternoon for a picture at the cinema, and I'm taking a taxi back. Coming along to the station to pick up a taxi, I remembered you and your train, and looked in for you."

"That was jolly kind of you," said Ridd.

"Not at all—not much trouble to step in and speak a word," said Cardew, amiably. "Besides, I understand that you're a relation of Blake, of my form—a chap I rather like."

"Sort of cousin," said Ridd, "We're both Yorkshire. You know Blake?"

"Oh, yes—jolly good chap," said Cardew, "I rather hope that he's going to vote for me in the election today—we've got an election on in the School House—one of our little House affairs, you know. But perhaps that wouldn't interest you, as a new kid."

"Oh, I don't know," said Ridd, "I'm interested in anything going on in the House I'm going to belong to."

"Well, I'll tell you about it on the way, if you'd care for a lift in my taxi."

"I'll be glad," said Ridd, "It's very decent of you, Cardew. But if I share the taxi you must let me pay half the fare."

"Oh! don't mench."

"I'd rather, really."

"Just as you like, of course. It's only four bob, anyway. Come on, then."

"My box is booked for Rylcombe——"

"That's all right: it will go when they clear the line, and be sent up to the school. You've got your bag? That's all right then. This way."

The new junior walked off the platform with Cardew.

The wily schemer was rather anxious to get him out of the station. A word with a porter would have revealed that there was no block on the Rylcombe line, and that his leg was being pulled.

Bag in hand, Ridd walked out of the station with Cardew, into

Wayland High Street, where a taxi, already engaged by Cardew, was waiting.

A couple of minutes more, and they were bowling away for St. Jim's.

Before they were out of Wayland, the local train was rolling off for Rylcombe, where Blake and Co. were waiting to greet the passenger who would not arrive. Cardew had no doubt that they would conclude that Ridd missed the connection, and wait for the next train in. If they did, it would keep them off the scene till quite close on the time for the election, which was very useful for his plans. They would not have too much time to get in for the election, and would not have the faintest idea what had become of Ridd. So far, at least, all seemed to be going well for Cardew the Cad.

Cardew chatted pleasantly as the taxi ran on: about the School House and its feud with Figgins and Co. of the New House; about Mr. Railton, the house-master, and Mr. Lathom, master of the Fourth Form; about Kildare, captain of St. Jim's—about all sorts of things likely to interest a new fellow, about to enter strange surroundings. He did not mention the election again yet—though he hoped that Ridd would do so.

Ridd, so far, had been completely taken in, as he could hardly have avoided being, as he had no reason for doubt or suspicion. But Cardew could see that he was by no means a simpleton: he had a keen intelligent face, and looked like a fellow who knew his way about. He was quite plainly pleased by all this pleasant friendliness from the handsome, well-dressed St. Jim's junior who had taken trouble on his account. But eagerness on the subject of the election might have opened his eyes.

As a matter of fact, Ridd came to the subject of his own accord, by the time the taxi was half-way to the school.

"And what's this election you mentioned?" he asked.

"Oh, just one of our little House affairs—very important to us, of course," said Cardew, negligently, "You see, each House at St. Jim's has a junior captain as well as a senior House-captain. As it happens the place is vacant and there is an election today."

"Who votes in it?" asked Ridd.

"Every junior in the House. Why," exclaimed Cardew, as if struck by a sudden new thought, "You'll have a vote, Ridd, if you get to the school before the votes are taken—you'll be a School House man and entitled to vote!" Cardew laughed, "Rather exciting, what, to vote in a school election before you've been at St. Jim's an hour!"

Ridd looked thoughtful.

"Well, I hardly think I ought to vote, as a new fellow, knowing nothing of the candidates," he said, "Who are they?"

"I'm one," said Cardew, with a smile.

"Oh! Are you?"

"Yes, and the other's a chap called Merry. He was junior skipper, but resigned because the fellows were dissatisfied with him. But he's changed his mind, and is standing for re-election—he's rather the man to chop and change—not very reliable. But perhaps you're right that you ought not to vote, as a new man!" added Cardew, thoughtfully, "You don't know Merry, and you've known me for only ten minutes or so. Better keep out of it, unless you're keen on it."

Ridd nodded.

Cardew reflected cynically that there was plenty of time to come back to the subject later. His present object was to disarm the new boy of any possible suspicion of his motives. And in that he was certainly successful.

"I suppose I shall see Jack Blake when I get in," remarked Ridd.

"Sure to," said Cardew: inwardly quite assured that Jack Blake was scheduled to kick his heels on the platform of Rylcombe Station till the five o'clock train came in from Wayland.

"Might speak to him about it," said Ridd.

"Jolly good idea," said Cardew, heartily, "I suppose you and Blake are rather pally?"

"Well, we haven't seen a lot of one another," answered Ridd, "Last time we met we had a scrap."

"Oh! Did you? What about?"

"He said my hair was red."

"Eh? Oh! Did—did—did he?" gasped Cardew.

Ridd's hair undoubtedly was red! That did not detract at all from his good looks: but undoubtedly it was very red. He laughed.

"Of course, it is red," he said cheerfully. "But I punched his nose, all the same, and he punched mine. But he's a jolly good sort, and I like him."

"One of the best," agreed Cardew. "Hallo, we're getting in—that's the old tower of St. Jim's, over the trees there."

Ridd glanced at it, with keen interest. A few minutes later the school gates were in sight: and three fellows, strolling in a row in the sunny road, glanced at the passing taxi. Cardew set his lips a little. He could hardly hope to smuggle Ridd into the school unseen: but certainly he did not want him to catch the eyes of the "Terrible Three" of the Shell. But there were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, and all three glanced at the taxi, at Cardew, and his companion, as it passed.

"You'll have to see your House-master, Railton, first," remarked Cardew, "I'll look for Blake and tell him you've come. I expect he's at the nets."

The taxi turned in at the gates of St. Jim's. Baggy Trimble, in the quad, stared at it, and grinned at Cardew, as it went on up the drive to the School House. Cardew was glad to get his companion out of the taxi, and into the House, and he walked him off to Mr. Railton's study without loss of time. At the door of the house-master's study they parted.

"I'll look for Blake," said Cardew, amiably, "You'll find him waiting for you at the corner of the passage when you come out."

"Thanks."

Ridd tapped at the door, and entered Mr. Railton's study. He was there for about ten minutes. When he came out, and came down the passage, he found a junior waiting for him at the corner. But it was not Blake—it was Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Taking the Stranger In !

“**P**LAY up, I suppose?” said Ernest Levison.

“I—I suppose so!” said Clive.

They seemed a little dubious.

Both of them were backing up Cardew in the election. Both of them, perhaps, felt an inward misgiving on the subject: but he was their pal, and they backed him up. They did not like, or pretend to like, his electioneering methods: but that made no difference to their loyal support. In truth, they knew that Cardew had good qualities, as well as bad: they liked him for the good, and tried to forget the bad, though that was not always easy. Now they were called on to back him up in his latest move, which had taken them rather by surprise. And they were going to do it—though with the usual lingering misgiving.

Cardew had found time to speak to them, while Ridd was with the House-master. Levison and Clive had had no knowledge of his plan to intercept the new boy at Wayland Junction, and get Ridd to the school under his wing, while Blake and Co. kicked their heels at Rylcombe. They saw no harm in that as a piece of strategy: as Cardew carefully refrained from mentioning that he had told the new fellow a string of untruths to effect his purpose. But they could not help feeling a little dubious about his further idea of getting Ridd into the study, making much of him, talking him round, and keeping him away from contact with any other fellows until the latest moment before the election. However, dubious or not, they were going to play up.

They were in the study now, making preparations for tea for the new boy. Cardew was downstairs, having waited for Ridd to come

out of Mr. Railton's study, to take him to see the House-dame, which he had to do. Cardew was very anxious to get Ridd safely into No. 9 in the Fourth, with the door shut: but the visit to Mrs. Mimms could not be cut out, so he accompanied him to the matron's room—determined to keep Ridd under his eyes until he had landed his fish, so to speak. It was left to Levison and Clive to make the preparations for giving the new fellow a distinguished reception.

Quite a handsome spread adorned the table in No. 9 in the Fourth. Cardew had plenty of money, and many good things were available at the school shop for a fellow well-provided with that useful article. There was no doubt that a new boy would prefer that handsome spread in a study, with three fellows making much of him, with their very best manners on, to tea in hall, a stranger in a crowd of strangers. First impressions counted for a very great deal; and Cardew, at least, had little doubt that when Ridd left that study, he would leave it with the fixed intention of voting for his new friend. He could not know, and he was not going to know if Cardew could help it, how very much depended on his single vote.

"I don't half like the idea," muttered Clive, as he sorted out pots of jam, "Cardew doesn't know the new man, and doesn't care a bean about him—and all this is just humbugging him for his vote." Levison frowned a little.

"Well, from what Cardew said, Blake and his crowd have gone down to Rylcombe to rope the new man in," he said, "I expect they'd stand him tea in the study, and talk him round for his vote."

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, I suppose," said Clive. "But—well, we're backing up a pal. But Blake and his crowd wouldn't tell Ridd any lies—and I'm afraid Cardew would. Look here, Levison, we know how Cardew pulled Grundy's leg, and that fathead Gore's. If there's anything of that kind here, I'm getting out of the study—I'm not standing for it."

"Same here," agreed Levison, "But Cardew knows there's a limit, so far as we're concerned. He's got sense. I think it will be all right."

"I hope so," grunted Clive.

"Here they come!" muttered Levison.

Cardew and Ridd appeared in the doorway. Cardew was smiling, and Ridd looking very cheerful. He was a little disappointed by not seeing Blake, who, Cardew had explained to him, had gone out for the afternoon with some friends. But undoubtedly he was very pleased by Cardew's pleasant and polite attentions, and he could hardly have helped feeling grateful to him for taking so much trouble about a new boy in a strange school. Very willingly he

had accepted Cardew's invitation to tea in the study, to meet the friends of his new friend. Indeed, his present impression was that, if all the St. Jim's Fourth were as agreeable as Cardew, he was going to find himself in a very agreeable form.

"Here we are," said Cardew, cheerily, "This is the new fellow Ridd, you chaps—a relation of old Blake's. Blake's out, as it happens, but I know he'd be glad if Ridd was looked after a bit, on his first day here. This is Levison, Ridd, and that's Clive, chap from South Africa—two of the best, as you'd learn later if I didn't tell you now."

Ridd smiled, evidently liking the looks of Cardew's friends. They greeted him very politely, looking as pleased as they could to see him. As a matter of fact, they liked his looks: it was only the circumstances in which Cardew was inveigling him into the study that they did not like.

"By gum, you fellows have got rather a spread here," said Cardew, just as if he had known nothing about it beforehand, and had not spent a slice of his ample financial resources on the supplies. "Good! Give Ridd a chair, Levison—not the one with the wonky leg."

Ridd smiled again as he sat down. He found the atmosphere in No. 9 Study very pleasant and cheerful.

"Jolly good of you fellows to take a stranger in like this," he said, and Cardew, who was standing a little behind Ridd's chair at the moment, winked at his friends unseen by the new boy. "Taking the stranger in" struck Cardew as a very accurate description of the proceedings—in quite another sense than that intended by Ridd.

Levison and Clive took no notice of the wink. They were prepared to play up, and make themselves agreeable to the new junior, but that was their limit. They certainly were not going to join in Cardew's amused mockery of the fellow he was taking in.

"Like St. Jim's, what you've seen of it, Ridd?" asked Levison.

"Yes, rather!" said Ridd, "Your House-master seems a splendid chap. I suppose you all like him here."

"Oh, quite," said Cardew, "Old Railton's very popular. Of course, he has his tough side—frightfully down on fellows who kick over the traces—break out after lights out, or smoke in the studies, and all that. But we like him all the better for that, really."

Cardew was a fellow given to breaking out after lights out, and smoking in his study, but certainly Ridd could not have guessed that one! He nodded.

"Black sheep in every flock, I suppose," he said.

"I'm afraid so," assented Cardew, sadly, "Of course, we don't know them—we're a bit particular in this study." Perhaps the expressions that came involuntarily over the faces of Levison and

Clive warned him, for he changed the subject. "You played cricket at your last school, Ridd?"

"Yes, rather," answered Ridd, and it was clear that the subject was agreeable to him, "I was in the junior eleven. I hope I shall have a chance here."

"Come down to the nets after tea, and let's see how you shape," said Cardew, "That is, if you're not tired after your journey!" he added, considerably.

Ridd laughed.

"Thirty miles in a railway train doesn't exactly tire me," he said, "I'll be jolly glad. I was thought fairly good as a bowler." Then he added, modestly. "But you fellows here may be miles ahead of me."

"Hardly," said Cardew, "As it happens, the House is rather hard up for junior bowlers. We lost a House match on Wednesday just for want of a man who could bowl. I'll be jolly glad to see how you shape—you see, if I get in as skipper I shall be making up the team, and I'd like to know whether we can count on a good man against the New House next time. After tea——"

"The election's after tea," said Levison gruffly. He was rather glad of that circumstance, for he was perfectly well aware that, whatever Ridd's bowling might be like, Cardew would have told him that it was worth a place in the junior House eleven, which would certainly be his if Cardew got in as skipper. Luckily, there was no time for the new boy's leg to be pulled to that extent.

"Gad! I was forgettin' the election booked for half-past five," said Cardew, "Well, after the election, then—it won't take so very long. After tea we'll all go down together, shall we—though you'll have to decide for yourself how you're going to vote, or whether you're going to vote at all," he added, laughing.

"I don't see why I shouldn't," said Ridd, thoughtfully. Apparently his views had changed a little, under the agreeable impression Cardew had made on him, "You say I'm entitled to vote, though I'm new here today."

"Oh, yes; every junior in the House, whether he's been here three years or three minutes," said Cardew, "That's so, isn't it, Levison?"

"Yes, that's so," said Levison, and Clive nodded.

"These chaps are voting for me," remarked Cardew, "But they're old pals, so of course they would. Still, they think I shall make a pretty good House-captain, don't you, old beans?"

"We shouldn't vote for you if we didn't," said Clive, rather gruffly.

"You can bank on that," said Levison.

Cardew smiled. Those two remarks, evidently sincere, could not fail to have their effect. Ridd's face was thoughtful as he went on

with his tea. He was enjoying that handsome spread, no doubt being hungry, if not tired, after his journey: and certainly he was feeling very comfortable in No. 9 Study, and very friendly towards the occupants thereof. Cardew could read in his looks that he was making up his mind to join the side of these pleasant fellows: and he could hardly conceal his satisfaction.

All was plain sailing now, in Cardew's opinion. He had only to keep Ridd in that study till the latest moment, then walk him down to the day-room with three fellows round him, keeping him as far as possible from a word with anyone else: and the result was as good as certain: the bird in the net, and the election in the bag! In his mind's eye, "Cardew the Cad" saw himself junior captain of the School House, Tom Merry defeated and his friends disappointed and chagrined, everything going his way—and in his satisfaction he rather forgot that there is many a slip twixt cup and lip!

19

Anxious Moments !

"GINGER!" said Monty Lowther, thoughtfully.

There was a wrinkle in his brow.

Tom Merry and Manners looked at him. Monty seemed to be worried about something, after the taxi had passed and gone in at the school gates.

"Ginger!" repeated Lowther, "Did you notice that chap in the taxi with Cardew? Notice the colour of his hair?"

His friends smiled. They had, certainly, noticed the colour of the hair on the head of Cardew's companion in the taxi. It had been visible, and its colour leaped to the eye.

"What about it?" asked Tom, "He looked a decent chap."

"Never seen him before?"

"Not that I know of."

"Same here," said Manners, "What about it?"

"That was a Wayland taxi," said Lowther, "Know the driver's phiz. One of the station taxi-cabs."

"So what?" asked Tom.

"Blake and his gang are waiting at Rylcombe for a new kid who had to change trains at Wayland," said Lowther, "And here's Cardew turning up with a chap we've never seen before, in a Wayland taxi. Looks to me as if he's got a move ahead of Study No. 6, and nobbled the new kid at the junction, before he changed trains. I seem to have heard somebody mention that that relation of Blake's who's coming today is a red-head."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"By gum!" said Manners, "It looks like it—if Cardew knew anything about the kid—just one of his cunning tricks to cut in at

Wayland and get hold of him before he went on to Rylcombe. But——”

“What for?” asked Tom.

Lowther gave him a pitying look.

“What for?” he repeated, “Has your poor old brain stopped functioning?”

“I hope not. But——”

“Ridd’s vote is going to decide the election, for the party that leads him by the nose, fathead,” said Lowther, “That’s Cardew’s game, same as Blake’s—if it was the new kid with him in that taxi.

Tom Merry frowned.

“Well, I don’t want to lead anybody by the nose,” he said, “I don’t think the new kid ought to vote, really, his first day here. I certainly shall not ask him for his vote, if I see him.”

“Think Cardew will be awfully particular?” asked Lowther, sarcastically.

“Um! Very likely not! I shouldn’t like to adopt Cardew’s methods, though,” said Tom, disdainfully.

“Hoity-toity!” said Monty Lowther, “Look here, that chap in the taxi with Cardew must have been Ridd——”

“Looks like it,” said Manners, with a nod.

“And Cardew’s not bagging his vote, if we can help it,” said Lowther.

“No fear!”

Tom Merry laughed.

“If he’s the new kid, Cardew seems to have made friends with him,” he said, “Are you thinking of cutting in after them, and grabbing him by the ears, and yanking him away from Cardew?”

“I’d rather do that than let that cad nobble his vote.”

“I don’t think that would be the way to get his vote,” said Tom, laughing. “He might get his back up. And you’re not sure he’s the new kid, either.”

“We’ll soon know,” said Manners, “If Blake got the new kid at Rylcombe, by the four train, they may be along any minute.”

“Is that what we’re nanging about for?” yawned Tom. “You fellows said you wanted a walk——”

“Aren’t we walking?” snapped Monty Lowther.

“Well, yes, but——”

“You’d better not ever stand for Parliament, Tom, if this is the way you encourage your party,” growled Lowther, “Don’t you know yet that a candidate’s job is to get himself elected?”

“I don’t see it! If people want him, they can say so.”

“Br-r-r-r-r! I want to see that chap when Blake rolls him along. We’re going to be nice to him——”

"Rot!" said Tom.

"Don't you think old hands like us ought to be nice to a new kid?"

"Oh! Yes, as far as that goes! Not for his vote, though."

"If Job had been backing you up in an election, Tom, he would have come to the end of his patience," said Lowther. "What about banging his silly head on a tree, Manners?"

"Couldn't bang any sense into it," said Manners.

"We're wasting time," said Tom. "I haven't the slightest wish to see the new kid Ridd. I'd rather be at the nets."

"You're going to see the new kid Ridd, as soon as Blake rolls him along, and you're going to be jolly nice to him," said Lowther. "You're going to have your best manners on, if you've got any, and we'll ask him to tea in the study, or in No. 6 with Blake's gang—and keep him right under our eye till we walk him into the day-room for the election."

"So that's the programme?"

"That's it!"

"I expect it's Cardew's too, if that was the new kid with him in the taxi," said Tom. "Anyhow I'm not going to butter up a new kid for his vote, and I'm getting tired of trickling round this road. Come in and let's get a spot of cricket, and blow all this electioneering stuff out of our heads."

"Fathead!" said Lowther.

"Ass!" said Manners.

"Well, I'll cut in, anyhow," said Tom. "I simply am not going to butter the new kid, and I don't think he ought to vote anyway. Coming?"

"No!" howled Manners and Lowther together.

"I'll leave you to it, then."

And Tom Merry walked away, and went in at the gates. Manners and Lowther exchanged a very, very expressive look.

"That's the silly idiot we've got to get elected," said Lowther.

"That's the howling ass!" agreed Manners.

"We're getting him in all the same. If that was the new kid with Cardew, he's got him in his study by this time, buttering him up!" growled Lowther. "I wish I knew! Anyhow I suppose we can't raid the study and drag him away by his red hair."

Manners chuckled.

"Hardly: especially as we're not sure."

"Blake's gang ought to be here by this time. What the thump are they hanging on at Rylcombe for?" growled Lowther, "The kid can't have been on the train. That looks——"

"It does!"

"Might have lost the connection—some moony new kid who doesn't know his way about. If they wait for the next, that's at five. They'll get back here none too early for the election. And it looks as if Cardew's got hold of the booby all the time! If he has, he's got his vote—he's as artful as a cart load of monkeys. And that howling ass going off to the nets, as if it didn't matter! I've a jolly good mind to let the whole thing slide."

"Can't do that," said Manners.

"No! Blow!"

It was very exasperating!

"We could cut down to Rylcombe, and see how things are," muttered Lowther, "But—they may be coming back by one of the foothpaths, and we should miss them! Blow! Blow! Blow!"

Five strokes came faintly from the distance, from the old clock-tower of St. Jim's. Manners and Lowther loafed about unhappily. If Blake and Co. had captured the new junior at Rylcombe, all was well, even if they had had to wait for the five train. But a dismal conviction was growing in their minds that the red-headed fellow in the taxi had been Ridd: intercepted and captured at the junction by the wily Cardew. However, they were soon to know now.

It was a quarter-past-five when Lowther exclaimed, suddenly:

"Here they come!"

"Only four of them!" said Manners, scanning distant figures approaching from the direction of the village.

"Then they've not got Ridd?"

"Looks as if they haven't."

Manners and Lowther hurried to meet Blake and Co. as they came. All four of the Fourth-Formers looked gloomy and exasperated. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was far from his accustomed placid self.

"What about Ridd?" called out Lowther, breathlessly.

Snort from Jack Blake.

"Nothing about Ridd! The howling ass lost both trains from Wayland—the priceless piffler seems to love losing trains—I daresay he'll lose two or three more, and wander into St. Jim's about midnight."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The chuckle-headed chump!" said Herries. "He never came by the four train, so we waited for the five o'clock, and he never came by it."

"Sitting at Wayland Junction, watching the trains go out one after another, I suppose!" grunted Digby, "What a priceless clown!"

"Won't I punch his head!" breathed Blake, "Won't I damage his nose worse than I did last time! The pie-faced dunderhead—all our trouble for nothing, and he won't turn up for the election after all."

"He never came?" said Manners. He looked at Lowther. "That as good as settles it, Monty! It must have been the new kid with Cardew."

"What?" exclaimed Blake.

"Is your cousin—?" began Lowther.

"He's not my cousin—only a distant sort of relation I wouldn't touch with a barge-pole, except to punch his silly head."

"Oh, don't be an ass! Is he red-headed?" howled Lowther.

"Red as a pillar-box, and then some, and then some more! You could see him a mile off, and fancy it was the Great Fire of London!" snorted Blake.

"Then he's the chap!" said Lowther, "Look here, Blake——"

"Won't I scrag him! Keeping us hanging up at Rylcombe for nothing——"

"Look here——"

"I'll mop him up! I'll——"

"Will you listen to me?" shrieked Lowther, "A red-headed fellow came in a Wayland taxi with Cardew—we thought it might be Ridd—and now it looks——"

Blake jumped almost clear of Sussex.

"What?" he roared.

"Chap with a red head you could light a cigarette at! Cardew had him in a Wayland taxi—he's been at the school a long time now—looks as if Cardew cut in and got him at the junction——!" gasped Lowther.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Cardew——" gasped Digby and Herries together.

Jack Blake stood staring at Lowther. He seemed unable to assimilate this for some moments. Then, without another word, he dashed off at a run for the school.

"Oh, cwumbs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "If that wat Cardew has cut in ahead of us, and got hold of our votah——"

"Come on!" exclaimed Lowther, "The dashed election's due in less than ten minutes now—come on!"

They cut after Blake. Blake, whose feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground, raced in at the school gates. Fellows stared at him, as he raced across the quad. He arrived panting at the School House, outside which two fellows in flannels were chatting—Tom Merry and Talbot of the Shell. They stared at Blake.

"Take it easy," said Tom, smiling, "Lots of time yet, Blake."

"Nearly ten minutes," said Talbot.

Blake did not answer or heed. He charged into the House, leaving Tom Merry and Talbot staring after him. Minutes, even moments, were precious now—if Cardew the Cad had Ridd, he was not going to keep him, if Jack Blake could help it.

Beaten at the Post !

BANG! Cardew was smiling, in No. 9 Study. Ridd sat in the armchair, in cheery mood after a good tea. Levison and Clive were both looking at the study clock. It was twenty-five minutes past five. Five minutes more, and the election was due: and by that time, the candidates who stood for election, and every fellow who was going to vote, had to be in the junior day-room. Most of them, no doubt, were there already, and late comers going in. And it seemed to Levison and Clive that it was high time to get a move on.

But Cardew did not stir.

He was not taking chances with his recruit. He was keeping Ridd in the study till the very last moment. One minute—not more—before the half-hour, Ridd was going down, with the three round him. His vote was as good as a certainty now: and nobody else was to be allowed a chance at him. Arriving at the last minute, there would be no time for anyone else to get busy, if anyone thought of it. The election was in the bag!

But was it?

With a sudden bang, the study door flew open. Four fellows in No. 9 jumped at the same moment.

Levison and Clive looked startled. Ridd stared. Cardew's brow grew suddenly black, and his eyes glinted at Jack Blake of the Fourth, red and breathless in the doorway.

"What—?" began Levison.

Blake tramped into the study.

"So he's here!" he panted.

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Cardew sprang to his feet. He pushed in between Blake and Ridd.

"What do you want here? What—"

"You jolly well know what I want!" roared Blake, "Pinching our voter, you smudge! I say, Ridd—"

"Blake, old man!" Ridd came across to Blake, with a cheery grin on his face, "Glad your nose has got over the punch I gave it last time I saw you."

"Glad yours has, too," said Blake, "I punched yours harder than you jolly well punched mine."

"You jolly well didn't!"

"I jolly well did!"

"Hold on, Ridd," Jack Blake blocked the way, "Look here, we've been waiting for you at Rylcombe Station—why didn't you come on by train?"

Ridd laughed.

"Couldn't, with the line blocked," he answered. "Didn't you know? Sorry if you went to meet me and had to wait. Cardew very kindly gave me a lift in his taxi—"

"Line blocked!" howled Blake.

"Yes, land-slip or something. I couldn't come on by train, and Cardew met me at the station to tell me, like a good chap—"

"The lying toad!" roared Blake, "So that's how he wangled it, is it? Line blocked be blowed! The line's not blocked."

"But Cardew said—"

"When you've been here a bit longer, you'll know that Cardew the Cad would tell any lie that suited him," snapped Blake, scornfully, "He nobbled you at Wayland to bag your vote for him at the election. We've got an election on here, and it was a tie, and it all depends on one vote—your vote! If you vote for that rat, you'll vote for a rotter that may be sacked any day for pub-crawling, and any man in the House will tell you the same."

"But—but—!" stammered Ridd.

He stared at Blake, stared at Cardew's pale furious face, looked round at Levison and Clive. They lowered their eyes, colouring. Never had they felt more ashamed of their chum.

"Look here—!" hissed Cardew. He hardly knew what to say. Blake's sudden bursting into the study had knocked his plans sky-high—at the last moment! Only a few more minutes had been needed.

"I seem rather to have had my leg pulled." Ridd spoke very quietly, "Does this election hang on a single vote?" He addressed Levison.

"Yes," muttered Levison.

"And isn't the Rylcombe line blocked at all?"

"Not that I know of." Levison's face was red, "I never knew Cardew had told you anything of the kind."

"Shut up!" breathed Cardew.

"Oh, rats!" broke out Sidney Clive, angrily, "Can't you ever play fair, Cardew? Getting a voter away from Tom Merry's crowd is all right—but telling the fellow a string of lies—pah!"

"Look here, Ridd," exclaimed Blake, "Tom Merry thinks you ought not to vote, as a new fellow here today—you can please yourself about that. But if you do—you haven't promised to vote for Cardew, have you?"

"No!" Ridd breathed rather hard, "I should have, though! But now—so Tom Merry, the other candidate, thinks I shouldn't vote at all?" He smiled. "He never thought of catching me on my way here, telling me lies, and making a fool of me, did he? Looks as if he's the man for my vote!"

Cardew almost choked.

"Look here, Ridd—all's fair in war—" he began.

"Think so?" said Ridd, "Thanks for the spread, Cardew—even though I know what it was for," he added, sarcastically. "You've made a pretty fool of me—taking the stranger in, what?"

"I tell you——"

"You've told me enough, I think. Mind standing aside?" asked Ridd, "I'm going down with Blake."

Cardew panted.

"You're not! You——"

"He jolly well is!" grinned Blake, "Come on, Jimmy. Why, you cheeky rotter!" he added, in a roar, as Cardew, losing his self-control in his passion, struck at him, and he staggered back, "Why, I—I—I'll——"

He fairly leaped at Cardew. The dandy of the Fourth went spinning across the study, and would have crashed, had not Levison caught him.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Ridd, staring.

Blake panted. There was a chime from the clock-tower.

"Come on, Ridd! We shall be shut out—come on!" He caught Ridd by the arm, and hurried him from the study. There was a shout from below as they cut down the stairs.

"Bai Jove! Heah he is!"

"Hurry up, Blake!" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Wun like anythin'!" howled Arthur Augustus, completely oblivious of the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, "They're all in—wun like anythin'."

"Here we are!" panted Blake.

They raced for the day-room, and just got in as Darrell of the Sixth was about to close the door. But Darrell held it ajar as he saw Cardew, Levison and Clive in the distance. Cardew, white with rage, Levison and Clive gloomy and glum, pushed in: and the door was closed and locked.

"**A**LL wight, I fancy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Right as rain!" said Blake.

"We've got him!" murmured Herries.

"Got him all right!" grinned Dig.

Study No. 6 were in high feather. Blake's relation, Jimmy Ridd, was there—in Tom Merry's crowd. Study No. 6 hung round him as if they loved him—as indeed they did at that moment. Manners and Lowther gave him friendly grins: Tom Merry a cheery nod. Kangaroo smacked him on the back. Fellows he had never seen before grinned at him as if he had been an old pal.

In the opposite crowd, Cardew's face was pale and bitter. But perhaps he was still hoping that some fellow might have changed over, and that he still had a chance: anyhow he was there to try his luck.

"O.K. now, Tom!" whispered Lowther.

"Our win!" said Manners.

"Um!" said Tom, "I hardly think a new kid ought to vote, first day in the House——"

"Shut up, will you?" hissed Lowther, "He can hear you."

"Why shouldn't he?" said Tom.

There was a chuckle from Ridd. He looked round at Tom.

"Not asking me for my vote?" he inquired.

"No!" answered Tom, bluntly.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Shut up, you ass!" hissed Blake.

"Rot!" said Tom, "The new kid asked me a question, and I've answered it. I'm not asking any man for his vote."

Ridd chuckled again.

TOM MERRY'S RIVAL

"You needn't trouble to ask—you're getting it all the same," he said.

Darrell called for silence, and the vote was taken. Perhaps Cardew, up to the very last moment, still hoped. If so, the announcement of the result put finish to that lingering hope. Kildare's announcement was heard in breathless silence.

"Tom Merry, forty-eight! Cardew, forty-seven! Tom Merry is elected junior captain of the House!"

Then there was a roar.

"Hurray!"

"Good old Tom!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwway!" yelled Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglass wildly in the air, "Bwavo! Huwway! Good old Tom Mewwy!"

Probably, before long, many of the fellows who had backed Cardew were glad after all their old skipper was back in his rightful place. Anyhow, there he was—and after all the wily trickery of Cardew the Cad, there was defeat for Tom Merry's Rival.

THE END