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CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry Has An Idea.

TOM MERRY wore a worried look. He was sitting on the edge of the table in his study in the School House at St. Jim's, his hands thrust deep into his trouser-pockets, and looking at Manners and Lowther, who were seated in the open window, facing him.

The Terrible Three—as the chums of the Shell were known at St. Jim's—had met together in consultation, and their serious expression showed that the matter in hand was one of great importance.

Tom Merry was Merry by name and merry by nature; but just now his usually sunny face was clouded. He felt the weight of a great responsibility upon his youthful shoulders. A crisis had arrived in the history of St. Jim's. Masters and seniors, indeed, seemed to be unaware of it, and went on their way apparently unconscious that anything unusual was the matter. But in the Lower Forms was much suppressed excitement.

"Something's got to be done," said Tom Merry, at last. "I really don't see what you two chaps want to sit there like a couple of stuffed parrots for, without saying a word! It's a serious matter."

"Got nothing to say," said Manners.

"Who's leader of this study?" inquired Monty Lowther pleasantly. "Why don't you think of something, Tom Merry? It's your business, isn't it?"

"Of course it is," said Manners. "For goodness' sake, old chap, think of a wheeze for keeping our end up against those Grammar School fellows! It's expected of you."

"That's all very well," said Tom Merry. "I've got lots of ideas, as far as that goes, but I want backing up."

"Rats! You can't say that we don't back you up all the time."

"I know you do. But that's not enough. So long as things were as they used to be, when we were rowing with Study No. 6 in the School House, or with Figgins & Co. over in the New House, we three could always keep our end up."

"I should rather say so."

"But now the case has altered. Since Dr. Monk opened the Rylcombe Grammar School we've had our hands too full. It was a foregone conclusion that we should start having rows with the Grammar School fellows."

"Of course. That's in the nature of things."

"Especially as they declared that they were going to put St. Jim's in the shade, and make us sing small, and hide our diminished heads, and so forth. It was our bounden duty to go for them and put them in their place."

"Right-ho! But it hasn't worked out very well. It's they who've put us in our place, instead," said Monty Lowther ruefully.

"Whose fault is that?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know! Yours, very likely."

"Nothing of the kind! This is the reason of it. The Grammar School juniors are united, and they all follow young Monk and stand by him like old soldiers, while we don't do anything of the kind. We're divided against ourselves. Here at St. Jim's it's School House against New House all the time, and the School House divided against itself as well. How can we expect to make headway against the common enemy unless we unite?"

"Good wheeze! Let's unite."

"That's the idea; but it's not so easy. Propose to Figgins & Co. that they should follow our lead, and see what they would say," said Manners.

"Oh, those New House kids have cheek enough for anything!"

"Then there's Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, in Study No. 6. If we propose it to them, they'll want to lead, not to follow, which of course would be absurd."

"Too absurd for anything," said Tom Merry hastily. "We must lead, of course. That goes without saying. But, look here. After the reverses we've had at the hands of the Grammarians, I think even those obstinate kids may be brought to see reason. If we all united under a single leader, there's no reason why we shouldn't lick Monk and his lot out of their boots. I'm going to try, anyway!"

Manners and Lowther looked very dubious.

"Well, there's no harm in trying, I suppose, anyway," said Manners.

"My idea is to call a general meeting," went on Tom Merry, "and then put it to them plain. There's no denying the fact that the Grammarians have got the best of our little rubs so far. Especially in that row in the village. We should have licked them then, but Blake started fighting with Figgins at the critical moment, and that settled us."

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Yes; there was always something of that kind cropping up," he remarked. "That's where the Grammarians have the advantage, certainly. But I believe it will take a lot more lickings to make Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. follow our lead."

"I'm going to see," said Tom Merry determinedly.

Manners stared at him.

"What the dickens are you going to sea for?" he inquired.

"Ass! S-E-E; not S-E-A!" said Tom Merry. "I've been working this idea out in my mind in class this morning."

"Ha, ha! No wonder old Schneider was down on you!"

"Well, he's always down on me; so that makes no difference. Now, you know what the Highland chiefs used to do in a time of danger: send round a giddy fiery cross to call in the clan. That's the idea. I'm going to send a note round to all concerned to call them to a meeting in the wood-shed, to make plans against the common foe."

"I dare say they'll come," said Monty Lowther. "But if they do, it will end in a kick-up. You mark my words!"

"We must make it a great point to keep our tempers," answered Tom Merry. "It takes two to make a row. And if we're awfully patient the thing is bound to go peaceably enough."

"I don't know! If they can't row with us, Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. can start rowing with each other. And I'll bet that they do it, too!"

"We must risk that. If the idea fails, we must go on trying what we

can do alone against the Grammarians. But union is strength, and we must unite if possible. Now we'd better write that note, and I'll get young Curly of the Third to take it round."

Tom Merry took his hands out of his pockets and slipped off the table. Pen and paper were at hand, and he was soon busy upon the note which was to serve the purpose of a call to arms.

Monty Lowther and Manners leaned over him, one on either side, to help with criticism and advice.

"Lemme see," said Tom Merry, scratching his curly head thoughtfully. "How shall we begin? 'Dear Silly Asses' would be about correct. But that might offend them, and we don't want to do that."

"Dear Kids," suggested Manners.

Tom shook his head.

"No. As they're in the Fourth Form, and we're in the Shell, they would take that as a reflection. Ah, I have it!"

He dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote:

"Dear Comrades,—For the sake of upholding the honour of the old school, and keeping our end up against the Grammar cads, you are hereby con-
voked—"

"Conwhatted?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Convoked to a meeting—"

"Sure that word's all right, Tom?" asked Manners anxiously. "We don't want to give those kids the grin of us, you know."

"Of course it's all right!" said Tom testily. "If you want to know, I looked it out in the dictionary on purpose. It sounds impressive, too."

"Yes, it sounds all right."

"Convoked to a meeting in the wood-shed, to discuss ways and means for putting the Grammar cads in their place—"

"You want the plural there, Tom. Places."

"Nonsense! Put 'em in their place," said Tom Merry. "This is a metaphorical expression—"

"My hat! Where does he get those words from?"

"Looked that out in the dictionary, too, I suppose," said Lowther. "Go on, Tom!"

"In their place," continued Tom Merry victoriously. "If you have the honour of St. Jim's at heart you will not fail to turn up for this important meeting to-night at seven."

(Signed)

TOM MERRY."

"There, that ought to fetch them!" said Tom Merry, with an air of satisfaction. "I'll make another copy, and send one to Blake and one to Figgins. They'll come."

"Yes, I expect they'll come. But how it will end—"

"Oh, don't croak! Here, I say, Curly!" Tom Merry called to a youngster of the Third Form who was passing the open door of the study. Curly Gibson looked in. "You're just the fellow I want!" said Tom Merry. "Take this note to Blake, will you, and this one over to Figgins in the New House? Buzz off!"

"Right you are, Merry!" said Curly cheerfully.

The boys in the Lower Forms at St. Jim's would have done anything for Tom Merry. Curly Gibson took the notes and vanished.

"There," said Tom Merry, "that's done. How ever it turns out, we've done our best, and no fellow can do more than that. Now come along to the gym."

CHAPTER 2.

The Chums of Study No. 6.

"HEWVIES, old man, what a fearful smothah you are makin'!"
The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sounded in tones of complaint in the famous apartment in the School House at St. Jim's known as Study No. 6.

The three chums of the Fourth were there: Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy. Herries was making toffee, and, as Arthur Augustus said, he was making also a fearful smother. The toffee was burnt, and the smell was terrific, and a quantity of butter had fallen into the fire and melted there, and blacks were sailing about the room in squadrons.

D'Arcy, who was almost painfully clean in his person, had been getting restive for some time, and finally he voiced his objection.

"Weally it is too bad!" he said. "Hewwies, old man, I must say that you are a silly ass! I don't want to hurt your feelin's, you know, but, sewiously, you are a silly ass!"

"Oh, ring off!" said Herries crossly.

"I wefuse to wing off! You are makin' the atmosphere of this study positively unbearable! Some of those blacks have settled on my collah and soiled it. I must wequest you to leave off makin' this fearful smothah."

"I'll smother you if you don't shut up, you duffer!"

"Oh, dry up, both of you!" exclaimed Jack Blake impatiently. "How am I to travel through this beastly imposition if you keep on cackling at one another like a pair of old hens? That's what I want to know."

"Well, you had better gag Gussy," said Herries. "I'm going to finish this giddy toffee, if I suffocate everybody in the School House! It's bound to go right in the long run if I stick to it. Gussy can go and eat coke!"

"I wefuse to go and eat coke. I would wathah eat that toffee—almost. Hewwies, you have weferred to me as a duffah—"

"So you are," said Herries, with deliberation; "a howling duffer—the howlingest duffer that I ever came across!"

Arthur Augustus rose from his seat.

"I am extwemely sowwy, Hewwies, but it is quite imposs for me to pass over such wemarks as that," he said, screwing his eyeglass into his eye and surveying the toffee-maker through it. "I must wequest you to withdraw those expressions and apologise."

"Rats!"

"Then I shall have no alternative but to give you a fearful thwashin'."

"Oh, sit down!"

"I distinctly wefuse to sit down! Are you goin' to apologise?"

"Rats!"

"Then I shall thwash you."

And Arthur Augustus advanced upon Herries in an extremely warlike way.

"Oh, shut up!" said Blake. "Can't you keep quiet? You're bothering me."

"I am sowwy to bothah you, Blake, but I feel that I have no course open to me but to thwash Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus, who was always as obstinate as a mule when he got an idea into his head. "I cannot allow even a fwiend to tweek me with diswespect. Hewwies, are you weady? I am waitin' to thwash you."

"Here you are," said Herries.

D'Arcy advanced, and Herries jerked the pan from the fire and brandished it. D'Arcy made a sudden jump backwards.

"Hallo! Why don't you come on?"

"Be careful! You will soil my clothes with that feahful thing!" said Arthur Augustus, retreating in alarm as Herries in turn advanced, with the pan of half-melted toffee held out before him. "I entweat you not to be wash."

"What about that apology?"

"Undah the circs, I will waive that. I will overlook your wude wemark." D'Arcy retreated still further, through the open door of the study, Herries following with the pan outheld. "Hewwies, old chap, please don't be a silly ass! Oh!"

The latter exclamation was uttered by the swell of St. Jim's as he ran backwards into a junior who was running along the passage.

It was Curly Gibson, coming to deliver Tom Merry's note. The impact of the Third Former upon D'Arcy's back sent him staggering towards Herries, and his spotless waistcoat came in contact with the sooty pan.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries. "Where are you coming to?"

"Oh, my waistcoat—my waistcoat!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It does look a sight, certainly! Never mind; you've got plenty more. Now are you going to let me finish making this toffee in peace?"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

Herries returned triumphantly to the fire. Arthur Augustus ruefully began to dust his beautiful waistcoat. D'Arcy's waistcoats were the wonder of the School House, and the delight of their owner's heart. Any damage to his waistcoat touched Arthur Augustus in his tenderest spot.

Curly grinned as he looked into the study.

"Letter for you, Blake."

"Chuck it over!" said Blake, without looking up. "Who's it from?"

"Tom Merry."

Curly threw the letter on the table, and departed. Blake picked it up with some interest. He wondered what Tom Merry could have to write to him about, when their studies were only two minutes' walk apart.

He opened the letter, and gave a whistle as he read the contents.

"Hallo, you chaps! Listen here!"

"Oh, don't bother me!" said Herries. "I've got my hands full with this beastly toffee."

"Listen to me—"

"Don't wowwy," said D'Arcy. "I can't listen to anything till I've scwaped this feahful soot off my waistcoat. I no longah wegard Hewwies as a fwriend."

"It's important," said Blake; and he proceeded to read out the letter, and they had to listen to it whether they wanted to or not. "There! What do you think of that for an example of cheek!"

"I can't think of anything but my waistcoat just now," said D'Arcy. "I should never have made a fwriend of Hewwies if I had known what a feahful wuffian he weally was."

"Oh, dry up about that waistcoat!" exclaimed Blake. "Look here, I'm getting about fed up with you and your beastly waistcoats! If you don't want to go out of this study on your neck, let that subject drop. Fancy Tom Merry having the cheek to convoke us—jolly good word that, though!—to a giddy meeting in the wood-shed! Shall we go?"

"May as well," said Herries. "Let's hear what he's got to say."

"Oh, I know what he's got to say!" said Blake, with a sniff. "He'll want us to unite against the Grammar cads, under his lead. I know the little game."

"Of course, that's rot! We don't mind leading, but anything else is out of the question."

"Yaas, wathah. Do you know, deah boys," said D'Arcy, looking round, "I weally think that I should make a pwetty good leadah. You want a chap with tact and good ideahs for leadah, and I weally think that I should make a first-wate one. If you chaps are willin', I'll suggest it to Tom Mewwy."

Blake winked at Herries.

"Jolly good idea!" he exclaimed. "If the Terrible Three are willing, we won't say no, will we, Herries?"

"Certainly not!" said Herries, entering into the joke.

"Go and suggest it to them, Gussy," said Blake. "Tell them you've thought the matter over, and decided that it's the only thing to be done, as they've been making such a mess of things lately. They're bound to listen to reason."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Explain to Tom Merry that he's a silly ass, you know, and tell Manners he's a duffer, and Lowther, that he ought to be in a lunatic asylum."

"Yaas."

"Then suggest that they should follow your lead like good little boys."

"Yaas. I'll go at once."

"Come back and tell us the result."

"Certainly."

And D'Arcy left off rubbing his soiled waistcoat, and left the study with a satisfied smile upon his face.

Herries giggled.

"I say, Blake, do you think he'll really say all that to Tom Merry?" he asked.

"I know he will."

"They'll kill him!"

"Yes; and we'll bury him quietly somewhere. It will do him worlds of good. I'm a patient chap as a rule, but when D'Arcy starts proposing himself as leader, it's time to come down heavy."

The chums waited for D'Arcy's return.

Blake forgot his imposition, and Herries his toffee, in the interest excited by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's mission to Tom Merry's study.

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Herries suddenly.

There was a sound of bumping in the passage. It sounded as if a body were being dragged along, struggling, and bumped upon the floor pretty frequently in its progress towards Study No. 6.

Blake chuckled.

"It's Gussy coming back."

The door of the study was kicked open. A figure was shot into the room, and lay sprawling upon the carpet; and then the door was slammed from outside, and a sound of laughter and footsteps died away down the corridor. It was D'Arcy who had been so unceremoniously returned to his native quarters. He presented a shocking appearance.

Blake and Herries shrieked with laughter as the swell of St. Jim's sat up and looked at them.

D'Arcy's jacket was ripped up the back, his collar was torn out, his necktie was gone, and his waistcoat and his face had apparently been rubbed with dust from the coal-locker.

"My hat!" gasped Herries. "What is it?"

"The wild man from Borneo," said Blake.

D'Arcy gasped.

"I have been tweeked vewy diswespectfully," he gurgled. "I have been tweeked with the gweatest wudeness by Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowther."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah. I considah it vewy sewious. Look at me!"

"I'm looking at you. It's as good as a comic paper."

"I object to that wemark. I——"

"Did you tell Tom Merry he was a silly ass?"

"Yes. I said I thought the time had come to be candid."

"Ha, ha, ha! And Manners that he was a duffer?"

"Yaas. I said we had thought it ovah, and come to that conclusion."

"Ha, ha! And Lowther——"

"That he ought to be in a lunatic asylum. It made him vewy cwoss."

"Ha, ha, ha! And what did they do?"

"They attacked me and dwagged me along the cowwidah," said D'Arcy.

"I tried to explain that I was weally only speakin' for their good, but they wouldn't listen. They have weally behaved in a most shockin' mannah! I stwuggled fuwiously, but it was no good. I am afwaid that I have lost my eyeglass. It is the eleventh eyeglass I have lost this term. Weally, I have had a beastly unpleasant expewience."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I considah you extwemely unsympathetic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And that was all the sympathy Arthur Augustus received from Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 3.

The Alliance that Didn't Come Off.

SEVEN striking from the clock-tower of St. Jim's when the Terrible Three arrived at the wood-shed and looked in.

"Nobody here yet," said Tom Merry, walking in. "We're first."

"Very likely they won't come," said Manners comfortingly.

"Oh, don't croak! They're bound to come. This old box will make a very good president's chair; and I've brought my bike bell to keep order. Mind you chaps keep your tempers. We want the meeting to be a success."

"I can hear somebody coming," said Monty Lowther.

Lowther was right. Footsteps were approaching the wood-shed, and the next moment an eye, assisted by a monocle, was looking in at the door.

"Come on, chappies!" said D'Arcy. "The boundahs are here!"

And Study No. 6 marched in.

"Who are you calling bounders?" asked Monty Lowther pleasantly.

"You thwee chaps. I considah you feahful boundahs!"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Gussy? If you are——"

Tom Merry nudged his warlike follower.

"Shut up, Monty! What did I tell you?"

"Well, I'm not going to let those kids call me names," said Lowther.

"I——"

"Who are you calling kids?" asked Blake amiably.

"Oh, do be quiet!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the good of holding a meeting if you are going to start ragging each other at sight?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Blake. "I don't see much sense in it at all. Do you, Herries?"

"Not much," said Herries.

"The fact is, Tom Mewwy is a feahful duffah, and——"

"Hallo, kids, you're here, I see!"

It was a new voice at the door.

"Hallo! Here's old Figgins!"

Figgins & Co. entered the wood-shed.

Figgins, long-limbed, and lean, and good-tempered, the fastest forward in the junior football team, Fatty Wynn, short and plump, and Kerr, cute and canny, were the three juniors of the New House, known all over St. Jim's as Figgins & Co.

They came into the wood-shed with somewhat suspicious looks.

They were generally on the alert when they came near the School House chums, and an alliance between the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 usually meant a warm time for Figgins & Co.

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom Merry cordially. "Jolly glad to see you! You got my note?"

"I got a note from young Curly," said Figgins. "I thought it was like your cheek to what you call convoke a meeting; but we thought we'd come along. I'd been thinking of doing the same thing myself, as I've got a suggestion to make to you chaps."

"All right. You'll have plenty of time to make it," said Tom Merry.

"The meeting is complete now, so I announce it open. I'm chairman."

"Rats!" said Blake. "Who made you chairman?"

"Well, I called the meeting, so I'm entitled——"

"More rats! We're going to elect the chairman by universal suffrage."

"Look here, Blake, it's no good being unreasonable. I——"

"Put it to the vote, then."

"Weally, I think it would be an awfully good idea for me to be chairman, don't you know, deah boys. A chairman requires tact and judgment, you know, and I weally think that I am the vevy chap for the post, you know. Yaas, wathah!"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse. For the genewal good, I must insist upon cawwyin' my point. You require a fellah with tact and——"

"Oh, kill him, somebody! Tom Merry, are you agreed to put it to the vote?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Anything for a quiet life."

"Hands up for Tom Merry!" said Blake.

The Terrible Three put their hands up.

"Hands up for Figgy!" exclaimed Kerr; and Figgins & Co. elevated their hands.

"Now hands up for me!" said Blake.

He put up his own hand, and Herries followed suit. D'Arcy put his hands in his pockets. Blake gave him a withering look.

"Why don't you put up your paw, fathead?"

"I am weally sowwy, Blake, but it is impos for me to vote for anybody but myself with a clear conch," said D'Arcy. "A meetin' of this kind requires a fellah with tact and a firm chawactah to be chairman, and I'm the vevy fellah. I object to puttin' myself forward in any way; but that's what I weally think."

"Good old Gussy!" chuckled Figgins. "You're dead out of it, Blake. Now, are you going to resign in my favour, Tom Merry?"

"Not half!"

"Then we've come to a deadlock. As a New House fellow, I can't sit under the chairmanship of a School House rotter."

"Oh, can't you?" said Blake, nettled at once by the reflection on his House. "Then I vote for Tom Merry; and he's got the majority. Tom Merry is——"

"Excuse me," said Arthur Augustus. "Aftah Tom Mewwy's extweme wudeness to me-to-day I cannot approve of him as a chairman, and so I vote for Figgins."

"Four to four," said Tom Merry. "Herries has the casting vote."
 "Oh, I'll vote as Blake does!" said Herries. "Anything for peace. Tom Merry is chairman of this giddy meeting."

Figgins & Co. did not like it, but they always played the game. Tom Merry was elected chairman, and he took his seat on the box, with his hand on the bicycle bell.

"Now that that point's amicably settled," he remarked, "let's get to business. I hereby and thusly declare this meeting open. Gentlemen of the Lower Forms of St. Jim's, you are called together for a most important object—"

"Cut the cackle, Chairman, and come to the hosses!"

"If you interrupt me again, Kerr, you'll get it where the chicken got the chopper—and that's in the neck," said Tom Merry. "Silence, all! Your turn will come."

"You're so blessed long-winded!" said Blake. "Get on, do!"

Buzz! went the chairman's bell.

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "it is known to all of you that a measly Grammar School has been started near Rylcombe by Dr. Mouk, and that the Grammar cads dwelling therein have had the awful cheek to think they can keep their end up against the juniors of St. Jim's."

"Yes, and they've had the awful cheek to lick us more than once," said Blake. "That is also known to us, Chairman."

"That's what we're going to stop. There's an old saying that 'Union is Strength,' and my idea is to unite our forces against the common foe. That's why this meeting is called."

"Why, that's what I was going to suggest!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Then you'll agree with me that it's a thing that ought to be done. Now, my idea is a union under a single leader—"

"Nobody's suggested having a married one."

"Don't interrupt. We have tackled the Grammarians singly, and have been licked. There's no good beating about the bush—we have got the worst of it."

"All the fault of you School House chaps," said Figgins. "If you had backed me up—"

"Catch us backing up New House cads!" said Blake.

"Silence! 'United we stand, divided we fall!' My idea is to form a single band, under a single leader, to be known as Tom Merry & Co.—myself, of course, being the leader."

There was a general gasp.

"Well, of all the cheek!"

"Of all the fearful nerve!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't see where the cheek comes in, or the nerve, either!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "What fault have you got to find with the idea?"

"The idea's all right," said Figgins. "It's the leader that's wrong. Considering how you School House chaps make a muck of things, it stands to reason that a New House fellow ought to be leader."

"Oh, that's rot, you know, Figgy!" said Blake warmly. "I must say that I agree with Tom Merry so far, that the leader ought to be a School House kid."

"Yaas, wathah! What we require is—"

"But the leader ought to be chosen from the Fourth Form, not from the Shell," said Blake. "That's the important point."

"Stuff!" said the Terrible Three together.

"I agree about the Fourth Form," said Figgins. "But a New House chap is wanted for the post, and that can't be got away from."

"Now, do be reasonable," said the chairman. "We can't all be leaders, so I call upon you chaps to withdraw your claims for the good of the cause."

"Withdraw your own blessed claims!" said Figgins. "Set an example."

"Yaas, wathah! I cannot approve of Tom Mewwy, for one. What we weally wequire is—"

"Put it to the vote!" exclaimed Blake.

"Right-ho! Vote—vote!"

"Very well," said Tom Merry resignedly. "Hands up, then! Is the leader to be chosen from the School House or the New House? Hands up first for New House!"

Up went the hands of Figgins & Co.

"Now for the School House!"

Six good right hands went up.

"School House has it," said Tom Merry. "Now about the Form. Is the leader to be chosen from the Fourth Form or the Shell? Hands up for the Shell!"

He put his own hand up, and Manners and Lowther followed suit.

Blake grinned.

"Another beastly deadlock!" he exclaimed.

It proved to be so, for when the chairman called a show of hands for the Fourth, six hands went up. Figgins & Co. and Study No. 6 were agreed upon that point, if upon no other.

"Well, we can't agree," said Tom Merry. "Talk about Nero fiddling while Rome was burning—here we are quarrelling like a lot of kids, with the enemy at the gates! I'm really surprised at you chaps!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I cannot discern any weal cause for surprwise. You cannot expect us to accept you as a leadah. Deah boys, I have a suggestion to make that will get us out of this pwesent difficulty, if you care to adopt it."

"Let's hear it," said Figgins.

"You all want to be leadahs, and you won't give way to one anothah. You are all wight under the circe, as none of you are weally fit to lead."

"Here, I say, choke him off!"

"Pwayer allow me to finish. I was about to suggest that you should all waive your claims in favah of a fourth party. What you weally wequire as a leadah is a fellah of firm chawactah like myself. Now—"

"Oh, buzz off home, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to buzz off home. My suggestion is the best way out of the difficulty, and I think it should be adopted."

"Blake, that thing belongs to you," said Figgins. "Why don't you take it out and lose it?"

"That is a wude wemark, Figgins. Before we pwocceed any further, I must insist upon weceivin' an apology."

"Would a thick ear do instead?" asked Figgins. "That's all you'll get out of me."

D'Arcy carefullly put his eyeglass into his pocket.

"I am extwemely sowwy, gentlemen, but I must ask you to suspend the meetin' for a few minutes while I give Figgins a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You couldn't thrash my left ear! Here, keep off!"

But the warning was not heeded.

D'Arcy had mounted the high horse now, and he was determined. He went for Figgins with his fists waving like the sails of a windmill, and in a moment was struggling with the chief of the New House juniors.

"Ha, ha!" shouted Kerr. "Give the School House bounders beans, Figgy! I vote that we clear them out of the place and hold a meeting ourselves."

"Think you could do it?" asked Blake politely.

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, why don't you try, my son? Come on!"

Kerr came on willingly, and he and Blake went staggering about the wood-shed locked in a deadly embrace. They staggered into a pile of faggots and brought them clattering down.

"Here, we must put an end to this!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If those New House bounders can't behave themselves they must be put outside, that's all!"

"Who's going to do it?" yelled a dozen voices from the door, where a crowd of New House youngsters, who had followed Figgins & Co. to the meeting, were looking in.

"We are!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Rescue, New House!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

There was a rush of the New House juniors at once.

The School House six made a manful effort to stem the tide, and to eject Figgins & Co. and their supporters. But the odds were too great. Instead of the New House party being ejected, that sad fate fell upon the School House juniors, the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 alike.

One by one they were shoved or hustled to the door and sent flying out, Tom Merry, struggling desperately, being the last to go.

They had no reinforcements at hand, and so they were quite at the mercy of the foe, and in a few minutes they found themselves in a sprawling heap, surrounded by New House juniors laughing and jeering.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Hear me smile! Who's cock-house now?"

"New House! New House!" yelled his followers.

The defeated and outnumbered School House party gave it up. They picked themselves up and limped away, followed by the hoots of the New House crowd.

At the door of the School House Blake paused to fix a withering glance upon Tom Merry.

"How many sorts of a silly ass do you call yourself?" he demanded. "I might have known that it would work out like this, as it was your idea. I've been there before."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Study No. 6 marched on indignantly to their own quarters.

The Terrible Three looked at each other rather ruefully.

"Bit of a fiasco, wasn't it?" said Manners. "If you remember, I told you how it would be."

"Oh, go on, you giddy Job's comforter!"

"Well, I warned you what to expect. What about a union of the three parties now under a single leader? What price Tom Merry & Co.?"

Tom gave a sniff.

"Tom Merry & Co. are off—right off," he said—"at least, for the present. No good trying to talk sense to those obstinate kids. We'll do it alone, and show 'em what we can do without their help. After all, we three can keep up our end against the Grammar cads; and when we make them sing small we shall get all the giddy glory."

Blake and his comrades had gone into Study No. 6 to repair damages. Blake had come to a resolution like Tom Merry's.

"No good thinking of uniting with those chaps," he said. "They've got too much nerve for anything! Fancy Figgins thinking that a New House chap ought to be leader! It would be comical if the matter were not so serious."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll do it on our own, kids; and I think we shall be able to take the Grammarians down a peg or two without assistance from either the New House or the Shell," said Blake. "We'll show Tom Merry and Figgins what stuff we are made of!"

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Meanwhile Figgins was speaking in much the same strain to the triumphant Co. He was rather elated with the victory in the wood-shed.

"That'll be a lesson for those School House kids," he said. "The fact is, that old casual ward they call a house is about played out. We're cock-house of St. Jim's, and it falls to us to put the Grammar kids in their place. We're going to do it. And when we've done it, those School House bounders will wish they had followed our lead."

And the loyal Co. heartily concurred.

The three rival parties were quite satisfied with themselves and with what they were going to do. But it was said of old that a house divided against itself will not stand; and, as a matter of fact, there were troublous times in store for the juniors of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 4.

A Brush With the Enemy.

"YAH!"

The Terrible Three started as the shout fell upon their ears.

It was the day after the memorable meeting in the wood-shed, which had ended so disastrously for the School House party. It happened to be a Wednesday, which was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and as it was an unusually warm day for the end of September, football practice had been voted "off," and the chums of the Shell had gone down the river in a boat.

About half a mile from the St. Jim's boathouse, the silvery Ryll flowed by the grounds of the Rylcombe Grammar School, and it was along the river that a good many of the encounters between the juniors of the rival establishments took place.

The disputes were mostly limited to the juniors. Seniors of St. Jim's and seniors of the Grammar School managed to keep on pretty good terms, and, in fact, often laughed together over the rivalry that had grown up between the youngsters. Dr. Monk, the Head of the Grammar School, had been at Oxford with Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, and there was no enmity there. That made no difference to the juniors. They were at daggers drawn, and they found too much fun in the warfare to wish to establish peace.

Each party was firmly determined to inflict the "kybosh" on the other, and until one or the other school was acknowledged top, there was not likely to be peace.

The Terrible Three, since the failure of Tom Merry's idea of a united "Co.," had turned various plans over in their minds for getting the upper hand of the Grammarians, but none of them had as yet come to anything.

Young Monk, the son of the Grammar School headmaster, was the leader of the Grammarians, and he was a good leader. There was not much doubt that he was able to keep his end up against the "Saints." If the latter had united the case might have been altered. But as yet disunion reigned.

The chums of the Shell were still talking the matter over when their boat drifted opposite the Grammar School grounds, and the loud and vociferous "Yah!" fell upon their ears. They looked up to see the bank thick with Grammarians.

The afternoon was so warm that many of the Grammar School youngsters had taken advantage of it to bathe, and the crowd on the bank, looking towards the boat, were in various stages of deshabille.

There were a good many in bathing-costume, too, waist-deep in the water. The boat drifted down the river, and Manners, who was steering, brought it away from the Grammar School side.

Tom Merry shipped his oar and looked at the Grammarians.

"Funny lot of animals," he remarked, in a tone loud enough for the Grammarians to hear. "Did you ever see a lot like that before, Monty?"

"Never!" said Lowther. "There's one good thing about them, though. They're having a wash. They know they need it."

"Rather!" said Manners. "Hallo, there's Monk! Hallo, Monk! How are you? And how are all the little Monkeys?"

And a giggle arose from St. Jim's boat.

Frank Monk, a well-built lad with a good-tempered, freckled face, was looking towards the boat, and apparently making a calculation in his mind.

"I say, you fellows," he muttered, below his breath, "Follow me, some of you, and we'll soon have them out of that boat."

The Grammarians were nothing loth.

Frank Monk plunged into the river, with a dozen doughty swimmers behind him, and struck out for the boat from St. Jim's.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "They're going to pay us a visit! Ha, ha! Stand by to repel boarders!"

"Let 'em all come!" giggled Monty Lowther. "Down with the Monkeys!" But the Monkeys were determined.

They came on right for the boat in a swarm. Tom Merry and Lowther stood up, oars in hand, to repel boarders. Monk was the first to reach the boat, and Tom gave him a gentle dig on the chest that sent him under water.

"Come on!" said Lowther cheerfully, whacking the water with his oar, and making great splashes round the swimmers. "I hope you won't get hurt, but I'm rather afraid you will. Your own fault, you know."

The enemy sputtered and gasped. They realised that it would not be so easy to get into the boat. Monk came up again, and was promptly pushed under the water once more. Then he gave it up and beat a retreat.

The current was carrying the boat further down the river. One by one the swimmers dropped away, and at last the skiff proceeded on its way unmolested.

The Terrible Three sent back a taunting laugh.

Frank Monk scrambled gasping from the river, and stood looking after the boat with a gleam in his eyes.

"They've done us!" he said. "But look here, you chaps, I've got an idea in my mind. They won't get back to St. Jim's so easily."

And he proceeded to unfold a plan to the delighted Grammarians round him. They greeted it with a shout of laughter, which reached the ears of the Saints as they floated on.

"Blessed if I know what they've got to cackle at," Tom Merry remarked. "We've done them, and they can't deny that. We got the best of that little skirmish, kids."

The chums of the Shell pulled on to the village.

Tom Merry was in funds that afternoon, and the destination of the chums was the village tuck-shop, where Tom intended to stand a royal spread, after which the chums would pull home up the river.

They left the boat at the bridge, and strolled down to the tuck-shop. It was by no means empty. There were a good many fellows from St. Jim's there, as well as a crowd from the Grammar School.

The Terrible Three pushed their way into the shop. Mother Murphy, a

benign old lady in spectacles, was presiding behind the counter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing there, making purchases.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Are you standing a feed all round?"

"Wathah not!" said D'Arcy. "Pway don't intewwupt me, Tom Mewwy, or I shall forget something. I want a dozen jam-puffs, Mrs. Murphy."

"I don't think I've got quite a dozen left, Master D'Arcy," said Mother Murphy. "There's been quite a run on them this afternoon. No, only eight."

"Oh, weally! That is vewy exaspewatin'! I want a dozen," said D'Arcy. "Howevah, if you have only eight, I suppose I must make that do. But it is weally extwemely exaspewatin'!"

"What price us?" demanded Tom Merry. "We're in search of jam-puffs, too!"

"Oh, it doesn't matter about you boundahs!" said D'Arcy. "Don't wowwy me. I will take the eight, Mothah Murphy—"

"That you won't!"

D'Arcy turned to the new speaker.

He was a fellow of about seventeen, belonging to an Upper Form in the Grammar School. He was one of the few seniors who took a part in the school rivalry, frequently cuffing the St. Jim's juniors when he came upon them. His name was Hake, and that he was a bully in his own circle was easily seen by the way the younger Grammarians shrank out of his path as he came through the shop.

D'Arcy took a languid survey of him through his eyeglass.

"Did you address me?" he inquired amiably.

"Yes, I did," said Hake. "I'm here for some jam-puffs, and if there's only a few left, they're coming this way!"

"Pway pardon me, but I weally cannot permit it. I have first claim, and the jam-puffs belong to me!" said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

Hake snorted.

"Are you going to argue with me about it?" he demanded. "Do you want your silly head knocked off?"

"No. I should think that would be extwemely painful. I weally do not want to entah into any dispute with you, my good fellah," said D'Arcy loftily. "But I must weally insist upon my wights."

"Your what?"

"My wights."

"Oh, your rights! I'll give you rights. Get out."

"Eh?"

"Get out of this shop!" roared Hake. "I've had enough of you and your monocle! Get out before I fire you out!"

D'Arcy drew himself up.

"I can only chawactewise such wemarks as extwemely wude," he said. "I am supwised and pained at bein' addressed in such a mannah. I am accustomed to bein' tweeked with pwopah respect."

"Oh, get moving!"

"I uttally wefuse to get movin'. I wefuse to stir fwom this spot until I have completed my purchases, includin' the jam-puffs."

"I give you two seconds!"

"You can give me two weeks, if you like, it will make no diffewence," said the swell of St. Jim's calmly. "These jam-puffs belong to me, and I cannot wesign my wights to anybody."

"I'll give you jam-puffs!"

And Hake suited the action to the word, picking up one of the disputed comestibles and jamming it upon D'Arcy's aristocratic nose.

The swell of St. Jim's gave a yell.

"Oh, you howwid wude beast!"

Hake grinned.

"Are you going now? I— Here, hands off! Chuck it!"

He suddenly found himself in the grip of the Terrible Three.

The chums of the Shell and Study No. 6 might be at loggerheads at home, but abroad they were as one against the foe.

Tom Merry got a grip on Hake's collar, and Manners and Lowther seized him at the same time, and he was plumped down upon the floor and firmly held there.

He struggled in vain to rise. He was big enough to beat any one of the chums separately, but he was helpless in the grip of the three.

"Let me go, you young beasts!"

"Not just now," said Tom Merry placidly.

"Help!"

There was a restive movement among the Grammar School boys in the shop. Hake was a bully, and none of them liked him; but he was one of themselves. But instantly all the St. Jim's fellows—and there was a good many of them present—closed up round the Terrible Three. Tom Merry seized a syphon of soda-water from the counter.

"Any Grammar kid coming this way will get a dose!" he observed.

"That's not a threat, only a friendly warning."

"Help!" gasped Hake. "Sock it to them! I'll wring your necks presently!"

That was not the kind of appeal to bring rescue.

The Grammar School boys looked at one another, and went on munching tarts and buns as though no Hake existed.

"Now, Hake, you insisted upon having those jam-puffs," said Tom Merry.

"There are seven left, and I think you had better have them."

"Here, I say!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I've got to take them back to Study Six. That Gwammah School cad can't have them!"

"My dear Gussy, I am head cook and bottlerwasher in this scene. You must give up the jam-puffs for the good of the cause."

"But weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Nuff said. Lowther, old man, give Hake those jam-puffs."

Monty Lowther understood, and he grinned hugely as he took the dainties from the counter.

Hake received them. One on his nose, one on either ear, one under his chin, and a couple down the back of his neck, roaring and gurgling all the time.

Even D'Arcy did not grudge the pastry for that excellent purpose.

He laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks at the sight of the bully's face, jammy all over, and his wild contortions in the grip of the Terrible Three.

"How do you like jam-puffs, Hake?" demanded Tom Merry.

"G-r-r-r!"

"Would you like some more?"

"I'll— Oh! Ooch!"

Lowther stuck the last of the jam-puffs into his mouth as he opened it to threaten, and Hake gurgled and gasped into silence.

"Perhaps you'd like some soda-water?" suggested Tom Merry. "You've only got to say the word, you know."

"G-r-r-r!"

"I suppose that's a new way of saying 'Yes.' Here goes!"

Fizz! Whizz!

Hake roared and yelled as the stream of soda-water played over his countenance.

With a desperate effort he tore himself loose and bounded to his feet.

"I'll half kill you for this!" he yelled, rushing at Tom Merry.

Manners put out his foot, and the bully staggered over it and went reeling. Tom Merry gave him a push on the chest, and he sat down.

Unfortunately, he was just in front of a large box of eggs as he sat down. He sat in the midst of the eggs, and there was a smashing and squelching such as had never been heard in the tuck-shop before.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "You'll have to pay for those eggs, Hake."

Hake scrambled up.

He was a fearful sight, broken eggs and streaming yolks clinging all over his clothes.

Fizz! Whizz!

Another stream of soda-water smote him in the features, and he turned and fled. He had had enough of the Terrible Three at close quarters.

Tom Merry stooped over the egg-box.

"He's broken nearly all of them," he remarked. "He may as well have the rest."

Whizz! Whizz!

Egg after egg broke upon the person of the Grammar School bully as he bolted. He escaped at last, and Tom Merry staggered against the counter, laughing himself dizzy.

"My hat!" he gasped. "That was funny!"

"My eggs!" exclaimed Mother Murphy tearfully. "He is gone! And I know he won't pay for the eggs! I know him!"

"That's all right, Mother," said Tom Merry. "I'll settle up for the damage, and pay for those jam-puffs, too. The fun was worth it."

"That you won't!" said Arthur Augustus. "I shall stand tweek."

"Oh, rats! It's my affair."

"No, it isn't, Tom Mewwy; it's mine. Take it out of that soveveign, Mothah Murphy."

"Certainly, Master D'Arcy; and thank you kindly."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, have your way, Gussy! You're an obstinate little bounder."

"I object to bein' alluded to as a boundah—"

"Oh, rats! Now, chaps, what are you going to order? I'm in funds to-day, and it's a general treat. You Grammar School chaps can join in if you like."

"Well, you're not a bad sort, Tom Merry," said one of the Grammarians, all of them availing themselves with alacrity of the generous offer. "We're going to give you and your lot some fearful lickings this term."

"What price gas?" inquired Tom.

"Oh, it's not gas! If you knew what Frank Monk has in store for you—"

"Shut up, Lane!" said another Grammarian. "Don't give it away."

"That's all right, Carboy, I'm mum."

"Oh, bosh!" said Tom Merry. "We've had one round with your precious Monk this afternoon, and he got it where the chicken got the chopper. We're going to give you some high old times before we've finished with you!"

But for the time being there was peace—only good-natured chaff flying about—till the treat was over, and Tom Merry settled up with Mother Murphy, and took his departure.

The Terrible Three strolled down to the river.

"I say, do you think there was anything in what Lane was saying?" Manners said suddenly. He had been looking very thoughtful. "Do you think young Monk has some beastly wheeze up his sleeve to work off on us?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Tom Merry. "He's an awfully deep card, as we know by a few of the tricks he's served us already. But we shall give him as good as he sends, never fear!"

It was growing dusk as the chums boarded their boat, and settled down for the pull up the river to St. Jim's.

Dusk was deepening on the river as they came opposite the Grammar School, and Tom Merry glanced round alertly over the spot where the swimmers made the unsuccessful attack upon the St. Jim's boat.

Suddenly the boat was checked, and Manners pitched forward in his seat and bumped into Tom Merry.

"Hallo, hallo! What's the matter?"

"The boat struck something. There's a rope or something——"

"Here they are!"

It was a shout from the dense shadow under the trees.

Tom Merry realised the truth at once. They had fallen into an ambush. The Grammarians had stretched a rope across the river, unseen, in the dusk. Frank Monk and his followers were waiting close at hand.

Tom Merry sprang to the bows and grabbed at the rope. But as he did so a boat crowded with Grammarians shot out from under the trees and crashed into his craft. In a moment the St. Jim's craft was crowded with Grammar School juniors.

"Sock it to them!" yelled Frank.

The Terrible Three fought gamely.

Escape was impossible, but they gave a good account of themselves. More than one of the assailants went splashing into the river, and was soaked from head to foot.

But the odds were too great. After a desperate struggle, which set the boat rocking and very nearly capsized it, the three chums were got down on the floor-boards, the Grammarians scrambling and sprawling over them, cackling with the exuberance of victory.

"Got them!" said Monk, in tones of the deepest satisfaction. "Prisoners of war, by George! Give in, you college bounders—we've got you!"

"Yes, you've got us!" gasped Tom Merry. "Oh, won't I give you a thick ear for this some time, you young monkey!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Who's top school now—eh?"

"We are!" yelled the Grammarians. "St. Jim's is no good!"

"I'll show you some time!" gasped Tom Merry.

"We're going to show you something now," said Monk. "Bring the horrid bounders ashore, kids! This is where we put them through it."

And the Terrible Three were taken ashore under the dusky trees, and although they put a bold face on the matter, they felt a very keen uneasiness as to what was to follow.

CHAPTER 5.

Follow Your-Leader.

TOM MERRY and his chums made no further resistance. It was useless, with the grip of a dozen Grammarians upon their arms and collars. They were at the mercy of the foe, and they stood under the dusk of the trees in the midst of their captors, waiting for what was to follow. The Grammarians were chuckling and cackling hugely, and

it was evident that they had some unusual "wheeze" in their minds to work off on the trio from St. Jim's.

"Got the rope, Lane?" asked Frank Monk.

"Yes, here it is."

"Put 'em in line, kids. Tom Merry in front, as he's their leader. Nice sort of leader, to lead them into a thing like this, I don't think!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Oh, accidents will happen!" said Tom Merry. "My turn will come, and I'll make you rotters sing very small."

"Brag's a good dog," retorted Monk. "You can't keep things going against us, kid. We're above your weight. After we've given you a good lesson we shall go lightly with you, as you're hardly worth bothering about, as a matter of fact."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

The disdainful attitude of the Grammar School chief got his back up at once, and he mentally resolved to make Frank Monk eat his words at a later date.

But for the present Monk had things all his own way.

A cord was attached to Tom Merry's right arm, and it was drawn behind him and fastened to his left, and then the cord was passed right round his body, and knotted.

He was about as helpless a prisoner as he could be now.

"Don't be afraid, kids," said Monk encouragingly. "We're not going to hurt you, you know. It's a game of follow-your-leader, you know, and Tom Merry's your leader."

"Oh, dry up!" growled Monty Lowther. "Get on with the washing, and not so much talk!"

"Don't lose your ickle temper. Fasten him up, Carboy."

"Right you are!"

Monty Lowther's arms were extended before him, and his wrists tied to Tom Merry's arms, so that he stood behind Tom with arms outstretched, and would be inevitably compelled to "follow his leader" wherever his leader moved.

Manners was then placed behind Lowther, his arms outstretched in the same way, his wrists being fastened to a cord passing round Lowther's body.

Tom Merry was scarlet with mortification.

The sight of the three juniors fastened together in such a manner was utterly absurd, and the Grammarians were laughing loudly, and Tom already suspected that Monk meant to send them back to St. Jim's in that style.

Monk surveyed the prisoners with a great deal of satisfaction.

"They look lovely!" he asserted. "It seems, really, hardly necessary to improve their beauty at all. But we may as well give the thing a finish. You've got that blacking, Carboy?"

"Never fear!"

"Have you kids got any objection to having your faces blacked?"

"Yes, we jolly well have!" exclaimed Monty Lowther hotly.

"I'm sorry for that, because it won't make any difference. Start with Tom Merry, Carboy, and don't spare the blacking. It's cheap, and we don't want to be mean."

"Ha, ha! I'll give him enough!"

Carboy had a tin of soft, oozy blacking in his hand. He stuck a hard brush into it, and began to daub Tom Merry's face with the sticky stuff.

Tom wriggled and gurgled.

"Oh, you beast, won't I pay you out for this?"

"Ha, ha! Keep your little temper."

Tom Merry was soon transformed into a Christy Minstrel, and then Monty Lowther and Manners came in for the same polite attention.

The sight of their blackened faces made the Grammarians scream with merriment.

"My word!" ejaculated Monk. "They will make a sensation at St. Jim's, and no mistake, kids!"

"You're not going to send us back in this state?"

"That's just what we are going to do."

"I say, don't be a cad!"

"Ha, ha! That will do, Carboy. They're black enough. Now for the finishing touch."

Monk drew a piece of chalk from his pocket and chalked a white circle round the eyes of the captives.

The effect of the white circles on the black faces was ludicrous in the extreme, imparting a peculiarly owl-like aspect to the unhappy juniors.

"Now that's about finished," said Monk. "Bring them out into the lane and give them a start. We'll return your boat by the river, kids. I expect it will get to St. Jim's before you do. Shove them along, kids!"

The St. Jim's trio were bundled out into the lane. The road to St. Jim's lay before them. It was a lonely road after dark, and there was little chance of their getting help en route before reaching the school.

"Off you go!" chuckled Monk. "Follow your leader!"

"I say—" began Tom Merry.

"No, you don't! It's near calling-over, and we've no time to listen to what you say. Start off, or we shall have to help you."

"Oh, rats! We'll start when we like!"

"No, you won't! You'll start when we like," said Monk coolly. "Now, chaps, when I give the word you all start kicking. One—two—three! Ha, ha, ha!"

It was not necessary to give the word, for the Terrible Three had already started. Tom Merry leading, and his comrades, perforce, following their leader, they started down the dusky lane towards St. Jim's, followed by howls of laughter from the Grammarians.

Tom Merry's feelings were too deep for words. But Monty Lowther and Manners were by no means silent. They murmured things very uncomplimentary to the Grammarians as they lurched along unsteadily through the dusk.

"Oh, it's no good growling!" said Tom Merry at last. "They've done us—done us brown!"

"Yes, they have," said Manners. "That's because we've got such a jolly good leader."

"That's it!" said Lowther. "We're proud of you, Tom Merry, we are indeed! We think you ought to have a tin medal!"

"You can't blame me," said the unfortunate leader of the Terrible Three. "It wasn't my fault. Accidents will happen."

"They do seem to happen when you're leader," Lowther confessed. "Blessed if I don't wish we'd taken old Figgy's offer, and made him leader. He wouldn't have led us into a thing like this."

"Oh, don't growl! I know it's pretty rotten!"

"I should say so! Nice sort of figure we shall cut at St. Jim's! We shall get in after locking-up time, and have to call out Taggles. The whole school will know about it, and we shall never hear the end of it."

"We may meet somebody on the road," said Tom Merry hopefully.

"There's a chance."

"Not likely."

The three juniors tramped on. The rest of the Saints who had been to the village had already got home, and there was no chance of coming upon any of them in the lane at that hour. And chance pedestrians were few and far between.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly, "I can hear somebody coming!" The chums listened.

There was a sound of footsteps in the thick dusk, and the red glimmer of a pipe. A burly form loomed up in the light of a solitary corner-lamp. It was a country labourer going home from his work.

"Here's a chance! Stop him!"

The labourer was turning from the lane to a side track when he passed the lamp. The juniors hurried forward as fast as their state would allow, to intercept him.

"Hallo! Hallo!" shouted Tom Merry. "Stop a minute, will you?"

The man heard the shout, and stopped, looking round him.

The juniors bundled on. They came into the light of the lamp, and the labourer stared at them, with horror in his face. They had forgotten the state of their faces, black with white circles round the eyes, and in the dim light of the lamp their aspect must have been strange and fearful to the countryman.

He gave a frightened gasp, and took to his heels, bolting through a gap in the hedge like lightning.

Tom Merry halted in dismay.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Come back, you silly ass! Stop!"

But the countryman took no notice. He was evidently under the impression that he had seen some fearful spectre, and in a few moments his running footsteps died away in the dim distance.

"The silly ass!" growled Tom Merry wrathfully. "There's our last chance gone."

"We may meet somebody else," said Lowther hopefully.

"And give them the jumps," said Manners. "Let's get on."

They got on. In spite of their painful anticipations as to what their reception would be like at St. Jim's, they were glad to see the gates of the school before them at last. The gates were locked, of course. They were late, and there was nothing for it but to rouse out Taggles, the school porter. It was impossible to ring the bell, as their hands were fastened, so Tom Merry started kicking at the gates and calling.

For some time there was no response. Then a lamp glimmered within, and the face of Taggles looked through the bars.

"What the—who the— What is it?"

Taggles nearly dropped the lamp as he saw the face of Tom Merry. He stared at the junior as if he could hardly believe his eyes.

"Open the gates, quick!" said Tom Merry.

Taggles sniffed.

"Yes, I see myself doing it, you young monkey! Wotcher mean by disturbing a honest man this time in the evening. Get along with yer!"

"But we want to come in."

"If I have to come out to yer," said Taggles, "I'll warm yer! Get along!"

"He doesn't know us!" murmured Lowther. "I don't believe our mothers would know us in this state, by Jove!"

Taggles was retreating.

Tom Merry kicked at the gates again.

"Taggles, you ass! Open the gates! Don't be a silly lunatic! I'm Tom Merry!"

"I'll Tom Merry yer! Get along, and don't try to take me in with a yarn like that!"

"I tell you I'm Tom Merry; and here's Manners and Lowther." Taggles came back towards the gates and peered at them in the light of the lamp.

"Then 'ow did you get into that state?" he demanded, beginning to see at last that Tom was really himself.

"We've had a row with the Grammarians."

"Ho, ho! And got the worst of it, as usual!" sneered Taggles.

"That's no business of yours!" said Tom hotly. "Just you open the gate, you old fraud, and let us in, and then you can go back to your little wooden-hut and eat coke!"

"Ho, ho! I'm an old fraud, am I? And a silly lunatic! Ho, ho!"

Taggles was evidently in a bad temper. He seemed to find a kind of pleasure in contemplating the blackened juniors through the bars of the gate.

"I say, open the gates, Taggles. And just cut this rope loose——"

"Ho, ho! I'm an old fraud, am I?"

"I take that back, Taggy. You're young and lovely; and if I were a girl I should fall in love at first sight with your beautiful eyes," said Tom Merry.

Taggles snorted. Compliments did not seem to please him, either.

"Nice young gents you are, to come home in such a state!" he said. "My word! Wonder what the doctor will say?"

"Don't tell him, Taggles. I say, old fellow, you're a man I respect highly. I always had a very strong regard for you, Taggles."

"Yes, when you want me to open the gates after locking-up," said Taggles; "not at other times, Master Merry. Ho, no!"

"My dear Taggles——"

"Ho, ho! I was an old fraud just now, and now I'm your dear Taggles. Ho, ho!"

"Look here, old chap! Is half-a-crown any good to you?"

"Cash?" said Taggles suspiciously.

"Well—no. I've glued all my tin at the tuck-shop," confessed Tom Merry. "But you shall have it to-morrow morning, honour bright."

Taggles sniffed.

"If you think you're goin' to bribe me, Master Merry, you're mistaken."

"You old fraud—I mean, dear old Taggles!"

"Ho, ho!" Taggles produced his keys and unlocked the gates. "You can come in, young gents, and go up to the School House and report yourselves. I dare say Mr. Railton will be pleased to see you. He has been inquiring for you once."

The juniors entered. Taggles closed the gates and locked them again. He surveyed the Terrible Three with a gnomish satisfaction. Many and many a rub had he had with the chums of the Shell, and he had always come off second best. Now it was his time to triumph!

"I say, Taggles, you're going to set us loose, aren't you?" said Tom Merry, in a tone persuasive enough to melt a gargoyle.

It had no perceptible effect upon Taggles, however. The school porter shook his head.

"No, I ain't," he said. "That's your way to the School House. Get along!"

"But I say, Taggy, you're such a nice chap——"

The porter grunted, and walked away.

Tom Merry screwed round his head to look at his followers.

"Frightful sort of beast he is, isn't he?" he remarked. "We'll make him sit up for this, sometime. I suppose we've got to stick it out."

"I suppose so. Get moving."

"Come on, then. I hope we don't meet any New House kids."

"No such luck. We're sure to meet them," said Lowther.

Monty was quite right.

As the Terrible Three drew near the School House, three figures came down the steps, and in the light from the hall they recognised Figgins & Co.

The New House trio had been over to pay a visit to Blake, and were about returning to their own house.

Tom Merry groaned.

"Fancy meeting that lot now! Here, dodge them!"

But, fastened together as they were, it was not easy for the Terrible Three to dodge. The New House juniors spotted them, and came straight towards them, wondering what the peculiar-looking object was, dimly seen in the dusk of the quadrangle.

"My—my only pyjama hat!" said Figgins. "What is it? Who is it? Where does it come from? Shall we kill it?"

"Oh, keep off!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Come on, chaps!"

The Terrible Three hurried on to the School House. Figgins & Co. stared after them, and burst into a shout of laughter.

"Great Scot! It's Tom Merry! He's been in the wars! That's the kid who had the cheek to want to be our leader! Nice things he'd have led us into! Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed the Co.

And with the laughter of Figgins & Co. ringing in their burning ears, the Terrible Three entered the School House.

CHAPTER 6. The Return!

"HALLO!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "What's that fearful row?"

Blake was putting away his boxing-gloves, which he had had on for a friendly round with Figgins a few minutes before. Study No. 6 was looking rather untidy, the natural result of a boxing match in such confined quarters.

The sound of loud laughter from below had reached Blake's ears, and he stopped to listen. Something was going on in the hall of the School House below.

"It sounds like somebody laughing," said Arthur Augustus. "Yaas, it is somebody laughing at something or other, deah boy."

"What a brain you must have to deduce things like that," said Blake admiringly.

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy innocently. "I have a vevy big bwain, weally, and I think I weally ought to be leadah of the juniahs, deah boys. I am sure that we should have a weally howlin' success as D'Arcy & Co."

"Something's up," said Herries. "Let's go and see."

Blake was already at the door.

The chums of the Fourth Form hurried out of the study, and looked over the bannisters. A strange and startling sight met their gaze.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "Look at Tom Merry!"

The Terrible Three had entered the School House. They had entertained a faint hope of getting to their own quarters unnoticed, and somehow or other contriving to release themselves and clean their blackened faces without having the whole of the School House as audience. But the hope proved to be vain.

They were spotted the moment they entered the hall; and the junior who spotted them gave a yell that brought fellows tumbling out of the studies and the Common Room in hot haste to see what was the matter.

The laughter that went up at the sight of the unfortunate three was Homeric. Seniors and juniors gathered round, staring at them, holding their aching sides, cackling and chuckling for all they were worth.

The faces of the Three were crimson, but their blushes did not show under the thick coating of blacking. They tried to push their way to the stairs to escape, but the laughers were not willing to let them go so soon. They wanted to have their laugh out.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was deep in a mathematical problem in his study, and the noise brought him out with a jump.

"What's the—what's the—my hat!"

He stared at the chums of the Shell.

"My word! What's the matter? Who are these niggers?"

"We're not niggers!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "We've met with a little—a little accident, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry shoved his way towards the stairs.

"Let's get by, you cackling asses! Can't some of you cut this rope?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who did it?" cried Blake, whose eyes were streaming with tears. "It can't have been Figgins. He's only just left us. Have you let the New House kids fix you like that, Tom Merry?"

"No! Get out of the way!"

Blake gave a start.

"You don't mean to say it was the Grammarians?"

"I don't mean to say anything. Let us pass."

"My aunt! You've let those Grammar kids make guys of you—you who wanted to be our leaders! Tom Merry & Co! Jolly glad I didn't take any shares in the firm."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Have they come to the school like that?" asked Herries. "What a sight on the road! The Grammar kids will never let us hear the end of it. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tom Merry!"

"Untie this rope, you silly ass!" was Tom Merry's reply.

"Hallo, cave! Here's Railton."

But it was too late.

Mr. Railton, the housemaster of the School House, had heard the disturbance, and he was on the spot, a frown upon his face.

"Stop there! You need not go upstairs. Who are you, and how dare you enter the School House in this state?" the housemaster demanded sternly.

"Please I'm—I'm Tom Merry."

"Tom Merry! How came you in this state?"

"It was an—an accident."

Mr. Railton could not help smiling.

"Tell me the facts, at once, Merry. Who has treated you like this? Is this a joke of the New House juniors?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then who is responsible for it?"

"Some—some fellows we met, sir."

Mr. Railton understood.

"Ah, I suppose this is a result of the ridiculous rivalry that has grown up between St. Jim's and the Rylcombe Grammar School. Is that the case?"

Tom Merry was silent. He knew that Monk and his friends would get

into trouble if Dr. Holmes took the matter up and made representations to the headmaster of the Grammar School at Rylcombe. Tom Merry always played the game. There was nothing of the sneak in his disposition. Whatever reverses he suffered at the hands of the enemy, he was not one to complain.

"Come, answer my question, Merry! Would you know the individuals in question again?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Do you know their names?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"I really think," said Mr. Railton, "that they have gone too far in treating you like this, and that they should be punished. Is it possible that you have come all the way from Rylcombe Grammar School in this absurd fashion?"

"We couldn't help it, sir. But—but, if you please, we'd rather let the matter drop. We should have served them the same if we'd had a chance."

Mr. Railton concealed a smile.

"I shall think about it, Merry. Meanwhile, go upstairs and get yourselves cleaned. Blake, you may untie them."

And Mr. Railton walked away. When he was inside his study again he laughed heartily.

Glad enough were the Terrible Three to get away from the laughter and chaff of the crowd downstairs. They were escorted to their quarters by a grinning party, and Study No. 6 accompanied them into the Shell dormitory, and slammed the door in the faces of the others. Blake proceeded to untie the unfortunate victims of the Grammarians' little joke.

"You've got off pretty lucky from Railton," he remarked. "He's a good sort, and he won't speak about the matter again. If it had been the New House master you'd have had a warm time, kids! Old Ratcliff can't see a joke. Though, really, Tom Merry, you three fellows are enough to make a dead cat laugh!"

"Oh, get on!" said Tom Merry.

"I'm getting on as fast as I can. It must have been a genius tied this cord; I can't get the knot undone. Ah, there it goes!"

Tom Merry was free at last.

Meanwhile, Herries and D'Arcy were busy with the other two victims, and Lowther and Mannors were released at the same time. They made a rush for their washstands to clean the blacking off their faces. The chums of the Fourth watched them with great interest.

"You look a little better now," remarked Blake, as Tom Merry raised his face from a basin of blackened water. "After all, it will do you kids no harm to have an extra wash. I've often thought that you needed it."

"Oh, dry up! Get out of our dormitory!"

"That's what you call gratitude, I suppose? Here, we've been wasting time untying you, and now that's your way of offering thanks, is it?"

"Oh, travel, do!"

"Catch me playing the good Samaritan again!" said Blake. "Come on, chaps, leave the poor kids to clean themselves. I say, though, Tom Merry, have you still got that idea in your head about forming a Co.? Do you still want to lead?"

"Oh, get out! Your face worries me!"

"If you like to fall into line," said Blake magnanimously, "we'll let you join us, and we'll show you how to get your own back on those Grammar rotters."

"I'll wait till you grow up before I follow your lead," said Tom Merry loftily. Tom was two months and seven days older than Blake, and never failed to let him remember it. "Now, kids, run away to bed like good boys!"

Blake snorted with indignation.

"If you hadn't been through it already, I'd give you a thick ear to take to bed with you!" he said darkly. "Come away, kids. It rests with us to keep up the credit of St. Jim's against the Grammar cads. Tom Merry has shown how much he can do."

"I expect you'll fare worse!" said Tom defiantly. "We shall see. I'm not going to let things stick where they are. Travel along, and if you tackle the Grammar kids, I expect you'll want our help to get you out of trouble."

"Oh, you won't see us coming home tied up in a bundle, this side up, with care!" said Blake, with a sniff of disdain. "I— Here, chuck it!" Tom Merry had seized his basin of blackened water with both hands. Blake beat a hasty retreat to the door.

"Chuck it, you silly ass!"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry politely.

And he "chucked" it, though not in the sense that Blake intended.

The Fourth-Formers gave a whoop as the water splashed among them. A wail of anguish rose from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Oh, you howwid bwute! You have soiled my collah!"

"Get out!"

"I wefuse to get out. You have soiled my collah, and I will give you a fearful thwashin'!"

"Here, Lowther, bring over that basin!"

"You wuffians—you feahful wuffians!"

"Swamp it over his waistcoat!"

"Pax," gasped D'Arcy—"pax, deah boys! I entweat you not to swamp it ovah my waistcoat. I will wetire immediatly."

And he retired in hot haste, without waiting to give Tom Merry the promised "thwashing." He overtook Blake and Herries in the passage.

"I shall gwow to dislike Tom Mewwy," he said; "I feel sure of it. He nevah tweats me with pwopah respect. My collah is soiled."

"Oh, blow your collar!" said Blake. "Look at my trousers!"

"Your twousahs are of minor importance, deah boy. I feel such a feahful boundah if I have a soiled collah. It weally causes me acute suffowin'. Pway excuse me, chappies, while I go and change my collah."

And D'Arcy scudded off on that important errand.

Tom Merry and his chums removed as far as possible the traces of their unlucky adventure with the Grammarians; then they went downstairs. But the chaff and chipping they met with soon made them wish that they had remained in the dormitory. They retreated to their own study with glum faces.

"This is rotten!" said Tom Merry. "We shall have to do something to take those Grammar brutes down a peg or two, or life won't be worth living in St. Jim's. Let's put our heads together and think of a wheeze."

They put their heads together, but it was not so easy to think of a wheeze. The wheeze was still unthought of when bedtime came, and the Terrible Three had to retire to the Shell dormitory, to face once more a torrent of chaff from their Form-fellows.

CHAPTER 7.
The Lunatics.

WHAT are we going to do this afternoon, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Study No. 6 came out of the Fourth Form class-room after school on Saturday morning.

"Football, I suppose," said Herries.

Blake was looking very thoughtful. He had been looking thoughtful all the morning, and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, had once or twice found him inattentive, and had made him a present of fifty lines. Herries had not noticed it—Herries never noticed anything—but Arthur Augustus had observed that his leader was in a brown study.

"Have you some ideah in your head, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, tapping Blake on the shoulder. "It is weally time we did somethin', you know, to take down the Grammarians. We have chipped Tom Mewwy so much that we weally ought to do somethin' ourselves to show that we are not duffahs like the Tewwible Thwee."

"You've hit it first time, Gussy," said Blake. "I've got an idea!"

"Is it your own?" asked Herries.

"Yes, it is. I thought it out in class this morning. We should want a lot of help to carry it out; but there are enough Fourth-Formers in the School House to do it. You know where those Grammar School kids play their football, don't you?"

"Yaas. They haven't any gground near the school, and they have to walk a quartah of a mile. Not like our show here, deah boy."

"That's it. Well, my idea was to go for the kids when they're playing their footer and give them the order of the boot—"

"Gweat Scott!"

"And shove them off the ground, and collar the ball, and play a game there ourselves," said Blake coolly. "How's that for high?"

"Enormous!" said Herries admiringly. "Tom Merry or Figgins would never have thought of that. But we shall have to be in pretty strong force to do it."

"That's easy enough. Suppose we go and reconnoitre this afternoon, and see—Hallo, Figgy!"

Blake broke off to nod to Figgins. The chief of the New House juniors was grinning amiably.

"Hallo, Blake! Where are you off to this afternoon?"

"Going for a drive," said Blake suspiciously.

"Mind you don't go near the Grammar School, and get sent home tied up in a bundle," said Figgins, shaking his head solemnly. "You School House chaps don't know how to take care of yourselves, you know."

And Figgins departed without waiting to hear Blake's indignant retort.

The leader of Study No. 6 looked uneasy for a moment.

"I say, do you think he heard what I was saying just now?" he said. "I didn't know the long-legged image was so near. Well, it can't be helped. Come along!"

"What's that about a drive?" asked Herries.

"I was thinking we would have Gaffer Jones's trap out and have a little run," said Blake. "We can reconnoitre the enemy's country at the same time."

"That's a good wheeze; but Gaffer Jones charges eight bob for his trap for the afternoon," said Herries. "We're not beastly millionaires."

"Oh, we can stand two-and-eightpence each," said Blake. "I can drive first-rate, you know, and we shall have a high old time. If we meet any of the Grammar cads we can have a shot at them with our peashooters."

"Yaas, wathah! I should be vevy pleased to stand tweat, deah boys."

"Rats!" said Blake. "We all stand an equal whack, of course. Now, come along, and let's get ready."

The juniors did not take long to get ready. They quitted St. Jim's, and walked down to the village, and were soon bargaining for Gaffer Jones's trap, and succeeded in hiring it for the afternoon for the stipulated sum of eight shilings, neither more nor less.

Blake mounted and took the reins—a proceeding which D'Arcy eyed rather dubiously through his eyeglass. The horse did not look very restive, but D'Arcy had his doubts.

"I say, deah boy," expostulated the swell of the School House, "I weally don't want to put myself forward in any way, you know, but weally and twuly I think you had better let me dwive. I weally think——"

"Rats!" said Blake cheerfully. "Jump in!"

"But undah the circs, Blake, it will be weally safah——"

"Are you coming or not?"

"Well, I will take a seat beside you, then, so as to be at hand in case of dangah awisin'," said Arthur Augustus, placing one foot on the step.

Blake gave him a gentle poke on the chest with the butt of the whip.

"No, you won't! Your place is at the back, my dear kid. I can't have your face beside me, frightening all the horses we meet. I must think of the public a little."

"I am sowwy to have to insist, but considewin' what a duffah you are, Blake, I weally——"

"Good-bye!" said Blake.

He shook the reins, and the horse started.

"I say, you are leavin' me behind!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Go hon!" said Blake, without turning his head.

D'Arcy had just time to scramble into the trap from behind, with a helping hand from Herries. Gaffer Jones's trap was one used for commercial purposes, chiefly for the delivery of vegetables to the inhabitants of Rylcombe and the surrounding parts, and there were some remains of its morning's cargo still on board. Herries pulled up the tailboard and fastened it. Blake drove down the village street with a flourish of the whip, followed by a shout from the village children.

"Look out! Grammar School cads!" he exclaimed suddenly.

Herries and D'Arcy were at once on the alert.

They were opposite the village tuck-shop, and Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the leading spirits of the Grammar School juniors, were standing outside, regarding them with considerable interest. There were a good many more of the Grammarians lounging about.

"Hallo, bounders!" called out Frank Monk. "Did your friends get home all right the other evening? We took great care of them."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake.

Carboy leaned towards Monk and whispered to him. A grin overspread Monk's face, and he nodded. Carboy disappeared into Mother Murphy's shop.

Blake noticed that, but he was busy with the horse just now. Some of the Grammarians set up a yell which startled old Tom, and made him break into a trot. The trap passed on down the street.

"I say, we were going to get some lunch here to take in the trap," said Herries anxiously. "We can't go the whole afternoon without any grub, you know."

"That's all right," said Blake. "If we had got down there, those Grammar cads would have got hold of the trap. They're mean enough for anything. There's the new tuck-shop at the end of the street, and we can get what we want there."

"Yaas, wathah! I can't see any Gwammah School boundahs in this diwoction," said D'Arcy, squinting round with his eyeglass.

The other tuck-shop was some distance away. Blake drove up and stopped the trap outside, and they got down.

"You can stop with the trap, Gussy," said Blake. "Call us at once if any of the Grammarians heave in sight."

"Cewtainly, deah boy. You may wely upon me."

"Keep your eyes open, you know."

"Yaas, wathah."

Blake and Herries went into the shop to make their purchases. Arthur Augustus kept a sharp look-out for the foe for a minute or two, and then began to polish his eyeglass. In that absorbing occupation he soon forgot the Grammar School, the Grammarians, the trap, and everything else.

He was roused from his important task by a sudden rush of feet, and the next moment he was sitting on the pavement.

In a moment, however, he was on his feet, shouting to his comrades.

Blake and Herries came out of the shop in a twinkling.

Monk, Lane, and Carboy had come upon the scene. Carboy had a sheet of cardboard folded under his arm, but in the excitement of the moment the Saints did not notice it. They only saw that an attack upon the trap was threatened, and they rushed to the rescue.

"Help! Wescue!" shouted D'Arcy, flinging himself upon Frank Monk.

"Help, deah boys! Let us give these boundahs a feahful thwashin'!"

Willingly enough Blake and Herries dashed into the fray.

The Grammarians were driven back from the trap. Blake, as he came out of the shop had seized an egg in each hand from a box at the door, and it was probably fear of the eggs, rather than of the juniors, that made the Grammarians fall back so promptly.

"Come on!" said Blake invitingly, with his right hand holding an egg aloft. "I'll show you how I can bowl, if you like. Don't be backward in coming forward."

But the Grammarians, with wary eyes upon the eggs, kept their distance.

"Get the stuff out, Herries," said Blake. "I'll keep guard here. You are an ass, Gussy! They might have captured the trap for all the good you were."

"I weally was not to blame, deah boy. I was polishin' my eyeglass——"

"Oh, blow your eyeglass! Buck up, Herries, old man!"

Herries re-entered the tuck-shop and reappeared with a basket containing the joint purchases. It was placed in the trap, the Grammar youths eyeing the proceeding from a distance of a dozen paces.

"Now get in," said Blake. "They're going to make a rush as we start; I can see it in their eyes. Take these eggs while I take the reins."

Herries and D'Arcy got into the trap. Each took an egg, and Blake went round to the front to climb into his seat there.

"Come on!" muttered Monk.

The three Grammarians rushed on. They had evidently determined to risk the eggs. As it happened, there was nothing to risk.

Arthur Augustus threw back his head to take aim, and caught it in the cord of his eyeglass. The monocle was jerked from his eye, and this so confused Gussy that he hurled the egg he knew not whither.

Herries knew, however, for it broke on his left ear, and he gave a howl of fury.

"My deah boy!" gasped D'Arcy, "I am extwemely sowwy—ooch!"

Herries was in no mood to listen to the protestations of the swell of St. Jim's. He was wild, and he did not stop to think. He gave D'Arcy an egg for an egg, and it broke on the nose of Arthur Augustus.

"Wooroch! Ooch! Oh, you howwid bwute! How wude of you!"

"Come on!" yelled Frank Monk.

He caught the tailboard of the trap. The three Grammarians hung on. D'Arcy was rubbing the egg from his face, and Herries from the side of his head, and for the moment the Grammarians were not interfered with.

They might have got into the trap then, if that had been their object, but apparently it was not. Monk and Lane hung on to it, and Carboy was busy too. Blake turned round in his seat, whip in hand.

"Get off, you bounders!"

"Yah!"

Crack went the whip. Lane gave a yell, and dropped away. Herries, leaving the stickiness on his face alone for the moment, seized some of the vegetable fragments from the bottom of the trap and pelted the Grammarians with all his energy.

Monk let go, and then Carboy. The horse got into motion, and the three Grammarians stood in a line, staring after the departing trap.

They were laughing uproariously.

Blake frowned a little.

"You are a nice pair of dangerous lunatics, you two," he remarked. "But I really don't see what there is for those three geese to cackle about so much."

"I decline to be alluded to as a nice pair of dangewous lunatics—I mean, as a dangewous lunatic," said D'Arcy. "It is a wude expression."

"Rats! You've wasted two eggs! Nice pair of objects you look!"

"All Gussy's fault!" growled Herries, industriously rubbing his ear with his handkerchief. "The silly ass ought not to be allowed out without a chain on!"

"It was an inadvertence on my part, Hewwies, and I must say that your conduct was most wude and ungentlemanly."

"Oh, don't talk to me! You're a dangerous maniac, that's what you are!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a——"

"I say, what are all the people giggling at?" said Blake anxiously. "They seem to see something comical about this trap."

It was true enough.

Several country people had been passed, and each in turn had stared at the trap, and burst into a loud guffaw as it passed him.

Blake was puzzled.

So far as he could see there was nothing to laugh at, yet it was perfectly evident that everyone he passed saw something comical about the party.

"I suppose it's the way you drive," suggested Herries.

Blake gave him a withering look.

"If you've got nothing more sensible to say than that, Herries——"

"Well, I suppose they're not laughing for nothing," said Herries obstinately.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally must wequest you to hand ovah the weins to me, Blake. It is not gwatifying to make an exhibition on the public highway."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Blake. "I'm a jolly good driver. It's not that. I can't get on to the wheeze, but there's something up, somehow."

There was certainly something up. There could be no doubt upon that point.

The trap passed a market-cart, with a couple of stolid-looking fellows sprawled on the sacks in it, and the stolidity melted from their faces like snow in the sun, and a loud horse-laugh followed the juniors.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"They be loonytics, they be."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

D'Arcy fixed an indignant look upon the waggerons, screwing his monocle into his eye, and surveying them with indignant scorn.

"I considah your wemarks extwemely wude," he exclaimed. "How dare you!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"They be loonytics!"

"I can't make it out," said Blake desperately. "I can understand anybody taking D'Arcy for a lunatic, but as for us——"

"That's it," said Herries. "D'Arcy is a lunatic. But as for us——"

"Weally, I don't undewstand it at all," said Arthur Augustus, looking back at the grinning waggerons. "I have nevah been so surprised in my life. Hallo, here's a St. Jim's chap! Let's see if he notices anythin' to laugh at."

Gore, of the Shell at St. Jim's, a School House boy, was plodding along the lane. The trap passed him, and Blake cracked the whip and hailed him cheerfully.

"Hallo, Gore! Can you see——"

He broke off. Gore had glanced at the trap, and he broke into a laugh.

"Ha, ha! Going to the asylum, are you?"

"What do you mean, Gore?"

"Ha, ha! I can't talk to lunatics! Get on! Wow!"

Blake exasperated, gave Gore a flick with the whip, and drove on.

"This is getting on my nerves!" exclaimed the chief of Study No. 6 desperately. "I think we'd better cut the drive short, kids, and get home. I can't imagine why every giddy ass should burst out cackling at the sight of us, but they're doing it, and I don't like it."

"Yaas, wathah."

The trap passed a group of farm labourers standing by a stile. They stared at it, and burst into a general guffaw. They shouted after the trap, and Blake distinguished the word "lunatics." His face was crimson.

It seemed as if the whole countryside had gone mad. The drive could not be called a success. Herries persisted that it must be Blake's style of driving that was at the bottom of the trouble. Blake sniffed at the idea, but he changed places at last with D'Arcy, and the swell of the School House took the reins.

That made no difference, however.

The very next person passed on the road laughed loud and long, and yelled something after the trap in which the word lunatics was again distinguishable.

"I say, let's get back, for goodness' sake," exclaimed Blake. "I feel as if I were in a nightmare. I can't stand much more of this."

"Vewy well," said D'Arcy. "I will turn the twap wound."

"Don't run us into the hedge, Gussy."

D'Arcy had a narrow escape of running them into the hedge, but a miss was as good as a mile. He turned the trap, and old Tom trotted contentedly back towards Rylcombe.

In the return journey the juniors repassed most of the pedestrians and vehicles they had already passed, and from each they received a volley of chaff.

"Lunatics!" shouted Gore, keeping safe out of the reach of Blake's whip this time. "Why don't you go to Colney Hatch?"

Blake made a cut at him without avail.

The chief of Study No. 6 was excited and annoyed. He had never had an experience exactly like that before in all his career, varied as that had been. Why the public should persist in regarding him and all his comrades

as lunatics he could not possibly imagine. It seemed like a dream. But one thing was certain, the sooner that far from enjoyable drive was over the better.

They re-entered the village, and found themselves the cynosure of all eyes. Children gathered round and followed the trap in crowds, old folk stood at their doors and windows and laughed and shouted. Blake felt as if his head were turning round.

What on earth could it all mean?

The youthful crowd behind the trap were shouting and jeering. The word "lunatics" recurred with painful frequency.

"I shall begin to think soon that we really are lunatics, and right off our rockers," said the bewildered Blake. "Hallo, there's the Gaffer's place at last!"

He heaved a sigh of relief at the sight of the open yard gates.

D'Arcy drove the trap in, and the children collected round the gates, laughing and shouting still, looking into the yard with undiminished interest.

The Gaffer was standing near his door, and he looked up at the sound of the trap. Blake was positively relieved to see that his face was quite grave, and that he, at all events, apparently saw nothing to laugh at in the turnout.

"You're back early, young gentlemen," he remarked.

"Yes; we got rather tired of it," said Blake glibly.

"Of course, I shall have to charge you the full eight shillin's all the same," observed the Gaffer, who partook strongly of the ways of Shylock in his business dealings.

"Oh, blow your old eight shillings!" said Blake crossly. "We don't want you to take anything off. We haven't had much of a drive. There's something wrong with the trap. Everybody we passed began to cackle at us."

The Gaffer looked astonished.

"What's wrong with it?" he demanded. "I can't see anything. Perhaps it was the way you drove. I— Ha, ha, ha!"

As the trap moved on a little the Gaffer had a view of it from the back. Then he broke into a cackling laugh.

Blake stared at him wrathfully.

"Hallo! Have you got it, too?" he exclaimed, jumping to the ground. "This is the last time I want your beastly old trap! What are you cackling about, you image?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "What the deuce are you cacklin' about?"

"Haw, haw, haw! Look at that!"

Gaffer Jones was pointing to the tailboard of the trap. The three juniors from St. Jim's hurried to him and looked also. Then a general gasp escaped them. The mystery was made clear now. Stuck to the back of the trap was a sheet of cardboard, upon which were inscribed in bold red letters the words,

"WE ARE ALL LUNATICS!"

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy stared at that peculiar notice in dumbfounded amazement.

"We are all lunatics!" murmured Blake faintly, at last. "Gaffer, you villain, how dared you stick that there?"

"Haw, haw, haw! It wasn't there when you took the trap out of the yard!" chuckled the Gaffer, with tears of mirth rolling down his wrinkled cheeks. "Ho, ho, ho! I never seed it afore! He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Oh, shut up with your he-he-ing, and your ho-ho-ing!" exclaimed Blake. "How did it get there, then? Oh, I know! Those Grammar School kids!" Like a flash it burst upon his mind. It was the work of Monk, Lane, and Carboy. That was what the attack on the trap had meant outside the tuck-shop in Rylcombe. He remembered now that he had seen something like a sheet of cardboard under Carboy's arm.

"The—the horrid beasts!" gasped Blake. "He must have got that ready at Mother Murphy's, and then followed us, and we—we never tumbled."

"Well, we couldn't see it from inside the trap!" growled Herries. "How were we to know? The beast has stuck it on with seccotine. He had that all ready. My hat! And we never suspected."

"It is weally extwemely exaspewatin'! Blake, what sort of a beastly old leadah do you weally call yourself? That's what I weally want to know, deah boy."

"Oh, shut up!" said Blake crossly. "Blame me, of course. I was driving; and I haven't any eyes in the back of my head. You chaps ought to have tumbled to the wheeze."

"He, he, he!" came a cackle from the gate. "They are all lunatics! He, he, he!"

Blake seized the whip and pretended to make a rush at the gate, and the youthful villagers scattered in double-quick time.

Blake paid the gaffer his eight shillings, and they left the yard, Herries carrying the basket of provisions. They were feeling considerably small. The Grammar School joke had been very funny from the Grammar School point of view, but it was distinctly exasperating to the juniors from St. Jim's.

"Needn't say anything about it at the school, though," said Blake hopefully. "No need to tell a yarn against ourselves, you know."

Herries gave a sniff.

"What price Gore? He saw us, and he won't keep it dark."

"Oh, confound Gore! I forgot him. I suppose it will be all over St. Jim's by the time we get in!" growled Blake.

He was right. When the chums of the Fourth arrived at the school they found quite a crowd at the gates to welcome them. Conspicuous among them was Gore. The grinning faces showed that the adventure was widely known.

"Hallo, lunatics!" rose a general shout. "Good old lunatics!"

The chums, with faces as red as fire, marched on through the gates.

"Hallo!" said Gore, staring at them. "Hallo, lunatics! You ought to be in Colney Hatch, you know! They oughtn't to let you loose in this reckless way!"

"Oh, get out of it!"

"Now, don't be a naughty lunatic. I say, chaps, has anybody got a strait-waistcoat? This lunatic is getting dangerous."

A yell of laughter followed.

The chums of the Fourth marched on with crimson faces, and glad enough were they to hide their blushes in their own study in the School House.

CHAPTER 8. The Raiders.

It was long before Study No. 6 heard the last of that adventure. They were called the "lunatics" by all the school, and the title seemed to stick. Naturally enough, the Terrible Three had a great deal to say about the matter.

Blake had chipped them about the unlucky outcome of their encounter

with the Grammarians, and they were not slow to retaliate now. The chums of the Fourth grew tired of the subject, but the rest of St. Jim's seemed to find it amusing for a long time.

Even some of the seniors joined in the joke, and gravely asked Blake solicitous questions as to his mental state, and the price of strait-waistcoats. Study No. 6 were furious; but there was no escape from the chaff.

Figgins & Co. chuckled over the story, of course. Figgins & Co. were thinking a great deal of themselves about this time. The Terrible Three and Study No. 6 had been defeated in turn by the Grammar School, and it rested with Figgins & Co. to restore the tarnished glory of the Saints.

That was what Figgins & Co. were determined to do, if only to show their rivals that the true leaders of the Saints were to be found in the New House at St. Jim's.

"The Grammar kids are a bit above the weight of the School House chaps," Figgins observed, a few days after the adventure of Study No. 6. "If we don't take the matter in hand, St. Jim's will never get a look-in at all. Now, my idea about the football——"

"Your idea?" said Kerr.

Figgins coloured a little.

"Well, it was Blake's idea," he admitted. "But you know very well that those School House chaps aren't fit to carry it out. They would only make a muck of it."

"No doubt about that," said Fatty Wynn. "We couldn't leave it in their hands. Besides, it's rather a good idea to bone Blake's plan and carry it out better than he could. It will be one up against the School House."

"That's what I was thinking. And it's really a good wheeze, you know. Dr. Monk couldn't get the ground near his beastly Grammar School for a football ground, and he had to take that field at a distance. That places the Grammarians at our mercy if we go in sufficient force. They will be nearly a quarter of a mile from headquarters, and won't be able to get help in time."

"This is where we really ought to be joined with the other party," said Kerr thoughtfully. "Tom Merry and Blake would be a great help in a thing of this kind."

"Yes, if they knew their places; but they would want to lead, and so that settles it," said Figgins, with a shake of the head. "Besides, we want to show what the New House can do without help from over the way."

"Right you are! After all, there are enough of us."

"That's so. Now, on Wednesday afternoon the Grammar cads are sure to be playing football on that field, and that's where we come in. There will be the two elevens, and perhaps a dozen fellows hanging about. Not likely to be more than that. I think that if we take, say, forty chaps we shall be able to lick them out of their boots."

Kerr whistled.

"That's rather a number, without calling on the School House for recruits."

"We can do it. All the Fourth and the Shell who board in the New House will join in, and that will make up the number. Some of the Third, too, may be useful."

"But will they all follow our lead?" said Fatty Wynn dubiously.

"Of course they will, or else get an assortment of thick ears!" said Figgins, looking warlike. "We'll settle the matter over-night, and arrange who is to go. With the Fourth, the Shell, and the biggest kids out of the Third Form, we shall make up the number, and it will be all plain sailing."

It was really a grand idea, and the prospect of a pitched battle on the enemy's territory was attractive to the New House youngsters.

That evening Figgins marshalled his forces. He found plenty of recruits. Most of the New House youngsters were only too willing to join in any row with the neighbouring school, and the thought that a victory over the Grammarians would be one up against the School House added to their zest.

Nearly half of the Fourth Form and the Shell boarded in the New House, as well as a considerable number of the Third, and among the latter were many fellows quite big enough to take part in the projected foray. Close upon two score of youths entered eagerly into the plot, and on Tuesday evening many warlike preparations were made.

There were some difficulties, of course. Some fellows in the Shell thought that they were entitled to lead, and would have had Figgins take a back seat. Figgins had a couple of fights that evening, and despatched French and Jimson in turn, and after that there was no more argument.

The next morning there was suppressed excitement among the elect. Blake noticed a great deal of whispering going on among the New House fellows in the Fourth Form, and wondered what was the cause. But he was not enlightened.

He little dreamed that Figgins had appropriated his plan of dealing a blow at the Grammarians, and was about to carry it out. Blake himself had postponed the idea. The ridicule which had followed his adventure with the Grammar School boys made it hard for him to raise a party to follow his lead against the enemy. And this, as it happened, left a clear field for Figgins & Co.

After school the New House party prepared for business. Figgins had forbidden them to say a word in the school as to their intentions, and outside the New House nothing was known. The raiders left the school after dinner in twos and threes, and rendezvoused at an old barn near the school.

When the party was complete, Figgins gave the order to march. The juniors had mostly provided themselves with stuffed stockings or some similar weapon ready for the fray. The Grammarians were certain to desperately resist the invasion, but Figgins had no doubt as to which side victory would rest with.

The New House raiders broke up into small parties so as not to excite suspicion, but they drew near again as they approached the football field. Loud shouts told them that the Grammarians were busy there.

When Dr. Monk had started the Grammar School near Rylcombe, he had found it impossible to obtain as much land as he required near the site of the school. As is the case with some of the great public schools, the football ground was at a distance from the school itself. St. Jim's was more favourably situated. The Grammar School master had been compelled to take what he could get. The junior ground—or Little Side—was hidden from the big red-brick Grammar School by a belt of trees, the senior ground being nearer the school. Nothing could have been more favourable to Figgins's plan—or, rather, Blake's plan.

The New House youngsters drew nearer the ground, and as they came in sight they were regarded with some suspicion by the Grammarians standing about. Two Grammar elevens were playing—one side captained by Frank Monk, the other by his friend Carboy. Nearly a dozen youthful Grammarians were looking on. The latter began to look alarmed as Figgins and his heroes collected close to the line.

"I say, what are you kids doing here?" exclaimed Lane, coming towards them. "You're on private ground here."

Figgins looked him up and down in an extremely irritating way.

"Whom may you happen to be?" he inquired, with great politeness.

"I'm Lane. You know well enough, you long-legged monstrosity!"
Figgins flushed.

"Well, Lane, or Footpath, or whatever you are, we've come here to play football."

Lane stared at him in blank amazement.

"You've come here to play football on our ground!" he exclaimed, scarcely believing his ears.

"Certainly. That's what I said."

"Why, we'll scalp you—we'll skin you—we'll——"

"You'll travel," said Figgins. "I give you ten seconds to start."

"I'll start you!" yelled the exasperated Lane. "I say, fellows, these cads have come to play football on our ground! Come and kick them out!"

And he rushed upon Figgins to start the kicking-out process. In a moment he was on the ground, and the Grammarians, rushing to his aid, were scattered in a moment by the superior numbers of the Saints.

The disturbance, of course, at once attracted the attention of the players, and the game stopped. The footballers came to the edge of the field.

"I say, what are you kids doing here?" bawled Monk. "Get out!"

"Not this afternoon," replied Figgins politely. "We've come to play football."

"Eh—what? What?"

"We've come to play football. I'll trouble you for that ball, please."

"You—I—my ball—I——"

Monk was simply stammering in his rage and amazement.

Such a sublime piece of cheek as this had never come within his experience before.

"Come, hand over that ball!" said Figgins. "You're in the way, you chaps. Clear out!"

"I'll—we'll—I'll——"

"Oh, don't talk so much, Monkey!" said Figgins. "Hand over that ball. Ooch!"

Monk handed over the ball, sending it plump into Figgy's countenance, and Figgins was bowled over like a ninepin. This was the signal for a rush. The Saints dashed into the fray, with stuffed stockings well to the fore. The Grammarians, unarmed and outnumbered, fell back on all sides.

Figgins jumped up and rushed into the conflict. Figgins was a host in himself, and his long arms and huge fists did great execution. The Grammarians put up a gallant fight, but they had no chance from the first.

They were fairly driven off the field. Some of the more timid were already scuttling off to the Grammar School for help, while Monk and the more determined of his followers fought hard for their territory.

They fought in vain. They were driven off, and though not put to actual fight, they had to keep their distance. Monk was furious, but helpless.

Figgins chuckled with glee as the enemy drew off, and the conflict ceased.

"Now form up for the game," he directed. "The chaps who are not playing will have to keep guard against those Grammar cads coming back."

The plan had not been made in vain, and all the juniors knew their places. The game was not likely to amount to much as a game of football; but the idea was to play it on the enemy's ground as a signal triumph over the Grammarians, and that idea Figgins was determined to carry out.

The two elevens formed up, while the rest of the Saints remained on guard to intercept any attempt of the defeated Grammarians to interrupt the game.

Figgins kicked off with Monk's ball, and the game commenced. The defeated Grammarians looked on with absolute amazement.

"Well, of all the nerve!" gasped Monk. "They're playing on our ground with our footer! Of all the beastly cheek I ever heard of, this captures the Huntley & Palmer!"

"We're not going to stand it!" exclaimed Carboy.

"Not much! This gives us a chance!" said Monk hastily. "There's not enough of us to deal with the cads now, but there's heaps of fellows will come when they get the word. I say, Carboy, just cut off and fetch all the help you can, and we—"

"What are you going to do?"

"We'll lay for the brutes in the lane and cut off their retreat," said Monk, with a grin. "We'll make them properly sorry for themselves before we've done with them!"

The Grammarians chuckled.

"Good wheeze!" said Carboy; and he shot off at once towards the school. Some of the fugitives had already arrived there and spread the news, so Carboy found plenty of fellows ready to follow him to the rescue.

Meanwhile Frank Monk and his comrades drew off the ground. The Saints watched them go, with derisive shouts, to which the Grammarians replied in kind.

"Beaten to the wide, and no mistake!" chuckled Figgins, pausing in the game. "Keep your peepers open, kids. We shall have to bunk when a lot of them come from the school. But we've played a game with their ball, on their ground, and there's no getting out of that."

Frank Monk and his companions disappeared. The New House teams continued to play the game, and Figgins scored the first goal. But it is certain that the players bestowed more attention upon the enemy than upon the game. And there was a cessation of play at once as Carboy was seen returning with a crowd of Grammarians at his heels.

"Stop!" shouted Figgins. "This is where we bunk."

They crowded off the field.

Figgins had the captured football under his arm.

"I say, are you going to keep their ball, Figgy?" asked Kerr dubiously.

"I'm going to take it back to St. Jim's, just to show that we can do it," said Figgins. "We'll send it to them by post afterwards. Come on!"

In a compact body, the New House juniors beat a retreat from the contested field. The Grammarians followed fast. Figgins & Co. emerged into the lane leading to St. Jim's, and broke into a trot. They were greatly outnumbered by their pursuers, and Figgins, like a prudent general, did not wish to encounter great odds at close quarters, and to have a victory followed up by a defeat.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Kerr suddenly. "Look there!"

Figgins gave a whistle of dismay.

Ahead of them, in the lane, drawn up evidently to dispute their passage, were over a score of Grammarians, with Frank Monk at their head.

Figgins understood at once, and his face became grave.

"My hat!" he muttered. "So that was their little game! That's why the brutes went off so quietly, was it? My only hat!"

The Co. looked dubiously at their leader.

A crowd of Grammarians were coming on behind, breaking into a run now. The New House raiders were taken between two fires.

"Come on!" said Figgins desperately. "We've got to break through them, that's all! Come on, and we'll give them the giddy kybosh!"

There was nothing else to be done. Shoulder to shoulder the raiders rushed on, and in a moment more there was a wild and whirling conflict raging in the narrow lane. Grammarians and Saints were mixed and mingled.

inextricably, fighting like wild-cats, pommelling, and punching, and wriggling, and staggering.

Frank Monk went straight for Figgins, to regain the trophy of victory which the New House chief was carrying off from the football field.

The two leaders closed in deadly strife, and the football slipped from under Figgy's arm and went no one knew whither.

Fatty Wynn and Lane, struggling desperately, lurched against Figgins, and he staggered on the edge of the ditch that bordered the lane, and went in headlong, dragging Monk with him. There was a mighty splash, for the ditch was nearly full of water. Two fearful-looking objects rose from the flowing stream, smothered with mud, caked with slime and fungus. They were still fighting, however, and making a terrific splashing round them.

The New House juniors were game. They fought hard, but the enemy were three to one, and the odds were too hopeless. The fight could only end one way; and when Figgins at last tore himself from Monk's grasp he found his followers in full flight, and had no alternative but to imitate their example. He dashed away, his long legs standing him in good stead now, while the Grammarians, whooping with triumph, followed fast, pursuing the defeated juniors to the very gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

The Welcome Home.

AFTER the departure of Figgins and his gallant band, some of the New House fellows who were in the secret had let it out, and the news of the expedition came to the ears of Blake. His wrath may be imagined. The chums of Study No. 6 were just going down to football practice when Pratt of the New House told them about it.

Blake was red with indignation.

"The horrid wasters!" he exclaimed. "Do you seriously mean to tell me that Figgins has boned my idea like this, Pratt?"

"Your idea?" said Pratt, with a sniff. "I haven't heard anything about that. Figgins and half our house have gone to wipe up the Grammarians on their footer field. That's all I know. I'd be with them, only I had an imposition to do. I tell you, we're going to make things hum. It's the New House that will put the Grammar cads in their place."

"Yes, by boning School House wheezes!" snorted Blake. "There's one comfort, though—Figgins & Co. are certain to make a bungle of it."

"Yaas, wathah! A mattah of this kind requires tact and judgment," said D'Arcy. "I think I could have managed it all wight; but Figgins—"

"Figgins will get licked," said Herries. "Let's go and watch for him to come in. I'll bet you a thick ear, Pratt, that Figgins comes home licked."

"Rats!" cried the New House junior.

He walked away. The chums of the Fourth looked at one another wrathfully. Their idea was "boned," as Blake expressed it, and there was no help for it now. And it was not really a comfort to surmise that Figgins would get the worst of the tussle with the Grammarians. For, as patriotic Saints, the juniors would rather have seen him win.

"Well, this is rotten!" said Blake. "I don't mind Figgins using up our wheeze so much, as the fact that he'll make a muck of it. It's a good wheeze wasted."

"Yaas, wathah! I think we weally ought to wemonstwate with Figgins."

"We'll chip him to death if he comes home licked," said Herries. "That's

something. Tell the fellows, and let's wait for the horrid boulder to come in."

And so it came about that when Figgins & Co. returned from their disastrous expedition half the School House awaited them at the gates of St. Jim's.

"Here they come!" shouted Blako abruptly.

A group of flying figures appeared in sight down the long, dusty lane. As they came nearer they were recognisable as New House juniors, and they were evidently running their hardest from a pursuing foe.

Blake's prediction had evidently been realised. Figgins & Co. had had the worst of it, and the New House raiders were in full flight, with the Grammarians on their track.

Blake gave a scornful sniff.

"I told you how it would be!" he exclaimed. "I say, Pratt, what do you think of your chief and his wonderful wheeze now?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Pratt ungraciously.

"By Jove, they can run!" said Blake, looking admiringly at the oncoming fugitives. "If they put up a speed like that on the cinder-path we shouldn't have much chance against the New House on sports' day. I'll tell you what, Pratt, if you chaps want to win the mile and the obstacle race next time you'd better get some of the Grammarians to follow on your track, and you'll be sure to do the trick."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Pratt.

As the New House fugitives drew nearer to the gates the School House boys set up a derisive cheer.

"Bravo!"

"Well run!"

"Buck up, now! They've nearly got you!"

"Well run—well run!"

The fugitives came panting up. There were a goodly number of them, but by no means all the raiding band. Others were panting on behind. Figgins & Co. were not to be seen yet.

"Come on," called out Blake—"come on! Well run! Oh, my hat, did anybody ever see such a set of silly asses! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed three voices in unison. And Blake turned his head to see the Terrible Three at his side. "Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake nodded and grinned to his rivals of the School House. In chipping the New House they were at one.

"Nice sight, ain't it?" he asked. "Makes you feel proud to belong to St. Jim's, Merry, doesn't it?—I don't think."

"Well, they're putting up a jolly good foot-race," said Tom Merry, with an air of being fair at any price. "Give 'em what credit is due."

"Yaas, wathah! They are weally wunnin' vewy well," said Arthur Augustus. "I think that Figgins is sowwy by this time that he did not follow my lead, deah boys."

"I should say so," assented Tom Merry. "You couldn't have made a worse muck of it than this, anyway, even you, Gussy."

"Pway don't make dispawagin' wemawks, Tom Mewwy. I——"

"Hallo, here they are! Make way for the foot-racers," exclaimed Tom Merry. "You take first prize, Jimson; you're the first man in."

"And French is second," said Blake. "Second prize for French. Shall we give him a black eye or a thick ear, chaps? I think he ought to have both for running away from the Grammarians."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Cheese it!" gasped French, reeling against the gate. "We had no

chance. It was all Figgins's fault for leading us into such a hole—the Champion ass!"

"We've been licked out of our boots," gurgled Jimson. "They caught us in a trap, and they were three to one."

"Serve you right for being caught," said Tom Merry unsympathetically. "I suppose this is what you New House chaps call upholding the honour and glory of St. Jim's, isn't it?"

"It's about as good as coming home tied up in a bundle, as black as a nigger," said French defiantly.

Tom Merry coloured. Blake broke into a laugh.

"He's got you there, Tom Merry," he exclaimed. "I must admit he's right."

"You needn't talk," said Tom. "You're all lunatics, you know!"

And then it was Blake's turn to blush at the reminder.

The defeated New House party came in at the gates, and went off at once to their own house, most of them being sadly in need of cleaning and repairing. But all were not in yet, and the School House boys watched curiously for the rest.

In ones and twos and threes the vanquished raiders dropped in. Last of all Figgins & Co. appeared in sight, with a mob of Grammarians following them. Figgins & Co. had covered the rear, like the heroes they were, and they showed innumerable signs of the fray.

At the sight of the Grammarians the School House fellows became restive. Tom Merry took his hands out of his pockets.

All the New House party were now in with the exception of Figgins & Co., who were some way behind the rest. They had turned to face a rush of the pursuers, and the latter had fallen back again. Figgins & Co. came on, and the Grammarians made another rush, this time in more force.

"Buck up!" panted Figgins. "Another spurt does it."

And the New House chums "bucked up"; but they were almost spent, and the effort was not a great one. Fatty Wynn dropped behind, and the clutch of the Grammarians closed upon him.

Figgins and Kerr could have reached safety, but they heard the shout of Fatty Wynn, and they were not the fellows to desert a chum.

Exhausted as they were, they turned back instantly, and rushed to the rescue. That was just what the Grammarians wanted, and in a moment Figgins & Co. had disappeared under a sprawling heap of the enemy.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"We're not going to stand this!" he exclaimed. "Come on, you fellows!"

Figgins & Co. had fallen into the enemy's hands a dozen yards from the gate. Tom Merry rushed to the rescue at top speed, with Manners and Lowther at his heels. After them went Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, and then a crowd of School House boys.

"Look out!" yelled Frank Monk.

The Grammarians looked out. But they had no chance against the new attack, which swept them away and drove them helter-skelter down the lane. Tom dragged Figgins to his feet.

"Thanks," gasped Figgins, "awfully!"

"Come on, old kid, there's too many of them for us," said Tom Merry.

He helped Figgins on. The New House chief was quite spent, and he staggered in his walk. Manners and Lowther lent a helping hand to the Co. The rest of the fellows kept off the Grammarians, who had returned to the attack.

The Saints passed through the ancient gateway, and the enemy followed them right up to the gates. Tom Merry closed the latter.

"Yah!" roared the Grammarians, crowded outside. "Yah! Come out! Yah!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed with the light of battle.

"Just you wait a minute, you bounders!" he exclaimed. "We'll come out fast enough."

The terrific noise had attracted the attention of the St. Jim's fellows from all quarters, and they were hastening towards the gate. Tom Merry's voice rang out like a call to arms, and he swung open the gate again.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "Sock it into them!"

The tables were turned now. The Grammarians were outnumbered, and they had to retreat. They were soon in flight, and the School House fellows returned victorious.

Figgins was leaning against the wall, gasping for breath.

"My hat," he gasped, "this has been a time!"

"Serve you right for boning another chap's ideas," exclaimed Blake severely. "Next time perhaps you'll leave me to carry out my own wheeze my own way."

Figgins grinned in a sickly way.

"We've had bad luck!" he gasped. "Anyway, we've beaten you fellows so far—we've played a game of football on the Grammar ground, and very nearly carried off their footer, too."

"Very nearly!" sniffed Blake. "And very nearly got yourselves slain into the bargain. I'd like to know where you'd be now if the School House hadn't come to the rescue?"

"Oh, that's rot!" said Figgins.

"I don't see it," said Tom Merry. "Of course, after this, Figgy, you'll admit that the School House will have to take the lead against the Grammar cads."

"Bosh!" said Figgins. "Rats! Rubbish! That's my opinion."

"But you must acknowledge—"

"Acknowledge your giddy grandmother!" said Figgins. And he marched off to the New House.

Blake gave an expressive snort.

"I never saw such an obstinate rotter as that chap!" he exclaimed. "He'll never see reason, I suppose. If this isn't enough for a lesson for him, what will be?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "It stands to reason that the leader must belong to the School House, if we have one at all. I'm surprised at Figgins. I never knew he was so obstinate before. But you kids are not much better."

"Who are you calling kids?"

"You Fourth Form wasters," said Tom Merry deliberately. "Kids, and obstinate kids, that's what you are. You're as obstinate as Figgins. You won't follow your proper leader any more than he will. I'm two months and seven days older than you are, so—"

"Will you have the gloves on or off?" asked Blake, with great politeness.

"Whichever you like," said Tom Merry immediately.

"Then come along to the gym., and I'll knock some of the conceit out of you."

"I'll see if I can do the same for you, Blake."

And in a few minutes they had the gloves on in the gym., trying, as Monty Lowther said, to knock the conceit out of each other, which task Monty declared to be an impossible one.

CHAPTER 10.

Arthur Augustus Comes Out Strong.

THE boxing-match in the gym. had the effect of letting off steam, so to speak, but it did not settle the vexed question. "Tom Merry & Co." remained only an idea, and the rivals of St. Jim's seemed as far from union as ever.

"I don't quite know how to argue with Blake," Tom Merry confessed to his chums. "I've punched his head fearfully, but he's still of the same opinion. He's awfully obstinate. We shall have to leave those kids out, chaps, and buck up against the Grammar School on our own, that's all."

Study No. 6 came to the same conclusion.

"It's simply waste of time punching Tom Merry's head," said Blake, after that round in the gym. "I hit him hard enough to convince anybody, but he's as obstinate as a beastly mule. That chap will never follow my lead. We shall have to do it on our lonesome."

"Yaas, wathah! I am weally not supswised, Blake."

"What aren't you surprised at, Algernon?"

"My name is not Algernon. I stwongly object——"

"Oh, cut the cackle, oid chap. Go ahead!"

"I am not supswised," said D'Arcy, with dignity, "that the Tewwible Thwee wefuse to follow your lead. Aftah what has happened, I must sewiously considah whethah I can, consistently with my dig, follcw it myself, deah boy."

Blake's hand strayed towards a ruler.

"Yaas," went on D'Arcy, with a wary eye on the ruler. "You see, you lead us into such feahful positions, deah boy. It was all your doin' that we were bwanded as lunatics."

"You've nothing to complain of. You are one."

"That is an extwemely objectionable wemawk. Upon the whole, Blake, I weally think the time has come for you to wesign the leadahship of this study into more capable hands."

Blake's eyes glittered.

"Whose hands are you speaking of, Gussy?" he inquired.

"My own," replied D'Arcy immediately. "I should be the last person in the world to put myself forward in any way, deah boy, but undah the circs I must weally speak out for the good of the cause. I don't want this study to be put into the shade, don't you know?"

"And you think we are going to follow the lead of a tailor's dummy with an eyeglass stuck on its face?" asked Blake, with great politeness.

"I weally wish you would use more respectful expressions, Blake. I am only makin' a suggestion for the good of the cause. I weally think that what we wequire in a leadah is tact and judgment, and firmness of chawaetah, and you cannot deny that I have those qualities, oid fellah. I put it to you."

"Oh, my hat! Why doesn't somebody kill this funny merchant?"

"If you wefuse to follow my lead against the Gwammawians," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I shall not insist——"

"Well, that's very nice of you, at all events."

"Yaas, wathah! I shall not insist, but I shall pwocceed to form a pawty of my own, to deal with the mattah in a pwopah way."

Blake and Herries looked at each other.

"Oh-o! So you're going to start in opposition, Gussy?"

"Not exactly," said D'Arcy. "I have a gweat wespsect for you two fellahs, and I wish you to wegawd me as your best fwied. My aim is to keep our end up against the Gwammaw School boundahs, and I feel that it cannot be done unless I set to work in feahful cawnest. You two chaps can

help if you like. I am going to form a party in the Fourth Form to back me up, and I weally think it will be a gweat success."

"I wish you luck," said Blake cordially. "Are you going to ask Tom Merry to join? You had a lot of success with him before."

D'Arcy shook his head. He had not forgotten his rough reception at the hands of the Terrible Three.

"No; I shall leave Tom Mewwy stwictly out in the cold," he said. "I shall wefuse to let him come into the party at all, or Mannahs or Lowthah. They were extwemely wude to me, and I am goin' to give them the cold shouldah."

"Well, I hope you'll pull off the thing all right," said Blake, winking at Herries. "We'll keep right out of it, so as to give you a chance, you know. How are you going to begin?"

"Well, I was thinking of giving a big feed, and asking all the Fourth Form to it—School House and New House both," said D'Arcy—"that would be a way of getting the kids together. Then I should make a speech."

"Bravo! We'll come and hear the speech."

"I shall put it to them plainly, that we ought to unite for the good of the cause, and that Tom Mewwy and Figgins, and—excuse me—and Blake have pwoved themselves incapable of leadin', and I shall then pwopose to them to form D'Arcy & Co."

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it, Gussy, and I hope you'll win."

"Thank you vewy much, Blake. I weally think that ideah will pan out all wight."

And Arthur Augustus, full of his idea, quitted the study.

His chums laughed till they were scarlet in the face.

"How do you think it will work out, Blake?" asked Herries, as soon as he could speak.

"Oh, they'll all come to the feed," said Blake. "I'll answer for that. I won't answer for anything else, though."

The chums were very curious to learn the progress made by Arthur Augustus.

The swell of the School House made no secret about it.

At bedtime that night he informed them that practically the whole of the Fourth Form, belonging to both houses, had accepted the invitation to the feed for the following afternoon, and agreed to hear the speech afterwards.

"Is Figgins coming?" asked Blake curiously.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"No, I have not invited Figgins," he replied. "I think it is not at all pwob that Figgins would be willin' to follow my lead, and he might make a disturbance. I have left Figgins & Co. out of it. You chaps can come if you like and back me up."

"Oh, of course, we shall be there. We wouldn't miss the feed for anything, to say nothing of the giddy speech."

"I have been w'itin' it out," D'Arcy confessed. "I am gettin' it by heart, you see. I want it to be weally impressive. I say, Blake, do you think the speech should come befoah or aftah the feed, deah boy?"

"Well, if you have it before the feed, you can depend upon the chaps hearing it," said Blake eagerly. "After the feed they might bunk without stopping for it."

"They'd be very likely to," said Herries.

"That's just what occurred to my bwain. I weally think I had bettah have the speech first," Arthur Augustus agreed. "I shall not keep them more than a quatah of an hour."

Blake burst into an involuntary chuckle at the thought of the hungry

Fourth waiting a quarter of an hour for Arthur Augustus to get through a speech.

"Have the speech first, by all means," he exclaimed. "I don't see why you should limit yourself to a quarter of an hour, though. Why not make it an innings of half an hour?"

"I will think about it. Of course, I want to go into the mattah thoroughly. Yaas, perhaps upon the whole I should be able to do more justice to the subject in half an hour," D'Arcy said thoughtfully.

"What about the feed?" asked Herries. "Where is it coming off?"

"I have awwanged for an al fwesco feed."

"A—a what?"

"An al fwesco feed."

"He means al fresco," chuckled Blake. "You're going to have it in the open, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah. There won't be woom in the study for a quartah of the guests, and we can't have the Fourth Form woom for a feed. The weathah is vewy fine just now, and I weally think a picnic near the old barn will be a gweat success."

"Certainly. Have you arranged about the grub?"

"Yaas. I have given Dame Taggles three pounds and carte blanche."

"What's she going to do with a cart?" asked Herries, who was a little dense. "Is that to bring the grub in? You'll want a fearful lot to fill a cart, I should think."

D'Arcy smiled condescendingly.

"That's Fwench," he explained. "I mean, I have instwucted Dame Taggles to get evewythin' that is necessawy, and handed her three pounds to pay for them. I am sure that for that sum we shall have a weally wippin' feast. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, rather. It will be worth while listening to the speech, almost."

"That is a wude wemark, Hewwies. I should be sowwy to think that eithah you or Blake could be envious of me now that I am about to become a pwominent personage."

"Ha, ha, ha! Are you envious, Blake?"

"Fearfully," said Blake, in a solemn tone. "Bursting with it. Oh, D'Arcy, D'Arcy, why did you become a great man and make your chums envious?"

"Now weally, Blake, don't be a widiculous ass!"

"It's so painful to be put in the shade by a really great man," sobbed Blake. "Henceforth, it is Arthur Algernon Aubrey who takes the cake, and we've got to hide our diminished nappers. Herries, old man, let me weep on your manly chest."

"Rats!" said Herries. "Try Gussy's."

"Here, keep off, and don't be widiculous," exclaimed D'Arcy, as Blake seized him round the neck in an affectionate embrace and proceeded to weep on his chest in an exceedingly vociferous manner. "Blake, I insist upon your weleasin' me."

"Booh, booh-hooh!" sobbed Blake, weeping copiously, and shaking D'Arcy violently with the greatness of his grief. "I c-c-can't help it."

"I—I—I weally—weally—weally——" D'Arcy could not get the words out, for Blake was shaking him till his teeth rattled in his head like castanets. "I—I—weally—— Blake, I insist upon your weleasin' me, or I shall pwobably lose my tempah and stwike you."

The Fourth Form were gathered round, howling with laughter at the ridiculous scene, and Gussy felt that his dignity was suffering.

"Blake, I insist—— I weally shall stwike you——"

"Hallo! What's all this row?" exclaimed Knox, the prefect, putting his head in at the door. "Don't you know it's time lights were out?"

He stared at Blake in amazement.

"What's the matter with you, Blake?"

"Nothing. I'm only weeping," said Blake. "Can't a chap weep if he wants to? What's the school coming to when a fellow can't have a quiet weep?"

"Get into bed, you young monkeys!" said Knox. "I'm not going to wait long."

D'Arcy escaped at last, and sat down on his bed gasping.

"Blake, if anythin' of this sort evah happens again, I shall no longah weward you as a fwiend," he spluttered.

"Get into bed, you young monkeys! I'll be back in two minutes,"- said Knox. And he slammed the door and stamped away.

The juniors were soon in bed. Knox was the sharpest-tempered prefect in the School House, and they knew that he was not to be trifled with.

The prefect saw lights out, and the Form settled down to slumber. Not all of them, however. Mutterings could be heard proceeding from the bed of Arthur Augustus.

Blake caught detached sentences, and chuckled in the darkness.

"Wespected fwiends and Form fellahs,—Undah the circa., it is weally most pwopah to unite and elect a leadah, and I have the honah of suggestin' myself. My ideah is to form a combined party, to be known as D'Arcy & Co."

Arthur Augustus was evidently running over his speech in his mind, and knocking it into shape. He was still muttering when Blake fell asleep.

When the rising-bell clanged the next morning, Blake rubbed his eyes and sat up. The first object that met his view was Arthur Augustus, sitting up in bed with the clothes huddled round him, a pencil in his hand, and a paper on his knee.

"Hallo, Gussy!" exclaimed Blake. "What's the little game?"

The swell of the School House looked up languidly.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Blake. I am goin' ovah my speech for this afternoon, and I find that it will be a little longah than I anticipated. Do you think that the fellahs would mind if it took thwee-quartahs of an hour?"

"Oh, no, they'd enjoy it," said Blake. "Make it an hour, Gussy."

"No, I weally think that about thwee-quartahs of an hour will be enough."

In the class-room that morning Figgins & Co. were looking curious. They knew, of course, of the projected feed, to which nearly all the New House portion of the Fourth Form had agreed to come. They wanted to know more.

"I say, Blake, what's the wheeze?" whispered Figgins, while Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, was attempting to drive Latin into the heads of his hopeful pupils. "What's all this about a feed in the field near the old barn?"

"Don't ask me," said Blake. "It's Gussy's idea."

"They haven't asked us to the feed," said Figgins. "I call that mean of Gussy."

"Oh, he's not mean. He's afraid you'll make trouble."

"He's right," said Figgins. "I daresay there will be a row."

Figgins said no more, but he exchanged significant glances with the Co. When Figgins looked like that, it was certainly very possible that there would be, as he said, a "row."

During the day Arthur Augustus pursued his idea, raking in recruits to his feast from all sides until it was certain that practically the whole Form would be there.

Figgins & Co. were really the only ones left out in the cold in the Fourth

Form. Some of the Shell hinted that they would not object to come, but D'Arcy was firm on that point.

"I am forming a Co. for an important purpose," he explained. "You Shell fellahs would only make twouble. I'm sowwy to leave you out, but there it is."

And upon that point the swell of the School House showed an inflexible firmness.

He had made up his mind as to what he wanted, and he stuck to it. D'Arcy could be very obstinate when he liked. It was certain that the feed would be a success, but as to the success of the projected "D'Arcy & Co.," that was more problematic.

"Hallo, Gus!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the Terrible Three met Arthur Augustus, after morning school, coming out of the class-rooms. "I hear you are staggering humanity with an immense feed this afternoon."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Of course, you want us to come. Thanks awfully, that's very decent of you. We'll be there, won't we, chaps?"

"I weally——"

"That's all right. Don't press it; we accept."

"Rather," exclaimed Manners. "We're never backward in coming forward at a time like this."

"Never," said Monty Lowther solemnly—"never shall it be said that I refused to join any chap in a feed."

"But weally, you are mis——"

"You're a good little ass, Gussy! Come on, chaps, we want to get in a sprint before dinner."

"But weally——"

"That's all right, Gussy; we understand."

And the Terrible Three hurried off, leaving Arthur Augustus with his remonstrance unuttered, staring after them.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "I believe they knew all along that I was not goin' to ask them, the cheeky boundahs. Nevah mind, if they behave themselves. They will be upon their honah, so I weally think it will be all wight."

The Fourth Form looked forward eagerly to that al fresco entertainment.

When some of them saw in advance the preparations Dame Taggles had made for the feed, in obedience to D'Arcy's instructions, their mouths watered.

D'Arcy had a great command of filthy lucre, and it could not be said that he was mean in the expenditure of it.

There was provender in quantity sufficient to make the Fourth Form ill for a long time, and the hearts of the invited guests were happy.

When afternoon school was over, and the last lesson struggled through, the juniors gladly crowded out of the class-rooms, and there was a general exodus towards the selected spot.

It was a golden September evening, and still quite warm, and the spot, shaded round by old trees, close by the ruined barn, was a pleasant one.

The Fourth Form set towards the spot like a tide, some of the chosen ones carrying bags and baskets in which the provisions for the feast were stowed.

Arthur Augustus was first upon the spot.

The bags were opened on the grass, and the comestibles brought to light, and the quantity and quality of them delighted every heart.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Pratt of the New House. "Three cheers for the founder of the feed—Arthur Augustus Algernon Plantagenet D'Arcy."

The cheers were given with a will, and for once Arthur Augustus allowed the variation of his name to pass without remonstrance.

"And now for the feed," exclaimed Mellish.

"Good idea," said Tom Merry. "It was awfully good of you to invite us, Gussy. I see there aren't any others of the Shell here. Shows your good taste to be so fond of chaps like us."

"Rather," said Mopty Lowther. "It's good of you, Gussy."

"Jolly good," said Manners. "Hand us over those tarts, Blake."

"Pway wait a minute," said Arthur Augustus. The juniors had stretched themselves on the grass, but the swell of the School House remained standing. "Pway wait a minute, deah boys. I have a few remarks to make."

And the guests, with one eye on D'Arcy and the other on the feed, as it were, waited a minute, not without visible signs of impatience.

CHAPTER 11.

A Feast and an Interrupted Speech.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS screwed his monocle into his eye and looked round upon the assembly. He certainly had a good audience—numerous enough if not very patient.

"Go ahead!" said Blake encouragingly.

"My dear fwriends and Form-fellahs," said Arthur Augustus, "I have only a few words to say on this auspicious occasion—"

"Glad to hear it!" said Tom Merry heartily.

D'Arcy gave him a withering look.

"Tom Mewwy, I must wequest you to keep silent while I am speakin'," he said. "I must be tweated with pwopah wespect."

"I stand corrected," said Tom Merry, taking off his cap and bowing.

"My mistake. May your shadow never grow whiskers! Silence, kids! Go ahead, Algernon."

"Fellows of the Fourth Form, I have only a few words to say—"

"So you've said already," said Mellish.

"I must weally not be intewwupted."

"The question is, how long are you going on?"

"That is not a pwopah wemark to make, under the circs, Mellish."

"Oh, rats! You asked us to wait a minute just now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, then"—Mellish took out his watch—"you've had nearly a minute already. But we'll be fair. You shall have another minute, starting from now."

"That's fair!" said a dozen voices; and more watches came into view.

"A whole minute, Gussy, and we'll time you. Go on."

D'Arcy looked indignant and annoyed.

"Weally, deah boys, don't be unweasonable," he protested. "I have called you all together on a most important mattah—"

"Yes, rather! It looks like a jolly good feed!" said Blake.

"That is not what I mean."

"It's what we mean, though," said Mellish. "Buck up! You've had thirty seconds."

"Mellish, I wegard your wemark as impertinent."

"You can regard it how you like, but blessed if you're going to have more than a minute! You asked for one, and we've allowed you two, and nothing could be fairer."

"Nothing," said Walsh. "Forty seconds now."

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"Listen to me, deah boys. Don't be unweasonable, and don't be wude. I weally entweat you not to be wude. You are called together for a most

important purpose, and I shall not detain you more than thwee-quartahs of an hour while I explain——”

There was a roar at once.

“What?”

“Eh? Three-quarters of an hour!”

“Oh, he’s off his rocker!”

“My deah fwiends, pway be patient!” said D’Arcy. “In the cwisis things have come to, I am sure that you won’t think much of such minor things as a feed or anythin’ of that sort. The honah of St. Jim’s is at stake.”

“We’re getting fearfully peckish,” said Pratt.

“Awfully!” said Jones, hungrily eyeing the good things. “I say, Gussy, that minute’s up.”

Mellish snapped his watch shut.

“It’s more than up!” he exclaimed. “We’ve done the fair thing. Now for the feed!”

“My deah boys, I only want you to be patient for about thwee-quartahs of an hour——”

“Ha, ha! Likely!”

“Well, pewwaps I could explain the situation in half-an-hour if I twied.”

“Go hon! Couldn’t you cut it shorter?” jeered Mellish, handing round some of the contents of the bags to the eager juniors.

“Well, pewwaps I could. Now, wait for a quartah of an hour, and I will condense my wemarks into that space,” said Arthur Augustus. “It is weally a most important mattah.”

“Make it ten seconds, and we’ll think about it,” said Pratt.

“Now, that’s what I call a generous offer,” said Blake admiringly. “Do you think you could get through with the explanation in ten seconds, Gussy?”

“Quite imposs,” said D’Arcy. “I weally think some of you are guilty of gweat wudeness, and-are not tweatin’ me with pwopah wespsect.”

“I’ll tell you what!” exclaimed Monty Lowther. “You can go on gassing while we feed. That will kill two birds with one stone.”

“Yaas; but then I sha’n’t be feedin’ too.”

“Never mind that. On such an important occasion a fellow ought to have a mind above such things as feeds, as you said yourself.”

“Vewy well,” said Arthur Augustus, seeing that there was no help for it. “Pewwaps that is a good idea.”

“No pewwaps about it,” said Lowther. “It’s a jolly, ripping, good idea! Thanks, Mellish, I’ll have some of that cold pie. What’s yours, Tom?”

“Same,” said Tom Merry promptly. “It looks nice.”

“Pudding for me,” said Herries. “Go on, Gussy. I can’t see any reason at all why you shouldn’t talk if you want to; it won’t interrupt us.”

This was not very encouraging, and certainly the juniors were paying far more attention to the feed than to Gussy. But Arthur Augustus was full of his new idea, and he went ahead:

“Gentlemen of the Fourth Form, I have called you togethah on this important occasion to——”

“To have a jolly good feed,” said Herries. “Thanks!”

“I must insist upon not bein’ intewwupted. You are called togethah to hear me pwopound a plean for keeping up the honah of St. Jim’s against the Gwammah School outsidahs——”

“Bravo!” said Blake. “Keep it up, Gussy. Some of that ham, please, Walsh.”

“It cannot be denied,” said D’Arcy, with a furtive glance at a scribbled paper he drew surreptitiously from his pocket—“it cannot be denied, my

friends, that since the Gwammah School was opened in the neighbourhood of Wylcombe the ancient college of St. Jim's has not held up its head in the way it weally should have done——"

"These tarts are ripping! Go on, Gussy!"

"What is the cause of this extweme fallin' off?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "I ask, what is the cause? I challenge contwadietion—— N-no, that's not right." He glanced at the paper again. "I mean, I ask, what is the cause, and I weply, the failure of St. Jim's is due to two causes. Firstly——"

"I say, is this a giddy sermon?"

"Firstly," repeated D'Arcy, unheeding, "the fact that we are not united against the enemy. That is the first weason——"

"Shove over the jam-puffs, Blake."

"Here you are. I'll have some of those cream ones."

"Pie this way, please."

"Who's got a corkscrew? Look here, don't say there isn't a corkscrew. I regard this as very careless of D'Arcy to invite chaps to a feed and not provide a corkscrew."

"Knock the neck off the bottle. You howling ass, I didn't say spill the beastly stuff all over my trousers."

"Accidents will happen."

"One will happen to you if you're not more careful!"

"My dear fwiends," said D'Arcy, "I weally wish you would keep a little more quiet, and give me a little of your attention——"

"That's all right, Gussy; we're listening."

"The second weason," said Arthur Augustus, "is that the leadership of the Saints has been vewy bad indeed——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Tom Mewwy has twied his best against the Gwammah cads, and he has been feahfully licked," said D'Arcy. "You are all aware of that——"

"Here, draw it mild, Algy!" said Tom Merry, turning red.

"I am not thwovin' it in your face, Tom Mewwy; I am simply statin' a fact that is thw known to ewevy gentleman pwesent," said Arthur Augustus.

"Hear, hear!" said Blake cordially.

"Rats—rats!" said Manners and Lowther.

"You can say wats if you like," said D'Arcy, "but you know vewy well that it is the case. Tom Mewwy has been feahfully licked by the Gwammah cads, with his Tewwible Thwee, who are not vewy tewwible to the Gwammawians——"

"Quite so," said Blake. "I must say that Gussy hits the right nail there."

"Oh, let him run on," said Tom Merry. "Hand over the tarts, Mellish."

"Then to come to the othah leadahs," said Arthur Augustus victoriously. "There's Blake. I don't want to say anythin' against my fwiend Blake——"

"You'd better not!" said his friend Blake.

"But twuth compels me to state that he has been almost as big a failure as Tom Mewwy in dealin' with the Gwammah cads. I think you will all agwee with me that Blake is no good——"

"Hear, hear!" said Mellish, with all his heart.

"He's a vewy nice chap, you know," said D'Arcy; "I wathah like him, and I must say the best I can for my fwiend. But as a leadah he is no good, and in dealin' with the Gwammah cads he has pwoved himself an ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the delighted audience. "He doesn't want to say anything against you, Blake, only you're an ass!"

"I don't want to spoil the harmony of this feed," said Blake, "but, under the circumstances, I feel called upon to wipe up the ground with Gussy!"

And he rose to his feet.

"My deah fwiend," said D'Arcy, "I twust you will not forget that you are my guest, and that any wude conduct would be extwemely bad form——"

"Right-ho!" shouted a dozen voices. "Sit down, Blake."

"Oh, very well!" said Blake resignedly; and he sat down. "Run on, Gussy. But for mercy's sake ring off as soon as you can!"

"I will wing off," said D'Arcy, "when I have finished. I think I have made it clear, deah boys, that Tom Mewwy and Blake are simply no good as leadahs——"

"Quite clear," said Mellish. "I say, isn't there any more lemonade?"

"Now to come to Figgins," resumed D'Arcy. "He is equally useless as a leadah. I must say that he is neithah useful nor ornamental. He—— Ooch!"

"Hallo! What's the matter now?" exclaimed Blake, looking up.

D'Arcy had broken off suddenly, clapping his hand to his ear.

"Somethin' stung me," said the swell of St. Jim's. "It must have been a wasp, I think. It was a feahful sting."

"Why don't you say it was a bat?" asked Blake. "Imagination, dear boy. Get on with that speech. The feed will be over soon, and when the grub's gone, I fancy your audience will be gone, too."

"That is wathah a reflection on the Form," said D'Arcy. "I weally cannot cwedit it. But to wesume. As I was sayin', I—— Gerrooch!"

He clapped his hand to his nose.

"What are you at now?"

"It was anothah wasp, I think. That is vewy stwange for wasps to be so thick at this time of the year," said D'Arcy. "But to go on. Figgins has pwoved himself as big an ass as eithah Tom Mewwy or Blake, and what we want is a—— Yah! Gerrooch!" He smacked both hands on his face. "Someone is playin' a twick on me!" he exclaimed indignantly. "That was not a wasp. It was a pea fwom a pea-shootah."

"Ha, ha, ha! Look for the shootist, and scrag him!"

"I will sewag him feahfully if he does it again!" said D'Arcy. "I weally considah it most wude. Now, it bein' pwoved that Figgins, and Blake, and Tom Mewwy are no good as leadahs, it remains for the Fourth Form to find a new one. My ideah is this—for the New House and the School House to unite——"

"Your idea!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "I like that!"

"Don't intewwupt," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "My ideah is a union of the whole Fourth Form of St. Jim's, undah a new leadah. And as the leadah ought to be a fellah with plenty of tact and judgment and firmness of chawactah, I pwopose myself for the post."

"Bravo! That's right, Gussy."

"Hear, hear!"

D'Arcy beamed around upon his Form-fellows.

"I am glad that the ideah wecommends itself to you, my deah fwiends!" he exclaimed. "The party is to be known as D'Arcy & Co., and I an to be the leadah; and I think I can pwomise you that we shall make the Gwammah cads sit up."

"What I like about Gussy," said Tom Merry, "is his modesty. He has such a poor opinion of himself—never puts himself forward."

"I should be extwemely sowwy to put myself forward, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "It is only the necessity of the case that has bwrought me forward. I think I ought to— Ooch!"

He smacked his hand to his nose. Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, ooch if you want to," he said. "Nobody's stopping you. How do you ooch?"

"Somebody has shot anothat pea at me and stwuck me on the nose!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I will thwash him feahfully when I find him! I call upon the bwutal person to come forward!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a loud laugh proceeding from the ruined barn close at hand. Blake gave a shout.

"Figgins & Co., in the barn," he exclaimed. "Go and thwash them, Gussy."

Figgins & Co. it was, without a doubt. Three well-known faces showed themselves for a moment at a rift in the old wall, and three peashooters were levelled. D'Arcy gave a yelp as the stinging peas smote his aristocratic countenance.

"Ha, ha, ha!" grinned Figgins. "Hear us smile! How do you like 'em done, Gussy?"

D'Arcy made a rush for the barn.

He was so indignant that his unfinished speech was forgotten.

He disappeared into the ruined structure in search of Figgins & Co., and the next moment there was a sound of scuffling and gasping.

Then Gussy came staggering out of the barn. He had not been there a couple of minutes, but in that short time he had undergone a transformation.

His jacket had been jerked off, and was wound about his head and tied there, completely blindfolding him. His braces had been tied round his wrists, which were secured behind him. He staggered blindly towards the feasters.

Figgins & Co. issued from the barn arm in arm, and walked away, laughing.

D'Arcy came staggering among the picnickers. He fell over Mellish's legs, and came down with a bump upon that individual.

"Hem, get off!" roared Mellish. "Do you take me for a beastly feather-bed."

D'Arcy rolled on the grass.

"Pway welease me," he exclaimed. "I have been tweated diswespectfully. Blake, Hewwies, where are you? Why don't you welease me?"

"Thought you had cast us off?" grinned Blake. "You can't want help from such an ass as I am, surely? You're a great leader now, and we aren't any good."

"Just so," said Tom Merry. "I'd help you, too, Gussy, only I've proved myself such an ass, you know, that I really think I'm no good."

"I entweat you to welease me, deah boys," said D'Arcy, stumbling about.

"Will you promise not to finish the speech if we let you loose?" asked Mellish.

"Oh, I say, that is an extwemely unweasonable wequest."

"Then you can stick it out."

"Upon second thoughts, Mellish, I will agwee."

"You won't make any more speeches? Honour bright?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mellish released him. D'Arcy blinked round at the grinning juniors. The feasters were mostly in convulsions. Whether D'Arcy was much good as a

leader or not, there was no doubt that he furnished his form-fellows with plenty of merriment.

"I have been tweeked with gweat diswespect," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall thwash Figgins when I meet him again. This meetin' is now ovah, deah boys, but I shall call anothah meetin' to-mowwow, and I hope you will all come."

"Will there be another feed?" asked Pratt.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we'll all come. Won't we, chaps?"

"Rather! You can depend upon us, Gussy. We'll stick to you. We'll all join the Co."

"Thank you vewy much," said D'Arcy beamingly. "I thought that an appeal to the bwains and intelligence of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's would not be made in vain."

"Or an appeal to their tummies," murmured Blake.

The feast was ending now. The feasters began to disperse. Most of them had promised to turn up at the next meeting.

"I weally think D'Arcy & Co. will be a great success," said Arthur Augustus, as they walked back to St. Jim's. "The fellahs seem vewy enthusiastic, don't you think so, Blake?"

"Rather!" said Blake heartily. "But it will cost you a fearful lot at the tuck-shop to keep their enthusiasm up to the mark. That's all."

CHAPTER 12. D'Arcy & Co.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was not the kind of fellow to be discouraged. When he got an idea into his head, he could be very obstinate about it, as his chums had more than once learned.

The idea was now fixed in his brain that he was the destined leader who was to revive the ancient glories of St. Jim's, and put the Grammar School in its place. The first meeting that had been called, with a view to forming "D'Arcy & Co.," had been a success from the feasters' point of view, but not very encouraging to the swell of the School House. But Arthur Augustus was determined to take a rosy view of everything.

"Is that second meeting coming off, Gussy?" Tom Merry inquired, meeting the swell of St. Jim's the next morning before school.

"Yaas, wathah! And wemembah, Tom Mewwy, that all Shell boundahs are barred," said Arthur Augustus. "You poked fun at me yestahday at my meetin'."

"Did I? That was too bad!"

"Yaas, it was feahfully bad form, you know; and weally you fellahs are out of place in a meetin' of the Fourth Form," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "If you cannot be sewious on a sewious occasion, you can keep off the gwass."

"Is there going to be a feed this time?" asked Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you'll get the meeting all right, but when the feeds fall off, your meetings will fall off too," Tom Merry remarked. "I know your giddy Form. They'll go anywhere where there's anything to eat. That's about their mark."

"I weally think you are unjust to them, Tom Mewwy. I hope to inspire the Fourth Form with a gweat spiwit of patwiotism, and get them to back me up against the Gwammah cads," said D'Arcy. "Then I shall show you chaps how the enemy ought to be weally dealt with."

"I shall be glad to see it," grinned Tom Merry.

D'Arcy was evidently satisfied with himself and his plans. He was thinking about the coming campaign in the class-room that morning, and Mr. Lathom had to take him to task more than once.

"Construe, D'Arcy!" exclaimed the Form master sharply, fixing his eyes on Arthur Augustus. "What are you thinking about?"

D'Arcy gave a start. His wits were wool-gathering, and he had quite forgotten Cæsar and the Gallic War, which happened to be the matter in hand.

"You will commence, D'Arcy," said Mr. Lathom grimly.

"Yaas, wathah. I mean, yes, sir."

"The class is waiting for you, D'Arcy."

"Gallia est omnes divisa in partes tres," said D'Arcy hurriedly. "St. Jim's is divided into three parties——"

"Eh?"

"I mean all Gaul is divided into three parts," said D'Arcy, growing more confused at his slip, "quarum incolunt Belgæ, aliam Aquitani tertiam, qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli, appellantur—three partics, Study No. 6, the Tewwible Thwee, and Figgins & Co."

"What!" thundered Mr. Lathom, petrified.

"I mean—that is to say—I mean——"

"You are evidently thinking of something else, D'Arcy."

"I am weally sowwy, sir, but——"

"But you will write out a hundred lines from the first book of Cæsar, to impress upon your mind the fact that there is a time for everything, and that the present is the time for study," said Mr. Lathom.

"With pleasure, sir," said D'Arcy, with his usual politeness.

Mr. Lathom elevated his eyebrows.

"What did you say, D'Arcy?"

"I said, with pleasure, sir."

"Very good. As the imposition will give you pleasure, you may take two hundred lines instead of one hundred," said the Form master grimly.

"Yes, sir," said the unfortunate Arthur Augustus.

And the lesson proceeded.

D'Arcy's spirits were damped for a time, but not for long. When the class was dismissed, he was as cheerful as ever.

"You look very jolly for a chap who's got two hundred lines to write," Blake remarked, as they left the class-room.

"Yaas; I have been thinkin', old chap. Mr. Lathom is so awfully short-sighted that he nevah knows one chap's hand fwom anothah, and so it will be vewy easy for you and Hewwies to do my lines. You can do one hundred each, deah boys."

"Well, of all the nerve!"

"You see, I'm feahfully busy just now," said Arthur Augustus. "I'll do as much for you anothah time. It takes up all my time to get this mattah going, you know. I am determined to bwing all the Fourth Form into line against those Gwammah cads, and put them in their place, and I haven't a minute to spare for anythin' else."

"Oh, we'll do the lines," said Blake, winking at Herries. "We ought to do something to help. But, I say, these meetings will run you into a lot of tin. Have you come into a fortune lately, or have you been robbing a bank?"

"Oh, that's all wight," said D'Arcy. "I wrote to my govannah yesterday for a couple of fivahs for a most important purpose, and I had them by the post this mornin'. I am weally vewy flush just now, and, of course, I couldn't gwudge spendin' money in so gweat a cause."

"By Jove, I wish I had your governor!" said Blake. "I suppose you

couldn't give him away with a pound of tea, could you? Never mind, I'll come to the feed. I'll do that much for you, Gussy. You can always depend upon us to stand by you at such a time."

"Rather!" said Herries, with much heartiness. "We'll never desert you, Gussy."

"Not while the fivers last, anyway," Blake remarked. "And I expect it's the same with the rest of the Form."

Blake was quite right there.

There wasn't the slightest difficulty in congregating the whole of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's to a feed. The difficulty, in fact, was to prevent the Shell and the Third from coming.

After school that day the picnic was repeated. This time D'Arcy got through most of his speech, to which his guests listened more or less. When the good things were gone, however, the guests started going too, which was rather annoying to D'Arcy, who had not finished his speech, and had not enrolled a single member in the projected Co.

"My deah fwiends," said the swell of the School House; "don't be in a huwwy. I have a book here to take down the names of all who wish to join me in this patwiotic entahpwise against the Gwammah cads."

He produced a notebook and pencil.

"Now, all those who are willin' to be wecwuits come forward and give in their names," he exclaimed, wetting the point of the pencil. "Don't all speak at once."

There did not seem to be any danger of that.

In fact, nobody spoke at all. Some of the fellows grinned, and many of them put their hands in their pockets, and strolled away.

"My deah chaps," exclaimed D'Arcy, "you cannot have forgotten the important purpose for which this meetin' was called. How many of you are goin' to join the Co., and back me up against the Gwammah School?"

"None, I expect," said Mellish, with a grin. "You see, you're not exactly the kind of leader we should be likely to follow. But we want to do the fair thing, and so I'll tell you what. We'll come to these feeds as long as you like to stand them."

"That's fair," exclaimed Pratt. "Nothing like playing the game! How does that suit you, Gus?"

Gus sniffed.

"It doesn't suit me at all," he exclaimed. "My object is to form a party to bwing the Gwammah cads down a peg or two, not simply to feed a lot of hungry juniahs. I considah that you are extwemely unpatwiotic."

"Go hon! You pain me!" said Mellish.

"Gentlemen of the Fourth Form," said Archur Augustus, looking round upon his fast-diminishing audience, "I appeal to you not to let this gweat opportunity pass. It may nevah wecur. I have some gweat plans in my head for takin' down the Gwammah cads. I may mention that after ewevy expedition against the enemy, there will be a feast."

The juniors pricked up their ears at that.

"Now you're talking," exclaimed Mellish. "That's honest?"

"Honah bwight," said D'Arcy. "There will be a feast to celebwtate the victory—"

"But supposing there isn't any victory?"

"There's sure to be, as I shall be your leadah."

"That's all very well. But suppose there isn't? Will the feed come off in any case?"

"Yaas, certainly; if you all back me up."

"Gussy, old fellow, you're talking sense at last," said Mellish. "I don't mind putting my name down now."

D'Arcy wrote down the name of the first recruit in his book.

"Vewy good, Mellish. Now you othahs."

"Put my name down," grinned Pratt. "I'm on."

And after that there was no lack of recruits.

Arthur Augustus, with a beaming face, wrote down the names of twenty Fourth Formers; and there was no doubt that he might have had a larger number of recruits if the others had not already gone.

"Aren't you comin' in, Blake?" he said persuasively. "You and Hewwies?"

Blake shook his head.

"Not much, Gussy. You can make a giddy ass of yourself without my help."

"That is a wude wemark. I weally think——"

"No, you don't! You can't! Come along, Herries!"

The meeting broke up. Arthur Augustus, satisfied with his success so far, looked as if he were walking on air. "D'Arcy & Co." was a realised ambition at last. True, he had a suspicion that his followers were inspired rather by a love of good eating than a desire for battle with the foe. But so long as he led them to victory, and crowned himself with glory, what did that matter?

Arthur Augustus was busy now thinking out the plan of campaign. It was necessary for him to deal some terrible blow at the prestige of the Grammarians, to make D'Arcy & Co. a success. The first victory would cause all the waverers to rally round him, and then Blake and Herries and Figgins & Co. would have no choice but to follow his lead, and even the Terrible Three would have to come into line.

There were big things in Gussy's head about this time. He thought over the plans and schemes for taking down the Grammarians night and day. Blake and Herries waited curiously to see what the outcome would be. Tom Merry and Figgins were also keenly interested. Gussy was in such deadly earnest that something was sure to happen.

Blake did not question Gussy as to his plans. The swell of the School House had shown a strong desire to become secretive. He frequently muttered things aloud in the study, however, which partially enlightened his chums.

"Yaas, wathah!" he exclaimed suddenly one evening, as the chums sat doing their preparation in the study; so suddenly that Blake gave a jump and dropped half a dozen blots.

"You ass!" howled Blake. "Look at that!"

D'Arcy screwed in his eyeglass and looked at it.

"Yaas, I see it," he remarked. "How extwemely careless of you, Blake."

"It was your fault! You made me jump! What's the matter with you, fathead?"

"I've got an idea."

"Well, the next time you get one, get it quietly," growled Blake.

"Hallo! Where are you off to now, image?"

"I am goin' to call togethah the Co. to lead them on the warpath," said Arthur Augustus, with great dignity.

"Ha, ha! Don't forget to feed 'em first."

D'Arcy deigned no reply. He marched from the study, leaving Blake and Herries chuckling. He first sought out Mellish, his earliest recruit.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Mellish, in a very friendly way. "Got any toffee?"

"Yaas, wathah! Take some."

"Thanks; this is good. When is the next feed coming off? You see, if D'Arcy & Co. is going to be a success, there ought to be another feed soon, to—to keep us together, you know."

"Yaas; I've been thinkin' about that. I want you all to come out this evenin', Mellish. It's time to stwike a blow at the enemy."

Mellish did not look very enthusiastic.

"Oh, is it?" he remarked carelessly.

"Yaas, wathah! I have a feahfully good plan in my head. I have been scoutin', you know, the last few days, to learn about the movements of the enemy, don't you know, deah boy."

"Have you, really? I must be off now. Excuse me——"

"I say, don't wun away like that, Mellish. I haven't told you my plan yet."

"Well, I'm in rather a hurry. What is it?"

"I have discovahed that Monk and Lane and Carboy, the leadahs of those howwid Gwammah boundahs, are in the habit of takin' a spwint ewevy evenin'——"

"Taking a what?" demanded Mellish, in astonishment.

"A spwint."

"I've never heard of it before. What is it? Something to eat?"

"My deah fellah, if you don't know what a spwint is——"

"Well, I don't. I've heard of fellows taking a cigarette every evening, but as for a spwint—is it a new brand of smokes?"

"Don't be an ass! What I mean is, they take a wun ewevy evenin' to keep themselves in form for the footah," explained D'Arcy.

"Oh, I see, you mean a sprint," exclaimed Mellish. "I understand now. Well, supposing they do take a sprint every evening, what's that got to do with us?"

"Why, you see, we can lay a twap for them, and catch them in it," explained D'Arcy. "You know how they sent Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah home the othah day, tied up and blacked all ovah their faces. It was a scweamin' joke."

"Ha, ha! That's true enough."

"Well, if we catch those thwee, we can send them home in the same state," said D'Arcy. "It would be a first-wate wheeze on the Gwammarians, don't you think so?"

"It would be tit for tat, certainly," said Mellish thoughtfully. "When are you thinking of carrying out the idea?"

"Nothin' like stwikin' while the iron's hot," said Mellish. "I'm awfully sorry I've got an engagement for this evening, or I'd be with you like a shot."

"But I say, you know," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in dismay, "you can't have an engagement, you know, when it's time to go on the warpath. You belong to the Co., and you will have to back me up, you know, deah boy."

"I wish I could, Gussy; I really and sincerely wish I could; but on the present occasion it's quite impossible," said Mellish.

"Vewy well, then, I shall cwoss off your name, and you will not be invited to the feed to celebrat the victory," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Eh? What's that, Gussy?"

"Only the members of the Co. who follow me will come to the feed," said Arthur Augustus. "It will be a wippin' one, too."

"That alters the case—I mean, I admire you immensely, Gussy, and I know the thing is bound to be a huge success if you lead," said Mellish. "I was really only joking. I shall come, of course, and back you up like—like anything."

"That's wight. It will be a scweamin' wheeze," said D'Arcy, beaming. "I'm goin' to take a big bottle of wed ink, and make those Gwammah bounders as wed as Wed Indians, you know."

"Ha, ha! But mind, the feed comes off whether we're successful or not."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then let's hunt up the rest of the Co., and get to business," said Mellish briskly. Pratt of the New House was the next recruit they encountered, in the course of hunting up the Co. and getting to business.

Pratt listened to D'Arcy's beautiful scheme with rather suspicious looks.

"You're quite sure about the bounders taking that sprint every evening?" he asked.

"Yaas, I've watched them myself, and they always go the same way, the same time."

"But suppose a lot more of the Grammarians took it into their heads to take a sprint, too, the same way, and the same time also?" demanded Pratt.

"Where should we come in, then?"

"I suppose you are not afraid of a fight?" said Arthur Augustus, sniffing disdainfully. "Besides, I shall be there to inspire you with courage by my presence."

Pratt chuckled.

"You say the feed's to come off, in any case, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I'm on. Let's get the others, and start."

The rest of the Co. showed a similar unwillingness to go on the warpath under the generalship of Arthur Augustus, but the prospect of the feast of victory brought most of them round. D'Arcy found himself with a dozen followers, the greediest boys in the Fourth Form, but certainly not the best fighters. But if everything went well, there were enough of them to eat the three Grammarians. But would everything go well? That was the question.

Arthur Augustus had not forgotten the bottle of red ink. It was a big bottle, and it contained enough ink to make the Grammarians as highly coloured as could be wished, if only they could be comfortably caught first. The news of the foray had leaked out, of course, and most of the Fourth Form and the Shell knew what was coming. The Terrible Three and Figgins & Co. came to the gates to see the raiders off, with Blake and Herries.

"Good luck, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Mind you don't let the bounders get away, and don't fall into a trap yourself."

"I am not likely to fall into a twap," said D'Arcy. "I am not a leadah like you, Tom Mewwy, and I shall not be twapped so easily."

Tom Merry laughed good-humouredly.

"It would be rotten, you know, if you came home inked with your own red ink," he remarked. "We'll wait here and watch for you, Gussy. Take care of yourself."

"I shall be extremely careful. This will be the first weal success St. Jim's has had against the Gwammah boundahs," said Arthur Augustus. "Come on, deah boys! It will be getting dusk soon. March!"

D'Arcy & Co. marched.

The swell of St. Jim's led the way, his eyeglass screwed into his eye, and the dozen or so juniors followed, not looking particularly proud of themselves.

The grins and giggles that followed them from the crowd of boys at the gateway perhaps made them feel uncomfortable. Perhaps their confidence in their leader was not complete.

Certain it is that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy himself was the only one in the party who felt quite satisfied as to the result of the expedition.

CHAPTER 13.
D'Arcy Resigns.

DUSK was deepening in Rylcombe Lane when Arthur Augustus halted in the spot he had already selected for the ambushade. It was certainly a favourable spot, the lane being narrow here, and bordered by a hedge pierced by gaps.

D'Arcy pointed to the hedge.

"That's where we take covah," he said. "Get out of sight, deah boys." He looked at his watch. "It's almost time for the Gwammah boundahs to come by, unless they have changed the time this evenin'."

"That would be all right," growled Pratt. "Nice to stick here about an hour, and those bounders not to turn up after all."

"Don't gwumble, deah boy. You can't expect to cawwy on a war without any twouble, you know. Think of the glory of being the first to take the Gwammah cads down a peg."

Pratt grunted. Apparently the prospect of the glory did not comfort him.

The juniors took cover in the gaps of the hedge, and waited. Arthur Augustus, with his monocle adjusted, kept a keen watch upon the road.

"Hallo!" murmured Mellish, about ten minutes later. "I can hear something!"

"Yaas, wathah! I can hear it, too!"

The juniors pricked up their ears.

From the distance of the dusky lane came the sound of light, pattering footsteps—the steady pat-pat-patter of running feet.

D'Arcy's eye gleamed through his monocle.

"Weady, kids? They're coming!"

"We're all ready! My hat! I shouldn't wonder if the thing was a success after all!" muttered Mellish. "Even an ass like Gussy stumbles upon a good thing sometimes."

"That is not a wespectful way to speak to your leadah, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I must insist upon you wetractin' those words."

"Don't be an ass, Gussy—I mean, a bigger ass than you can help—"

"You will wetwact those expressions, Mellish, or I shall have no alternative but to thwash you!" said Arthur Augustus, getting up.

"Ass! If you make a row the Grammarians will hear it, and bolt."

"That would be wotten, I know, aftah all the twouble we have taken; but undah no circs can I allow a followah of mine to tweek me with diswespect. Are you goin' to withdwaw those obnoxious expressions, Mellish, or—"

Mellish was not a fighting-man. He thought, too, of the feed.

"I withdwaw them," he murmured. "Dry up now, Gussy!"

"I am satisfied, deah boy. Look out!"

The running feet were close to the ambush now.

Three athletic, youthful figures loomed up in the dusk of the lane.

They were the Grammarian chums. Football was as keen at the Grammar School as at St. Jim's, and the three leaders of the Grammarians were always careful to keep themselves fit. Monk, Lane, and Carboy, as Arthur Augustus had discovered, were in the habit of taking this same sprint every evening, and the ambush was really a good idea—if it worked out all right!

The three running figures came nearly abreast of the hidden Saints.

D'Arcy sprang into the lane.

"Collah them!" he shouted.

The three Grammarians were taken by surprise for the moment.

A dozen juniors came rushing upon them from the dusk.

Arthur Augustus valiantly seized Monk, and was lying on his back in the

dust the next moment. Lane and Carboy laid Mellish and Pratt over him. Then the three began to hit out right and left, but the odds were too great, and the fight would certainly have gone against them had not the quick-witted Monk thought of a stratagem.

"This way!" he roared. "Come on! Buck up, Grammar School!"

"Come on, chaps!" yelled Carboy, quick to take the cue from his leader. "Come on, before they get away!"

"My hat!" gasped Mellish. "I knew how it would be! There's a swarm of the beasts! I'm off!"

And he was on his feet, and off like a shot, in the twinkling of an eye. He did not go alone.

Pratt followed, and then two or three more, and then the rest. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the only one who firmly stood his ground. The swell of St. Jim's was as much taken in by Monk's ruse as the others, but he would never retreat. With all his faults, the Beau Brummel of the School House had heaps of pluck.

"Wescue!" he shouted. "Wescue, deah boys! Buck up! I weally entweat you to buck up!"

But his followers only "bucked up" in the running line, and he was left alone to deal with the foe.

He did his best.

He had been knocked down twice, but he was up again, and fighting frantically. There was not much science in his fighting, but there was plenty of go, and the Grammarians had their hands full to secure him.

But with three pairs of strong hands gripping him he was made a prisoner at last.

"My hat!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "I know this merchant! This is Gussy Algernon Aubrey Plantagenet! Didn't know he was such a great fighting-man before."

"Welease me!" exclaimed D'Arcy, struggling in the grasp of his enemies.

"Wescue, deah boys! I entweat you to back me up!"

"Ha, ha, ha! They're gone, Gussy!"

"Keep still, image," said Carboy; "you'll get hurt! I say, what's this bulging out his pocket? My hat! It's a bottle of ink—red ink! Do you usually carry a big bottle of red ink about in your pocket, you young lunatic?"

"I suppose that was intended for us?" said Monk. "Tell the truth now, young shaver. What were you going to do with that bottle of ink?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a young shavah," said D'Arcy. "My followahs have wun away, and I am a pwisonah of war, but I wefuse to be insulted."

"Ha, ha! What were you going to do with this red ink?"

"I wefuse to weply."

"We'll jolly soon make you. Hold his mouth open, Carboy, and I'll pour it down the inside of his neck," said Frank Monk, drawing the cork of the bottle.

He had no intention of carrying out his threat, but the threat itself was enough for Arthur Augustus.

"Pway do not be so extwemely beastly," he exclaimed. "On second thoughts I will weply. I was goin' to wedden your faces with that wed ink, just for a scweamin' joke."

"Thought as much," said Frank Monk. "Going to serve us as we served your precious Terrible Three, I suppose? It would have been a screaming joke, no doubt, but not quite so screaming as the one I am going to work off on you."

He signed to Carboy and Lane, who jerked the swell of St. Jim's over on his back in the road, and pinned him down there.

Frank proceeded to drench his aristocratic countenance in red ink.

"What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," he exclaimed, "You will look very pretty like this, Gus."

"Oh, you howwid wuff person! I—I—greerroo!"

"Ha, ha! That's what you intended for us!"

"You are spoilin' my collah! You are stainin' my waistcoat!"

"Never mind, I hear you've got more. Don't wriggle, or you'll get some down the back of your neck. There, I told you so!"

"Goo—oo—gerrooh!"

"I think that will about do," said Frank, when the bottle was empty, and D'Arcy's face was the colour of crimson. "You can get up now, Gussy."

He tossed the bottle over the hedge, and Gussy staggered to his feet. He was bristling with wrath and indignation, and streaming with ink. That red ink idea had seemed to him about the best possible thing in jokes. But that was when he had thought of it as being bestowed upon the Grammar lads. Now that his own face was streaming with it, it struck him that there was a side to the matter which was not comical.

"You howwid wuff bwutes!" he exclaimed. "I shall give you a feahful thwashin' for this howwid outwage!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go home, Gussy. You want cleaning. Go home!"

"I shall thwash you feahfully! Come on, you howwid bwutes!"

Gussy cared nothing for the odds. He rushed at Frank Monk in the most ferocious way. Frank was probably not afraid of the fighting powers of the swell of St. Jim's, but he gave the streaming ink a wide berth. He dodged the attack.

"Sorry I can't stop now, Gussy," he exclaimed. "I'll lick you another night. Come on, kids, or we shall be late for calling-over."

And the three Grammarians dashed off, laughing so much that they could hardly keep going. D'Arcy made a movement to follow, but thought better of it. In an extremely disconsolate state of mind, he turned his steps towards St. Jim's.

He was disappointed and indignant. The thought of Tom Merry, Figgins, Blake, and the rest, waiting to see him come in, was not gratifying. If he had returned victorious it would have been different. But in his present state—

But there was no help for it.

He strode on to St. Jim's, and came in sight of the gate. The crowd of boys there was bigger than when he had left. In the dusk he saw Mellish and Pratt explaining to interested listeners how it was they had to run.

"There were close on fifty of them," said Mellish. "Nearly the whole beastly Grammar School, you know, and we fell fairly into the trap. We fought hard, but it was no good against so many. We had no chance from the first, had we, Pratt?"

"Not a bit," said Pratt. "I knocked down four of them, but then I had to cut it. It was no good trying to stick it out, with the enemy four or five to one."

"What a feahful whoppah!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly, coming up in time to hear the last veracious statement. "There were only thwee of them."

"Hallo! Here's the great red chief!" howled Tom Merry, "Look at his complexion!"

A deafening peal of laughter greeted Arthur Augustus.

His aspect was indeed ludicrous.

His face was crimson, and so was his collar, and his beautiful waistcoat

was stained with red ink, obliterating most of the original colours, which were numerous enough.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy tried to make himself heard, but it was no use. The juniors laughed till the tears streamed down their faces. Even his own followers, who had so basely deserted him in the hands of the enemy, laughed as loudly as any.

The absurdity of his appearance, and the fact that he had been drenched with the very ink he had taken with him for the Gramsuarrians' benefit, struck the Saints as extremely funny.

D'Arcy glowered at them indignantly.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Figgins, wiping his eyes. "You'll be the death of me some day, Gussy, I know you will."

Blake went off into a fresh roar.

"Oh, Gussy, Gussy! If you only knew how lovely you looked!"

"Spare his blushes!" grinned Tom Merry. "I can't quite tell the blushes from the red ink. Which is which, Adolphus?"

"Oh, don't wot!" growled Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not see what there is to laugh at."

"Then you'd better get a looking-glass."

"I have been tweated wottenly. There were only thwee of the Gwammah cads, and if some of these funks had stood by me it would have gone off all wight."

"But they went off instead," grinned Blake.

"Who are you calling funks?" demanded Mellish. "There were swarms of the rotters, and I call on the others to bear me out."

"Heaps of 'em," asseverated Pratt. "Why, that fellow Monk was calling to 'em to come on, to get hold of us before we could escape."

"It was only a wuse."

"A wuse! What does he mean by a wuse?"

"A ruse," chuckled Tom Merry. "I suppose Monk pretended there were a lot more Grammarians behind him, to scare you away—and he succeeded."

"Oh, that's all rot! We shouldn't be taken in like that, of course."

"Besides," said Blake gravely, "Pratt knocked down four of them. We have his own word for it. How could he knock down four out of three? It can't be done arithmetically."

"That settles it," said Figgins, shaking his head.

"It was a feahful whoppah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Pwatt nevah knocked down anybody. He was knocked down himself, and he jumped up and bolted. He never knew how many there were—he never stopped to see."

"He's dreaming," said Pratt uneasily. "They were in dozens, if not scores. I don't want to exaggerate, but I should say there were fifty at the very least."

"Yes, I can imagine Monk taking fifty chaps with him on a sprint in the evening," said Tom Merry solemnly. "It stands to reason he would."

"Oh, if you're going to rot, Tom Merry——"

"You are a beastly set of beastly funks, that's what you are!" exclaimed D'Arcy, looking round upon his unfortunate Co. "I have twied to lead you to a glowious victory, and you haven't the couwage of mice. I am done with you. I wash my hands of you."

"You'd better wash your face next," suggested Mellish.

"I have done my best for the honah of the coll.," said Arthur Augustus, unheeding the interruption. "But you chaps are not worth leadin'. You've got no pluck!"

"Here, draw it mild."

"I wefuse to draw it mild. I am not afwaid to tell you the fwuth. You are a lot of funks, and you can find a new leadah. I wesign."

"Oh, don't do that, Gussy!" implored Mellish. "Don't be so cruel to us. What shall we do without our Gussy! Think again!"

"I wesign," repeated D'Arcy firmly. "You can do without me. You ought to have backed me up. I have come back a perfectly widiculous sight!"

"You're right there, by George!"

"Because you funky wotters didn't back me up! I'm done with you. I wefuse to lead you any more. I wesign. As for the Gwammah cads, let them wip."

And Arthur Augustus marched off in a state of great indignation.

Wherever he appeared he was greeted with shouts of laughter, until he made his escape into a bath-room, and succeeded in getting some of the red ink cleaned off.

"The great red chief hath spoken," exclaimed Tom Merry solemnly. "D'Arcy & Co. is dissolved, and you heroes won't get any more free feeds—and serve you right!"

And that unlucky expedition proved, in truth, the end of "D'Arcy & Co." Arthur Augustus had had enough of generalship for a time.

CHAPTER 14. A Troublesome Co.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS had resigned, and the "Co." had come to a sudden end, but if D'Arcy was satisfied, the members of the Co. were not. It is true that they were not at all anxious for any more expeditions against the Grammar School; but they did not forget the feast of victory which had been promised them by their great leader. It had apparently escaped D'Arcy's memory, but there were plenty of anticipative juniors to remind him.

D'Arcy was not seen again that day. The task of cleaning off the red ink was a long and painful one, and when it was finished he went to bed. But when the rising-bell awoke the Fourth Formers the next morning, he was immediately tackled upon the important subject by Mellish and Walsh.

"Going to be a fine day," Mellish remarked, as he sat up in bed and looked towards the window. "Just the day for a feed in the open air."

"Ripping," said Walsh. "Same old spot, I suppose, Gussy?"

D'Arcy had one leg out of bed. He stopped and looked across at Walsh.

"Did you speak to me, deah boy?"

"Yes, rather! I said it would be the same old spot, I suppose, behind the barn."

"I weally do not quite compwehend the dwift of your wemarks, Walsh. Is anythin' goin' to happen behind the barn?"

"Yes, I think so, eelse there will be a row," said Walsh. "I think that feed is going to happen, Gussy."

"What feed, my deah fellahs?"

"The feed you promised us if we followed you against the Grammar cads!" howled Walsh, beginning to get excited. "Don't make out that you've forgotten."

"Come, Gussy, none of your rotting," said Mellish. "You know perfectly well what we mean. You undertook to stand a feed, and you know it."

"Yaas, wathah! If you followed me against the Gwammah cads," said D'Arcy warmly. "But you didn't. I followed you, as a mattah of fact, aftah you had wun away."

"That makes no difference."

"Yaas, it does, wathah—a gweat difference. I'm not a mean chap, and I'd stand anybody a feed, but I'm not goin' to feed a lot of funks that wan away and left me in the hands of the enemy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "It's no good talkin'; I'm feahfully obstinate when I've made up my mind, and I've made it up on that point."

"You'll find that we can be fearfully obstinate, too," said Mellish. "It was agreed that the feed was to come off whether we were victorious or not."

"Of course it was!" exclaimed Walsh. "We shouldn't have followed a leader like Gussy on any other terms."

Gussy turned red with indignation.

"If you had backed me up we should have given those Gwammah cads a feahful thwashin'," he said. "I'm not goin' to feed a lot of funks. I despise you feahfully!"

"Do you? You're going to stand that feed."

D'Arcy waved his hand loftily.

"Don't wowwy me, deah boy; I've made up my mind."

"Well, we'll see," said Mellish—"we'll see what the Co. say about it. If you try to crawl out of that feed, Gussy, you're in for a high old time."

"I am not crawlin' out of it," said D'Arcy. "I simply wefuse to stand a feed to a set of beastly funks, that's all."

And D'Arcy proceeded to dress himself, with his usual care, and dismissed the matter from his lofty mind.

But the Co. did not dismiss it; they talked it over while they dressed, and indignant glances were cast towards their great leader. They went down to breakfast, and the matter was dropped for a time. But when the School House met the New House fellows in the general class-room it was revived again.

Pratt leaned over his desk to speak to the swell of St. Jim's, taking advantage of the extreme short-sightedness of Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth.

"I say, Gussy, is the feed to be in the usual place?"

"There's not going to be any feed, deah boy."

"What! You haven't forgotten, surely?"

"I haven't forgotten how you wan away, and left me to be tweated with gweat diswespect by the Grammah cads," said D'Arcy. "I'm not goin' to feed a lot of funks. I wegard you with extweme contempt."

"You—you image! You tailor's dummy! If you try to get out of that feed—"

"What did you address me as, Pwatt?"

"A beastly silly tailor's dummy," said Pratt. "A——"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"Pwatt, you will eithah withdwaw those wude and extwemely diswespectful expressions, or I shall have no alternative but to thwash you!"

Pratt looked alarmed. Mr. Lathom had his back turned, but he might look round any moment.

"You ass! Sit down! You're in the class-room now. Do you want to get us both caned?" he growled under his breath. "Sit down!"

"I wefuse to sit down unless you withdwaw those wude wemarks. Othahwise, I shall thwash you," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway make up your mind."

"You ass—you idiotic chump! Leggo!"

D'Arcy reached across the desk and seized the New House junior.

"Vewy well, I will——"

"Leggo!" gasped Pratt, in mortal terror lest Mr. Lathom should turn his head. "Oh, you're off your beastly rocker! I apologise."

D'Arcy released him.

"I am quite satisfied," he said beamingly. "That is all wight, Pwatt." The master of the Fourth Form glanced round.

"Who is that talking?"

Arthur Augustus sat down rather hurriedly.

"Who was that talking?" exclaimed the Form-master again.

"If you please, sir, it was I," said D'Arcy. "I was explainin' somethin' to Pwatt, sir."

"Then take fifty lines, D'Arcy."

"Certainly, deah boy—I mean sir!"

The subject of the feed was not mentioned again till the class was dismissed. But when the swell of St. Jim's left the class-room he found himself followed out into the quad by a good-sized crowd.

The whole of his erstwhile followers were there, School House and New House juniors alike, and they were all looking excited.

D'Arcy walked on haughtily, apparently not noticing them, till they made a rush and surrounded him under one of the old elms.

"Pway do not incommode me," said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I have not the slightest desire to converse with you persons. You have disgwaced the coll. and yourselves by showin' the white feathah to the Gwammah cads, and I have decided to dwop your acquaintance. Pway welieve me of your pwesence."

"We'll relieve you!" exclaimed the incensed Pratt. "You nearly got me into a fearful row in the class-room."

"That is all wight. Your apology was accepted. But I do not desire to talk to you. I wegard you and all the west with great contempt."

"Hark to the howling rotter!" exclaimed Mellish. "He wants a lesson, and wants it bad! Now about that feed, Gussy."

"I have already stated my decision in wegard to that."

"You mean that it isn't coming off?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then we'll put you through it!" exclaimed Mellish. "Collar him!"

"Pway stand back," said D'Arcy. "I object to violence on pwinciple. I should be sowwy to have to thwash you, Mellish—"

"Collar the beast!"

D'Arcy backed against the tree and put his fists up. But he was seized by a dozen pairs of hands in a moment, and the indignant juniors jammed him against the tree with a slam that took his breath away.

"Now then," said Mellish determinedly, "you're going to give your solemn word to stand that feed, or else we'll put you under the pump!"

"I wefuse to give my word."

"Bring him along, kids!"

There was no difficulty about that. In the hands of so many, Arthur Augustus was quite powerless. His struggles were not of the slightest avail. He was hurried away from the quadrangle to the pump in the yard before the stable, and a dozen hands held him under the gaping mouth of the pump.

Mellish seized the handle.

"Now then, Gussy, what about that feed?"

"I wefuse to make terms with a set of beastly funks!"

"Obstinate rotter! Hold him, you chaps, while I give him a shower!"

D'Arcy struggled frantically, but in vain. Mellish was working the pump with fierce energy. A sudden gush of water came from the spout, and it

drenched Arthur Augustus and also the sleeves of the juniors who were holding him.

"Here, look out, fathead!" yelled Pratt. "You've soaked my sleeves!"

"Sorry," said Mellish, working away. "You mustn't mind a little wet. Have you had enough, Adolphus Algeron?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you give in?"

"No! I distinctly wefuse to give in!"

"Then you shall have some more, you obstinate mule!"

Gush—gush! came the water from the pump. D'Arcy was soaked to the skin, but as obstinate as ever. The other juniors came in for their share of the water, too, D'Arcy's frantic struggles dragging them under the spout.

"Help!" yelled D'Arcy. "Wescue!"

He had caught sight of a familiar face looking into the yard. Tom Merry came in, followed by Manners and Lowther. After them came Blake and Herries.

"Hallo!" Blake exclaimed. "I wondered what all this awful row was about. Are you chaps washing your captain? How curious?"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "D'Arcy & Co. have done some funny things, but I never expected to see the Co. washing him under a pump. Is that one of the duties of the Co., Gussy?"

"Help!" spluttered D'Arcy. "Wescue!"

"He doesn't seem to be enjoying it," Manners remarked. "The Co. must have mutinied. Poor old Gussy! Why don't you come down heavy on the giddy mutineers, Gussy?"

"Cower them with your glance," suggested Monty Lowther. "Quell them with the power of your eye, Gussy. I've heard of that being done."

"Help! Wescue!"

A fresh gush of water from the pump cut off D'Arcy's supplications, and he choked and gasped and spluttered. Blake made a step forward.

"Here, I say, Mellish, that will do, you know! That's enough."

"Mind your own business!" said Mellish. "He hasn't had enough yet by half. I'll show him if we're going to be done out of a feed! Hold him tight, kids!"

"Right-ho!" said Pratt. "Soak the beast!"

Mellish worked away at the pump-handle. Blake ran towards him.

"I've told you he's had enough, Mellish. Stop it!"

"Sha'n't!"

"Won't you, by George!"

Blake's grip was on the back of Mellish's collar in a twinkling. With his knuckles grinding into Mellish's neck, he dragged the energetic pumper away.

"Leggo! Lemme alone!"

"Not just now," said Blake. "Stand by me, you chaps."

Herries was at his side in a moment, and he collared Pratt. The Terrible Three, who thought that Gussy had had quite enough, ran to his aid at once, and the Co. scattered like chaff before them. They had not been able to face the Grammarians, so they were not of much use against the stoutest fighting-men of St. Jim's.

The Co. scattered, with the exception of Mellish and Pratt, who would have been glad enough to scatter, too, had not Herries and Blake held them in an iron grip.

"Hold the bwutes!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "They have tweeked me in a most outrageous mannah, and I weally think they ought to be dwenched!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake heartily. "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Take the pump-handle, Gussy."

D'Arcy worked away at the pump energetically.

The water gushed out in a heavy stream.

"Your turn first, Mellish."

"Let me go!" yelled Mellish, squirming. "Let me go, you—you—Gorrooh!"

The gush of the water over his head cut short his further remarks.

He was dragged away again, as limp as a wet rag, and Pratt was jerked under the spout, and a gush of water drenched him from head to foot.

"Had enough?" asked Blake.

"Yes—yes! Let me go, hang you!"

"Have you had enough, too, Pratt?"

"Yes, you beast!"

"Do you think they have had enough, D'Arcy?"

"Certainly not!" said Arthur Augustus promptly. "I weally do not think they have had anythin' like enough, deah boy!"

"Well, say when!" said Blake, shoving Mellish under the pump again.

"Hold on!" yelled Mellish. "Gussy, I apologise!"

"Ah, that atahs the case!" beamed D'Arcy. Soaked to the skin as he was, he had not lost his Chesterfieldian politeness. "If the boundah apologises, Blake, I do not insist upon his furthah punishment."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "If you really consider he's had enough——"

"Yaas, wathah, if he apologises!"

"I'm sorry," gurgled Mellish—"I'm awfully sorry!"

"Are you awfully, feahfully sowwy?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Leggo!"

Blake released the unfortunate Mellish. D'Arcy turned his eye upon Pratt, screwing his monocle into it the better to survey him.

"Are you goin' to apologise, too, P'watt?"

"No, hang you, I'm not! I'll see you further first!"

"Pway dwag him undah the spout, Hewwies!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries. And Pratt was quickly under the pump again, and D'Arcy worked away at the handle.

"Hold on!" yelled Pratt, as the water began to drip. "I've changed my mind!" D'Arcy ceased to pump. "I apologise!" said Pratt. "I'm fearfully sorry! Let me go, you beast!"

"Let the boundah go, Hewwies. I accept his apology."

Pratt and Mellish crawled out of the yard, looking like half-drowned rats. Taggles, the school-porter, came out of the stable.

"Wot are you himps doing with that there pump? Get hout!"

Tom Merry shook his finger at the irate Taggles.

"Now, Taggles, don't be rude," he admonished. "Don't lose your ickle temper. It's bad for a man of your age, especially a man who drinks as much as you do."

"Get hout!" roared Taggles. "Get hout of this yard!"

"Oh, wats!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "We wefuse to huwwy. You have no wight to speak in that mannah, my good fellah. It is wuff and wude."

"I'll report yer—I'll——"

"I say, chaps," exclaimed Tom Merry, looking round, "let's shove old Taggles under the pump! A wash would do him all the good in the world."

"Good whoeze!" exclaimed the juniors all together; and they made a rush at Taggles. They did not mean to duck him, as a matter of fact, but Taggles thought they did, and he dodged back into the stables in double-quick time. He was up the ladder into the loft in next to no time.

"Come down, Taggles!" shouted Tom Merry ferociously.

"You young himps! You brutes! I'll report yer!"

"Look here," said Blake, "we're not coming up there to fetch you. If you want that wash you'll have to come down."

"You—you himp!"

The juniors, grinning, quitted the spot, and Taggles breathed easily again. Arthur Augustus made a bee-line for the School House to get a change of clothes. The other juniors followed at a slower pace.

"We sha'n't hear any more of D'Arcy & Co., I expect," Tom Merry remarked. "We shall have to come back to my original idea in the end."

"What's that?" asked Blake politely. "I never knew you had any original ideas."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I mean, Tom Merry & Co. is the only possible solution of the difficulty."

To which Blake and Herries responded with one voice:

"Rats!"

And Arthur Augustus, turning his head for a moment as he hurried on, added:

"Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 15.

A Peculiar Picnic.

THE Co. did not venture to tackle Arthur Augustus again. With Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three against them, none of them felt inclined to make the venture.

Arthur Augustus had the best of it, but, as a matter of fact, he finished by conceding the disputed point. After school that day he met Pratt in the quadrangle, and Pratt gave him a scowl worthy of a Sicilian brigand.

"Yah!" was his intelligent and polite greeting.

"My deah chap," said D'Arcy, "pway don't bear malice! It's awfully bad form, you know. I have accepted your apology, and though I despise you considewably, I don't want to be bad fwriends with you, weally. Let bygones be beastly bygones, you know."

"Yah! I might have known a School House cad wouldn't stand a feed!" said Pratt, with a sniff of disdain. "You're a mean beast!"

"Eh?" said Arthur Augustus, startled. "If you apply such oppwobwious terms to me, Pwatt, I shall be compelled to thwash you!"

"Mean beast!" said Pratt, preparing to dodge. "Mean beast!"

"You are quite undah a wong impwession," said D'Arcy, in a tone of explanation. "I did not stand the feed simply as a punishment to all you beastly funks for not standin' by me as you ought to have done when we tackled the Gwammawians."

"Tell that to the Marines!" said Pratt.

"Do you mean to imply, Pwatt, that you considah me a mean person?" asked Arthur Augustus, with great dignity.

"Yes, I do—rather!"

"Indeed! You are vewy wude and unjust," said D'Arcy; "and to pwove it to you, I will stand the feed, aftah all."

"Honour?" asked Pratt.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! Then I'll tell the chaps."

D'Arcy jumped into popularity again at a single bound. The Co., though dissolved, rallied round him once more—or, at least, round the feed. They offered to help him in the purchase of the provisions—assisting with advice, and nothing, of course, more valuable than that—and it was agreed that

the feed should take the form of a picnic in the old castle on the ensuing half-holiday.

"We'll get the grub at Mother Murphy's in the village," said Mellish, "and we'll all be with you, Gussy, and help you carry it. If we carry some each, we're bound to get enough."

"That's vewy good of you, Mellish."

"Don't mention it, dear boy! I like to be obliging."

Arthur Augustus asked Blake and Herries to come to the picnic, but they were otherwise engaged for the afternoon. So were the Terrible Three.

The Co. were swollen in numbers when the time came. Many of them had assumed the privilege of bringing a friend. Over thirty juniors prepared to accompany Arthur Augustus to Rylcombe for the purchase of the provisions. If they all carried something, as Mellish had suggested, there was certain to be enough to go round.

But D'Arcy, in the generosity of his heart, did not mind. In fact, there was safety in numbers, for the party were certain to meet some Grammarians in the village. And they did, as a matter of fact. Monk, Lane, and Carboy were in Mother Murphy's little shop when the horde of Saints began to pour in.

The Grammarians looked ready for war when Gussy entered, but they assumed a peaceable and absolutely dovelike expression when they saw the number of his followers.

"Hallo!" said Mellish, bold enough with so many at his back. "Here's the Grammar cads, and they haven't got a gang with them this time."

"We hadn't a gang last time," said Monk derisively. "You were scared at nothing. Gussy was the only one of you that showed an ounce of pluck. No malice on either side, D'Arcy—eh, old boy? We really have a great respect for you."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "You acted in a vewy wuff and wude mannah. But, weally, you are such feahful boundahs, that it isn't fair to blame you, you know."

Monk breathed hard for a moment. Lane tapped him on the arm. It was no time for a row, with a crowd of the Saints against them. The Grammar School trio moved towards the door.

They would probably not have escaped unhandled if the Saints had not been fully occupied with the thought of the picnic. They left the shop, but they did not go far. They remained near the door, to discover if they could overhear what was in the wind. The careless talk of the St. Jim's juniors soon enlightened them.

Monk's eyes began to gleam.

"A picnic at the ruined castle, kids!" he whispered. "Do you hear?"

Lane and Carboy nodded eagerly. The same thought had flashed into three minds at once.

"This is where we come in!" said Carboy emphatically.

"What ho!" remarked Lane. "That's just what I was thinking. We could get a crowd of the chaps together by the time they get to the castle. D'Arcy seems to be making a fearful lot of purchases, and taking his time about it."

"Come on!" said Frank Monk concisely. "We're on this!"

And the three Grammarians melted away.

Meanwhile D'Arcy was busy in the tuck-shop, delighting the heart of Mother Murphy and the heart of his companions with the extent of his purchases. He was "blueing a fivah" he had lately received from his "governah," and spending it like a prince.

When the picnickers at last left the tuck-shop most of them had something to carry, and they took the path to the ruined castle in high spirits.

It was a warm afternoon for the time of the year, and the ruined castle was a very pleasant spot under the autumn sun. The picnickers disposed themselves among the masses of broken masonry, which served as chairs and tables. The good things were spread out in enticing array.

D'Arcy beamed upon his company. He was in high good-humour, in spite of the delinquencies of his refractory Co. Good-humour reigned on all sides, for it was in truth a "spread" such as was seldom seen by the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Fall to, kids!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally think there is enough to go wound. Pway fall to and do your best, deah boys!"

"You can trust us," said Mellish. "Here goes!"

"Rather!" agreed Pratt. "You're a good little ass, Gussy. This is ripping! Who says pie?"

A good many said pie. The feast commenced gaily enough. Engrossed by their important occupation, the juniors did not notice a head that rose above a fragment of ancient wall, and remained there regarding them for some moments.

Then it ducked down out of sight.

"They're at it!" Frank Monk whispered to his companions. "Feeding away like a lot of pigs. They haven't the faintest idea that Nemesis is on the track."

"There's a surprise in store for those merchants," murmured Carboy. "We are two-score; and they're not much class as fighters, anyway, from our experience of them."

"That's so. No need to lose time," Lane remarked. "We don't want to have half the loot gone by the time we capture it."

"Certainly not! Are you all ready?"

"Yes," came a whisper from the crowd of Grammarians who had willingly followed the three to the raid.

"Then come on!"

Frank Monk sprang into the ruined gateway of the old castle and rushed upon the picnickers. His followers were after him in a twinkling.

D'Arcy jumped up in alarm.

"Dangah!" he shouted. "Buck up, Saints! Dangah!"

The Saints were on their feet in a moment; but they had no time to prepare for the charge. The rush of the Grammarians simply bowled them over and scattered them right and left.

"Sock it to 'em!" shouted Frank Monk.

The picnickers were outnumbered. Few of them stood their ground. In a couple of minutes they were all running hard in various directions, and the Grammarians were left in almost undisputed possession of the picnic.

Not quite undisputed, for the blood of all the D'Arcys was boiling in the veins of Arthur Augustus, and he stood his ground and fought like a Trojan.

Monk and Carboy gripped him and sat him down upon a chunk of masonry and held him there, and the victorious Grammarians gathered round them.

"Licked!" said Carboy, with great satisfaction. "Licked hollow!"

"My hat! What a ripping feed!" ejaculated Lane.

"What are you going to do with that thing, Monk?" asked another.

"Why don't you let it run after the rest?"

"He won't run," said Monk, grinning.

"Yaas, wathah not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, struggling in the grip of his captors. "I wufuse to wun—I distinctly wufuse to wun!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Duck him in the pool yonder!"

"Shove him down into the vaults!"

"Pour some of this red-currant wine down his neck!"

"Plaster him with jam-tarts!"

These and other hilarious suggestions were made for the disposal of Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's struggled hard, but in vain.

"Now, look here, Gussy," said Frank Monk, "we'll make it pax, if you like, and you shall be invited to the picnic. How is that for high?"

"Why, you wuffian, it's my picnic!"

"No, it isn't; it's ours now," grinned Monk—"ours by right of conquest. We've raided this picnic, and it belongs to us."

"But, weally, I pwotest!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally——"

"My dear chap, all's fair in war. But I mean what I say. Those chaps have run off and left you in the lurch. We'll invite you to our picnic."

"I wefuse—I weally uttahly wefuse——"

"Very well. Stamp on his eyeglass, Lane, and you, Carboy, pour that bottle of wine over his waistcoat!"

"Stop!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, in an agony of terror. "Stop! I agwee. Pax!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hold on, kids! You make it pax, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Right-ho! Now be a good fellow and join us in the feed," said Monk.

D'Arcy rose and smoothed his ruffled clothes. He was never annoyed for long, and he was so relieved at the escape of his monocle from destruction that he was soon beaming in the most good-tempered way in the world upon the Grammarians.

"Vewy well," he said. "I certainly do not mind feedin' with you, deah boys, pwovided that you tweat me with pwopah wespect."

Monk winked at his chums.

"We'll do that," he said. "Anybody discovered tweating you with diswespect will be instantly given the giddy kybosh."

"Upon my head be it," said Lane solemnly.

"Vewy good. I will join you with gweat pleasuah, deah boys!"

"But, I say," said Frank Monk, "that's only a joke about the picnic—the stuff's yours, and we're not going to touch it, you know."

D'Arcy screwed his glass into his eye and beamed upon them.

"Yaas, you are," he said. "It was a fair capchah. Besides, I invite you all to the feed. There's no weason why we shouldn't be good fwiencls as well as deadly enemies, is there? You have invited me, and one good turn deserves anothah, so I invite you. Sit down, deah boys, and make yourselves quite comfy."

And so the swell of St. Jim's and the crowd of Grammarians sat down to the picnic, and had a really jolly time together. D'Arcy, upon reflection, was rather amused to think that the feed had been missed by his faint-hearted Co., after all, and he got on very well with his rivals of the Grammar School.

They toasted the founder of the feast in currant wine, and D'Arcy was called upon for a speech. That was the line in which D'Arcy came out strong, and he was upon his feet in a moment.

"It is with gweat pleasuah that I acknowledge this toast," he said. "This is weally the pwoudest moment of my life, suwrounded by fwiencls and enemies—I mean, by fwiencls and well-wishers. Of course, you Gwammah fellahs are a lot of feahful boundahs——"

"Order! Order!"

"Take that back."

"Do you want to be boiled in oil?"

"Apologise!"

"Yaas, wathah! I apologise and withdwaw the wemark," said D'Arcy.

"It was simply a slip of the tongue. Pway pardon me, I did not mean to say what I weally thought——"

"Order!"

"I mean, I do not wish to twead on the corns of any gentleman pwsent," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway do not let us bwreak up the harmony of this meetin'. I am pwoud to know you all, and I hope this will not be the last occasion upon which we shall meet wound this festive board. Gentlemen, I drink to the Gwammah School and the cads—I mean, the kids who belong to it."

"Bravo!"

The feed was a great success. When all was over, the Grammarians escorted Arthur Augustus as far as Rylcombe Lane in a body, and there, before they parted with him, they all insisted upon shaking hands with him.

And as everyone gave him a really hearty grip, with malice aforethought, D'Arcy's arm was feeling a little tired when he reached the last of forty handshakes.

"Good-bye, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, rather relieved when the ordeal was over. "Be good!"

And he turned his face to St. Jim's, and the Grammarians went their way. Blake and Herries met D'Arcy in the lane.

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Blake. "I've just heard from Mellish that the Grammarians had captured you, Aubrey, and we were coming to look for you."

"He doesn't look hurt much," Herries remarked.

"I have had a wippin' time," said D'Arcy. "The Gwammah cads are not so bad, and I've had a weally nice picnic with them. We made it pax for the afternoon. Blake, old chap, I'm not goin' to do any more of this leadin' business. The Co. do not tweat me with sufficient respect. I have wesigned, and I mean it, and that's the last feed I am goin' to stand."

And D'Arcy kept his word.

CHAPTER 16. In Peril of His Life.

"MERRY!"

Tom Merry was strolling down towards the river when he heard his name called. He looked round. Sefton, a Sixth Former of the New House, was coming towards him. He had an oar under his arm.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry coolly.

"I want you, Merry. Come along!"

Tom eyed him cautiously, but did not make any movement to "come along" as requested.

Sefton was not a popular character. He was the bully of the New House. Once he had been the close chum of James Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, and the two had been on terms of deadly enmity with the juniors. Monteith had latterly turned over a new leaf, and was becoming—as Tom Merry put it—quite decent. But Sefton was a cad "from start to finish," to borrow another expression from Tom. He was a bully in his own house, and he frequently extended his favours to the School House youngsters. The more timid of them submitted quietly to the hectoring of a Sixth Former, but Tom Merry had never been accused of being timid by his worst enemy. He was about the last fellow in the world to be bullied, especially by a senior belonging to the rival house.

Sefton had old causes of dislike for Tom Merry. There was a gleam in his

eyes now as he looked at the junior which boded no good to Tom if he showed a disinclination to obey.

"Are you coming, Merry?"

"That depends," said Tom cheerfully. "If you want me to come down to the tuck-shop and have a feed at your expense, Sefty, I'm your man."

The Sixth Former scowled.

"You had better not work off any of your little jokes on me, Merry. I'm not Kildare, you know, and I'm not inclined to stand any of your cheek."

"No, I know you're not Kildare," assented Tom. "You wouldn't pass for an apology for him in the dark, Sefton."

The New House senior scowled savagely.

"I want you, Merry. Are you coming?"

"What do you want me for?"

"I'm going up the river. I want you to steer. Come along at once, or I'll give you a hiding you'll remember for a long time to come."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed rebelliously.

A senior of one house had no right to fag the juniors of the other house, that was an unwritten but well-understood law at St. Jim's.

But Tom was an obliging fellow, and he would have done what was wanted if he had been asked civilly, without standing upon his rights.

But the bullying tone of Sefton was more than enough to put his back up.

"I'm waiting for you, Merry," said Sefton, in an ominous tone.

"You can go on waiting," retorted Tom Merry. "You know perfectly well that you have no right to fag a School House boy."

"Are you going to start teaching a Sixth Former what he may and may not do?" asked Sefton, with a dangerous look in his eyes.

"Well, you could do with a lesson," said Tom, keeping a wary eye upon him as he came closer. "You are a fearful cad, Sefton, and you have been asking for a hiding for a long time. If I were in the Sixth Form I would give you the one you want."

"You young hound!"

Sefton dropped the oar and made a rush for the junior. Tom Merry promptly dodged, and the angry senior chased him round the boathouse.

Tom was the best sprinter in the Shell, and though a junior, of course, would under ordinary circumstances have had no chance against a senior, Sefton was in such poor condition that he was, in fact, at a disadvantage.

Tom vanished round the boathouse, the savage senior panting after him in vain, and when Sefton stopped to puff for breath, Tom Merry was at a considerable distance from the spot. Sefton stood breathing hard. Secret smoking in his study had sapped his wind away, and a short run left him gasping like a grampus.

"The—the little beast!" he snarled. "I'll make him smart for that yet."

It was clearly of no use to pursue Tom Merry further. Sefton turned savagely back towards the river, looking out for some other fag.

From his natural bullying instincts, he would have preferred a School House boy, and as it happened one was standing on the plank landing-stage, with his hands in his pockets, looking out to the river. He had an eyeglass screwed into his eye, and his waistcoat was of all the hues of a particularly gorgeous rainbow, and so Sefton did not need telling that it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He strode towards the junior.

"Here, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus looked round. He screwed his monocle tighter into his eye and regarded Sefton with an inquiring stare.

"Yaas, deah boy. What can I do for you?"

"You can come and steer my boat for me," said Sefton grimly. "That's the one. Jump in!"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I am extwemely sowwy, Sefton, but it is quite imposs."

"What do you mean? Jump in?"

"I am not attired in suitable garb for the wivah," explained D'Arcy. "If you will wait about half an hour, deah boy, I will wun up to the School House and change my clothes. I should be vewy willin' to oblige you, but I could not weally go on the wivah in these clothes."

"Really?" said Sefton. "That's a pity, because you've got to; you see."

"Not at all," explained D'Arcy patiently. "You see, you have no wight to fag School House juniahs, and it wests with me entirely whethah I go or not."

"Does it?" grinned Sefton. "This looks like it, doesn't it?"

And he gripped D'Arcy by the collar and swung him into the boat. The boat naturally rocked violently, and D'Arcy measured his length in it, hurting himself considerably by the hard contact with the thwarts.

He scrambled up in a state of great indignation.

"You howwid boundah!" he shouted. "How dare you tweat me with such extweme wudeness? You have no wight to fag a School House chap, and undah the cires. I quite wefuse to steer for you. Undahstand that, my deah fellah; I uttahly wefuse."

Sefton followed him into the boat.

"Sit down and take the lines," he said roughly.

"I wefuse! I distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

The New House senior shoved him into the seat with a violence that gave D'Arcy a big ache where he hit the wood, and then pushed off.

Arthur Augustus jumped up like a jack-in-the-box, but the water was widening between the boat and the landing-place, and landing again was impossible.

Sefton gave him an ill-natured grin.

"Do as you're told, my lad, or it will be the worse for you."

"I uttahly wefuse to do as I am told," said D'Arcy. "You have tweated me with diswespect, and I wegard you with uttah contempt."

"Take the lines, you young fool! Do you hear?"

"Yaas, I hear, but I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. You have no wight to fag a School House chap, and I wefuse to be fagged. Yaas, wathah!"

Sefton drew in one of his oars, and gave D'Arcy a crack across the shoulder with it. The swell of St. Jim's uttered a terrific yell.

"You howwid beast! You have hurt me."

"How singular!" grinned Sefton. "Strange to say, I intended to hurt you, and I'll hurt you again if you don't take the lines and steer."

"I wegard you as an absolute wuffian!"

"Are you going to do as I tell you?" shouted Sefton savagely. The oar rose into the air again, and D'Arcy, whose shoulder was aching badly, made haste to take the lines.

"That's better," grinned Sefton. "Keep steady, you young ass! I've got this oar ready to give you further instructions. You'll find that I can keep you in order, young shaver."

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a young shavah. You are a feahful beast, and I warn you that if I steer your beastly boat I shall wun you into the beastly bank."

"You'd better," said Sefton, "if you want your neck broken. Not otherwise."

"I'm not the kind of fellah to be bullied by a beastly boundah like you,"

said D'Arcy. "I despise you feahfully. You are simply no class. I demand to be put ashore at once."

"Ha, ha! You can go on demanding. Blessed if you're not as funny as a Punch-and-Judy show. I'll always have you out with me, I think. It's a cheap entertainment; funny without being vulgar," grinned Sefton.

Arthur Augustus gave him a withering look.

It was evident that his contempt was absolutely without effect upon the hardened Sefton. The New House senior was pulling up the river now, and the boat was gliding along through what was known as the Deep Reach. Here the Ryll was of unknown depth, and the spot was regarded as a dangerous one for a swimmer, as it certainly was for any swimmer who had not plenty of strength and nerve.

D'Arcy thought nothing of that. His dignity had been outraged, and he was determined that he would not steer the bully's boat, come what might. D'Arcy could be fearfully obstinate when he chose. He chose now.

He was looking out for a chance to capsize the boat, and the thought of danger had not crossed his mind. He was conscious only of his offended dignity. And the chance came. The boat was passing the little isle where the Saints often picnicked, and Arthur Augustus, with a gleam in his eye, steered right for the bank. Sefton did not notice what he was doing till the boat went with a crash against the trunk of a fallen tree that lay half in the water, and capsized instantly.

The senior gave a shout of rage, which was choked by the water as it swamped over him. He made a desperate clutch at the tree-trunk, and caught a ragged branch, and dragged himself out of the water.

Then he glared round vengefully for D'Arcy.

But the swell of the School House was not ashore with him. The boat was floating away bottom upwards, and Sefton expected to see D'Arcy clinging to it—but he was not!

The bully turned pale, as the thought crossed his mind that D'Arcy might be under the deep waters.

"D'Arcy!" he shouted. "D'Arcy!"

There was a faint cry from the river.

"Help!"

Sefton gave a gasp. Away down on the river was a dark spot, and he knew that it was the head of Arthur Augustus. A hand was flung up into the air, and then both hand and head disappeared beneath the rushing waters.

"My Heaven!" stammered Sefton, white as death. "He will be drowned! I—I cannot save him!"

The bully had not the pluck to make the attempt.

The water was deep, the current swift and strong. D'Arcy, being in the stern of the capsized boat, had not been able to get a hold upon anything, and the swift current had given him no time. He had been swept away in a moment, and he was already a score of yards from the island when Sefton saw him.

The bully watched in agony for the head of the hapless lad.

It came up again. D'Arcy could swim, though he was not a good swimmer. But in a deep river and a swift current he was lost. His struggles were feeble; the current was sweeping him away to his doom.

"Help!"

Fainter sounded the cry of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Buck up! I am coming!"

It was a shout from the bank of the river.

The voice of Tom Merry rang over the wide waters, bringing new hope to the heart of the sinking lad.

CHAPTER 17.

Tom Merry to the Rescue.

TOM MERRY stood on the high, grassy bank, his eyes fixed upon the lad as he was swept down by the rushing water.

Tom's face was pale, his lips set.

Well he knew the peril of a leap into that deep, rushing stream, but not for an instant did he hesitate.

His hands went up and struck together over his head, and he dived from the high bank into the stream, and in a moment was being whirled away by the current.

But as he was carried away, he struck out strongly, and by a slanting line reached the middle of the river, so as to be in the path of Arthur Augustus.

There, as he struggled against the rush of the water, D'Arcy was swept down to him, and he clutched at the half-unconscious boy as he came by.

His grasp closed upon D'Arcy's collar, and remained fixed there.

Then both went whirling away, but D'Arcy's head was above the water now, held there by Tom Merry's firm grip upon the back of his collar.

With his free hand Tom struck out, striving to reach the bank again.

But that was not so easy.

Twice he came close to the land, and dragged at the roots there, and was swept away before he could get a hold.

D'Arcy was not quite unconscious, and would have gone down like a stone had Tom Merry released him. But that he had no thought of doing. If either sank, both would go—it was sink or swim together.

Down the stream they went, towards the boathouse of St. Jim's. Would there be help there? Tom Merry despairingly wondered.

For he knew now that he could not get D'Arcy ashore unaided.

Himself he could have saved, but both—never! Was there help to be had? He was fatigued with the struggle, dragged down by D'Arcy's weight, sick and dizzy with the rush and swirl of the waters. How long could he hold out?

He sent forth a shout for help as he came near the plank landing-stage—a faint and feeble shout, but all he had the strength to utter.

To his joy, it was replied to.

"Hallo! What's up? Good heavens!"

It was Blake's voice from the planks.

In a twinkling Blake had flung off his cap and jacket, and was in the water, swimming out towards the two with powerful strokes.

He was almost as good a swimmer as Tom Merry, and as Tom came abreast of the plank-stage, Blake reached him, and laid hold of Augustus.

Herries had stared after Blake for a moment in amazement, and then he sprang into a boat that lay rocking by the edge of the planks, and pushed off with frantic haste.

The boat went whirling out into the stream, and Herries grasped the oars and pulled as if for his life. Blake's timely assistance relieved Tom Merry of D'Arcy's weight, and none too soon.

"Get to the boat!" panted Blake.

The hero of the Shell obeyed. With his last ounce of strength he struck out for the boat, and reached it, and took a grip on the gunwale. There he hung, too far spent to be able to drag himself over the side.

Blake was keeping D'Arcy up, and striving to escape being borne away by the current. The water was not so swift here, and he succeeded, and Herries reached out with a boat-hook and inserted it in the back of his collar.

"Gr-r-r-r!" came in a muffled tone from Blake.

"It's all right!" shouted Herries. "I've got you!"

"I know you have, fathhead!"

Herries drew him nearer and gripped him by the shoulder. Blake hung on to the boat, and Herries dragged the insensible D'Arcy in.

"You've punctured me in the back of the neck, you image!" growled Blake. "Where's Tom Merry? Help him in. I can manage."

Herries laid Arthur Augustus on the thwarts, and then seized Tom Merry, and dragged him over the gunwale. Then he helped Blake in.

Tom Merry lay and gasped like a newly-landed fish.

"My hat! That was a narrow shave, chaps."

"It was," said Blake. "Did you go in for Gussy?"

"Yes, some distance up the river. I saw him in the water. Blessed if I know how he got there. He was right out in the stream."

"Give us an oar, Herries."

Herries and Blake pulled the boat shoreward. There was quite a crowd on the landing-stage now—the adventure had been seen by scores of eyes. A dozen willing hands bore D'Arcy from the boat as it was brought in and made fast.

"Up to the school with him!" said Blake. "Off you go!"

And the lads started at a run for the school, bearing the insensible lad in their arms. Tom Merry sank upon a bench, and breathed hard.

"Better come up and get your things changed," said Blake. "Lean on my arm. I say, Merry, you've saved old Gussy's life."

"I think you saved both of us," said Tom.

"Possibly. But I ran no risk, that's nothing. I sha'n't forget this, old kid; and Gussy won't, either. Come up to the school."

Tom Merry leaned heavily upon Blake's arm as he went up to St. Jim's. Half-way to the gates Monty Lowther and Manners met them, and they marched Tom off at once to the Shell dormitory to change his clothes. Blake was soon changed himself, and he went to inquire after Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's had been placed in the school hospital, and put to bed immediately, and Dr. Short had been telephoned for. The boy had already recovered consciousness, however, and Blake was allowed to speak to him.

Arthur Augustus was looking rather white and worn as Blake came to his bedside. But he nodded to his chum cheerfully enough.

"I say, old chap, I think I've weally had a beastly nawwow escape," he remarked. "I should have been drowned if Tom Mewwy hadn't dwagged me out."

"I expect you would," said Blake. "I'm jolly glad things have ended so well, Gussy, old dear. By Jove! it was a narrow squeak for you, and for Tom Merry, too."

"Did he wun vewy much wisk?"

"He came pretty near getting drowned himself," said Blake. "He's got the pluck of ten, that chap has; and you owe him your life, Gussy."

"I shall express my gwatitude with gweat pleasuah," said D'Arcy. "He is weally a decent fellah, you know; and it was vewy kind of him to jump into the wivah to save me without stoppin' to think of his clothes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He must have spoiled his clothes," said D'Arcy. "It is not ewevybody who would do as much. I don't know whethah I could make such a sacwifice. I hope I should, of course, but I weally hope I shall never be put to such a tewwible test."

"Let's hope not, Gussy. But I say, how on earth did you get into the river? Were you trying to learn swimming with your clothes on?"

"Nonsense, Blake! You speak as if you considahed me a feahful ass!"

"Well, I do—I mean, how did you get into the water, then?"

"I was with Sefton in the boat, and it wan into the island and capsized."

"Well, he must have been a clumsy owl," exclaimed Blake, in disgust.

"It was my fault," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "You see, deah boy, he had made me fag for him when I did not desire to do so, and I am not a chap to be bullied by any wuffian like that, so I wan the boat into the beastly bank on purpose."

"Well, you're a cough-drop," said Blake. "You might both have been drowned."

"Yaas, wathah! But I didn't think of that."

"But I say, where's Sefton?" exclaimed Blake, in sudden alarm. "Is he—"

"He is on the island. I saw him waving his arms as I was cawwied away by the beastly cuwwent," said Arthur Augustus.

Blake drew a breath of relief.

"That's good. So he's on the island. But where's the boat?"

"I think it floated away on the beastly wivah."

"Ha, ha, ha! Then Sefton's wrecked on an uninhabited island, like a giddy Robinson Crusoe," exclaimed Blake. "If the boat's gone he won't be able to get off. He's not the chap to try to swim the river in the Deep Reach. He'll stick there till he's fetched off."

"Yaas, wathah! You had bettah tell some of the fellahs."

"Catch me! Sefton is a beastly bully, and he has endangered your life. He can wait on the island for a bit, as a punishment," said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! Serve him wight," agreed D'Arcy. "He's a beastly boundah. Of course, I can't say anythin' against him to Mr. Waitton when he wants to know how I came to be in the watah. But he ought to be punished."

Blake's eyes sparkled with fun.

"We'll punish him, Gussy. He shall stick on there till late to-night, and then we'll fetch him off. If he docsn't turn up there will be a search, and we'll join in it. Don't say a word, and it will be ripping fun."

And D'Arcy promised that he would not. And when the house master came to speak to him, to learn the cause of the catastrophe, not a word concerning Sefton passed D'Arcy's lips.

CHAPTER 18, Tom Merry and Co.

CALLING-OVER came, and there was one name on the roll that was not answered to Mr. Ratcliff. The master of the New House was taking call-over, and he lifted his head and repeated the name which had elicited no reply.

"Sefton!"

Still no answer. Mr. Ratcliff's brows contracted slightly.

"Sefton!"

Silence! Sefton's place in the ranks of the Sixth was empty, and his Form-fellows were looking at each other dubiously. Where was Sefton? He was probably the worst-conducted boy in the New House, but he was always careful to keep his delinquencies out of sight, and it was a very unusual circumstance for him to be late for call-over.

"Is Sefton present?"

"No, sir," said Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's. "He hasn't turned up, sir."

"Very well."

Mr. Ratcliff marked the name down as absent, and went on with the roll. There were no others missing, even D'Arcy answering to his name when the

Fourth Form were called over. The swell of St. Jim's was almost himself again now—a little pale, but otherwise no worse for his adventure.

The boys were dismissed to their houses, and Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy went into their study. Blake was in high glee.

"There's bound to be a search, and we shall have a little run," he said. "We shall be the ones to discover Sefton and bring him home, as we know where he is. But, I say, kids, I've got something important to speak about."

"Go ahead!" said Herries tersely.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway go on, deah boy!"

"It's about what Tom Merry did to-day. He saved Gussy's life."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Of course, Gussy isn't either much use or much ornament," said Blake. "But it was plucky of Tom Merry, and he's a fine fellow. After what he's done for one of us, I don't think it would be good form to stick out against his idea, you know."

"Just what I was thinkin'," said Arthur Augustus, with a nod. "Aftah his weally bwave action, I think we ought to be willin' to weward him by joinin' Tom Mewwy & Co."

"Well, I don't mind," said Herries, after a pause. "It's a fact that we ought to be united against the Grammar cads, and it's pretty plain that the Terrible Three won't follow our lead. If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, you know, Mahomet has to buzz off to the mountain. We'll follow Tom Merry's lead."

"I'm glad you think as I do," said Blake, with a nod. "I think we'd better go and tell him what we've decided upon."

"Yaas, wathah! I will explain to him," said D'Arcy. "You can leave it to me, deah boys. I'm the last fellah in the world to put myself forward in any way, but a mattah of this kind requires tact and judgment. You can safely leave it in my hands."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "I don't care. Come on!"

"Wait a moment, deah boys! I must get my eyeglass."

And with his monocle satisfactorily adjusted, Arthur Augustus accompanied his chums to the study of the chums of the Shell.

Tom Merry looked rather surprised when they came in. The Terrible Three were busily at work with their preparation, but Tom pushed his books aside with his usual politeness.

"Hallo!" he said. "Come in! No rows, you know. We're busy."

"We haven't come to make a wow," said D'Arcy. "Aftah what has happened this aftahnoon, you must think us extwemely ungwateful if you imagine us capable of makin' a wow now, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, what's the trouble? Go ahead!"

"In the first place, I wish to expwess my extweme gwatitude for your vewy bwave conduct. You jumped into the watah to save me, without stoppin' to think of the wisk of bein' ddowned and of spoilin' your clothes. I wegard you with gwreat respect."

"My dear Gussy, I couldn't let you sink, you know. What would St. Jim's be like without its champion ass?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy, that is a wude wemark, and undah the circs it is impos for me to thwash you," said D'Arcy. "Pway do not pwovoke me! Havin' expwessed my gwatitude to you, there is anothah mattah I wish to speak about, upon which all thwee of us are agweed."

"That's so," said Blake.

"We are willin' to join Tom Mewwy & Co.," said Arthur Augustus beamingly. "You fellahs can't do anythin' by yourselves, you know, but with

us to back you up, there is no reason why we shouldn't put the Gwammah cads in their place."

"Oh, that's rot!" said Tom Merry. "You surely don't think I want to take any advantage of having pulled you out of the water, D'Arcy?"

"Certainly not! But, all the same, we want to join the Co. against the Gwammawians. We are all agreed upon that point."

Tom Merry looked inquiringly at Blake and Herries.

"That's how the matter stands," said Blake. "We're willing to come into the Co. if you want us to. I expect Figgins will follow on."

"Well, if you've thought it over," said Tom Merry, "it's a jolly good idea. I must say that. If you all back me up we'll soon make the Gram-marians sing small."

"That's the idea." Blake nodded. "I say, you know that Sefton is missing?"

"Yes. Hasn't he turned up yet?"

"No. And he won't till he's fetched."

Tom Merry looked amazed.

"Do you know where he is, then?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "He's w'ecked on a desert island, and he can't come away till he's fetched in a boat. He hasn't the nerve to try to swim the Deep Weach of the wivah, you know, and he'll stop on the island till we go for him."

"But how did he get on the island without a boat?"

Blake explained. The Terrible Three broke into a simultaneous chuckle.

"Serve him right!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "Fancy a New House fellow having the cheek to fag one of us! Gussy was a howling ass to capsize the boat, though."

"I was thinkin' of the sewious infwaction of my dig," explained D'Arcy, "and I did not stop to think of the dangah, you know. Perhaps it was wash."

"It was more than rash," said Tom Merry—"it was howlingly idiotic!"

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy, I—"

"Still it serves Sefton right to give him a night out," said Tom. "There's bound to be a search, and we'll fetch him off. It will be fun to pull up the river at night—better than sticking here doing this rotten prep!"

Tom Merry rose from the table.

"I say, you mean all that about joining the Co., you fellows?" he said.

"Honest Injun?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly!" said Blake. "We join the Co. until we've succeeded in giving the Grammarians the kybosh. Then we dissolve, and start on the old terms again. That's agreed."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry heartily. "Shake on it!"

And the six juniors solemnly shook hands, in a circle, each holding the hand of the fellow next to him—rather an original hand-shake—to ratify the bargain.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "That's agreed and settled. Now let's go and see whether they're looking for Sefton yet."

And the six juniors left the study and descended the stairs.

It was soon seen that there was considerable anxiety felt on account of the missing boy. It was more than an hour since calling-over, and Sefton had not returned to the school. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, had told Mr. Ratcliff that it had been Sefton's intention to pull up the river. Fears were entertained that something had happened to him, and Mr. Ratcliff and several prefects went out to look for the missing Sixth Former.

It was easy enough for Tom Merry & Co. to slip away unobserved. The boathouse was locked up for the night, but Tom Merry had a key to it, as he was in the habit of having his skiff out at an early hour on fine mornings. The juniors soon had a boat on the water, and Blake pushed off.

"Hallo, there! Where are you going?"

It was Kildare's voice calling from the bank.

"Not a word!" murmured Tom Merry. "Pull like thunder!"

The oars dashed into the water, and kept good time. Arthur Augustus, with his eyeglass firmly screwed into his eye, sat in the stern steering. Four oars swept the boat along at a good pace. In the darkness it was impossible for anyone on the bank to more than just make out the form of the boat.

Kildare's voice rang out again:

"Who's in that boat? Pull in to this side. Do you hear?"

The juniors made no reply. Only the rattle of the oars in the rowlocks answered the captain of St. Jim's, and in a few minutes the boat was out of the sound of his voice.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"He couldn't expect us to hear him," he murmured. "He would have sent us in if we had heard him and pulled inshore. Buck up, kids! They're going along the bank looking for Sefton; but we shall be ahead of them, I think."

Tom Merry was right. The boat made good time, and ere long the island rose to view—a dim, black mass against the dim sky.

Tom Merry stood up in the bows of the boat, his eyes fixed on the black mass ahead. Blake, Herries, Manners, and Lowther were pulling steadily.

"Careful!" said Tom. "If you run us into the bank, Arthur Aubrey Adolphus, I'll snatch you bald-headed!"

"I shall not wun you into the bank," said D'Arcy. "I can steer first-rate, Tom Mewwy. I do not wow vewy well, as it seems to me to be too much like work, but I will steer with anybody. You can twust me."

"Hallo—hallo—hallo!" called out Tom Merry, as they drew nearer the island. "Anybody there?"

A sharp and snappish voice came back from the darkness:

"Yes, I'm here! Who's that?"

"I'm Tom Merry. Are you Sefton?"

"Yes, confound you! Have you been sent to fetch me?"

"No; we came of our own accord. I like your gratitude. You express yourself so gracefully, Sefton. You are a nice chap!"

"Hang you! Bring that boat here! What became of D'Arcy?"

"Oh, he was fished out of the river!"

"Is he safe?"

"Yaas, wathah!" answered Arthur Augustus for himself. "Quite safe, Sefton, thank you. It is extwemely kind of you to inquire."

"You young beast! I'll break your neck for this!"

"No, you won't," said Tom Merry coolly. "Unless you behave yourself we sha'n't let you come into the boat, you bully!"

"Come and take me off!" yelled Sefton.

"Will you promise to behave yourself if we do?"

"No—yes! Yes, certainly! Come and take me off!"

"Honour bright?"

"Yes, honour bright. Now come and fetch me. I'm as hungry as a wolf, and shivering with cold. Why don't you bring that boat here, you fools?"

"We're coming, old fellow. No need to break our necks about it, you know."

The boat glided to the shore of the island. Sefton seized the bows

instantly, as though he was afraid that the skiff would disappear again and leave him in the lurch.

"Come in," said Tom Merry politely. "Let him pass along, chaps. You'll have to sit beside Gussy in the stern, Sefton, unless you feel inclined to take an oar."

Sefton gave an unintelligible grunt and went into the stern.

Tom Merry pushed off as he was sitting down, and Sefton lurched and fell against Arthur Augustus and sat down on his knees.

"Here, keep off the gwass!" said D'Arcy. "I'm not a beastly cushion, Sefton! I weally wish you wouldn't sit on me, you know. Pway get off!"

"You did that on purpose, Tom Merry!" yelled Sefton.

"Did what?" asked Tom Merry innocently.

"Pushed off while I was sitting down, you young beast!"

"Yes, I pushed off on purpose, Sefty. You didn't want to stay here all night, did you?"

Sefton made no reply. He shifted into his seat, gritting his teeth with rage. The boat swung into the current, and the oars made time again.

"Pway give me a little more woom, Sefton!" said Arthur Augustus.

"You are in the way, old fellow. Pway— Ooooooh!"

Sefton's finger and thumb had closed on the ear of Arthur Augustus.

"You little beast! I'll give you something for capsizing my boat today!"

"Leggo!" yelled the swell of St. Jim's. "You beast, you said honah bwight when we let you come in! Leave go my beastly ear, or I shall lose my tempah!"

"Let him go, Sefton," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Mind your own business, Merry!"

"Are you going to do as you're told?"

"No, I'm not! I'll give you a hiding presently!"

"Very well. Get hold of him, chaps, and sling him over the side! We'll tow him back to St. Jim's with a boathook in his collar!"

Several of the Co. made a movement, and the New House senior was alarmed.

"Here, mind what you're doing!" he exclaimed, letting go the auricular appendage of Arthur Augustus. "Hands off, you rats!"

"Are you going to behave yourself?"

"No—yes! Hang you—yes!"

"Mind you do," said Tom Merry. "You won't have another chance."

And Sefton contained himself during the row back to St. Jim's. He knew that Tom Merry was quite capable of towing him back at the end of a boathook, and such an experience was not likely to be pleasant. The boat pulled up to the landing-stage, and a dozen forms loomed out of the darkness.

"Hallo, there! Who's that?"

"Us!" said Tom Merry cheerfully, as he ran the boat up to the planks.

"Who's 'us'?" asked the voice of Figgins.

"Tom Merry & Co."

"Hallo! What's that? A giddy rival firm?"

"Have you seen anything of Sefton?" asked Kildare, coming towards the boat.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Here he is, Kildare! We've found him and broughth him home, this side up, with gweat care, you know."

Sefton stepped ashore, pale with rage.

"Where have you been, Sefton?" asked the captain of St. Jim's, looking at him.

"On the island!" snapped Sefton. "My boat was capsized, and I couldn't get away."

He made no further explanation. He did not care to tell the head boy of the School House that his mishap had come about through his fagging a School House junior. He walked away to the school with a sullen scowl on his face.

"Well done!" said Kildare, turning to the juniors. "I am glad you found him, though he doesn't appear very grateful for your trouble. Have you been having any rows coming back?"

"Well, you know, he's rather a pig," said Tom Merry. "Still, it's no good blaming him for that. None of the New House fellows are much class—"

"What's that?" yelled Figgins & Co. in one voice.

"Here, don't begin that now!" exclaimed Kildare, with a laugh. "Put in the boat and come up to the school at once. It's rather late for a row."

The juniors put up the boat. Figgins & Co. walked up to the school with them, and Tom Merry explained how Sefton had been rescued. He also asked Figgins if he were inclined to join the Co. now that Study No. 6 had set the example.

Figgins shook his head.

"I'll come in as chief, if you like," he offered generously.

"Figgy, old chap, that's kind of you," said Tom Merry, seizing Figgy's hand and giving it a solemn shake. "I like a chap to be kind and generous. But I won't impose upon your good nature, you know. I'll keep on as chief myself."

Figgins grinned.

"Well, you won't get me as a follower, old kid, that's all."

"Better think it over. Study No. 6 have come into the Co. because I pulled Gussy out of the river. I shouldn't have dreamed of asking them on that account, of course. Still, it's a jolly good thing."

"P'r'aps," said Figgins. "I'll tell you what. I'll come into the Co. when you pull me out of the river. Not before. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoed Kerr and Wynn.

And they walked away to the New House, leaving Tom Merry & Co. to go to their own quarters.

CHAPTER 19.

How Figgins Joined the Co.

"A, ha, ha!"

Manners and Lowther looked up from their preparation as Tom Merry burst into a sudden, ringing laugh.

Tom had pushed his books away, and had been sitting in deep thought for some minutes, and that sudden burst of merriment had followed.

It was evident that some idea of unusual brilliancy had come into the brain of the chief of Tom Merry & Co.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "What's the joke?"

"What's the giddy wheeze?" demanded Manners. "Expound, my son, or else leave off that hee-hawing and let us get on with our work."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Explain, ass! Expound, fathhead!"

"It's a funny idea, kids!" said Tom, still laughing. "Do you remember what Figgins said last night after we brought the Sefton-bird back to its roost?"

"Let me see. Yes, I remember his saying that we must be asses to follow your lead."

"I don't mean that," said Tom, turning red. "I mean about his joining the Co."

"He said he'd join if you pulled him out of the river as you did Arthur Augustus."

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"It was a little joke of Figgy's. What about it?"

"I know it was a joke; but Figgy is a fellow of his word, and if it happened he would stick by what he said."

"Of course he would. But it won't happen."

"How do you know it won't?"

"Well, I know Figgins isn't likely to tumble into the river just to please you. He's not likely to fall off the bridge or to capsize a boat."

"I know he won't fall into the river of his own accord, but he might get shoved in." Manners and Lowther stared. "And when he was in," said Tom Merry coolly, "I could pull him out; and then he'd have to live up to his word. He couldn't back out. He said he'd join the Co. if I pulled him out of the river, and he made no conditions as to how he was to get into the river."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you think of the wheeze? With Figgins & Co. to join us, we should be a big crowd for the Grammarians to tackle, and St. Jim's would go ahead."

"Jolly good idea!"

"Then we'll carry it out," said Tom Merry. "Of course, there won't be any risk to Figgins. We don't want him to be drowned if it can be helped."

"Ha, ha! Certainly not!"

"Besides," said Monty Lowther, "there would be an inquest, and a lot of bother. We must certainly not let Figgins perish unless absolutely necessary."

"But, seriously," said Tom Merry, "he's going into the river, and I'm going to pull him out, and—and there we are, you see."

"Exactly; there we are. It would be a good idea to get Blake's lot to do the shoving in business, and we could be on the spot to perform the gallant rescue."

"Good! I'll go and speak about it to Blake at once!"

"Go on, then, and let us get our beastly prep. done."

Tom Merry quitted the study, and hurried, full of his new and brilliant idea, to Study No. 6. School was over for the day, and Herries was there at work; but Blake and Arthur Augustus were not to be seen.

"Where's Blake?" asked Tom Merry, looking in.

"Blessed if I know!" said Herries, without looking up. "Somewhere, I expect."

"But I want to speak to him."

"Then don't stand there speaking to me! Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Look here, that's not the way for a member of the Co. to speak to his leader!" said Tom Merry severely.

"Oh, go and eat coke! I'm working."

"I'll jolly soon—Hallo!"

Tom Merry broke off as he felt a hearty slap on his shoulder, and he turned his head to see Blake in football costume, with an extremely muddy ball under his arm.

"Hallo! I wanted to speak to you," said Tom. "I couldn't get out of that duffer where you were. I want to say—"

"Don't speak here," said Herries. "You worry me. Clear!"

"Come along!" laughed Blake. "Now, what is it, kid?"

They walked down the corridor, leaving Herries to wrestle with his prep. in peace. Tom Merry explained his idea, and Blake chuckled.

"You think it's a good wheeze?" asked Tom.

"Good? I think it's ripping! Figgins is a fellow of his word, and he'll stand by what he said. Of course, he never looked for anything of the kind; but he plays the game every time, and he won't back out."

"You'll shove him into the Ryll, then?" asked Tom.

"Certainly, with pleasure! After what you've done for us, old kid, I'd shove anybody into the river for you," said Blake obligingly.

"That's settled, then. And the sooner the quicker, you know."

"This very evening," said Blake. "It will be light for another hour; and I can get Figgins down to the river with some yarn easily enough. You'll keep us in sight, and chip in at the right time. That's your part of the business."

"I'll be ready. Manners and Lowther will be there, too, in case of accidents. Shouldn't like Figgins to be sent to a watery grave in the giddy bloom of his youth."

"Then keep an eye on me. I'll manage Figgy as soon as I've changed my things."

"Good business!"

They parted. Tom Merry rejoined his chums in high good-humour. It really seemed that at last everything was going well, and that Tom Merry & Co. would be complete. And when complete it would be invincible—Tom was sure of that.

"It's all arranged," he said. "Blake is going to do the trick, like a good kid. I want you two fellows to be with me in case you're wanted."

"Haven't finished yet," said Monty Lowther.

"Sorry!" said Tom, jerking his books away and depositing them in a heap under the table. "When there's important business on hand you can't expect to be allowed to go on doing silly work. Get a move on you!"

"But, look here, old Linton will be nagging at me to-morrow."

"Let him rip! This is where you follow your leader."

Tom Merry passed an arm through Monty Lowther's and another through Manners', and led them forth from the study without further argument.

They strolled down to the Ryll. It was a golden October evening, and the banks of the river were lively with boys, and there were a good many boats out. Tom Merry grinned as he caught sight of Blake in talk with Figgins. The terrible Three passed near them and caught some of what they were saying.

"I could do it as easily as anything," said Figgins.

Blake shook his head.

"I don't think you could, Figgy. I don't want to run you down, you know, but you New House chaps are rather clumsy. You admit that?"

"No, I don't!" exclaimed Figgins hotly. "One thing's jolly certain, and that is that I can do anything that a rotten School House waster can do, Jack Blake!"

"Well, I'd like to see you do it, that's all."

"Pooh! It's as easy as falling off a house!"

"Well, let me see you do it."

"I don't mind. You stand on the outmost plank of the landing-stage and bend down towards the water until you touch the toes of your boots?"

"Yes; without falling into the river."

"Catch me falling into the river!" said Figgins contemptuously. "I'm not such a silly ass as that, I hope!"

"It's easy enough to do it here," said Blake; "but when you're bending over the edge of the water, it's harder."

"It comes to just the same thing."

"Not at all. The water's deep there, you see, and you wouldn't have the nerve—"

"I'll show you!" shouted Figgins; and he turned and strode across the plank landing-stage to the edge, and stood there facing the river.

Tom Merry nudged his companions.

"Now look out for the fireworkers!" he whispered. "I never knew Blake was such a howlingly deep bounder before this."

Figgins carefully placed his toes in a line with the edge of the furthest plank.

"Is that right?" he demanded, with a sniff.

Blake made a careful examination, and shifted one of his feet a little.

"There, that's right," he said. "Now let's see you do it, old son. If you can, I'll admit that I was wrong. But at present—"

"Oh, cut the cackle! I'll jolly soon show you!"

Figgins bent forward with arms outstretched, gradually bringing his hands nearer to his toes without bending his knees.

It was rather a feat for Figgins, as his legs were very long ones; but he was very elastic, and there was no doubt that he would perform the feat successfully.

Blake watched him with the expression of a connoisseur.

"Yes, you're getting on. Touch your toes, mind, without bending your knees, Figg. By Jove, I really believe he's going to do it!"

Figgins continued to fold himself up, and the tips of his fingers came into contact with the toes of his boots. He was balanced over the edge of the water, which mirrored him below.

"Good!" said Blake. "Now——" He pushed against Figgins, and the New House chief went into the river with a mighty splash head-first. "My hat! He's fallen in! How clumsy!"

Figgins went right under the water, and he came up, spluttering, a dozen feet from the plank. He was a fine swimmer, so there was no danger; but he was in a state of fury.

There came a shout from a boat near at hand.

"Bai Jove! There's Figgins ddownin'!"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus.

"Couwage, Figgins!" shouted the swell of the School House. "I am comin' to the wescue!"

"Stop where you are!" roared Blake. "If you——"

"Blake! How can you be so bwutal! I must wescue Figgins."

"Stop! He—you—I—stop! Oh, you beastly lunatic!"

D'Arcy had leaped from the boat into the water, and gripped hold of Figgins.

"Couwage!" he gasped. "Couwage!"

"You giddy ass!" mumbled Figgins, as D'Arcy's weight dragged him under the water. "G-r-r-r! You— Gr-r-r-r! M-r-m-m-m-m!"

The fact was that D'Arcy was a bad swimmer, and Figgins had to hold him up. The heart of Arthur Augustus was full of pluck, but he was about as helpless as an elephant in the water, and if Figgins had not kept him afloat he might have had worse than a wetting.

"You ass!" gurgled Figgins, glaring at Arthur Augustus. "You horrid ass!"

"Figgins, I wegard that as distinctly ungwateful!" gasped D'Arcy. "I have come to the wescue without wegard to my clothes—"

"You ass! Get back into that boat or I'll drown you!"

Figgins shoved D'Arcy against the boat, and the swell of the School House caught hold of the gunwale. Figgins was wild, for a crowd of fellows on the bank were laughing loudly. The idea of Figgins being rescued by D'Arcy struck them as funny.

Splash!

Tom Merry had dived into the water, and he came up with Figgins just as he parted with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Here we are!" gasped Tom Merry. "I'm going to save you, Figgins!"

"Lemme alone!" roared Figgins. "I can save myself. Are you all off your silly rockers?"

"Leave him to ddown, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy, from the boat. "He is an ungwateful beast. Let him sink to a watahy gwave."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "I'm going to save him. Now, Figgy, are you going to be saved quietly, or shall I have to use force?"

"Let me alone! I—"

"Come along, kid."

Tom Merry seized Figgins without further ceremony, and commenced dragging him through the water towards the planks. Manners and Monty Lowther were ready there to lend a hand.

Figgins struggled desperately.

He had no desire to be dragged out of the water like a helpless child, and he resisted with all his strength, but Tom Merry was a little too much for him.

They went under several times in the struggle, but at last Tom got Figgins to the landing-stage, and caught hold of the outmost plank.

"Now, Figgy, up you go!" he gasped.

"I won't!" yelled Figgins. "Let me alone! You beast!"

"My dear chap, I'm here to save you. Hold him, Lowther!"

"Right-ho!" Lowther was kneeling on the plank, and he got a firm grip on Figgy's collar. "I've got the beast, kid!"

"I'll break your neck for this, Lowther!"

"Figgy, old fellow, I'm saving your life."

Tom Merry scrambled out of the water while Lowther held Figgins helpless. With that grip on his collar Figgy could neither get out of the water nor swim away. He was at the mercy of the Terrible Three. Blake stood by with his hands in his pockets, looking on with great interest.

Tom Merry leant down and got a grip on Figgins. Then Lowther let go.

"Now, Figgy, I'm going to pull you out. Come on!"

A powerful jerk, and Figgins came up out of the water, and was landed like a fish on the planks, gasping for breath.

He lay there for a moment, and then he jumped up, his face streaming with water, and the water from his drenched clothes forming a pool round him.

"You—you beasts! I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"Take it easy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I've saved your life!"

"You haven't! I wasn't in danger! What do you mean, you horrible fibber?"

"Well, I pulled you out of the river, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did; and I'm going to break your neck for it!"

"Hold on a minute. Have you forgotten your promise?"

"My promise?" Figgins was rather taken aback. "What are you driving at? What did I promise?"

"Come, Figgy, you can't have forgotten. You promised to join the Co., as a follower, if I pulled you out of the river as I did Arthur Augustus."

Figgins stared at him blankly for a moment.

Then comprehension dawned upon his mind, and a grin came slowly over his face.

"Well, you—you bounder!" he exclaimed. "So that was the little game?"

Tom Merry nodded cheerfully.

"Exactly. I hold you to your word."

"But—but—but I didn't mean——"

"I really don't know what you meant, Figgins. You ought to be the best judge of that. I only know what you said. You said that you'd join Tom Merry & Co. if I pulled you out of the river. I've done my part, and now I call upon you to keep your word."

Figgins could not help chuckling.

"Well, I'm a fellow of my word," he said. "I've been done, but I stand to what I said. I'm in the Co., if you like, and that's settled."

"Shake on that."

They shook on it. Figgins was never angry for long, and his good-tempered face had quite resumed its old expression. He could take a joke against himself.

Arthur Augustus stepped ashore. He was drenched and dripping and indignant.

"I weally do not know why you are shakin' hands with that outsiders, Tom Mewwy," he exclaimed. "I wegard him as an ungwateful and extwemely wude boundah. I have spoiled my clothes, to say nothin' of wisikin' my life, to save that person, and he spoke to me most wudely."

Figgins laughed.

"Sorry, Gussy," he said. "You see, you're such a howling ass, you know——"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass. Unless you withdraw that extwemely objectionable expwession, I shall thwash you upon the spot."

"Oh, I am so frightened," said Figgins pathetically. "Gussy, be good! As you are strong, be merciful! Hit one your own size."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind. I——"

"Never mind, I apologise," said Figgins, bestowing a wink upon everybody in general—"I apologise fearfully. I was very grateful. Now, let me off that thwashing."

D'Arcy's face cleared at once.

"Certainly!" he exclaimed. "I wegard that as quite satisfactory. Pway excuse me now, deah boys. I must go and change my beastly clothes, you know. I am howwidly wet."

"I fancy we'd better do the same," Tom Merry remarked. "Figgins, old chap, you're a Briton, and we're all glad to have you in the Co. Now we'll make those Grammar cads sit up."

CHAPTER 20.

The Co. in Council—D'Arcy Has An Idea.

TOM MERRY & Co. held their first meeting in the barn where the amateur theatrical society frequently met for rehearsals. They wanted to talk things over quietly without any irreverent interruptions.

The "Co." was complete at last.

Now that Figgins & Co. had come into the firm, the nine juniors who were the leaders of nearly all the mischief at St. Jim's were united, and they

made a very strong team, capable, as Tom Merry remarked, of knocking a dozen Grammar Schools into a cocked hat.

The nine were assembled, and Tom Merry looked over his comrades with an approving eye.

"Here we are again," he remarked. "Gentlemen of the Co., I'm glad to see you here—"

"Same to you," said Figgins, "and many of 'em."

"Don't interrupt, please. I'm glad to see you all together, united in the bonds of harmony and mutual esteem—"

"Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy is gwowin' quite eloquent!"

"Shut up, Gussy! Now that we're joined and united and combined, we—"

"What's the difference between joined, united, and combined?" asked Blake, with the air of one seeking information.

"There's no difference that I know of. Don't interrupt."

"Then what do you want—"

"Look here, I'm talking—"

"Well, then, don't be tautological!" said Blake severely.

That word rather impressed the Co. They looked at Blake admiringly. Tom Merry went on hastily without stopping for argument.

"Now we're all in the Co.," he said, "we ought to make things hum. We're going on the warpath against the Grammar cads—"

"Yas, wathah!"

"Gentlemen, I'm proud to be your leader—"

"So you ought to be—rather!"

"You've got plenty to be proud of," said Figgins. "But we haven't much to brag about."

"Don't be personal, Figgins. I sha'n't be in a hurry to save your life next time."

"Save my life, you boulder! Why—"

"Don't be irrelevant. Now, we have met in a council of war to decide upon a plan of campaign against the Grammar School. That's the important question before the meeting. Now, has anybody got a wheeze to suggest?"

"Yes, I have," said Figgins, at once.

"Then get up on your hind legs and suggest it."

"The Grammar cads fancy themselves at the good old game," said Figgins. "My idea would be to challenge them to a football match, and give 'em the kybosh."

"Good! I think we could do that all right."

"Do it? I should say so. We can make up a junior team at St. Jim's that will knock spots off any beastly Grammar School eleven."

"The idea is adopted," said Tom Merry. "We'll challenge the Grammar School to a football match, and give 'em beans."

"Bravo!" said the Co. with one voice.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally wegard that as an awfully, beastly good ideah, don't you know, deah boys. But there is one point I must wemark upon."

"Get it off your shirt-front, Gussy!"

"I weally think I ought to be centah-forward," said D'Arcy. "Of course, I play half in a weally cweditable and satisfactory mannah, but I have long had a feelin' that my pwopah place in the team is at centah-forward."

"Somebody suffocate him, please!" said the chief of the Co.

"I wefuse to be suffocated. I am the last person in the world to put myself forward in any way, but for the good of the team I am compelled to

draw attention to the fact that I should make a bettah centah-forward than Tom Mewwy. You wequire a——”

“We require you to shut up, Gussy!”

“I wefuse to shut up. I——”

“We’ll discuss the constitution of the team later, when the Grammarians have accepted our challenge,” said Tom Merry. “For the present, it can stand over. I think it’s a good idea, and a sound licking on the football field would take the Grammar cads down a peg or two. But we’ve got to get the better of them in other ways, and I want to know a really ripping wheeze to work off on them.”

“I have an ideah,” said Arthur Augustus.

“State it; and don’t keep on talking all night.”

“That is a wude wemark. This is my ideah, my deah boys. You know that Kerr has often impersonated people, and weally with gweat success. His governah is an actah, or something—some sort of a boundah of that kind——”

“Here, who are you calling a bounder?” exclaimed Kerr hotly. “What do you mean?”

“I withdraw the wemark, Kerr,” said Gussy gracefully. “It was certainly not a pwopah one to make. I apologise.”

“Oh, that’s all right.”

“It was far fwom bein’ my intention to wound your feelin’s, Kerr. I withdraw the wemark absolutely and without qualification.”

“Nuff said.”

“But weally I must make it quite clear that I intended no diswespect to your esteemed governah by that wemark. I——”

“Get on with the washing,” said Tom Merry.

“Don’t be in such a huwwy, Mewwy. I want to impwess upon Kerr that I intended no weflection whatever upon his esteemed governah, and——”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Kerr. “For goodness’ sake get off that topic!”

“If Kerr is perfectly satisfied——”

“Yes, yes, I’m more than satisfied. I’m perfectly happy; only do ring off, old chap.”

“Vewy well, I will wing off; but it is a duty I owe myself to make complete repawation for any involuntawy infwaction of the wules of courtesy,” said D’Arcy. “Now to come back to what I was sayin’ when I left off to apologise to our esteemed comrade Kerr. He has often done impersonations with considerable success, and I am not intendin’ to detwact fwom the honah due to Kerr when I wemark that I weally think I could go one better if I tried.”

“Oh, my hat!” said Figgins. “Cool!”

“Cheek!” said Kerr. “Let him go on.”

“I don’t want to bwag,” said D’Arcy. “I am statin’ facts, because it’s an important mattah, deah boys. Now, I think if I were to disguise myself as somebody or other, and pay a visit to the Gwammah School, I could vewy likely work off some extwemely jolly jape on those fellahs. I weally think this is a wippin’ ideah.”

Tom Merry looked reflective.

“My hat!” he exclaimed. “There’s something in that. Of course, Gussy couldn’t carry out an idea of that kind——”

“Tom Mewwy, I weally must take exception to that wemark——”

“Dry up. But it’s a ripping idea, and it might work. I think,” said Tom Merry, looking round, “that when it comes to impersonating anybody, or getting up a disguise, it will be admitted that Kerr is the chap we want.”

Kerr blushed modestly.

"Right-oh!" exclaimed Figgins and Fatty Wynn heartily. "That's so, Tom Merry. Kerr is the chap."

"But weally I pwotest——"

"Gussy, old son, you must be satisfied with originating the idea. You can leave it to lesser brains to carry it out."

"That way of putting it rather mollified Gussy."

"Well, I shouldn't like to become at all forward in insistin' on my own claims," he said. "If you think it's a good ideah, and give me the pwopah cwedit for owiginatin' it, I am satisfied."

"My dear chap, we give you heaps of credit," Tom Merry assured him. "Now, kids, I regard this as a good wheeze, and we must think over it and work it out. As it's nearly tea-time, this meeting is now adjourned."

And the Co. left the barn and walked back to the school.

"Hallo, there's the old Monk!" exclaimed Figgins.

A little old gentleman with a silk-hat and gold-rimmed pince-nez was walking towards the gates of St. Jim's.

The juniors knew him at once.

It was Dr. Monk, the headmaster of the Rylcombe Grammar School, and he was evidently going to see Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's.

The schoolmasters had been through Oxford together, and were on very cordial terms, in spite of the warfare that reigned between the two schools.

Tom Merry gave a start as he looked at Dr. Monk, who was irreverently termed "Old Monk," by the Saints, to distinguish him from "Young Monk," the leader of the Grammar youngsters.

"My aunt!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Kids, that's the wheeze?"

"What are you driving at?"

"Look at that respected pedagogue. Do you notice anything particular about him?"

The Co. looked attentively at the schoolmaster.

"Nothing particular," said Figgins. "Do you mean his face? It's awfully like a mummy I saw once in a museum, if that's what you mean."

"His hat!" suggested Blake. "It looks as if he'd dug it up somewhere, or as if it had been in the family for years. Is that it?"

"No. I was alluding to his size. He's not over five feet four."

"What's that got to do with anything or anybody?"

"This much. That Kerr is five feet four, too."

"Five feet four two," said Figgins, looking puzzled. "What on earth do you mean by five feet four two, Tom Merry?"

"Five feet four as well, I mean, ass!"

"Well, I really don't see why you can't say what you mean," Figgins remarked. "I——"

"Kerr, if five feet four——"

"Five feet four and a quarter, then, if you like," said Tom Merry. "What I mean is that he is about Kerr's size, and he's the chap for us."

"Great Scott! You mean that Kerr could get up as the Head of the Grammar School!"

"Why not? He's made up as Herr Schneider and as Lathom. Why shouldn't he pass for Dr. Monk? I believe he could do it."

"Do you think you could do it, Kerr?"

"I'd try," said Kerr modestly. "Yes, I don't see why it shouldn't work. That old chap simply lends himself to impersonation. That silk hat has been out of date these twenty years, and it's distinctive. Then the pince-nez and that wisp of beard, and those ragged whiskers he has clinging round his ears. And his complexion, too—I could get up a parchment complexion like that easily. As for his clothes, I could borrow some from the costumier's at Rylcombe that would answer perfectly."

Kerr was looking over the unconscious Head of the Grammar School with the eye of a connoisseur. Dr. Monk disappeared into the gates of St. Jim's, leaving the juniors talking excitedly.

"It's simply a ripping wheeze," said Tom Merry. "We have only to make sure of a time when old Monk is absent from the Grammar School, and then Kerr marches in in his guise."

"It will want a lot of nerve," said Blake dubiously. "Seems to me it would be safer to have a School House chap on the job. Of course, I'm not denying that Kerr is the best impersonator in the school. We all admit that. But for nerve—and that's what will be wanted—I really think we shall have to have a School House chap."

"I don't want to disturb the harmony of the Co.," Figgins remarked casually. "But I must say that Blake is going exactly the right way to work to get a pair of beautiful thick ears."

"If anybody here can give 'em to me—"

"Peace!" said Tom Merry, waving his hand soothingly. "This is too good a wheeze to be spoiled by a row now. Kerr is the man. If Kerr thinks he can do the trick, it's a go."

"I'm willing to try, and I'll do my best," said Kerr. "That's all I can say."

"That's wight," said Arthur Augustus. "I can't help thinkin' that I should be able to see it through bettah than Kerr, without detwactin' at all frowm the mewits of our fwiend Kerr. But I yield to the voice of the majowity."

Figgins chuckled.

"I say it ought to work out rippingly. Kerr can go on the scene as Dr. Monk, and we can be on hand all ready to chip in at the right time. He might lead a lot of them into an ambush, and we could give 'em the giddy kybosh."

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled with fun.

"By George, that's a good idea! Next half-holiday will be a good time, when the Grammar kids are all out of doors. It will be safer for Kerr not to enter the school. Only we must make absolutely certain that the real Monk is not on the spot."

"I will do some scoutin', if you like," said Arthur Augustus. "I should be quite willin' to twack him down, and—"

"And give the show away," said Figgins. "We know you, Gussy."

"I object to that—"

"We can settle the details afterwards," said Tom Merry. "Come in now, and I'll write that football challenge to the Grammar kids."

Kerr was looking thoughtful.

"I say, I've only heard the old Monk speak once or twice," he remarked. "I must hear him again, to get his voice, you know. That's the most difficult part."

"Go and speak to him now," said Figgins. "Before he goes in."

"I shall have to have some excuse—"

"I know!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Ask him about the football match—whether he will permit it, and so on. Of course he will, but there's your excuse."

"Good wheeze," said Kerr.

He cut across the quadrangle so as to intercept the doctor, who was progressing slowly towards the principal's house with his solemn, middle-aged tread.

Dr. Monk stopped as a polite junior stepped before him, and raised his cap in the most respectful way in the world. He had never noticed Kerr before, but he was a kind old gentleman, and polite to everybody.

"Do you wish to speak to me, my little man?" he asked.

Kerr's blood boiled inwardly at being called a little man, but he maintained an outward show of good-little-boy politeness.

"Yes, sir, if you please, sir. You are Dr. Monk, sir?"

"Yes, I am Dr. Monk," said the schoolmaster graciously.

"We were thinking of inviting the Grammar cads—I mean, kids—to a football match, sir," said Kerr. "Would you have any objection, sir? We thought it would be better to ask your permission first."

Dr. Monk beamed upon him through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Extremely proper," he remarked. "I should not have the slightest objection in the world; indeed, I should be very glad! There has been, I believe, some hostility between my boys and some of the boys of St. Jim's—"

"Has there, sir?" asked Kerr, with an air of astonishment.

"I am afraid so—ahem!" said Dr. Monk. "I am sure you would not take part in it, my little man. H'm! I should be glad to see a match instituted between St. James's and the Grammar School; and I am sure you would find my boys quite willing to meet you half-way."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, sir."

"H'm! I regard football as a great and noble game, and I should certainly see the match," said Dr. Monk. "I approve of it entirely."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"Not at all—not at all. H'm!"

Kerr raised his cap again, and the doctor marched on. He entered the principal's house, and Kerr rejoined Tom Merry & Co.

"Well, how did it work?" asked Figgins.

"H'm! Excellently, my little man! H'm!" said Kerr, "I have quite caught on to his majestic voice, my good boy. H'm!"

The Co. chuckled gleefully. Kerr had the tones of the Grammar School master to the very life. Tom Merry slapped him on the shoulder.

"You'll do, Kerr. Kids, I really think that this time the Grammar School will come out with a licking to their credit. Monk, Lane, and Carboy will sing small this time."

CHAPTER 21.

Taken In.

FRANK MONK came out of the gates of the Grammar School with his two chums, Lane and Carboy. The three Grammarians were in a mood for mischief.

They had been very successful against the Saints of late, and as a matter of fact it had got a little into their heads. They had grown to underrate the juniors of St. Jim's, and to feel that victory was theirs as a matter of course. But now that "Tom Merry & Co." was an accomplished fact, they were destined to have a rude awakening. But they did not know it yet.

"What are we going to do with ourselves?" asked Carboy. "A row with the Saints would be just about in my line."

"We should find some of them down at the tuck-shop," Lane suggested.

Frank Monk shook his head.

"My governor's gone into the village," he remarked. "He's got business there, and it may keep him till calling-over. We had better keep off the grass in that direction."

"Well, we must do something. I daresay some of the kids will be coming down the river. Remember how we served Tom Merry? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Monk and Carboy.

"Let's go up the lane towards St. Jim's, anyway," said Lane. "I'll race you two to the stile."

"Done!"

The three juniors started off at a run.

But Frank Monk had not taken a dozen steps when he suddenly halted with an exclamation:

Lane and Carboy stopped too.

Coming towards them was a familiar figure, that of a little old gentleman with a wisp of beard, straggling white whiskers, gold-rimmed pince-nez, and an old-fashioned top-hat.

The October afternoon was growing dusky, and in the lane, shadowed by high, over-arching trees, the dusk was thicker of course than in the open.

But there was no mistaking the little old gentleman.

"The Head!" murmured Carboy and Lane together, as they stopped.

"We might have run into him."

Frank Monk looked puzzled.

"I thought he was gone to the village," he said. "I could swear he said—"

The old gentleman halted.

"Frank, I really wish—h'm!—that you would not race about in such a violent manner. It is unbecoming—h'm!—to the dignity of a Grammar School scholar."

"Yes, sir," said Frank, with a grimace to Carboy and Lane.

"You had—h'm!—better return to the school."

"But we have only just come out, father."

"It is getting dusk," said the doctor. "It becomes dusk very early now. Besides, I am afraid that you may meet—h'm!—with some of those rough boys from St. James's Collegiate School."

The three Grammarians grinned.

"We could take care of ourselves, sir," said Carboy.

"H'm! Perhaps so—perhaps so. But I deprecate fighting of any kind exceedingly. Pray return to the school. Stay! If you wish to go for a walk I will take you with me."

The juniors did not look very grateful for the offer.

"Oh, we don't mind going in, sir, if you wish!" said Lane hurriedly.

"Not at all," said the old gentleman, beaming upon him through his glasses—"not at all, Lane! I will take you for a walk, and will improve your mind by conversation. But it would not be fair to allow only three boys to share in this treat. Your schoolfellows may come."

Lane and Carboy looked at the doctor, and then at Frank Monk. The latter was looking amazed. There was something about his father he could not quite understand—some subtle change which was indefinable, and for which he could not account.

"You will bring your Form-fellows," said Dr. Monk, with a wave of the hand. "I will await you here, my boys. Pray do not keep me waiting long."

"Certainly, sir!"

The doctor waited under the trees. The three juniors turned back towards the school, in an amazed frame of mind.

"I say, Frank, is anything the matter with your governor?" asked Carboy.

"Not that I know of."

"He's never taken us for a walk before. The junior masters do, of course; but, then, never at this time of the day."

"I know it."

"He can't have been drinking, I suppose?"

Frank Monk flushed indignantly.

"If you say my father has been drinking, Carboy——"

"Don't get ratty, old fellow. You must admit that it's peculiar."

"I know it is. But my governor is master of the school, and you've got to do what you're told!" said Frank stiffly. "That's what you'd better do, without so much jaw."

"Oh, if you're going to fly into a temper——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Frank crossly.

As a matter of fact, he was puzzled himself, and though he repudiated the suggestion Carboy had made he was at a loss to account for the doctor's action.

Dr. Monk stood waiting in the dusk under the trees. When the three chums were gone, the doctor broke into a chuckle—rather a singular thing for so grave and reverend a personage as Dr. Monk to do.

Still more singular were the muttered words that fell from his lips:

"My only hat! It works! Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dr. Monk!"

He started as a voice fell upon his ears. A scholastic-looking gentleman was coming by, and he was looking at the doctor in absolute amazement. He was one of the under-masters at the Grammar School, and well known by sight to the boys of St. Jim's.

The doctor looked extremely confused for a moment. It was rather startling to be caught chuckling by an under-master, and the amazement in Mr. Phipps's face disconcerted him.

"Ah, Mr—er—Phipps!" he exclaimed. "I—I—that is—I was—h'm!—thinking of a curious story Dr. Holmes told me the other day, Mr. Phipps. It was very—h'm!—comical."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Phipps, composing his face in a moment. He knew better than to appear surprised at anything his principal did, though he had been startled for a moment into forgetting that excellent rule. "I did not know you had returned from Rylcombe, sir. If you are at leisure——"

"Quite—quite," said the doctor, still apparently a little confused.

"Then you will look over the examination papers now, sir?"

"The—the examination papers?"

"Yes, sir. You will remember that you asked me to remind you."

"Yes, yes, certainly! I have such a—h'm!—such a bad memory, Mr. Phipps."

"They are all ready for your inspection in my study, sir."

"Yes, yes—certainly."

The doctor was walking to the gate beside Mr. Phipps, and they entered together. The Head of the Grammar School did not appear to be quite at his ease—indeed, a suspicious observer might have thought that he desired to escape from Mr. Phipps, and did not exactly know how to do it without exciting suspicion.

Mr. Phipps, of course, had no such idea in his head.

Dr. Monk was very often absent-minded, and he now appeared to be a little more absent-minded than usual. That was all.

"Will you come into my study, sir," asked Mr. Phipps respectfully, "or shall I bring the papers to you in your study, sir?"

"H'm! Where is my study—I mean—I will come into your study, Mr. Phipps. Yes, I will certainly come into your study. I could not put you—h'm!—to so much trouble."

"Very well, sir."

They entered the school, and Mr. Phipps led the way to his study.

He looked round as he reached the door. Dr. Monk had halted, and was hesitating, really as if he were inclined to make a sudden bolt for it. Then, as he found Mr. Phipps's eye on him, he suddenly collected himself, and followed the junior master into the study.

Mr. Phipps kept a perfectly grave face; but a startling suspicion had now shot across his mind—the same that had crossed Carboy's.

Absent-mindedness could hardly account for the extreme peculiarity and confusion of the doctor's manner, and it crossed Mr. Phipps's mind that his principal had been tasting the cup that cheers, not wisely but too well.

He was rather curious upon the point, and he thought he would see when the doctor began to look at the examination papers.

"Pray do not turn up the light so high, Mr. Phipps!" said the doctor. "You know how weak my eyes are."

Mr. Phipps smiled to himself.

"He doesn't want me to see him too plainly," he murmured. "He is decidedly the worse for drink. A man of his age and position! Shocking!"

"Did you speak—h'm!—to me, Mr. Phipps?"

"No, sir. I will turn the light lower, certainly. Is that comfortable, sir?"

"A little lower, I think."

"Certainly. Will you be able to read the papers now, do you think?"

"I think so. By the way"—the doctor went towards the door—"is the—h'm!—the lock of your door in a satisfactory state, Mr. Phipps?"

The junior master was simply astounded.

That question showed, if he needed showing, that the Head of the Grammar School was not in a condition to know what he was talking about.

"Yes, sir, I think so," he stammered. "I have found no fault with it."

"Ah, indeed!" The doctor took the key from the lock and slipped it in on the outside of the door. "You are sure of that, Mr. Phipps?"

"Certainly, sir; quite sure. Shall I see you to your room, sir?"

"To my room? Certainly not!"

"I—I thought you might like to lie down for a little, sir," faltered Mr. Phipps.

"Decidedly not! H'm! Excuse me a moment."

The doctor stepped out into the corridor, and closed the door after him. The next moment a snap fell upon the ears of the astounded Mr. Phipps. It was the key turning in the lock.

For a moment he stood rooted to the floor.

"Gracious goodness!" he muttered. "He is certainly intoxicated! He has locked me in my study! Is it possible?"

He stepped quickly to the door. He tried the handle, but the door would not budge. He called in a low voice, but there was no reply. Then he raised his voice, with the same result.

"Doctor—Dr. Monk! Pray unlock the door!" No reply. "I beg of you to unlock the door! Think of the—the talk—of the scandal, my good sir! Your—your condition will become known to everyone in the house!"

Still silence.

Mr. Phipps dared not make a disturbance. The doctor's extraordinary condition had to be kept a secret. That was a point of honour with his dutiful under-master. Mr. Phipps could only sit down and wait till someone came along and released him, and then he would have to let it be assumed that a boy had played the trick. He must save the dignity of his principal somehow.

And while the junior master was loyally waiting there in pained silence the gentleman who had locked him in his study was crossing to the gates

at a pace unusually rapid for Dr. Monk. And he was murmuring to himself:

"My hat! I'm well out of that! What a beastly narrow shave!"
And, singular to relate, Dr. Monk's voice was very much like that of Kerr, of the New House of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 22.

St. Jim's Scores a Victory.

"H'M! I hope I have not kept you waiting, my boys."

Frank Monk, Carboy, Lane, and a score of juniors were waiting at the gate, wondering where on earth the Grammar School master had disappeared to.

None of the youngsters much enjoyed the prospect of a walk under the guidance of the Head; but, of course, they could make no objection.

The doctor looked them over as he came out of the gate.

"Ah, very good!" he said. "Boys, I think we shall enjoy our little walk in the dusk of this fine October evening, and especially the improving conversation."

"It's getting near locking-up time, sir," Carboy ventured.

"Really! That is of no moment, however. Pray follow me!" The doctor strode into the dusky lane. "Keep near me, please, my son, and you, Carboy and Lane. The rest of you walk in threes behind; and pray do not dawdle on the way."

Carboy and Lane winked at one another. They were pretty well convinced by this time that Dr. Monk had been drinking more than was good for him. Frank Monk was puzzled and annoyed.

The Grammar School youngsters followed their headmaster down the lane. The dusk was deepening, and they wondered. They covered a considerable distance from the Grammar School, the doctor marching on ahead. In a portion of Rylcombe Lane where the hedges were high and thick he halted.

"Stop here, my dear boys," he said.

The "dear boys" came to a halt.

"Harris, I perceive that you carry a walking-cane. Hand it to me, please." Harris obeyed. Dr. Monk swished the light cane through the air. "Ah, yes! H'm! I think this will serve the purpose very well. Carboy, you will please stand forward."

Carboy started, and looked rather dismayed.

"Yes, sir. What for, sir?" he stammered.

The doctor gave him a severe glance.

"You have been whispering to Lane."

Carboy coloured uncomfortably. He had certainly been whispering a remark to his chum, but he had never dreamed that the doctor was so keen of hearing as to overhear it.

"I—I— Please, sir, I—I—"

"You whispered to Lane," thundered the doctor, "an insinuation, Carboy, that I had been indulging in the use of strong liquor!"

"Oh, sir, I—I—I—"

"Dare you deny it, Carboy?"

"I, sir—oh, please, sir, it was only a—a joke!"

"You must learn not to make such extremely reprehensible jokes, Carboy. It is impossible for me to pass over such a thing—quite impossible!"

"If you please, sir, I never meant—"

"You never meant me to hear? No, I imagine not. But I did hear, Carboy, and I am about to inflict a fitting punishment upon you. Stand

forward, here, Carboy!" Carboy came forward with extreme reluctance. "You will now bend down, Carboy, and touch the ground with your hands," said the doctor severely. "Ordinary caning will not meet the case."

"But, sir," said Carboy, going scarlet, as several of the Grammarians burst into a chuckle, "I—oh, sir—but I——"

"It is quite useless to object, Carboy, and to mumble in that ridiculous manner. You may take it as a great favour that I do not expel you from the school. Bend down before me, sir, and touch the ground with your hands!"

Carboy unwillingly obeyed. The cane in the doctor's hand rose and fell, and Carboy, being in a position for receiving a flogging, received the cane with a sounding whack, and squirmed and wriggled.

"You may rise now, Carboy. Lane!"

"Yes, sir. If you please, sir, I——"

"Take up the same position as Carboy. Quick, now!"

Lane dared not disobey. He twisted himself over as Carboy had done, and received a swish from the cane. He wriggled painfully.

"Remain like that, Lane, till I tell you to move!"

"Yes, sir. But——"

"Silence! Remain like that, and do not dare to argue with me! Frank!"

"Yes, sir," said Frank, who had been an astonished spectator of these proceedings.

"You will remain on this spot," said the doctor, consulting his watch, "for five minutes. Then you may return to the school."

"Are you going to leave us, father?" asked Frank, who really thought by this time that the doctor must be ill—in his head.

"Yes—h'm!—for a short time. You will remain here for five minutes. When you see me again you will know the cause."

And the Head of the Grammar School turned and disappeared through a gap in the hedge.

The Grammarians looked at one another in amazement.

"He's mad!" muttered Carboy. "I don't care, Frank, he's mad!"

"Mad as a hatter!" grunted Lane, resuming the perpendicular. "Mad as a thousand blessed hatters, or else drunk as a fiddler! You can say what you like, Frank; that's my opinion."

Frank Monk was silent. As a matter of fact, he did not quite know how to controvert the opinions so forcibly expressed by Carboy and Lane.

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Harris.

It was a sudden gleam of light from the gap in the hedge through which the doctor had disappeared. The clear, white light of an acetylene bicycle-lamp shone through the dusk. The Grammarians stared at it in amazement. The lamp was held by someone concealed in the blackness behind the hedge, and, as they looked, into the circle of light stepped the figure of the doctor.

"It's your governor, Frank!"

"The Head!" muttered the amazed Grammarians.

Amazed as they were, their amazement deepened at what followed. The doctor removed his silk-hat and tossed it away into the gloom, and then his gold-rimmed pince-nez. Then, to the stupefaction of the youngsters, he pulled off his whiskers and beard, and they followed the hat behind the hedge.

Frank Monk rubbed his eyes.

"Is this a dream, Lane?" he gasped. "Pinch me, old man!"

Lane obliged, and Frank gave an agonised gasp.

"Oh, you silly ass! You've taken a lump right out of me!"

"Well, you asked for it," said Lane.

"Look what he's doing now!" murmured Carboy. "It must be a giddy nightmare!"

The amazing doctor was rubbing his face with a wet sponge. And as he rubbed, the parchment complexion and the wrinkles disappeared as if by magic, and a fresh and youthful skin appeared in the place of them.

The pseudo doctor was a boy!

Yes, and as the sponge did its work the Grammarians could recognise the boy, too. They knew him as Kerr, of the New House at St. Jim's!

Frank Monk gave a shout as comprehension dawned upon him.

"Done!"

"Done!" echoed Carboy and Lane, in a fury. "Done brown! It was a game of those kids from St. Jim's! And now he's got the cheek to unmask before our faces!"

"And he caned us!" gasped Lane.

"The cheek! Caned us, by George! He wasn't the doctor at all!"

The most obtuse of the Grammarians could not help seeing the facts as Kerr divested himself of his disguise under their very eyes. In place of the amazement and alarm they had felt came a feeling of rage at being so neatly tricked by their rivals.

A rapid whisper ran through the Grammar ranks.

"We'll make 'em sit up for this!" said Frank Monk grimly. "He's doing that under our eyes to show what fools we've been. And so we have! But we can give him something for his trouble. Kids, follow me!"

Lane caught him by the arm.

"I say, Frank, they may be in force. It may be an ambush."

"I don't care!"

And Frank Monk rushed desperately for the gap in the hedge.

Kerr disappeared. The light was turned off in an instant. Frank Monk gave a yell as his foot caught in a stretched cord and he plunged forward on his hands and knees. Before he could rise he was pinioned by unseen hands in the darkness.

He struggled furiously, but it was of no use. He was a prisoner.

"Rescue!" he yelled. "Grammar School! Rescue!"

The Grammarians rushed gallantly to the rescue of their leader. Most of them went stumbling over the taut cord, and were strewn along the hedge, and from the openings of the thicket came yells of laughter from the hidden Saints, who were evidently there in strong force.

And more than laughter came, too—stinging volleys of peas from the shooters with which Tom Merry & Co. were armed, and yells and yelps arose on all sides from the unfortunate Grammarians.

In the confusion, Frank Monk tore himself loose and stumbled away into the lane again. A grip closed on him in the darkness, and he was borne to the ground.

"I've got you!" gasped Carboy. "Here's one of them, chaps! Take that, and that!"

"That" and "that" were two fearful punches that made poor Monk gasp.

"You ass!" he roared. "I'm Monk—Frank Monk! Leggo, you silly cuckoo!"

"My hat!" stammered Carboy, releasing him. "I thought you were one of those rotters!"

"You silly ass! Why couldn't you look?"

"How was I to see in the dark? I——"

A shout rang from the hedge:

"Go for 'em, chaps! Down with the Grammar School! Give 'em socks!"

There was a rush of Saints to the attack.

"Cut it!" shouted Frank Monk. "They're too many for us! Scoot!"

The Grammarians hardly waited to be told; they were already scooting, most of them, as fast as they could scoot.

Down the lane towards the Grammar School they went with a frantic rush, and after them came the juniors of St. Jim's, whooping with triumph.

Many a Grammarian was overtaken and rolled in the dust before the defeated and dismayed followers of Monk and Carboy reached the gates of the Grammar School.

There a fresh misfortune awaited them. The gates were closed for the night, it being now considerably past locking-up time. Their retreat into their own quarters was cut off, and the pursuers were coming on fast.

Frank Monk rang frantic peals on the bell. Other juniors hammered and kicked at the gates. The din was terrific. But the porter was old and slow. With a rush, the pursuers came on, and the Grammarians turned to defend themselves, with their backs to the gates.

Tom Merry & Co. came on fast, with a score of St. Jim's juniors behind them. Tom Merry was laughing so much that he could hardly run. Close beside him was Kerr, still in the garb of the schoolmaster, so that he looked like a little old man, with the head and face of a schoolboy. Figgins and Blake were well to the front.

"Got them!" shouted Blake. "Wipe up the ground with the bounders!"

"Halt!" called out Tom Merry, stopping and turning to wave back his eager followers. "Halt! Prepare for platoon firing!"

The juniors chuckled gleefully. The peashooters came to the fore again. As the defeated Grammarians hammered at the gate the Saints drew up and opened fire. The Grammarians could not return it, and there was not enough of them to charge the enemy and get to close quarters. They could only stand the fire, and hammer on the gates and yell to the porter to come and open them.

Some of the St. Jim's juniors were laughing too much to aim well, but a brisk fire was kept up, and Frank Monk and his followers were pretty well peppered by the time the gates swung open and they poured pell-mell inside.

With a clang the gates closed again behind the last of them.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry. "Hear me smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared his followers. "Hear us smile! Down with the Grammar School!"

And the breathless but gleeful juniors turned to retrace their steps towards St. Jim's.

"Victowy!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I weally think that my ideah has worked out wippingly, deah boys! It was a gwand and glowious victowy!"

"It was," said Tom Merry. "And it proves that the Co. is a success."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But there's one thing you've forgotten," said Manners. "We shall be back after locking-up, and there will be a row."

"My dear chap, who cares for a row, when it's a question of beating the enemy?" said Tom Merry. "Let them row as much as they like. We've given the Grammar School their first licking. But not the last. We're going to keep ahead, or bust something!"

A determination that was heartily endorsed by every member of Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 23

Stranded.

"HERE we are!" said Carboy.
 "Yes, here we are," said Lane. "Get the boat in to the bank, and don't bump too much. Don't sit on that hamper, Saunders!"

"I'm not sitting on the hamper."

"Well, don't do it again, then. Get that oar in, Miles, and don't make another splash like that, or I shall speak to you."

"Oh, don't keep on growling, old chap!"

"I'll do something more than growl in a minute! You ought to have some sense! Now then, jump out, Carboy, old fellow!"

"That's it," said Frank Monk. "Jump out, Carboy, and tie the rope to that bush. The boat will be safe enough here while we have a feed. Get the hamper out."

It was Wednesday afternoon, and the boat from the Grammar School had pulled up the Ryll to the Abbey grounds. There were sixteen young Grammarians in the boat, so that, although it was of a good size, it was pretty well crowded.

On the bank of the Ryll lay the ruins of an ancient abbey, and green-sward stretched down to the stream, shadowed here and there by trees and bushes. It was a beautiful spot, and very popular for picnics. Fellows from St. Jim's frequently came up there in boats, and on this particular Wednesday afternoon Frank Monk and a Grammar School party had selected it for an al fresco feed.

They had brought plenty of provisions along with them, in a couple of Hampers and some smaller packages, and as soon as Carboy had made the boat fast the cargo was handed ashore. The boat, made fast to the high bush, rode the water safely, and as it was impossible for it to drift loose, the picnickers gave it no further thought.

"Jolly good spot!" said Carboy, looking round. "Nice sunny afternoon for October, too. I was half afraid that some of those St. Jim's cads would spot us coming up."

Frank Monk shook his head.

"I am sure they didn't. I kept a careful look-out."

"It would be no joke to be raided just now," said Lane. "They might come in force, same as we did in that affair at the old castle. Still, as we've seen nothing of them so far, I fancy we're pretty safe."

"Of course we are! Get out the grub."

The Grammarians selected their spot for camping, and selected their seats, and then the packages were opened and the good things displayed.

The picnic was soon started, and the youngsters enjoyed themselves, discussing over the viands their plans for the downfall of the juniors of St. Jim's.

They little dreamed that while they were feasting there under a shady tree keen eyes were watching them from the other side of the river.

The opposite bank was thickly wooded, and it was private property, and trespassers were strictly prohibited; but, all the same, nine juniors from St. Jim's had found their way there, and were now in cover among the trees on the margin of the river, looking across at their foes of the Grammar School.

Tom Merry & Co. were on the warpath!

"There they are!" said Tom Merry, with great satisfaction. "Gussy's information that he overheard in Mother Murphy's tuck-shop was perfectly correct. There they are."

"As large as life," said Figgins, "and twice as natural! Sixteen of the greedy, guzzling young rascals, too!"

"Too many for us to go for," said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"That's not what I was thinking of," said Tom Merry.

"I say," Fatty Wynn remarked, with an anxious look across the river. "I really don't see why we shouldn't raid them. That grub looks awfully tempting."

"How are we to get across, fathead?"

"One of us could swim across, as you've already suggested, and get the boat. Then we could use the boat to cross in, in force, and wipe up the ground with them."

"Nine of us, against sixteen," said Tom Merry, "and they'd be watching us all the time, and ready for us. Fatty, old man, your idea is rotten. Besides, it would interfere with my plans."

Fatty Wynn growled.

"Oh, blow your plans, Tom Merry. I don't think we ought to lose a chance of securing a feed like that, and now I come to think of it, I'm fearfully hungry."

"Are you ever anything else?" asked Kerr politely. "I saw you filling yourself up before we started."

"Yes, I know, but I didn't have much—only a pudding and some pie, and an apple-tart, and a few potatoes and carrots and dumplings and some boiled beef, and half a dozen oranges and a cocoanut, and some cake. You hurried me so that I hadn't time for more than that."

"You must have wanted more," said Tom Merry. "I can imagine how awfully empty you feel now, if you shifted that little lot only an hour ago."

"It has taken us nearer an hour and a half to walk here. Besides, it would hit the Grammar cads in their tenderest spot to collar their grub."

"They may not be so tender in that spot as you are, Fatty," Monty Lowther remarked.

"It stands to reason they would be awfully hard hit at losing a feed. I know I lost a feed once, and it was days before I felt myself again. I think we ought—"

"Nuff said," said Tom Merry decisively. "It's no go. We're not going to come to close quarters with the Grammarians at all. That's settled. Who's the giddy chief here, I want to know? Dry up, Fatty Wynn!"

"Well, I don't see why—"

"It's not necessary for you to see," said Tom Merry loftily. "You're only a blessed private in this concern, and this isn't a blessed council of war. I've made my plans."

"You haven't told us what they are yet," said Figgins. "Not besides capturing their boat and leaving them stranded."

"You'll know all in good time, Figgy."

"That's all right," said Blake. "But remember the compact, Tom Merry. If you don't give the Grammarians the kybosh in a way that they can't possibly crawl out of afterwards, you're no longer chief of the Co. That's the cheese."

"I know it, and I'm going to do it. Now that we've run the bounders down, it will work out all right. Gussy has done jolly well this time in getting on to the plans of the enemy. He's a fearful ass, but I'll say that for him."

D'Arcy purred.

"I am glad to have been of service to the honourable Co.," he remarked. "The fact is, you know, I'm an awfully deep fellow, and I'm just the chap to go on a scout. I found out the plans of the enemy, which was the great point, deah boys. There they are!"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, "there they are. They haven't the faintest idea that we are watching them. First of all we're going to collar their boat."

The Co. looked thoughtfully across the broad, rolling stream.

The Ryll was very wide in this place, and the current was swift, the water deep. There were few swimmers even in the senior Forms at St. Jim's who would lightly have undertaken to swim the Ryll in this spot, and no junior had ever attempted it.

"I say," Blake remarked doubtfully, "do you think it will be quite safe, Tom Merry? It's a very beastly part of the river for a swim, you know. Fellows have been drowned here before now—fellows who could swim, too."

"Well, I know it's a bit of a task," Tom Merry confessed, looking thoughtfully across the wide, sunlit waters. "But it's got to be done, and that's all there is about it."

"Let's toss up for it," said Figgins. "That's fair, I've got a penny here—"

"Nothing of the kind."

"What do you mean? We——"

"I'm leader," said Tom Merry serenely. "There's not going to be any tossing up while I'm leader. It's a leader's place to give orders."

"Well, yes," said Figgins doubtfully, "I know it is, but it wouldn't be quite cricket to appoint one to do a thing like that, you know, when it's so awfully risky."

"Yes, it would. I insist upon my right as leader, and I'm going to appoint the swimmer," said Tom Merry obstinately. "That's understood, kids."

"Well, have your way, then. Who's the chap?"

"Myself!"

"Eh?" Figgins stared at him. "Is that your little game, you bounder? You're going?"

"Exactly."

"I don't want to cavil," said Blake thoughtfully, "but in a case like this I really think the best swimmer should be selected, and as I'm willing to go——"

"Who's best swimmer?" asked Figgins. "You don't mean to seriously say, Blake, that you think you could get across to that boat as easily as I could?"

"You! My dear chap, you couldn't get half way," said Blake. "It would be next door to manslaughter to allow you to try, Figgins."

"Would it?" said Figgins hotly. "You School House bounder, I'll show you! I'm going to be the man to do it, then. I'm going——"

"You're going to stay where you are," said Tom Merry. "What's the good of my being leader if I don't lead? This matter is in my hands. Mind, I'm going to have my orders obeyed by the Co., or there will be thick ears knocking around for someone."

"Quite so," said Monty Lowther. "Keep off the grass, Figgy. Fair's fair, and Tom Merry is leader, and that settles it."

"Oh, all right," said Figgins. "It's a beastly risky business, though, and I'd rather it were I going to do it. But have your way, Tom Merry."

"I mean to," said Tom placidly. He was stripping off his clothes in the cover of the trees. "It's a bit difficult for a swim, but the biggest difficulty is in getting the boat away without the Grammar cads noticing it. Luckily the bank there is rather high, and that big bush is between them and the water. But——"

"But it will be a ticklish business," said Arthur Augustus, squinting across the river through his monocle. "I weally think, Tom Mewwy, that

this mattah ought to be placed in my hands. I'm the last fellow in the world to put myself forward in any way, but a mattah of this kind requires——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! You'll make me tired before I start."

"I refuse to wing off till I have stated my opinion. A mattah of this kind requires an awfully deep fellow to cawwy it out in a weally pwoyah way, and you all know how deep I am. I weally think I am the man for the job, Tom Mewwy."

"Rats!" was the polite retort of Tom Merry.

"Vewy well. I have stated my opinion, and if anythin' happens now, you will be to blame. I wash my hands of it," said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry was soon stripped for the swim. He carefully scanned the position of the boat, and of the picnickers, and then crept down to the water and plunged silently in.

The Co. watched him anxiously from the bank.

Would the Grammarians spot the dark head on the sunlit river? If they did, it would be easy enough for them to get the boat out of danger, and the expedition of the juniors from St. Jim's would have been made in vain.

But the bank was rather high, and the picnickers were busy with their feast. The faint echo of their talk and laughter could be heard across the river. The big bush to which the boat was moored screened Tom Merry from their view, so long as he kept in a line with it. This he was careful to do, though it was not easy to judge his position exactly from the water.

Tom Merry was a splendid swimmer, as he had shown on more than one occasion. He breasted the deep, swift stream gallantly, stemming the current, and cleaving his way steadily across. The Co. watched him from under the trees, hardly taking their eyes off him once.

"He's getting on finely," muttered Blake. "He'll do it all right. The Grammar bounders haven't seen him yet."

"And they won't," said Monty Lowther confidently. "They're not looking towards the river, and so long as he keeps the bush between them he's safe."

"The ticklish part will come when he reaches the boat," Figgins remarked. "That bush screens him now, but it can be seen through close at hand, and they may see him get into the boat."

"Well, it won't take him more than a few seconds to cut the painter."

They continued to watch anxiously. The minutes crawled by. Tom Merry was slower now, but he was making good progress. He swam with steady, silent strokes, and hardly the faintest of sounds came from the swimmer as he cleft the water.

Now he was close to the boat—the long, arduous swim was nearing its end. Nearer and nearer, till his hand went up from the water and rested on the gunwale.

"My hat!" muttered Figgins. "He's done it! Now——"

"Why doesn't he get in?"

"Perhaps they've heard him!"

Tom Merry was resting, hanging on the side of the boat. He was as yet hidden from the view of the Grammar School youngsters, but he knew that as soon as he was in the boat he would be seen by anyone who glanced that way. The bush was not thick enough to hide him when he was close at hand.

But the chance had to be taken. He had a pocket-knife slung round his neck, and now he opened the largest blade ready. Then he silently clambered into the boat.

It rocked a little, and the bush swayed slightly. And at that moment, as it happened, Monk happened to glance towards it.

He stared through the flimsy screen, and caught a glimpse of the white

skin of the boy in the boat. Tom was reaching knife in hand for the painter.

Monk gave a shout of amazement, and sprang to his feet. In his haste he forgot a pie he had been carving, and which he had taken on his knees for greater convenience. The pie fell on Carboy's lap, and the gravy spouted out all over him.

"Hallo!" roared Carboy. "What the dickens are you at, Monk? You've spoiled my trousers! You ass, what did you do that for?"

Frank Monk did not reply.

He was making his way down to the bank with desperate speed. The Grammar School boys stared, and Lane and Carboy, guessing that something was wrong, quickly followed.

The rope was cut, and Tom Merry dropped the knife in the boat and seized an oar. The Grammarians had not removed the oars from the boat, and Tom Merry had one in his hands in a twinkling, and was shoving off.

"Stop, you beast!"

Frank Monk came racing down to the water. Lane and Carboy were not far behind him. Tom Merry took not the slightest notice; in fact, he did not even look up. He shoved away, and the boat shot out into the river.

"Stop!"

Frank Monk tore on to the water's edge. The boat was dancing away, far out of reach, but not beyond a desperate leap!

Monk did not hesitate for a moment. Without stopping, he made a bound, cleared the intervening space of water, and landed in the boat.

The craft, of course, rocked violently at the concussion, and Tom Merry fell over the thwart. The shock sent it dancing away into the middle of the river, and Lane and Carboy halted dismayed on the bank. It was impossible for them to jump.

Tom Merry was on his feet in a moment.

Frank Monk had sat down rather violently in the stern, and was dazed by the shock, and before he could rise the chief of the St. Jim's juniors was upon him.

He grappled with Tom Merry, but it was no good.

Over he went, with Tom's grip upon him, and in a twinkling he was splashing in the water, with the cheerful face of Tom Merry smiling at him over the edge of the boat.

"Sorry to give you a wetting, kid," said Tom Merry. "You shouldn't have come where you were not asked, you know. There's no room for any of your Grammar rotters in my boat."

"Your boat!" spluttered Monk. "It's our boat! Give it to us, you beast! Give us our boat!"

"It's my boat now, kid, by right of capture," said Tom Merry calmly. "Better swim back. If you don't I shall tap you on the head with the oar—like that!"

He gave Monk a gentle tap, and he ducked under the water. Monk was a fine swimmer, as Tom Merry knew. There was no help for it, and Frank Monk turned and swam back to the bank where now the whole of the Grammar School party were collected, staring across the water. Lane gave him a helping hand out of the river. He landed, shaking the water from him like a Newfoundland dog, and gasping for breath. And, with feelings too deep for words, the Grammar School party saw Tom Merry dip a pair of oars in the water and pull the boat to the opposite bank, and saw eight juniors of St. Jim's rush forth from the trees to greet him with a whoop of triumph.

CHAPTER 24.

The Grammarians Give In.

TOM MERRY brought the boat to the shore, and half a dozen hands laid hold of it. The Saints were grinning with glee as they secured the craft. Tom Merry jumped ashore, and Manners handed him a towel.

"Good old Tommy! The wheeze is worked."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the Co., waving their hands at the Grammarians across the river. "Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the Grammarians shouted back, but the words were indistinguishable from the distance; and they were certainly not complimentary.

Tom Merry rapidly rubbed himself dry, and slipped into his clothes again. He was dressed in a very few minutes.

"We've got their boat," said Monty Lowther. "And now what's the next move, Tom? You haven't told us what that awfully ripping idea is yet."

Tom Merry fastened his tie.

"You'll see," he replied. Even to his chums of the Shell Tom Merry had confided nothing so far, and all the Co. were curious as to the plan which was to put the Grammar School juniors so completely in the shade. "Man the boat!"

"What are you going to do?"

"We're going to have a little pow-wow with the Grammar School kids."

The juniors scrambled into the boat. Figgins, Blake, Manners, and Lowther took the oars, and Tom Merry shoved off. They pulled out into the river.

"Don't get too near—not near enough for them to try jumping," said Tom Merry, standing up in the boat as they drew nearer the other side. "Not that they're likely to try it after Frank Monk's experience. Here we are! Steady on!"

The boat was within six yards of the bank now.

The oarsmen rested, just keeping the boat level with the bank against the swift current.

Tom Merry took off his cap to salute the infuriated Grammarians. Howls of rage greeted him from the youth of the Grammar School. It was bad enough to have their boat taken, but this seemed insult added to injury.

"You—you cads!"

"Give us our boat!"

"Thieves!"

"Blackguards!"

"Brutes! Hand over that boat!"

"Come ashore, and see how jolly soon we'll lick you!"

"They're afraid to come ashore. They haven't the pluck to set foot on land while we're here! Yah! Cowards! Who's afraid to come ashore?"

Tom Merry listened to the vociferations of the Grammar crowd with a perfectly unmoved face. He waited patiently for them to finish.

"Haven't you got a tongue in your head?" roared Monk, exasperated.

"Why don't you speak, you fathead? Can't you talk, you dummy? Didn't you ever learn to speak, idiot?"

"My dear chap—"

"I'll 'dear chap' you when I get hold of you! Why don't you come ashore? Afraid?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Exactly! We're too frightened to come ashore. If you had a microscope with you, you could see us trembling."

"Oh, you rotter! What do you mean by collaring our boat? Give it back!"

"Can't be did. We've captured it, and we're going to keep it."

"Thieves!" roared the furious Grammarians, stamping up and down on the bank with helpless rage. "Thieves! Blackguards! Cads!"

"When you've done paying us compliments——"

"Yah! Thieves! Beasts!"

"I'm willing to discuss terms with you. No hurry. Keep it up as long as you like. We'll stay here for a bit. Plenty of time to get back to St. Jim's before calling-over."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to take our boat away?" shouted Frank Monk. "You—you can't! We have got to have it to get home."

"I suppose I can't, if you say so; but, still, I've got a very strong impression that I can," said Tom Merry. "What do you chaps think?"

And he looked inquiringly at the Co. in the boat.

"I think we can manage it if we try," said Blake gravely.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly," said Figgins. "It's really a pity about those Grammar cads. They will have to stay out all night. I'm sorry for them, but it can't be helped."

"I've heard that some of them are awfully doggish at the Grammar School," Monty Lowther remarked. "They will enjoy a night out, very likely."

"Give us our boat, you cads!" roared the Grammarians, exasperated by the chaff from the Saints. "Give us our beastly boat, you howling rotters!"

"Sorry!" said Tom Merry. "You can walk home."

"We can't!" howled Frank Monk. "The river on this side is private ground."

"How can a river be private ground? There must be a mistake somewhere, Monkey. If you look, you will notice a distinct difference between the dryness and the wetness."

"I mean the ground on this side is private, and fenced off, and you know it!" shouted Monk. "You know we can't get along the river to Rylcombe. We shall have to walk nearly a mile from the river to get to a road, and then go round through Wayland. You know that as well as I do, you silly grinning hyena!"

"Yes, it's a sad case, no mistake about that!" said Tom Merry, with a solemn shake of his curly head. "I'm really sorry. If we could do without the boat we'd give it to you, like a shot; but after being put to the trouble of capturing it——"

"Look here, don't rot!" growled Frank Monk. "You know very well we can't walk home. We shouldn't get back to the school before one or two in the morning. In fact, most of us couldn't walk the distance at all. You know that."

"Yes; you Grammarians are a weak-kneed lot of rotters!" Tom Merry agreed. "If you liked to come over to St. Jim's sometimes, we'd give you lessons in gymnastics, and in walking and sprinting, and help you to——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Monk, rather ungratefully. "We could beat any of you fellows at walking and running."

"Well, yes, I admit you did some tall running the other night when we were after you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the Co. "So they did!"

"Yaas, wathah! What an extwemely funny wemark! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Monk, turning red. "Look here, you know we can't walk home. You said something about making terms. What do

you want? We admit you've got the best of us. Do you want us to hand over the grub in exchange for the boat?"

Fatty Wynn's eyes flashed with happy anticipation.

"What a splendid wheeze! Of course, that was Tom Merry's idea all along, chaps. I didn't think of that. Tom Merry, you're a genius!"

"Don't gloat too soon, Fatty," said Tom Merry calmly. "I'm not going to do anything of the sort. And that wasn't my plan all along. Nothing of the kind."

"I suppose you're joking. You couldn't lose such an opportunity as this of getting a feed from the enemy!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn hotly. "Look here, Tom Merry, I know you're a silly ass, and not much good as a leader, but you can't be such a silly ass as that!"

"I'm afraid I am, Fatty," said Tom, laughing.

"I won't stand it!" cried Fatty excitedly. "Chaps, are we going to put up with such rot? Fancy refusing an offer of that kind! There's the Grammar cads willing to hand over the grub and make it pax, and Tom Merry wants to refuse. Why, it's—it's wicked!"

"Are you going to accept my offer?" called out Frank Monk.

"Not this time," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "We don't want your grub, Monkey. You can eat it to the last currant-bun."

"We do—we do want it!" howled Fatty Wynn. "Chaps, Tom Merry's about the rottenest leader I ever heard of! Who's game for a giddy mutiny?"

He jumped up excitedly. Kerr and Monty Lowther pulled him down again and held him fast to his seat.

"Sit still, fathead!" said Figgins. "If you say another blessed word I'll scoff your tea when we get back to St. Jim's, and you sha'n't have another blessed mouthful before you go to bed!"

"Oh, I say, Figgy," gasped Fatty Wynn, "I—"

"I mean it!" said Figgins. "So shut up!"

The fat boy of the New House accordingly shut up, but very reluctantly. Tom Merry turned his attention to the Grammarians.

"We don't want your grub, young Monkey," he said. "We've got terms to propose, and you can take them or leave them. We don't care much which you do; so you can please yourself."

"Oh, let's come to the terms!" said Monk. "Don't keep us all night."

"In the first place, you must admit that you are done—utterly, thoroughly, and completely done—licked to the wide!" said Tom Merry impressively.

"We ain't! We don't admit anything of the kind!"

"Rather not!" shouted the Grammarians furiously.

"Very well. That settles it. You can pull, boys. It's time we were getting back to St. Jim's."

The oars rattled in the rowlocks. The Grammarians looked at one another desperately. It was impossible for them to remain there. The river was too wide for them to hope to swim it—indeed, not more than half of them could swim at all. Two or three might have got across, but not with their clothes on. That was evidently not to be thought of. To go round by Wayland and walk home to Rylcombe Grammar School was to make up their minds to spend a night out. Frank could imagine the state of the school when none of the party turned up for roll-call, and hour after hour passed without their returning. It was impossible to think of it. The only thing was to make terms with the St. Jim's juniors for the possession of the boat.

"Stop!" shouted Frank Monk. "You—you rotters! We—we admit what you say! We give in, hang you, and acknowledge ourselves licked!"

"You must all say the same," said Tom Merry, signing to his Co. to keep

the boat abreast of the spot on the bank where the group of Grammarians stood.

"Oh, hang you! We all do say the same!" growled Carboy.

"Yes, yes, yes!" chorused the Grammar youths shamefacedly.

"Good, so far! You admit that you are hopelessly licked, diddled, dished, and done?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"And you haven't a leg to stand on?"

"No, no, no!"

"Well, I'm glad to see that you can tell the truth sometimes, even if it has to be squeezed out of you," said Tom Merry. "There is hope for you yet. Always keep this up, you know—never try to make out that you can hold a candle to St. Jim's, and perhaps we shall let you off lightly in the future."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Grammar youths gritted their teeth with rage. But they were in a cleft stick, as it were, and it was idle to lose their tempers.

"Now, as you all admit yourselves licked," pursued Tom Merry, "there's no reason why you shouldn't write it down, is there?"

"Write it down!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "What are you driving at?"

"I've got a fountain-pen here and a sheet of cardboard," said Tom Merry. "I'll sling them across to you if you agree to the terms."

"What do you want us to do?"

"You must write down at my dictation, that's all. I'll make up the statement for you, to save you trouble. You have only got to write it down and sign it."

The Grammarians looked dubiously at one another. This was a development they had not quite expected. There was fierce rebellion in every face.

"Tell us what you want to have written on your blessed cardboard!" growled Monk. "We're not going to sign any silly rot, Tom Merry!"

"I don't want any silly rot. I want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," said Tom cheerfully. "If you prefer a night out, say so, and we'll be off. You've got to write down a full confession that you're done, and that you can't stand against St. Jim's, and sign it with all your names, so that there can't be any doubt in the future as to which is top school. Otherwise, you can stay there and live like giddy Robinson Crusoes. No good talking. I have spoken!"

The Co. cackled from one end of the boat to the other.

They understood now what Tom Merry's great idea had been. Undoubtedly, if Frank Monk and his companions signed such a confession, the superiority of St. Jim's would be incontestably established. Whatever the Grammarians might say or do, there would be no going back on their own word, in plain black and white.

"My hat!" said Blake. "It's a ripping wheeze. We'll have the giddy document framed and hung up in the common-room in the School House."

"In the New House, you mean," said Figgins. "We're in this Co., Jack Blake. You seem to forget that, kid."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "Don't talk rot, Figgy. There's only three of you New House bounders, and you're not much good, anyway; and there's six of us—six of the best."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry. "We haven't got the document yet, kids. We'll decide what to do with it when we've got it."

"Weally, that is a most sensible wemark, Tom Mewwy. I do not considah you a vewy sensible chap, as a rule; but weally I must say—"

"Dry up, Gussy! Monkey is talking—the other monkey."

"We won't write anything of the kind," called out Monk. "We'd rather walk all round the world to get back to the Grammar School. We won't!"

"We won't!" yelled Carboy and Lane.

But some of the other Grammarians were looking dubious. They could not remain stranded on the bank of the Ryll, and there was no escape except by aid of the Saints.

"Do as you like," said Tom Merry indifferently. "Good afternoon."

The boat went with the current. The Grammarians watched it savagely. Frank Monk set his teeth and did not say a word. Tom Merry & Co. wondered whether the Grammar crowd would "stick it out." Tom Merry did not believe that they would, and he was right. The boat had not gone a dozen yards when there was a general howl for the juniors return.

"Come back! We'll sign the paper! Come back!"

The boat pulled up to the level of the bank again, the oarsmen taking care to keep at a secure distance from the infuriated Grammarians.

"Made up your minds?" asked Tom Merry pleasantly.

"You—you beast!" growled Frank Monk. "Is this what you call cricket? It's beastly; it's—it's mean!"

"As mean as tying three fellows up in a row and sending them to toddle to St. Jim's with faces blacked like niggers, do you think?" asked Tom Merry, with the manner of one simply in search of information.

"As mean as putting a beastly label on a trap and making people think that three happy, innocent youths were lunatics?" asked Blake.

"As mean as smotherin' a fellah with wed ink, and sendin' him home lookin' like a Wed Indian?" demanded D'Arcy.

Frank Monk grinned in spite of himself.

All was fair in war, and the Grammar School had had its innings, and now it was the turn of St. Jim's, and there was nothing to complain about.

Tom Merry drew the sheet of cardboard and the fountain-pen from his pocket.

"Here you are, Monk. Catch!" He tossed them to the Grammar School chief. "Now, write at my dictation."

Monk spread the cardboard reluctantly on a box, and prepared to write. His companions looked on with glum and gloomy faces.

"We, the undersigned, hereby declare that we have been dished and done by the young gentlemen of the great college of St. Jim's. Got that?"

"Yes, I've got that," growled Monk, industriously writing.

"And we acknowledge that we aren't up to their weight, and that it was like our beastly cheek to enter into any encounter with them—"

"I won't! I won't! I won't!"

"Very well; pull, you chaps. We're off!"

"Stop! I'll write it; but—but—but—"

"Never mind the buts. You can keep them till afterwards. Have you written it down?"

"Ye-es," said Monk savagely, "I've written it down. Is that all, hang you?"

"No, it isn't all, not by long chalks," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Let me see. 'Encounter with them.' You've got that. Next: 'And we are sorry we have been such big asses as to start a contest with them, and we beg their pardon for having the cheek to exist in the same county.'"

"I—I won't! Oh, confound you, you beast! I've got that down!"

"We hereby declare that St. Jim's is top school, and that we're simply nowhere. We humbly hope that the Saints will let us down lightly in the future, as we fully and completely acknowledge their immense superiority. Signed— And then shove all your names after that statement. Mind, if

they're not all signed clearly the whole thing will have to be done over again from the beginning. I've got some more cardboard."

Writhing with rage, Frank Monk wrote out the document of surrender, and one by one the Grammarians signed it. Sixteen signatures were appended to the statement.

"I've done it!" said Monk. "Now come and fetch it, confound you! I can't chuck it to you; it would drop into the water."

A sort of thrill ran through the Grammarians. If they could induce the Saints to bring the boat within reach, there was a chance yet! They had surrendered, but they had not made it pax, and so it was open to them to rush the boat if they had a chance.

But Tom Merry was not to be caught napping so easily. He winked solemnly at Frank Monk, while the Co. chuckled.

"If you'll excuse us," said Tom Merry, "we won't bring the boat too near. Of course, we couldn't suspect nice young fellows like you of meaning to play any tricks. That isn't my meaning at all. But we'll keep our distance—in case of accidents."

"Accidents will happen, in the best regulated Grammar Schools," said Monty Lowther. "Nothing like being careful, young Monkey."

"I can see you're afraid—"

"Oh, wats!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Tom Mewwy, we mustn't let them think we're afraid. Let's go and show them—"

"Ring off, Gussy! You're dead in this act. Franky, my kid, send all your agreeable companions away from the river, say a hundred yards off, and we'll come and fetch that paper. You can leave it on the hamper. Just a moment, though—we shall have to let you have the boat somehow. Stay there yourself, and we'll take you on board. Then when we've landed on our side of the river, you can pull the boat across and rescue those Crusoes."

"How do I know you won't make me a prisoner?" demanded Monk suspiciously.

"I'll give you my word," said Tom Merry, with dignity.

"All right. I suppose we've got to stick this out. Get away, you kids; no good hanging round. They've got us."

"But I say, Monk—" began Carboy.

"Oh, don't talk. What's the good? We're done, and it's no good talking. Clear off, you kids, and let's get it over."

The Grammarians reluctantly walked away from the riverside. Tom Merry watched them go, and called out to them to go further when they halted. At last they were at the stipulated distance, and Frank Monk was left standing alone on the bank, with the document in his hand, and a thunder-cloud upon his face.

"Pull in, you chaps!" said Tom Merry.

The Co. brought the boat to the shore. Tom Merry held out his hand to assist the Grammar School chief in.

"Hand over the document, Monkey, and jump in," he said cordially. "Buck up! I can see your fellows yonder are getting restive."

Frank Monk stepped into the boat. The document was handed to Tom Merry and safely buttoned up inside his jacket. Monk sat down in the stern.

"Shove off!" said Tom Merry. "Those chaps are coming!" He waved his hand to the Grammarians, some of whom were racing down to the bank. "Good-bye, sweethearts, good-bye. Be good!"

The boat pushed off into the stream. The Grammarians baffled, halted on the bank, with a dozen yards of water between them and Tom Merry & Co. They hurled shouts of rage and denunciation at the victors, which were

replied to only with laughter and chaff. The boat was pulled across to the bank, and it ran into the rushes.

Tom Merry & Co. stepped out upon the shore, and Frank Monk was left in sole possession. He picked up the oars.

"So long," said Tom Merry sweetly. "We'll take great care of this valuable document, Monkey, you needn't be afraid of that."

"I'll get it back some time," declared Monk. "Our time will come."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You'll have to come burgling at St. Jim's if you want to get it back," he remarked. "We'll give you a warm reception if you do. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, confound you!" said Monk. And the boat pushed off.

"Now trot," said Tom Merry. "They'll be across the river pretty soon, and if they came up with us they would have a try to get this valuable document back; and they're sixteen to nine. Follow your leader!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it does not appeal to me stwictly consistent with our dig to wun away," said Arthur Augustus. "I think it would weally be more becomin' to—"

"Stay here, Gussy, if you like," said Tom Merry, over his shoulder. "I dare say the Grammar kids would be glad to make an example of you. Come on, you chaps!"

The Co. set off at a good rate. D'Arcy thought he had better keep up with them, and leave his dignity out of the question for the time. In high good-humour the victorious Co. arrived in sight of the gates of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 25.]

The Triumph.

TOM MERRY halted as the gleeful Co. reached the gates of the school. He opened his jacket and drew out the document of surrender.

An admiring crowd at once surrounded Tom Merry & Co., and the juniors felt the full importance of their positon.

"Good!" said Figgins. "It has been ripping. Just hand over that card, Merry, and we'll be off. It's about time we had a feed, I think."

"What card?" asked Tom Merry innocently.

"That one!" said Figgins, with emphasis. "Of course, it is going to belong to the New House. As we're the more valuable part of the Co.—"

"Rats!" said Blake. "That card is going to hang up in Study No. 6. That's the proper place for it. Don't be an obstinate ass, Figgins!"

"You're both wrong," said Tom Merry. "The card of course belongs to the whole Co., and as I'm the leader, I naturally keep it in my possession."

"You naturally don't do anything of the kind!" exclaimed Figgins hotly.

"Come, hand it over, and don't be an ass!"

"Oh, go back to that casual ward you call a house, and eat coke! This card belongs to us!" said Monty Lowther.

"It doesn't! It—"

"I tell you—"

"But I say—"

"Weally, deah boys, it ought to be entwusted to my care," said D'Arcy.

"It was weally owin' to me that the thing came off at all, and weally—"

"Oh, shut up! Hand it over, Tom Merry!"

"Rats!"

"Look here! If you School House kids are looking for trouble, you'll jolly soon find out. I'm not going to stay here all night arguing."

"Neither am I. This card belongs—"

"To us! We'll take care of it."

"No, you won't! I—"

"Then we'll jolly well take it! Come on, chaps!"

"Stand off! What about the Co.—we agreed—"

"We agreed to break up the Co. as soon as we had given the Grammar cads the kybosh," said Figgins. "We've done it, and that's enough. I've been very patient with you School House kids for the good of the cause. Now I'm going to—"

"Nuff said, Figgins! You're not going to have it. Come along, kids!"

The Terrible Three strode on shoulder to shoulder. Figgins & Co. rushed into their path, and Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy made a rush at the same time. In a moment the once-united Tom Merry & Co. were engaged in a terrific scramble.

The boys of St. Jim's crowded round, in a ring, watching the fight with a great deal of interest. They found it decidedly funny.

It was a wild, scrambling conflict. Nobody knew exactly whom he was attacking or being attacked by. Blake found himself holding Herries' head in chancery, and pommelling away, while Fatty Wynn gasped on the ground with Kerr sitting on his chest. Monty Lowther was punching away at Tom Merry for all he was worth till he discovered that he wasn't hitting Figgins as he supposed.

The card fell to the ground, and several of the Co. saw it at once and scrambled for it. It was clutched up by Tom Merry, Figgins, and Blake at the same moment, and went with a tear into three pieces. Blake had a little bit, Figgins a good share, and Tom Merry more than half.

Kildare came up half-laughing and half-angry.

"Stop this at once, you silly kids!" he commanded. "Here, Monteith, take these kids of yours away, and I'll see to the others."

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, promptly hustled Figgins & Co. off the scene. Then Kildare drove the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 into the School House. They were separated inside, rather exhausted by the struggle, but pretty well satisfied.

"We've got a bit of the thing, anyway," said Blake, as he dusted himself down in Study No. 6. "Enough for a souvenir, anyway, and to prove we had a hand in the business."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've got some of the blessed placard," Figgins remarked, in his room over in the New House. "More than a third part, so I think we can be satisfied. We can show it to prove that the New House had a hand in squashing the Grammar cads, and that's all we want."

To which the Co. cordially agreed.

The Terrible Three were equally satisfied. They gathered in Study X to clean themselves a little after that rough and tumble in the quadrangle.

"We've got half the document," said Tom Merry—"more than half. We'll stick it up on the wall, and I'll write out the rest myself and stick on to it, and make a complete document. We've come out best, so I think we can be satisfied."

"Right-ho!" said Manners. "I've got a black eye, and I'm more than satisfied."

CHAPTER 26.

Grammar School v. St. Jim's.

SATURDAY!

A fine October day, with a bright sun and a cool breeze. The young footballers of St. Jim's looked out of the windows in the morning with looks of satisfaction.

It was a fine day for the football match with the Grammar School Juniors, which had been arranged by mutual consent.

After morning school, the junior eleven met in high spirits. They were looking and feeling very fit, and anticipating a victory.

"We have got to lick the Grammar School," Tom Merry remarked. "You see, we've shown them that we are superior in every other way, but we haven't yet licked them at footer. If they beat us, they will begin to crow again. If we lick them, they will be done right in, and won't have a leg to stand on."

"There's no 'if' about the matter," said Monty Lowther. "We're going to beat them, and give them the coup-de-grace, as it were."

"Oh, don't start talking Italian now, Lowther," remonstrated Blake. "You know we——"

"That's not Italian, that's French."

"Is it? I didn't recognise the accent, so I put it down as Italian. You see——"

"I see a blithering ass!" said Lowther witheringly. "Dry up! You kids in the Fourth Form can't be expected to know anything about French, pauvres garcons."

"If you start calling me a pove garsong," said Blake, "there will be a row. I'm not going to stand it. I——"

"Peace!" said Tom Merry. "I wish you kids would keep quiet. I'm like a blessed nurserymaid looking after you. Now, are you all feeling fit for the match, or shall I make any changes in the team?"

"One and all protested that they were fit as fiddles, right as rain, and in perfect and indeed extraordinarily good condition. The nine members of the Co. had been reinforced by French and Jimson of the New House, two very good footballers, and the team was indeed a very good one, and likely to give a good account of St. Jim's football ability to the visitors.

Tom Merry looked rather doubtfully at Arthur Augustus.

"I say, Gussy, do you feel quite up to the match?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle on, and turned it upon Tom Merry with a look of surprise and indignation.

"I wegard that as a wude question," he replied. "Of course I am fit. I think there are few fellows in the coll. who play football like I do."

"I agree with you there!" said Figgins cordially. "In fact, there isn't one. Your game is a new and original kind, never heard of anywhere else."

"Pway don't wot, Figgins. I wegard football as a gweat and gwand game, and I have always made it a point to play well. Indeed, as I have stated before, I weally considah that I should make a bettah centah-forward than Tom Mewwy."

"Modesty, thy name is Gustavus!" said Manners. "Don't you think you can play the Grammarians all right alone, Gussy, without any of us to help you?"

"Pway be sewious, Mannahs. I wegard this as an important mattah. If Tom Mewwy cares to wesign the captaincy of the juniah team in my favah, I am weady to lead you to victowry; and I should consider that vewy mewitowious of Tom Mewwy."

"Go hon!" said Tom. "I'm such a conceited ass, you know, that I'm going to refuse that generous offer. Gussy, old chap, I really think you were not born for a football captain. I've my doubts whether I ought to play you at half against a lot like the Grammarians."

"You are jokin', of course? It would be impos to leave me out," said D'Arcy. "I should be extwemely indignant."

"In that case, of course, we shall have to play you," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"But, weally——"

"We'll play you, but you won't give the game away more than you can help, will you, Gussy? Try not to make it a win for the Grammar School."

To this appeal the indignant swell of the School House vouchsafed no reply. He turned on his heel and walked away with his nose high in the air.

"He'll be all right," said Blake. "He can play up when he likes, and he's on his mettle now. I've not the slightest doubt that we shall lick the Grammar School."

"Don't forget about his eyeglass. He's not to take that on the field," said Tom Merry. "No good talking to the ass—just collar it before the match."

"Right you are!" said Blake, laughing. "Depend upon me."

After dinner the young footballers looked out for the Grammarians. It was pax that day between St. Jim's and the Grammar School, and the visiting footballers were to be received in a friendly spirit by the Saints.

The ground was in excellent condition. Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, had consented to act as referee—always willing and ready to take any trouble to help the youngsters on in playing the grand old game. Monteith and Darrell were linesmen.

As it was the first match that had ever been played between St. Jim's and the Grammar School, it excited a very general attention. Some of the masters intended to come down to the ground and watch. Kildare was thinking of getting up a match between St. Jim's First and the Grammar School Seniors; but Tom Merry & Co. had been ahead of him, and the junior match was the first to come off.

A crowd of Saints at the gate looked for the brake from the Grammar School. There was a shout when it came in sight.

High up in the brake were seated the Grammar School Junior Eleven, with several other Grammarians, and some of them were playing mouth-organs and penny trumpets to give a tone to the arrival. Round the brake rode dozens of cyclists, some of them two to a bike, and behind it were several vehicles crammed with Grammarians. And further behind were young Grammarians, who were coming on foot, in twos and threes and fours.

The late defeat had hit the Grammar School hard, and Frank Monk and his comrades were determined to do what they could to wipe it out on the football field. If they won the football match they might consider themselves entitled to hold up their heads again. If they lost it— But the Grammarians would not think of that. They were determined to win.

With a blare of barbaric music—as a novelist would put it—the brake drew up at the gates of St. Jim's, and the crowd of Saints there waved their caps and shouted. Frank Monk jumped down, and Tom Merry shook hands with him.

"Here we are again!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You're looking fit. Glad to see you, and the more the merrier!"

"There's about a hundred coming," grinned Frank. "You said let 'em all come, and they're taking you at your word."

"Glad to hear it. After we've licked you—"

"Eh?"

"I mean, after the match we're going to have an al-fresco feast, and there's plenty of grub for all-comers. We've had a whip round, and laid in a stunning feast—about the best that was ever seen at St. Jim's. Which-ever way the match goes, old chap, we'll have a good time, and part good friends."

"Right-ho!" said Frank. "I endorse all that, every word, Tom Merry. But, of course, we're going to lick you hollow."

"We'll take all the lickings you can give us," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"May the best team win. That's the motto of every good footballer, and that's enough. Come along!"

The Grammar School contingent were conducted to their dressing-tent, and the football rivals separated. There was a growing crowd round the field, nearly all St. Jim's, seniors and all, turning out for the match.

When the Grammarian eleven appeared in sight, after changing, they were greeted by a cheer. There were, as Frank had said, close upon a hundred Grammar School boys upon the ground, and they cheered their champions, and the Saints cordially joined in. The Grammar School footballers looked very fit in their red jerseys. St. Jim's were in blue-and-white. Tom Merry tossed with Monk for choice of ends, and lost. Frank Monk chose the end from which the wind was blowing; but the breeze was light, and there was little to choose. But it was a slight advantage; and from the Grammar crowd, eager for victory, even that small point gained was something. And they broke into a cheer as Frank Monk was seen pointing towards the goal he had chosen.

"Nevah mind, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, screwing on his monocle and looking round him—"nevah mind. We shall lick them all the same. I weally feel fit to play the game of my life, don't you know, and I am quite sure that I shall score a feahful lot of goals!"

"Take that window-pane off," said Monty Lowther.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind! I—Ow! Blake, how dare you jerk my eyeglass off in that extwemely wuff mannah! Westore it to me at once!"

Blake grinned.

"After the match, Gussy, not before. You look very beautiful without it, you know."

"I insist upon your westorin' my monocle at once," said D'Arcy firmly.

"Unless you westore it I shall pwoceed to violence."

"Oh, pway don't, Gussy! I feel so frightened!" said Blake plaintively.

"You're making my heart wobble like—like Figgins on his motor-bike. I—"

"What's that?" said Figgins, looking round.

"Come along!" said Tom Merry. "Cut the cackle, and line up! Do you want to keep the Grammar kids waiting?"

"Blake has wuffly wemoved my monocle," said Arthur Augustus. "I insist upon havin' it westored to me immediately!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "Come on, Gussy! They're ready!"

"I wefuse to come on! I shall assault you and stwike you violently if you do not return me my monocle at once!"

"Are you coming, Gussy? Lead on, Tom Merry, we're following you."

"We are not—we distinctly are not! I must have my monocle returned to me before I stir fwom this spot. Are you goin' to return it, Blake, or must I use violence?"

"I'm afraid you must use violence, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus made a rush at Blake. Blake's hand went up in the air, and the prized monocle flew away like a stone from a catapult. It dropped among the seats where the masters and some of the seniors were sitting.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, with a start. "What was that? I distinctly heard something drop." Mr. Railton stooped and picked up a glimmering object. "Dear me!" repeated the Head. "It is an eyeglass—a monocle. How singular!"

Mr. Railton smiled as he slipped the monocle into his pocket.

"I think I know who the owner is," he remarked. "I will return it to him—after the match."

D'Arcy's eye had followed despairingly the flight of the glimmering eyeglass through the air, and he saw Mr. Railton stoop, and knew that the monocle was picked up. It was useless to ask the housemaster for it just then, he knew. He turned a wrathful eye upon Blake.

"Blake, I no longah wegard you as a fwiend."

"Horrid!" said Blake. "Still, I can survive it, so long as you don't give me a feahful thwashin'."

"Buck up, you fellows!" called out Tom Merry. "Are you going to keep us waiting all the afternoon? Line up, can't you?"

The juniors hurried after their captain. They lined up, the ball at Tom Merry's foot. Kildare put his whistle to his lips.

Phip! The clear note of the whistle rang over the playing-field, and the ball rolled from the foot of Tom Merry.

The game had commenced.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, still feeling extremely annoyed, had taken his place at half, and he played up with the rest, in spite of the loss of his precious monocle. He was half inclined to refuse to play, as a protest against Blake's ruffianly conduct; but the thought of how valuable he was to the side stopped him from taking so extreme a step as that.

The kick-off was followed by a rush of the Saints, and they were soon swarming over the enemy's territory.

The Grammarians made a fine struggle, but the rush of the Saints was irresistible, and they brought the ball right up to the visitor's goal.

Tom Merry kicked for goal, but the ball was headed out. And then Figgins saw his chance. He came for the ball just in time, and it met his head and popped in again in a twinkling, long before the goalkeeper could get ready for it. It missed the goalie by a foot and fell in the net, and a rousing cheer rang from the ranks of the Saints crowded round the field.

From the New House boys especially came ringing shouts:

"Goal!"

"Goal!"

"Good old Figgins!"

"First goal to the New House! Hurrah!"

The Grammar goalie—who was our old friend Lane—threw out the ball with a grimace. It was first blood to St. Jim's in the first ten minutes of the game.

The Saints were looking very pleased with themselves as they walked back to the centre of the field.

"That's right!" said Tom Merry. "Keep that up! I'm proud of you, Figgy, old man! You headed the ball in splendid style! I've never seen anything neater!"

And Figgins blushed modestly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "You did vewy well, Figgins, though not so well as I think I should have done if I were playin' forward. A forward wequires——"

"A half-back requires to shut up!" said Tom Merry. "Line up!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I object——"

"No talking. Line up, kids!"

They lined up again. Frank Monk, looking rather grim, and immensely determined, kicked off, and the Grammarians this time were the side to attack. They drove the Saints back well over the half-way line. But then the home players rallied, and worked the ball along the touch-line up the field.

Many times the leather went into touch; but all the time the Saints were working their way on, and at last the Grammarians were forced to concede a corner.

"You take it, Blake," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

Round stood the players with gleaming eyes while Blake took the corner-kick. He dropped the ball just where Tom Merry wanted it, and the next moment, in spite of the fierce rush of the Grammarians, and the keen watch of the goalie, the ball was slammed home into the net.

A ringing hurrah went up.

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"Hurrah!"

Two up for St. Jim's. Twenty minutes had passed of the first forty-five, and the home team were two goals to the good. The Grammarians were looking grim as they lined up again.

"Buck up!" said Frank Monk tensely. "They're good stuff, but we've got to beat them—we are going to beat them! Buck up!"

And the Grammarians did buck up. As the game re-started, the Saints drove them back into their own half; but they rallied and advanced, and came on, rushing the leather right through the home territory.

Closer and closer to the goal, in a desperate tussle.

Two or three players on both sides went sprawling on the ground, no one heeding, as the rough tussle surged towards the home goal.

And Fatty Wynn, the goal-keeper for St. Jim's, looked more alert. He had spent most of his time hitherto in leaning against a goal-post, allowing his mind to wander off in happy anticipations of the feed that was to follow the football match. Now he bucked up and became as watchful as a cat.

"Look out, Fatty!" came a shout from round the ground; but Fatty Wynn did not need the warning—he was looking out. He stood all eyes and hands as the knot of struggling players reeled and surged nearer to the home goal.

Frank Monk broke through the press, the ball at his feet.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed at him pluckily, and the next moment went rolling over on the ground from the shoulder of the Grammar School captain. Then Frank eluded a back who dashed wildly at him and rushed right on for goal, with only Fatty Wynn to baffle him now.

Fatty watched like a cat.

The ball came whizzing in, but Fatty was all there. His foot met it, and it whizzed out again. But before he could be tackled, Frank Monk was on the oncoming ball, and his foot caught it, and it whipped into the goal like a flash of lightning.

Frank went rolling over, and the Saints surged round the goal mouth; but it was too late. The ball was in the net.

It was a goal for the Grammarians. And then it was the Grammar School's turn to shout. And they did shout, with a right good will.

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

"Good old Grammar School!"

"Hurrah!"

And the Saints joined in the cheers, for it had really been a fine goal, well taken, and Frank Monk deserved an ovation.

Fatty Wynn grunted as he chucked out the ball. He didn't quite know how he had let it pass him, but he didn't intend to let it happen again.

And it did not happen again in the first half of the match.

Twice again the Grammarians succeeded in rushing the game up to the home goal, and shots rained in upon the goal-keeper, but he proved quite able to deal with every one of them.

The whistle went for half-time, and left the score in the same position—St. Jim's two goals, to one of the Grammar School.

"Phew!" said Tom Merry, as he walked off the field for the brief rest, and he wiped his sweating brow. "This is warm work, and no mistake!"

"Yaas, wathah. I am weally inclined to wegard football as a feahful fag," said Arthur Augustus. "If I were not required so much by the coll., I should wathah keep out of such an extwemely stwenuous game. It is too much like work!"

"Oh, don't think of that, Gussy," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You know what sort of a side we should have without our Gustavus Adolphus in it. Don't ever dream of deserting us. Remember your duty to the college."

"Yaas, wathah," said the innocent Arthur Augustus. "That's weally why I stick it out, Lowthah, although it's such a feahful fag. I weally don't see what you are cackling at, Blake!"

"Would you like to see?" asked Blake. "It's an awfully funny thing—enough to make a cat laugh. Would you like to see it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There it is." Blake held up a small pocket mirror before Gussy, and mirrored to him his own countenance. "Did you ever see such a funny critter?"

"Blake, I stwongly object to such a joke. It savahs of impertinence. I have already told you that I no longer wegard you as a fwiend—"

"You're wasting time, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "The whistle goes in another minute. Chaps, we have got ahead of the Grammar kids now, and we've got to keep ahead in the second half. Stick to it, and we shall beat them to the wide."

"Righto!" said the team with one voice.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hand us over a lemon! I say, the Grammarians are playing up well!" remarked Manners. "That goal of Frank Monk's was really well taken! I don't think they're quite up to our form, though. A licking on the footer field will be the last nail in their coffin. Hallo, there goes the whistle!"

The shrill "pheed" of the whistle rang over the football ground, and the team poured out into the field once more to do battle with the heroes of the Grammar School.

CHAPTER 27. The Winning Goal.

THE crowd had thickened again round the ropes. The really fine display given by the juniors held the spectators there; and even the seniors, who were usually inclined to sniff at junior football, admitted that the match was worth watching—and watched it. A cheer greeted the appearance of the rival teams in the field.

The change of ends brought the advantage of the wind—what little there was—on to the side of the Saints. They commenced the second half with gay confidence.

Perhaps they felt just a trifle too much confidence to start with. They had taken two goals to one with the wind against them, and with it in their favour some of them regarded the rest of the match as something like a walk-over. They soon found out their mistake, however.

Frank Monk and his followers were in deadly earnest, and determined to wipe out the balance against them, and they put their best foot foremost from the very start.

Frank kicked off, and the Grammarians followed up the ball into the home half, and in spite of a strong defence they broke through, and came swarming up to the home goal.

Fatty Wynn was called upon to sustain a determined attack, and he did so, sending out shot after shot that rained in upon him.

But a sudden low shot from Carboy beat him at last, and the ball curled into the net, and a roar went up from the Grammarians on the ground:

"Goal!"

It was an undoubted goal, and the score was level now. The Grammarians had made up their lost ground at last.

"Hurrah! Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

The Grammar crowd were delighted, and they shouted themselves hoarse and husky in evidence of it. Victory once more smiled upon them.

Both sides looked very heated and resolute when they lined up again. Both sides were obstinately determined that the other side should score nothing further, and for a long time a tussle went on, without a goal accruing to either side.

The minutes were ticking away, and fellows were looking at their watches. The tussle was full of excitement and incident, but no goals materialised, and fears began to be entertained that the match would end in a draw. That would have been an unsatisfactory result all round, and both Saints and Grammarians began to shout advice and encouragement to the players.

"Play up, Grammar School!"

"On the ball, St. Jim's!"

"Buck up!"

"Don't go to sleep!"

"Play up! This is football—not the rest cure!"

"Buck up!"

Of all which the players very sensibly took no notice whatever. They were playing up as well as they knew how, and no one could do more than that.

"Ten minutes more," said Gore. "I suppose it will end in a draw. Might have expected as much of Tom Merry!"

"Oh, rats!" said Pratt. "They're playing up well. And St. Jim's is getting ahead, too. Most of the Grammar lot are on their last legs!"

Pratt's observation was correct.

The game had been a gruelling one, and both sides were showing very visible signs of wear and tear, but upon the whole the Grammarians seemed more spent than their opponents.

Tom Merry and Figgins, on the home side, especially seemed to be as fresh as paint, and Blake was playing up finely.

Arthur Augustus was pretty well fagged out, and as the hard game drew towards the finish he was of little use to his side, except by getting in the way of the enemy, which he frequently did by accident.

"There goes Monk!" came a delighted Grammarian's shout. "On the ball, Frank! Hurrah!"

Monk was breaking away, with the ball at his feet. As if by a miracle he had escaped forwards and halves, and was streaking for goal, dribbling the ball in fine style.

Fatty Wynn was on the alert.

The backs were scattered, but Arthur Augustus was rushing in. Fatty Wynn met the ball with his fist and drove it out again, and Monk swung round and collided violently with Arthur Augustus. They went to the ground together.

It is quite possible that that collision saved St. Jim's, for as Monk went sprawling to the ground, it gave the home backs time to rush in and clear, and the ball went sailing away to mid-field, over the heads of the oncoming Grammarians.

It came down past the half-way line, and the Saints were on it like a flash.

Tom Merry raced away, the ball at his feet, and with him in line went Lowther, Figgins, Blake, and French.

Arthur Augustus and Frank Monk were left lying where they fell. They sat up and stared at each other. Both were gasping. The last minutes of the game were ticking away, and the fate of the match hung in the balance.

"You—you wuff person!" gasped D'Arcy. "I wegard you as extwemely wuff! You have caused me a feahful shock to the system!"

"Oh, blow your system!" said Frank.

He staggered to his feet.

He was too winded for much of a run; he tottered rather than ran after the players. The Saints were on a fine burst.

Passing the ball with an almost machine-like precision one to another, the home forwards went through the stragglng defence like a knife through cheese.

As fast as one was tackled, he parted with the ball in good time, and working together like a machine, the front line of the Saints brought the ball right up to the enemy's goal, and made a concentrated attack upon it.

Lane did his best, but he could not perform miracles. Shots rained in upon him, and the fifth one found him wanting.

Whiz!

Past the ends of his outstretched fingers the leather shot, and lodged in the net! The next moment came a shrill blast upon the whistle. It was time!

The Saints round the ground were yelling and waving their caps like maniacs.

"Goal, goal, goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"St. Jim's wins—St. Jim's wins!"

"Goal, goal! Hurrah!"

The level green, clear, save for the twenty-two, a second before, now swarmed with eager lads, black with them, as they surged round the players.

Shouting and cheering, the Saints bore their champions off the field, winners of the great match by three goals to two.

Glad enough were the young footballers of a rest after the wearing game. They had played hard, and few of them had a run left.

The St. Jim's side gathered in their tent gleefully enough. Even D'Arcy forgot the loss of his eyeglass, and that he no longer regarded Blake as a friend. They had beaten the enemy, they had put the last nail in the coffin of the Grammar School, and they were happy and content.

They soon rubbed down and changed their clothes. Then they went out to seek the vanquished team. The ground was swarming with Saints and Grammarians, on very good terms with each other.

The visitors were, of course, disappointed; but the defeat had been such an extremely narrow one that no disgrace could be considered as attaching to it—a fact the Saints were only too eager to acknowledge.

Tom Merry slapped Frank Monk on the shoulder. Frank turned to him with a comical grimace. He was disappointed, but he took it like a true sportsman.

"Well, you've licked us!" he said.

"It was a close shave," said Tom Merry. "It was a jolly good game on both sides, and as much credit is due to you as to us. That's only the truth.

Anyway, we agreed to have a good time, however the match went, and we're going to, I hope."

"That's the cheese!" said Frank heartily. "It was a good match and a fair fight, and that's the chief thing; and we know how to take a defeat without growling."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I know you do. Come along, kids!"

The two teams, lately in deadly strife, fraternised amicably. Arthur Augustus recovered his eyeglass from Mr. Railton, and was happy again. When the time came for the feed, the Saints and the Grammarians sat down together in perfect good-humour to an al-fresco feast that fulfilled the highest expectations of the most exacting guest.

All rivalry was banished; the rivals toasted one another, and peace reigned supreme. When the time came for the visitors to return to the Grammar School, there were sincere regrets on both sides.

The Grammarian eleven mounted into the brake at the gates. The Saints stood there in a thick crowd to give them a parting cheer.

Frank Monk leaned down and shook hands with Tom Merry.

"Good-bye!" he said. "You've come out top, and we don't deny it; but we'll pull you down off your perch some time, if we live long enough! Tooral-loo!"

"Bye-bye, old kid!"

With a crack of the whip, the brake drove off. A burst of cheers followed it and its convoy of cyclists and pedestrians.

The brake disappeared in the evening dusk down Rylcombe Lane, and the Saints began to go in. They were all feeling very happy, after a jolly day.

"Well," said Tom Merry, turning to his comrades, "we've had our ups and downs with the Grammar School, but we've come out top dog, and I'm satisfied, for one. We've licked the Grammarians, so one more cheer for Tom Merry & Co.!"

And the Co. cheered with a will.

THE END.

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