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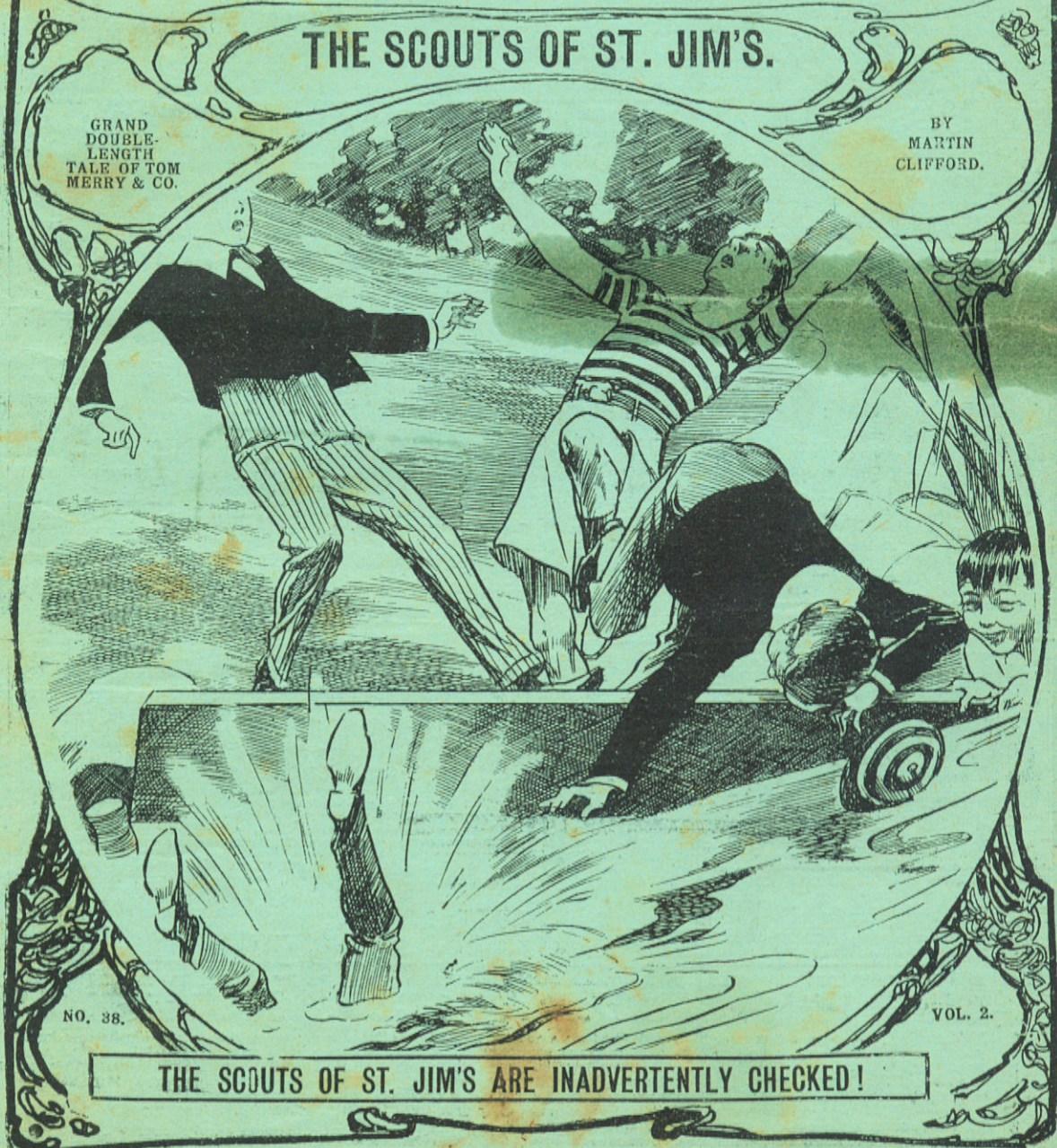
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NEW SERIES

## THE SCOUTS OF ST. JIM'S.

GRAND DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO.

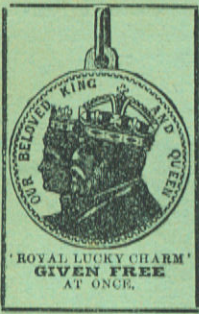
BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.



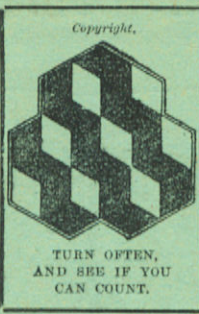
NO. 38.

VOL. 2.

THE SCOUTS OF ST. JIM'S ARE INADVERTENTLY CHECKED!



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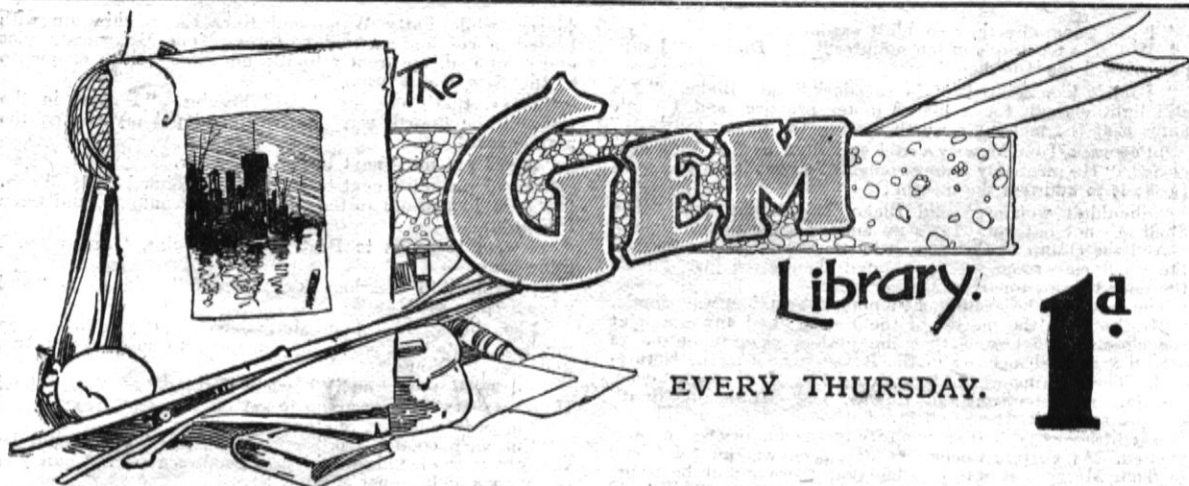
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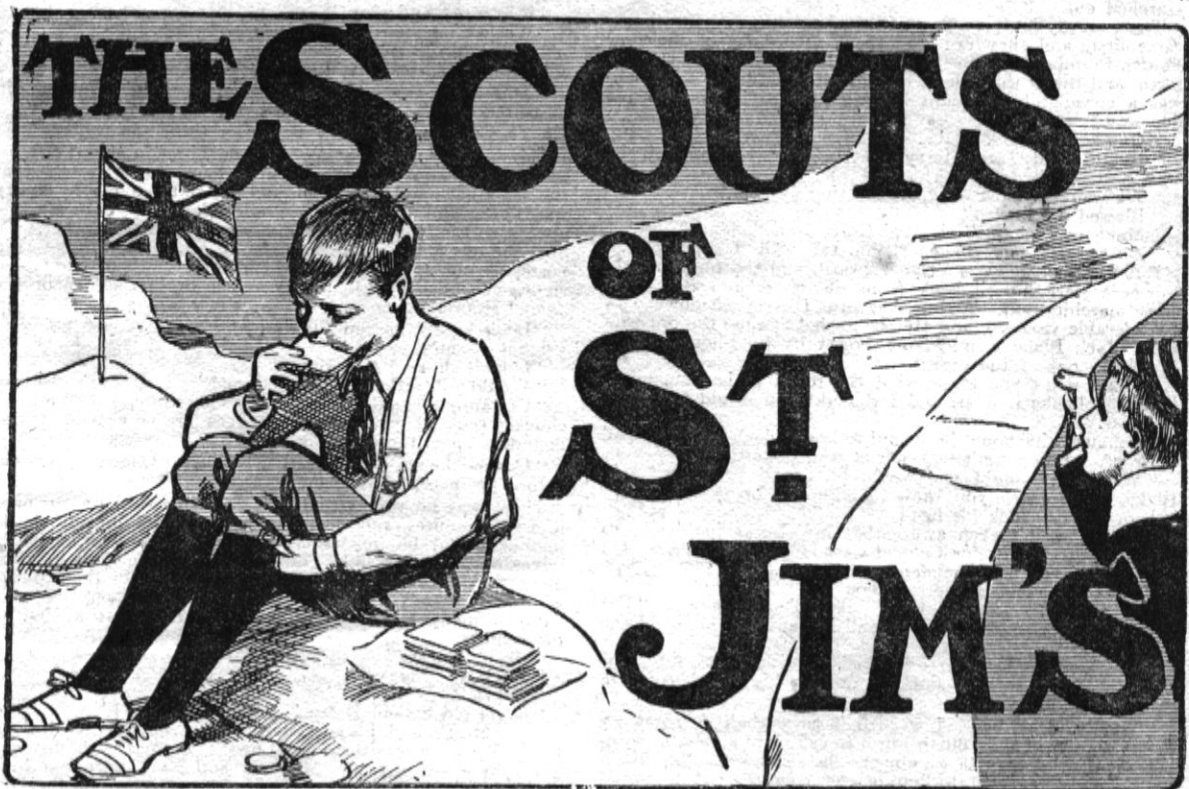
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### CHAPTER 1.

#### A Meeting is Called.

**H**ALF-PAST four chimed from the clock-tower of St. Jim's, and one minute later the doors of the Fourth Form class-room were flung open, and a mob of youngsters poured out. There was instantly a buzz in the wide, flagged passage, as if a dozen beehives had broken loose.

But the boys did not, as usual, make straight for the open door into the quadrangle. It was fine October weather, but

hardly a fellow in the Fourth went out of doors. The juniors collected in the passage in groups, or twos and threes, talking excitedly, and discussing some topic evidently of great interest to all of them. A dozen or more of the youngsters collected round Jack Blake, who was talking to his chums, Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries, in a rather dissatisfied way.

"Blest if I know what it's all about," said Blake. "I suppose we'd better go."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a decided nod. "Whatevah may be the weason the meetin' is called, it would only be the polite thing to do, you know."

**ANOTHER DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.**  
No. 38 (New Series).

"I don't see why they couldn't explain."

"Well, the meeting's in ten minutes," said Digby. "I suppose they'll explain then."

"I don't like being kept in the dark," said Blake. "It's still light enough for a bit of footer practice, and I don't know that the meeting's worth cutting the footer for."

"Pewwaps Tom Mewwy could enlighten us," D'Arcy suggested. "He pwobably knows somethin' about it, as Fewwahs Locke is to address the meetin'."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Blake, brightening up. "The Shell are not out yet. Let's go and wait for them."

And the chums of the Fourth hurried along to the door of the Shell class-room. They planted themselves just outside the door to wait for Tom Merry.

The cause of the excitement among the juniors was simple.

Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, had announced at the close of the lessons that the juniors were requested to attend a general meeting of the Lower School in the lecture-hall. The meeting was to be addressed by Mr. Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, and Colonel Carr-Hilton, of South African fame. That was all Mr. Latham had announced, and it was little enough. The curiosity of the juniors was greatly excited. As Ferrers Locke, the detective, was an old friend of Tom Merry's, it was possible that there might be something in D'Arcy's suggestion, that Merry of the Shell could enlighten them.

The four juniors had not long to wait. The Shell were delayed only a few minutes, doubtless while their master made the same announcement that had been made to the Fourth. Then the door was flung open, and the Shell marched out.

Three sturdy juniors—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—came first, and they ran into the locked arms of the four Fourth-Formers barring the way. The three stopped, perforce, and threw the fellows behind into confusion, and there was a considerable amount of pushing and shoving in the doorway.

"Halt!" said Jack Blake.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Get out of the way, you kids."

"We want to know what the meeting's about?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Make way, there!" shouted Gore, from behind.

"No hurry," said Blake. "You can wait, I suppose."

But the Shell made a surge forward, and the four Fourth-Formers were hurled back from the door, and the Form came marching out. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down with considerable violence, and Herries reeled against the opposite wall. Jack Blake caught Tom Merry by the shoulder, and drew him out of the crowd.

"I say, don't you know what the row is?" he demanded. "Ferrers Locke is in it, and I thought you would be bound to know."

"I thought he would be bound to know, deah boy!" gasped D'Arcy. "Pway don't wob me of my suggestion!"

"Well, we thought you would be bound to know," said Blake. "I suppose you knew that Ferrers Locke was here."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, I wasn't even aware that Mr. Locke had come to St. Jim's at all. As for Colonel Carr-Hilton, I've never seen him, though I knew the name, of course."

"Then what is the meeting about?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to it, to see, you know, and I'd advise you to do the same."

And the Terrible Three walked on. Arthur Augustus had picked himself up, and was dusting his trousers with a cambrio handkerchief.

"Weally, deah boys, I wegard it as watah dewogatory to the dignity of the Fourth Form to call us to a meetin' without acquaintin' us with its object," he remarked. "I should be strongly tempted to ignore the meetin', but it would be hardly the pwopah thing to do, undah the cires. I have a gweat respect for Mr. Fewwahs Locke, but weally—"

"Suppose we get along to the meeting," suggested Digby. "Those New House bounders will be bagging all the front seats if we are late."

"Good idea," said Blake. "Come on!"

And the chums of the Fourth hurried away in the direction of the lecture-hall. There was a tide of juniors setting in the same direction. All were eager to get good seats, and to hear what Mr. Ferrers Locke and Colonel Carr-Hilton had to say. Front seats had been already taken by Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, who had gone directly to the lecture-hall from the class-room. An argument was proceeding between the Terrible Three and three juniors belonging to the New House—three Fourth-Formers, known at St. Jim's as Figgins & Co. Figgins, the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors, was explaining matters excitedly to Tom

Merry, while Fatty Wynn and Kerr backed him up with heated voices and excited gestures. Tom Merry sat quiet and composed, apparently totally unmoved by the eloquence of the New House trio.

"I say, that's my seat," said Figgins. "I came in the moment the Fourth was dismissed, and put my cap on the middle seat."

"And I put mine next to it," said Kerr.

"And I put mine next to Kerr's!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "Then I dodged out to the tuckshop for a minute, and when I came in—"

"I went to speak to Pratt," said Figgins, "and when I came back—"

"I strolled to the door for a second," said Kerr, "and when I came back—"

"Look here," said Tom Merry severely, "you little boys mustn't all talk at once if you want to make yourselves understood. You—"

"I'll little boys you!" howled Figgins. "You School House waster, are you going to get off that seat?"

"I'm very comfy here, thank you!"

"I'm very comfy, too," said Lowther. "We should be all right if those kids would stop making a row. Can't you sit down and be quiet, Figgins?"

"You've got our seats!"

"Rats! It's a rule that the New House chaps can't sit down till all the fellows belonging to the cock-house at St. Jim's have seats—"

"You School House rotter, if you're looking for a thick ear—"

"Run away and play."

"We left our caps on the seats—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Tom Merry. "We found some old caps on the seats, and we chucked them away."

"You—you chucked them away?" said Figgins, in measured tones. "You chucked our caps away?"

"Yes; they're along the wall over there somewhere."

Figgins & Co. glared at the Terrible Three in almost speechless wrath. Tom Merry, of course, knew perfectly well that the seats belonged to Figgins & Co. But the House rivalry was keen, and School House and New House boys were always on the look-out to take a rise out of one another. To hurl Figgins & Co.'s caps into the distance, and to take calm possession of the seats to which they had an undoubted right, naturally appealed very much to the heroes of the School House.

"Look here," gasped Figgins, at last, "are you going to get out of those seats?"

"I don't think," said Manners.

"Would you rather be chucked out?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We'll be chucked out, if you please—if there are any New House bounders up to the chucking."

"Collar them!" exclaimed Figgins. "Chuck them out before the masters come in!"

There was no time to be lost. The meeting was to open in a few minutes, and when the masters came in, any chucking-out would be impossible. Figgins & Co. hurled themselves upon the Terrible Three, and a terrific struggle commenced. The fellows who were crowding into the hall, or who had already taken their seats, cheered on the combatants, many standing up on the seats to get a view of the conflict.

"Go it, Merry!"

"Buck up, Figgy!"

"Bravo, New House!"

"Good old School House! Sock it to them!"

Tom Merry and Figgins were rolling on the dusty floor. Fatty Wynn was sitting on Lowther's chest, pinning him down by sheer weight. Manners and Kerr were wrestling desperately. Jack Blake and his chums were in the row next behind, and they looked on with great interest. The disputed seats were left empty during the combat, and a gleam of mischief suddenly darted into Blake's eyes.

"Blessed if I can see why we shouldn't have the front seats," he muttered to Digby. "It's against the dignity of the House to let New House wasters have them, and against the dignity of the Form to let the Shell-fish have them. Come on—you and Herries."

"Right-ho!" grinned Herries.

The three juniors promptly scrambled over the backs of the seats in front of them, and sat down in the places of Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. The three pairs of combatants were rolling on the floor in a cloud of dust, and did not even see the cool usurpation. There was a sudden shout.

"Cave!"

Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master, was entering the



"I wefuse to wing off," said Arthur Augustus, ranging himself by the side of D'Arcy, minor. "Any bonndah pwesumin' to twy to frog's-march my young bwothah will immediately receive a feahful thwashin'!"

room. The short-sighted little gentleman came blinking towards the scene of the disturbance.

"Dear me! What is all this noise?"

The combat ceased instantly. Six dusty and dishevelled juniors stood up, breathlessly. The Terrible Three retreated towards their seats, and nearly sat down on the knees of Blake, Herries, and Dig.

"You young rotters!" muttered Tom Merry. "Get out of our seats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get out!"

"Rats!"

"I am sorry to see this horseplay in the lecture-hall," said little Mr. Lathom. "The quadrangle would be a more suitable place for a House riot, if you cannot keep quiet. Go to your seats at once!"

"Yes, sir," said Figgins meekly.

He looked expressively at Blake. Blake regarded the ceiling with an absent-minded smile. He had no intention of moving. Tom Merry exchanged glances with Figgins. They would gladly have joined forces for the purpose of ejecting the cool usurpers. But that was impossible under a master's eye. Slowly and reluctantly the dusty half-dozen turned away, and walked to the back of the hall. All the front rows were taken up now, and the six dusty juniors found places in the very last row of the audience.

"My only hat!" said Figgins. "The cheek of those young wasters—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We're both done," he said. "Blake scores this time. We—"

He broke off as there was a sudden hush in the lecture-hall. A door had opened at the back of the dais, and two gentlemen entered. It was exactly a quarter to five, and Ferrers Locke and the colonel were prompt to time.

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Colonel Explains.

TOM MERRY rubbed the dust from his eyes and looked at Ferrers Locke over the crowd of heads. The famous detective glanced over the audience, and gave Tom a cheery nod. There was a genial smile upon the clear-cut face of Ferrers Locke. He was well-known to the boys of St. Jim's; but interest centred upon the colonel.

The latter was a muscular, bronzed veteran of the South African war, in which his exploits were well known. After the first hush, there was a low buzz in the hall, which swelled into a burst of cheering.

"Hurrah!"

The colonel nodded and smiled. Mr. Lathom rose to his feet, and held up his hand for silence, and the cheering died away.

The Fourth Form master blinked at the meeting through his spectacles, and informed them that he had the honour of introducing Colonel Carr-Hilton, of whom they had all heard, who was desirous of speaking a few words to them on the subject of forming Boy Scout organisations at St. Jim's. He would be followed by Mr. Ferrers Locke, whom they all knew, on the same subject. Mr. Lathom sat down amid a buzz of applause. The object of the meeting was understood now.

"We ought to have guessed it," Tom Merry murmured. "The name of Carr-Hilton was enough. And it's a jolly good idea."

"Ripping!" said Monty Lowther. "I'm rather surprised that we didn't think of it ourselves. Hallo, he's going to speak! Order!"

Colonel Carr-Hilton advanced to the edge of the dais, and looked at his youthful audience with a good-humoured smile upon his bronzed face. The boys gazed with deep interest upon the man who had defended a town for long

months against an overwhelming force in the war which was well within their own recollections. There was a breeziness about the colonel's manner that seemed to smack of the boundless veldt.

There was no beating about the bush with the colonel. He came straight to the point. He said that he had Dr. Holmes's permission to address a few words to them on a subject he considered very important; that he would not detain them long, and that he hoped the time they were giving him would not be wasted.

Here the boys interrupted him with a prolonged cheer, and the colonel had to wait for that demonstration to end before he could proceed.

"Then I may take it that you like the idea," he said, in his crisp way. "I suppose every lad here would like to serve his King and country in some way. If the time ever comes—and it may come—when Britain needs you, you will fight for the old flag; and if you are to do that with effect, you must be prepared—you must be trained. There is no better way than by becoming a boy scout."

"Good wheeze!" said Jack Blake, from his front seat.

The colonel smiled.

"As my young friend remarks, it is a good wheeze," he said, taking up Blake's words. "I should be glad to see all the boys of this school, and especially the boys of the Lower Forms, organised into scout patrols. I hope you will all regard it as what my young friend, with whose name I am unacquainted, calls a good wheeze."

There was a ripple of laughter, and Jack Blake turned pink.

"It is the simplest thing in the world to organise the scout patrols," went on the colonel. "The training received from them is invaluable. If the idea is taken up at this school, I shall be happy to render any assistance in my power during the few days I am staying with Mr. Locke in this neighbourhood. I shall be happy to explain the whole matter to you, and give you any instruction you need. At present, I want you to think about it, and form a committee for taking up the matter in a definite and business-like way. That is all for the present."

And the colonel stepped back.

The boys gave him a hearty cheer.

The colonel was a man of his word. He had said that he would address to them a few words, and he had done so, and those who had been in terror of a long-winded oration were relieved at once.

"My friend Mr. Locke has a few words to say on the same subject," the colonel added, when the cheer subsided.

"He has a proposition to make which I hope my young friend, with whose name I am unacquainted, will also regard as a good wheeze."

The juniors laughed, and Blake wished he had not spoken. Ferrers Locke came forward.

The famous detective stood in an easy attitude, and spoke to the eagerly interested crowd of boys as if chatting with friends in the street.

"I have a suggestion to make, for carrying out the ideas of the colonel," he said. "In order to familiarise the boys of St. Jim's with the idea of becoming boy scouts, and to show them how keenly interesting scouting may be as a hobby, I suggest a test in which all the juniors of St. Jim's can take part."

"Hear, hear!"

"My idea is that a certain boy—to be selected with care, of course—should be chosen from the rest. This boy is to watch his opportunity, and to abstract a certain specified article from a certain place, and to make his escape with it. He is to carry it to a point not more than three miles from St. Jim's, and leave on that spot proof that he has done so, and then to return to the school. If he can accomplish this without being captured and deprived of his prize, he is the victor in the contest. The part of the other boys is to prevent his success—to capture him either upon his going or returning. He will do his best to keep out of sight, and you others will do your best to capture him. The boy effecting the capture, if it is effected, will become the first chief scout at St. Jim's. The boy, if uncaptured, will become the chief scout, as he will have proved his worth and capacity by eluding so many enemies. I think you will find this an instructive and interesting contest, partaking of the nature both of scouting and detective work."

"Hear, hear!"

"Then I take it that you regard it as what my young friend Blake calls a good wheeze?"

Blake was crimson by this time.

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Terrible Three.

"Hurrah!"

There was no doubt that the proposition was a popular one. The names of Ferrers Locke and the colonel alone would have sufficed to make it popular. The juniors received it with enthusiasm.

Ferrers Locke, with a smile on his face, waited for silence. "As the idea seems to be adopted, it only remains to form a committee to arrange details," he said. "Suppose you select a dozen fellows, who can consult with the colonel and with me. The details can be settled this evening, and tomorrow, which I understand is a half-holiday with you, will be an excellent time for putting the scheme to the test."

"Hear, hear!"

The colonel and Ferrers Locke made their bow, and retired by the door they had entered by, and Mr. Lathom followed them. The juniors of St. Jim's were left to form the committee. There was a buzz of eager and excited voices at once.

"It's a ripping idea!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Of course, there will have to be a committee, and of course we shall have to be on it."

"Faith, and I don't see that!" said Reilly. "Sure, there's no need of you on the committee, Blake darling. I can manage it intirely. I don't see—"

"You certainly won't see if you give me any of your cheek," said Blake darkly. "You won't see, unless you can manage to see with a couple of black eyes."

"Faith, and I—"

"Look here, let's see about the committee."

"Good wheeze!" said Mellish, with a chuckle, and a roar of laughter followed.

"Oh, shut up!" said Blake crossly. "What do you think of the idea, Tom Merry?"

"I," said Tom Merry blandly. "Why, I think, with my young friend with whose name I am unacquainted, that it is a good wheeze."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses!"

"Order!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Order yourself, you New House waster!"

"School House ass!"

"Peace, my children!" said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand. "We don't want Mr. Locke or the colonel to come in and find us quarrelling. They will expect that committee soon. Peace, my infants, and listen to your uncle."

Tom Merry's appeal had its effect, and the threatened House row was averted. Tom Merry mounted upon a chair and waved his hand for silence.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Committee Selects Itself.

"ORDER, gentlemen, please!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Order! I have only a few words to say."

"Don't say them!"

"We've had all that from the colonel!"

"No cheap imitations!"

"I suppose every fellow here wants to serve his King and country—"

A howl interrupted the speaker.

"No cheap imitations!" bawled Figgins. "We've had that. Give us something new."

"I'll jolly well give you a thick ear if you don't shut up," said Tom Merry warmly.

"I'll take a dozen if you can give them to me."

"Order!"

"Silence!"

"Silence for the chair!"

"We've got to get to business," pursued Tom Merry. "The colonel will expect that committee to be formed. I take it that all present desire to adopt the suggestion, and all are willing to be trained as boy scouts to serve their King and—"

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"THE FIFTH AT ST. JIM'S."

A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
By Martin Clifford.

"Don't give us that again."  
 "I'll give you what I like."  
 "Oh, ring off, and get to business!"  
 "Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as the pwopah thing for you to do, Tom Mewwy, to immediately wing off and pwoceed to business."

"Order!"  
 "We have now to proceed to form a committee, to carry out the scheme," continued Tom Merry. "As leader of the juniors in the cock-house at St. Jim's, I beg to propose myself as chairman of the committee."

Figgins jumped up excitedly.  
 "You don't belong to the New House," he exclaimed.  
 "Who said I did?"  
 "You were speaking of the cock-house."  
 "That's the School House."  
 "Rats! And many of 'em!"  
 "Order! As I was saying—"  
 "More rats!" said Jack Blake. "I agree with you that the School House is cock-house of St. Jim's, but it's all rot to say that you're leader. I'm leader. You are, comparatively speaking, a new boy."

"Order! I suggest myself as a member of the committee and—"  
 "I oppose!" yelled Blake.  
 "I second the opposition!" shrieked Figgins.  
 "And my esteemed friends Blake and Figgins as fellow-members."

"I second that," said Blake.  
 "I third it," said Figgins.  
 "It having been settled, therefore, that Blake, Figgins, and myself form the nucleus of the committee—"  
 "Hear, hear!" said Blake and Figgins.  
 "Rats, rats!" said Reilly. "Sure, and I want to know—"

"Order! I further suggest that our friend Reilly, as representative of the great and thriving city of Belfast, be nominated a member of the committee."

"Faith, and I agree wid ye intirely!"  
 "What's Belfast got to do with a boy scout committee?" demanded Gore. "I want a place, as eldest boy in the Shell."

"Rats! You're only the eldest boy in the Shell because you're too dense to get your remove into the Fifth."

"Look here, Tom Merry—"  
 "I'm too busy. Four members of the committee having been decided upon, I suggest Monty Lowther and Manners as the next."

"Seconded!" said Monty Lowther promptly.  
 "Passed unanimously by both of us," said Manners.  
 "That makes six," said Jack Blake. "Of course, Dig, Herries, and D'Arcy will have to be on the committee."

"I don't see why."  
 "They belong to Study No. 6, you know—my study."  
 "I can't see that that's a reason."

"There are lots of things you can't see, Tom Merry. You can't see that I shall give you a dot on the boko if I have any of your cheek, for instance."

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "That will make ten," said Blake. "Ten is really enough for a committee."

"What about Kerr and Wynn?" demanded Figgins warmly. "Do you think the New House is going to have only one member?"

"Well, the committee will have to manage things, and you New House chaps haven't much sense, as you will admit yourself, Figgins."

"Will I?" spluttered Figgins. "I'll—"  
 "Peace, my children," said Tom Merry. "Kerr and Wynn will join the committee."

"Good!" said the New House Co.  
 "The committee is now complete—"  
 "Is it?" roared fifty voices. "You cheeky bounders—"

"Order!"  
 "Rats!"  
 "The committee being now complete, we will proceed to business—"

"Hark at the cheeky rotter!" howled Gore. "I'm going to be on that committee, anyway!"

"I really think I ought to be on that committee," said Skimpole, blinking at Tom Merry through his big glasses. "With my knowledge gained as an amateur detective, I should be able to give expert advice upon the subject. I approve—"

"Oh, ring off, Skimmy! The committee will now proceed to business!"

"More rats!" said Kerruish warmly. "You know perfectly well that the committee—that no committee can be complete without a member from the Isle of Man!"

"We can't have more than twelve—"

"Oh, that's all right! One of you can resign in my favour."

"Oh, anything for peace!" said Jack Blake. "We'll make it thirteen, and Kerruish can come in. But that's the limit."

"Thirteen's a good number," said Kerruish. "I think the thing's satisfactorily settled now, and the committee can proceed to business."

"Bosh!" said Gore. "Rot! What price me?"  
 "Twopence would be dear."

"I'm coming in—"  
 "Order!"  
 "I'm coming—"

"This disorder is simply scandalous!" said Tom Merry severely. "Unless quiet is kept, the hall will be cleared during the deliberations of the committee."

"We can't form a committee of the whole blessed Shell and Fourth Form," said Blake. "Be reasonable, do!"

"Yaas, wathah! Can't you be satisfied with seein' the fellows of the highest ordah of intellect on the committee?"

"Certainly not!" said Skimpole. "As a sincere Socialist, I object to the committee system on principle. Every fellow has a right to an equal voice—"

"Order!"  
 "Rats!"  
 "Order must be kept, or the hall will be cleared!" said Tom Merry sternly. "Any fellow saying rats to a member of the committee goes out on his neck!"

"Rats!" said Gore.  
 Tom Merry kept his word. He gripped Gore by the shoulders, ran him to the door, and hurled him forth ignominiously. He turned back, a little flushed, and very determined.

"Who'll be the next?" he inquired.  
 "That's the cheese!" exclaimed Blake heartily. "Every chap who interrupts the proceedings of the committee goes out on his neck. They ought to be grateful to us for taking so much trouble on their behalf, without putting them to the bother of voting for us."

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 Gore was the leader of the malcontents, and he did not enter the hall again. Most of the juniors, as a matter of fact, were quite willing that their recognised leaders should form the committee. The Terrible Three and Study No. 6 both claimed the leadership of the School House juniors; but there was no doubt that they shared it between them. Figgins & Co. were always backed up by the juniors of their House. Order was at last partially restored, and the committee acknowledged.

"Can't hold the meeting here, though," said Tom Merry. "Juniors are not allowed the use of the lecture-hall, and they'll be in to turn out the lights soon. Let's get along to the club-room."

The club-room was the apartment in the School House where the Merry Hobby Club held its meetings. It was convenient, and the committee forthwith proceeded there. Most of the other juniors dispersed to their studies for tea.

There was very scanty accommodation in the club-room for thirteen juniors, but with a little cramming it was managed. Tom Merry took the chair, a proceeding which was immediately vigorously protested against by a dozen juniors.

"Oh, come!" said Figgins. "Out of that, you know!"  
 "I move Tom Merry to take the chair," grinned Blake, taking hold of the hero of the Shell by the collar, and giving him a tremendous jerk.

"Hold on!"  
 "I'm doing it! Out you come!"  
 "Look here—"

"Oh, get out!"  
 "I am occupying the chair temporarily, ass!" gasped Tom Merry. "Ferrers Locke will be chairman when he comes."

"Oh, that alters the case!" said Blake, letting go. "We ought to send word to Ferrers Locke that the committee is now sitting."

"Bai Jove, Blake, that information would be slightly inconvewt!"

"Eh? The committee is sitting, isn't it?"  
 "Wathah not! Tom Mewwy and Figgins and Hewwies are sittin', but the west of us are standin', and it's jolly uncomfy, too!"

"Ass!"  
 "I wefuse to be called an ass!"  
 "Duffer, then! I was speaking figuratively."

"I stwongly object to the use of figuwative language in mattahs of business," said D'Arcy. "If we send any information to Fewwaha Locke, I move that it be cowwect information, and not couched in figuwative language."

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Lowther. "You'll be the death of some of us yet."

"I wefuse to wing off!"  
 "Silence for the chair!"

"The temporary chair," said Blake.  
 "Oh, as you like! Silence for the temporary chair!" said Tom Merry. "Word must be sent to Ferrers Locke that the committee is sitting—"

"The committee is standin', deah boy!"

"That the committee is met together—"

"Yaas, that's more cowweet! Nothin' like bein' quite sowweet and wegulah in mattahs of business," said Arthur Augustus.

"That the committee is met together, and is ready for him to take the chair as soon as is convenient to him, and that we shall listen with great respect and attention to what he has to say, and will do our best to keep Gussy from talking."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"As chairman, I—"

"As temporary chairman, you—"

"As temporary chairman, I appoint Jack Blake to take that message to Ferrers Locke, and also a kind invitation to Colonel Carr-Hilton to honour the proceedings of the committee with his presence."

"I should be vewy pleased to be the messengah. As the only membah of the committee who can weally and twuly be said to have good mannahs, I shall be pleased—"

"Cheese it, Gussy! Off you go, Blake!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake, and he left the club-room. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and favoured Tom Merry with a stare that ought to have frozen him in his seat. But it did not, and there was an animated discussion in the club-room until Ferrers Locke returned with Jack Blake. The colonel was with the doctor, and could not immediately accept the kind invitation. The buzz died away as Jack Blake escorted the famous detective into the club-room, and Tom Merry respectfully vacated the chair.

## CHAPTER 4.

### The Committee Gets to Business.

FERRERS LOCKE sat down, and the committee assumed a more orderly aspect. The famous detective's manner was business-like.

"I am glad to see you getting to business so soon," he said. "It won't take us long to arrange the details, I think. I have been thinking the matter over, and I will tell you my views. A boy is to be first selected to play the part of the hare. I suppose he will be a member of the committee?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"I am willin' to offah my services," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "I'm not the kind of fellow to put myself forward in any way; but, undah the circe, I cannot but wegard myself as the most suitable person."

"Ring off, Gussy!" muttered Blake, in the ear of the swell of the School House.

"Undah the circe, Blake, I must wefuse to wing off!"

"Order, order!"

"If there are no other volunteers, D'Arcy's offer must be accepted," said Ferrers Locke, with a smile.

"But there are, sir!" said Tom Merry promptly. "We'd all jump at the job!"

"Yaas; but as the most suitable person—"

"Cheese it, Gussy, you're interrupting Mr. Locke!"

"I weally beg your pardon, Mr. Locke. It was not my intention to intewrupt you, or to be discourteous in any way."

"Quite so. As I was saying—"

"But I weally wish to assuah you that it was not my intention—"

"Exactly!" said Ferrers Locke. "In the first place, then, as all are volunteers, we must select the individual to play the part of the hare. A junior who is a good runner must, of course, be chosen, and I leave the selection to the committee."

There was a pause.

"Not much good doing that, sir," said Tom Merry. "We should never agree. Every chap would vote for himself, and that would leave us where we started."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's between Blake, Figgins, and myself, as a matter of fact," pursued Tom Merry. "If it were put to voting we should come to that."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it would be bettah for this mattah to go by mewit than by votin', and in that case you could select me, and save furthah bothah."

"Order!"

"Of course, the hare ought to be a School House fellow," said Blake, "so it really comes down to a choice between Tom Merry and me."

"Rats!" said Figgins promptly. "I was just going to say that, as the hare ought to be a New House fellow, you and Tom Merry are out of it."

"Now, don't be an ass, Figgy!"

"Then don't you be a silly cuckoo!"

Ferrers Locke waved his hand.

"Suppose you three draw lots for it," he said.

"Well, that's a good idea," said Tom Merry. "Anybody got a penny to toss up?"

"I have a half-sovereign, Tom Mewwy, if that will do."

"That's all right, Gussy. I suppose it doesn't matter if it should get lost?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Give it to Mr. Locke, and we will guess in turn," said Tom Merry.

Ferrers Locke held the coin, and Blake guessed first, and was wrong. Then Tom Merry guessed, and was wrong, too. Figgins grinned.

"Then I'm the pippin!" he exclaimed.

"Rats!" said Blake warmly. "You may be wrong, as well, and then we all guess over again. Play the game, Figgy!"

"Oh, all right! Head, Mr. Locke!"

Ferrers Locke showed the coin, and head it was. Figgins chuckled.

"I think that settles it," said Figgins. "Eh, Blake?"

"Oh, yes, rather! Figgins is the hare!"

"Unless Figgins, for the sake of havin' the thing done in the best poss. style, would care to weign in my favah," suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. To which Figgins replied with the ancient and classic expression—"Rats!"

"The hare is now selected," said Ferrers Locke. "And I must say that I consider Figgins quite equal to the task he has undertaken."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

"The next point to settle is, what is the article to be taken, and where from? I suggest some handy article that can be easily carried, such as a pocket-knife, or a watch. Figgins is to take it from a certain spot and escape with it, and go a certain distance—we will say as far as the ruined castle on the other side of Rylcombe Wood. After he has once started, he is liable to be captured at any moment, until he has visited the ruined castle, made some plain mark on the spot to prove his visit, and returned to St. Jim's. The gate of the school will be home."

"I'll manage it," said Figgins.

"The hare is not to receive any assistance from the hounds, and all are to try equally hard to capture him," said Ferrers Locke. "There is no objection to parties uniting for the purposes of comparing notes and helping one another in the tracking; but the capture can only be performed by one person. The capture is effected by placing a hand on the shoulder of the hare, and he will not resist."

"Oh!" said Figgins.

"That is the rule of the game. It is a contest of scouting and woodcraft, not of physical strength. Another point. All who join in the contest must join in the tracking. It would not do to wait for Figgins's return, near the gates of St. Jim's, for instance. If Figgins has reached the castle successfully, his captor must reach the castle also before capturing him. Apart from this, any latitude is allowed—the capture may be either by scent, sound, or sight."

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

"The contest should commence after dinner to-morrow," resumed Ferrers Locke. "Colonel Carr-Hilton and myself will be there to give you a send-off. You juniors dine at half-past one, I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then Figgins is at liberty to begin any time after two."

"What-ho!" said Figgins. "I'll give 'em a run for their money."

"The article to be taken should be, I think, a small Union Jack," said Ferrers Locke. "This can be planted in the old castle as a proof that Figgins has been there."

"Good wheeze."

"Now, as to where it shall be taken from. Suppose we place it in the gym, and from two o'clock Figgins is allowed five minutes in which to obtain possession of it and to escape by any means he thinks fit, without anyone touching him. After five minutes past two, the chase commences."

"Good!"

"I think that all is settled now," said Ferrers Locke, rising. "I have never dealt with a more businesslike committee."

The committee smiled complacently. Their business had been to say "Yes," "Very good," or "Ripping" to each of the detective's suggestions. Still, it was very pleasant to be told that they were business-like by so famous a personage as Mr. Locke. And the details of the contest being settled, the businesslike committee broke up.





"Bosh!" said Gore, "Rot! What price me?" "Twopence would be dear!" retorted Blake.

#### CHAPTER 5.

##### D'Arcy Minor Comes to Tea.

**T**OM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther went straight to their study after the committee-meeting, to get tea. Blake, Digby, Herries, and D'Arcy went along to Study No. 6 with the same important object in view. D'Arcy had a thoughtful expression upon his face, and was evidently reflecting upon the scheme arranged for the morrow. Blake gave him a dig in the ribs to rouse him from his meditations, and put a kettle in his hand.

"Fill that, Gussy," he said. "You can do your cogitating afterwards, while it's boiling."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, get a move on!"

D'Arcy carried the kettle along the passage and filled it at the tap. As he came back a youngster of the Third Form came upstairs, and hailed him cheerfully. The Third-Former was very like D'Arcy in features, but totally unlike the elegant swell of the School House in every other respect. He was untidy in his personal attire, and he had a smear of ink on his collar, and several smears on his fingers, and a suspicion of recent jam about his mouth. But though he was an inky "infant," as the Third-Formers were called at St. Jim's, his manner was quite self-possessed.

"Hallo, Gus!" he exclaimed. "Who are you fagging for?"

D'Arcy changed the kettle from his right hand to his left, and jammed his eyeglass into his eye. Then he proceeded to take a survey of D'Arcy minor from his curly head to his square-toed boots, with a freezing expression that ought to have reduced the Third-Former to a withered state on the spot. But D'Arcy's younger brother did not seem to feel the effect of it.

"Oh, come off!" he said disrespectfully. "None of your gammon, you know!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"You can't come it with me, you know, Gus," said Wally familiarly. "I asked you a civil question. Who are you fagging for?"

"I wegwet to see you usin' such wascally bad gwammah, Wally. You should say 'whom.'"

"Oh, don't begin lecturing now, old Gus! You are fagging, I suppose?"

"I am not faggin'. I should uttably wefuse to fag for anybody. I am fillin' the kettle for tea in Study No. 6."

"Good," said Wally. "I'll come to tea with you. I want to have a jaw with you chaps."

"I am afwaid I cannot ask you to tea in Study No. 6."

The greatest story of the year, ANSWERS' New Short Serial. "GREED," starts to-day.

Wally, unless you wash your hands and put on a clean collah," said his elder brother frigidly.

Wally grinned.  
"Bless you, I don't want to be asked," he said. "I can come to tea with a chap without a formality like that. I'll carry the kettle for you if you like. You might jam it against your trousers and make a spot on them, and then you'd raise Cain, you know."

"Weally, Wally—"  
"Oh, hand over the kettle!"  
"Well, it is certainly more appropwiate for you to cawwy the kettle," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "Here you are! Ow! You young villain, you've wubbed the beastly thing against my twousahs!"

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "So I have! Can't be helped!"

"You howwid little wuffian, I believe you did it on purpose!"

Wally did not reply to that remark, but marched on to Study No. 6. Blake was lighting the fire, and he looked round.

"Got that kettle? Hallo, it's young impudence!"  
"Gussy has asked me to tea," explained Wally. "I wasn't really coming, only he implored me with tears in his eyes."

"Weally, Wally—"  
"So I came. I thought I'd carry the kettle as Gus is so careless. Here it is."

"Ow! You young ass! Don't jam the filthy thing against my waistcoat!"

"Sorry. Stick it on the fire, and don't grumble," said Wally cheerfully.

Blake put the kettle on the fire. He gave Wally D'Arcy a very expressive look. Had he not been the brother of Arthur Augustus, Wally would probably have been hurled out of the study neck and crop by the indignant Former.

Herries and Digby were laying the table. There was a rather decent spread in Study No. 6—cold ham and beef, and sausages to flank the bread-and-butter and tea, and a cake to finish with. Wally eyed the table with an appreciative eye.

"Good," he said. "Gussy has asked me at the right time, I see. I'll make the tea for you, if you like, Blake. I can make it a treat."

"You needn't trouble, thank you."  
"Well, don't make it too strong. I don't like it strong. You haven't given me a chair yet, Gus."

"Weally, Wally—" said Arthur Augustus feebly. The swell of the School House was always at a loss how to deal with his terrible young brother.

Wally found himself a chair, and sat down. D'Arcy sat beside him, Herries and Dig. opposite, and Jack Blake, having made the tea, sat at the head of the little table. Wally gave his brother a dig in the ribs.

"Pass the ham, fathhead!"  
"I refuse to be addressed as a fathhead!"

"Pass the ham, then, chump. You chaps must excuse me talking to my brother like this," said Wally, looking amiably round the table. "Gus is rather dense, and I have to speak to the point to wake him up. Don't I, Gus?"

"Weally, Wally—"  
"Pass the ham, old chap, and don't jaw."

D'Arcy passed the ham. The other three were grinning; there was something almost sublime about the unlimited nerve of D'Arcy minor. Blake poured out the tea.

"Are you keeping all the bread that way, Gus?" asked Wally sarcastically. "And have you appropriated all the salt?"

"I am sowwy—"  
"Never mind about your sorrow. Pass the stuff along."

"Weally—"  
"Oh, don't jaw, old chap! Pass it along!"

Arthur Augustus obeyed helplessly. The juniors commenced their tea. Wally did it full justice. The fare was a great deal better than Third-Formers had as a rule, and he was soon beaming contentedly round the table.

"I've heard of the feeds you chaps give in this study," he remarked. "I think I shall often come here to tea with my brother Gus."

"Will you?" said Blake grimly.

"Yes. Gus promised the mater to look after me in every possible way, and, of course, that includes feeding, doesn't it, Gus?"

"Weally, Wally—"  
"Never mind. Pass the sausages. These sausages are prime, Blake."

"Very good," said Blake, with heavy irony. "If our humble table meets with the approval of a young gentleman belonging to the Third Form, we have only—"

"Oh, don't be funny!" interrupted the young gentleman of the Third Form. "You can fill my cup again, please."

Blake filled the cup speechlessly.

"I want to talk to you fellows," said Wally placidly. "I hear that you are getting up a scouting contest, or something—something that's to come off to-morrow."

"Quite correct."

"You Fourth-Form chaps and the Shell are in it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about the Third Form?"

"Eh?" said Blake. "What about the Third Form? The chief thing I have noticed about them is their cheek—or perhaps their inky fingers."

"What about the Third Form in this contest?" said Wally, undisturbed. "We're juniors of St. Jim's, you know, same as you are, though you put on as many airs as if you were the Fifth or Sixth. Ain't we coming in?"

"No room for cheeky kids," said Digby.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Wally. "You're funny to look at now, but there's no need to have your conversation to match."

Dig. half rose in his seat, but he remembered that Wally was D'Arcy's guest, and he sat down again, and ate with an air of great determination.

Wally proceeded calmly to devour his fourth sausage.

"That's what I want to know," he remarked. "Where do we come in?"

"You came in at the door," said Blake, with heroic calmness. "Whether you go out at the window or not, depends."

"Oh, rats! I think the Third Form ought to take an equal share in the run."

"You are at liberty to think what you please," said Blake politely.

"Yaas, wathah! There is no objection to that, deah boy. But as for admittin' Third Form youngstahs to the wun, that is absolutely imposs—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"If we're not in the show," resumed D'Arcy minor, "we shall start an opposition scouting brigade in the Third Form. so I warn you!"

Jack Blake grinned.

"You can start anything you like," he agreed.

"We'll jolly soon put you in the shade. I've been thinking, too, that the School House isn't half keeping its end up against the New House. The juniors want a new leader. I don't see why a leader shouldn't be chosen from the Third."

The chums of the Fourth stared at the "infant," petrified. Their leadership had been disputed by the heroes of the Shell, but to have it disputed by a youngster in the Third was amazing—almost appalling. The college was evidently going to the dogs!

Jack Blake rose to his feet. He wagged a warning forefinger at Wally, who seemed no wise perturbed by the storm he had roused.

"Youngster," said Blake, in an impressive tone, "there are some things we can stand, and some things we can't. We've put up with a lot of your cheek, because you're Gussy's guest, and—"

"Oh, come off!" said Wally. "You can't impress me with the heavy father business, you know. Sit down!"

"Eh?"

"Sit down! No good preaching at me. I've had all that from the pater. Don't be an ass! Sit down!"

Jack Blake collapsed into his seat.

"My only hat!" murmured Digby. "Shall we slay him?"

"Gussy," said Blake, in measured tones, as soon as he recovered himself, "if that young, cheeky imp wasn't your guest, I'd—"

"But he isn't my guest, deah boy."

"Eh? Didn't you ask him to tea?"

"Wathah not. He asked himself, and came into the woom without my permish."

"My only hat! And we've been putting up with his cheek—"

"Outside!" roared Herries.

In a moment Blake, Herries, and Digby were upon the Third-Former. He was jerked off his chair, and a second jerk bore him to the door.

"Here, hold on—let go—I'll punch your head for this, Gus! Hold on—"

But the indignant chums of the Fourth were deaf to Master Wally's remonstrances. They yanked him out of the study, and they ran him along the passage at top speed. They came to the head of the stairs, and sent him rolling down.

Wally sat up half-way down, clutching at the banisters, with his collar torn out, and his jacket about his ears, wondering whether he was on his head or his heels. And Blake, Herries, and Digby returned to Study No. 6 and finished their tea, with expressions of righteous satisfaction upon their faces.

## CHAPTER 6.

## Wally says there will be Trouble.

THE great scouting contest planned by Ferrers Locke caught on immediately. The Shell and the Fourth Form were eager, almost to a man, for the hunt to commence.

D'Arcy minor's proposal that the Third Form should take part in the contest was negated by the Fourth and the Shell with singular unanimity. But Wally was not the youth to be discouraged with ease. On Wednesday morning he was busy discussing the project with his comrades of the Third, and the inky youngsters all backed him up heartily.

If the Fourth and the Shell were going to die for their King and country some day, and had to be trained ready for that important object, why shouldn't the Third be trained for the same purpose? A Third-Former was as good to die for King and country as a Fourth-Former or a Shell-fish! At least, so Wally declared, and Jameson and Gibson and other inky heroes of the Third backed him up with all the strength of their lungs.

Accordingly, when classes were dismissed on Wednesday morning, a stream of inky-fingered and indignant youngsters poured out of the Third Form room, and gathered in the quad.

Wally D'Arcy mounted upon a seat under the elms, conspicuous in the crowd by his elevated position, his excited gestures, and the ink-spots on his collar.

"Are we down-hearted?" was his first question.

To that ancient question, the Third Form responded with one voice, in a shout that rang through St. Jim's:

"No!"

"Are we going to be down-trodden?"

"No!"

"Are we going to be left out of the scouting?"

"No!"

"Ain't we good enough to die for our King and country?"

"No—that is, yes! I mean yes!"

"Who cares for the Fourth Form or the Shell?"

A general groan.

"I've got a brother in the Fourth Form," pursued Wally excitedly. "You all know what he's like——"

"He's like you, ain't he?" said Jameson.

"If you want a thick ear, Jameson——"

"I mean in features," said Jameson. "I wasn't referring to the ink-spots."

There was a yell of laughter, and Wally jumped off the seat to execute summary vengeance upon Jameson. They rolled in the quadrangle in a deadly embrace, collecting up dust and a quantity of dead leaves.

There was a cry of "Cave!" as Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, bore down upon them. The Third Form scattered, and the meeting came to an abrupt end. Wally and Jameson rose, to find themselves under the stern glance of the housemaster.

"What were you doing?" demanded Mr. Railton severely.

"Having a little argument, sir," said Wally meekly.

The housemaster could not help smiling.

"You will take twenty lines each for arguing in the quadrangle," he said; and, with a warning shake of the head, he walked on.

D'Arcy minor and Jameson looked at one another rather ruefully.

"Blessed pair of asses we are to start ragging one another!" said Wally. "We shall be left out of the scouting contest if we lose time."

"You shouldn't begin it."

"You began it."

"I tell you——"

"I tell you——"

The scrimmage seemed to be on the point of recommencing, when the Terrible Three were observed strolling under the elms. Wally at once hurried off to intercept them, leaving Jameson to tenderly nurse a swelling nose and a bruised eye.

Tom Merry looked at D'Arcy minor with a grin. The hero of the Third looked very dusty and ruffled, but as cool as ever. He planted himself in the path of the Terrible Three.

"Get away!" said Lowther, retreating a pace. "You make me feel inky to look at you!"

"I want to speak to you chaps——"

"The want is entirely on your side, kid. And why don't you take off your cap when you're addressing your elders?"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Wally. "What I want to say is, why shouldn't the Third be admitted to the scouting contest?"

"Can't be bothered with a parcel of kids!"

D'Arcy minor glared.

"You long-legged Shell-fish——"

Tom Merry jerked Lowther back as he was about to reply forcibly to that epithet. Monty Lowther glared at him.

"Lemme go, Tom! I'm going to squash that microbe!"

"Oh, hold on! Let us reason with him," said Tom Merry. "Now, young shaver, you ought to understand that a kid of your age is no use in a contest of this kind. A lot will depend on running powers. Now, I suppose you wouldn't pit yourself as a runner against anybody in the Fourth or the Shell?"

"Yes; rather! I can distance my brother Gus any day!" said Wally instantly.

Tom Merry scratched his head.

"Well, that's the exception that proves the rule," he said. "I can knock spots off Mellish, of the Fourth, and Gore, of the Shell!" said Wally triumphantly.

"Well, that's because Gore smokes and ruins his wind——"

"That makes no difference. I don't care what the reason is. You said I couldn't run against a chap in your Form, and I say I can. Any other objections?"

"We can't have a lot of inky fags swarming over the job. The dignity of the Middle School is at stake."

"Rats!" said D'Arcy minor cheerfully.

Tom Merry turned pink.

"If you say 'Rats!' to me, young shaver——"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry waved his hand benignantly.

"Go!" he said. "I won't lick you; I should soil my hands! Go in peace——"

"Or you'll jolly soon go in pieces, you cheeky young imp!" said Manners darkly.

"Then, you mean to keep the Third Form out?"

"Yes; rather!" said the Terrible Three, in unison.

"There'll be trouble," said D'Arcy minor, frowning.

And as the chums of the Shell only grinned at this terrible threat, he stalked away in high dudgeon. He looked round the quadrangle for Blake & Co., as the next best persons to apply to, and he found them in a group on the School House steps.

The four Fourth-Formers were sunning themselves, the day being a very bright and sunshiny one for late October. Arthur Augustus was rubbing the spot Wally had made on his trousers with the kettle the previous evening, and which showed up in the sunlight in spite of cleaning.

"Hallo, young ink-merchant!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Are they the same spots on your chivvy that you were wearing last night?"

D'Arcy minor drew his sleeve hastily across his face. As his sleeve had been dipped in a puddle during his scramble with Jameson, this action did not improve the appearance of his face much. The chums of the Fourth cackled in chorus, and D'Arcy ceased rubbing the obnoxious spot on his trousers, to look severely at his brother.

"Weally, Wally, I wish you would make an effort to look a little more respectable," he said. "It is vevy painful to me to have fellows wemarkin' that my young bwothah is the untidiest and inkiest fag in the Third Form at St. Jim's; and weally——"

"Oh, don't you begin!" said Wally disrespectfully. "I have a bone to pick with you chaps. Tom Merry says that the Third Form are left out of this contest."

"Tom Merry has hit the right nail exactly on the head," said Jack Blake blandly.

"Look here, you can't expect us to take it lying down——"

"You can take it lying down, standing up, or sitting still," said Blake liberally. "Your attitude on the matter is left entirely to your own discretion. But we can't have a swarm of inky fags on this job."

"We're not going to be left out."

"Rats!"

"There'll be trouble!" said Wally threateningly.

The chums of Study No. 6 laughed. The threat did not disturb their equanimity.

"You see, it's a question of the dignity of the middle Forms," said Blake condescendingly. "If you infants want a hand in the business, you can come to the gate and cheer us when we get home."

"Yaas; wathah!"

D'Arcy minor deigned no reply, but an expressive snort; and then he walked off with his hands in his pocket. He crossed over to the New House in search of Figgins & Co., and ran them down in their study. Figgins & Co. were preparing for the run, and Figgy was carefully selecting the clothing he should wear.

"No good going in running clothes," he remarked thoughtfully. "This is more scouting than running; and if I have to take cover in the bush, it would be jolly cold. I suppose I can't do better than a Norfolk jacket and knickers. I think I'll have shoes. I hope one of you fellows will be the one to catch me, if I get caught."

"We'll do our best," said Kerr.

"I say, Figgy, you'd better take some sandwiches with you," said Fatty Wynn. "You'll get fearfully hungry if

you have to stay out a long time, and you may be hours getting home if you have to dodge."

"Good idea," said Figgins. "You can get me some at Dame Taggles, Fatty. I can trust you to get good ones?"

"Well, rather," said Fatty Wynn. "Mrs. Taggles knows better than to work off any of her stale sandwiches on me—rather! Hallo, young ink-spots! What do you want?"

"I've got something to say to you," said Wally, coming into the study. "I hear that the Third Form are being left out of this run."

"You've heard correctly, my son."

"We're not going to stand it."

"Sit down, then."

"We're as good scouts as you are," said Wally warmly. "We're willing to join peaceably in the scheme. That's all we want."

"Check!" said Figgins. "The babies in the Second Form will be wanting to run next."

"Oh, that's all rot, of course!" said Wally. "The Second Form are out of it. We shouldn't dream of allowing those nippers to enter."

"No, and we sha'n't dream of allowing you nippers to enter," grinned Kerr.

"That is different—"

"Can't see it. Anyway, it's settled."

"Then it will be soon unsettled," said Wally. "There'll be trouble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I warn you there'll be trouble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally left the study and slammed the door, leaving Figgins & Co. still laughing. As he went out into the quadrangle, deeply incensed, he caught sight of Ferrers Locke and Colonel Carr-Hilton strolling under the trees. Ferrers Locke was showing his companion about St. Jim's. Wally's eyes gleamed, and he cut across towards the two gentlemen, and arrived breathless and panting.

"If you please—" he gasped.

Ferrers Locke and the colonel immediately stopped.

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Third-Form Plot.

FERRERS LOCKE looked down upon the Third-Former with a good-humoured smile. Wally dragged his cap off, and showed his bunch of curly hair standing nearly on end as usual.

"If you please," he said breathlessly, "may I speak to you, sir?"

"Certainly, my little man."

The great fighting-man of the Third Form frowned a moment at being addressed as a little man. It did not savour of reverence. But he plunged quickly into his subject.

"If you please, sir, the Third Form—I belong to the Third, sir—were not asked to the meeting to hear you speak last night."

"My remarks were mainly addressed to the Fourth and the Shell," assented Ferrers Locke.

"You forgot the Third, sir."

The detective nodded, with a smile.

"Yes, I am afraid I must plead guilty to that sin of omission, my little man."

"We're as good as any other Form at St. Jim's, sir. There are some big fellows in the Third, old enough to be in the Fourth or even the Shell, only they haven't been able to get their remove. Those rotters—I mean those fellows calls us the Infants, but that's really only their rot, sir."

"I see," said Ferrers Locke gravely, while Colonel Carr-Hilton smiled. "That is only their rot, is it?"

"Yes, sir," said Wally undauntedly. "If any chaps are good enough to die for their King and country at this school, you'll find them in the Third quite as much as in any other Form. Why shouldn't the Third Form learn to be scouts as well as any other?"

"Why not, indeed?"

"Certainly," said the colonel.

"Then you think we might as well join in the contest this afternoon, sir?" said Wally eagerly.

"Well, I don't see that it would do any harm," said Ferrers Locke. "Of course, you will have no chance of capturing the hare. You naturally will have no chance against fellows so much older and stronger than yourselves."

"Not the average Third-Former, sir, I admit, but there are some of us who can keep their end up with the Fourth—myself, for instance."

"I see. Well, although I really think the Third Form would be left hopelessly behind, yet that is no reason why they should not be admitted to the contest."

"Quite so," agreed the colonel. "I am glad to see so much spirit in a lower Form. The chief difficulty is that a swarm of very little boys might have the effect of obscuring the tracks that will have to be followed."

"Oh, we'd be awfully careful about that, sir!"

"Then you may bring the matter before the committee," said Ferrers Locke. "It is entirely a question for the boys concerned to settle among themselves. I should not like to impose my opinion on them."

"Exactly," said the colonel.

"My opinion really is, that the admission of the Third Form would do no harm, but would probably not do much good to the Third," said Ferrers Locke. "A better plan would be for the Third to get up a scouting organisation of its own."

"Yes, sir, we mean to do that; but for to-day—"

"Well, you must see the committee. It is entirely in their hands," said Ferrers Locke, with a smile.

"Thank you, sir," said Wally.

He walked away in a dissatisfied mood. He felt pretty sure of the answer the committee would give him. If Ferrers Locke had expressed a decided opinion, or if the colonel had done so, the committee would have adopted the view unanimously. But the two gentlemen evidently did not mean to interfere. And the claims of the Third Form were likely to be met shortly and sharply by a prejudiced committee. Wally did not even know whom the committee were, but he guessed that Tom Merry would be on it, and he went about looking for the hero of the Shell. He found the Terrible Three in their study in the School House, and he entered without the formality of knocking. Three distinct glares were at once fastened upon him.

"Here's that young shaver again," grunted Manners.

"I suppose he has constituted himself our shadow."

"Are you chaps on the committee?" demanded Wally.

"Yes, we are," said Tom Merry patiently. "Now you know, run away and play."

"I've spoken to Ferrers Locke and the colonel—"

"The dickens you have!"

"And they have no objection to the Third Form taking part in the contest, but the matter is left to the committee to decide."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Do you want to bring it before the committee?"

"Yes. When does the committee meet again?"

"I dare say it will meet some time this evening."

"This evening?" howled Wally. "The contest will be over at dark."

"My dear chap, we haven't any time for committee meetings now; it will be dinner-time soon, and half an hour after that we start."

"How am I to bring the matter before the committee if the committee doesn't meet?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"How am I to do it, fathead?"

"You must work that out in your own head," said Tom Merry. "I haven't any time now to work out problems for Third Form kids."

"Look here, there'll be trouble!"

"Go ahead with the trouble, then."

Wally walked out of the study. The Terrible Three grinned at one another.

"We could let that cheeky young beggar in," Tom Merry remarked. "But the whole thing would be mucked up with a swarm of fags aged nine to twelve joining in the hunt. They'd trample out all the tracks, and muck things up generally."

Wally left the School House with a determined expression upon his smudgy face. Jameson and Curly Gibson met him in the quadrangle with serious looks.

"Well, how has it worked out?" asked Jameson.

"Rotten!"

"They won't let us in?"

"No; I've seen the lot of them. Ferrers Locke and Colonel Carr-Hilton remain out of it, and won't decide; it's left to the committee. And Tom Merry says that the committee won't meet till after the run."

"Then we're done in," said Gibson.

D'Arcy minor shook his head.

"Not yet, my pippin. I've got an idea."

"We couldn't very well join in without leave," said Jameson doubtfully. "It would look like cheek on our part, to Locke and the colonel. And, besides, we don't know any of the particulars of the contest, and so we should be hopelessly out of it."

"I wasn't thinking of that."

"What's the idea, then?"

"I know that Figgins is to be the hare, and that the others are to track him down. That's as much as I know. I have just learned from Tom Merry that they're starting immediately after dinner, too. Now, as there's to be only

one hare, and that's Figgins, it stands to reason that the hunt can't start without him."

"I suppose not."

"Well," said Wally boldly, "suppose Figgins is missing?" Jameson and Gibson stared at him blankly.

"Missing!"

"Yes."

"But why should he be missing?" said Jameson, who was a little dull of comprehension. "He'll take jolly good care not to be missing, won't he?"

"We might take jolly good care that he is missing," said Wally. "What I mean is, why shouldn't we collar Figgins?"

"Collar him?"

"Yes, and shut him up somewhere. Then we could make our own terms with the precious committee," said Wally.

"My hat! We could never do it."

"Why not?"

"Well, Figgins is the biggest junior in the New House, for one thing, and he could knock any two or three of us flying."

"If we could get him into a certain spot, we could have a dozen of the Third all ready to pounce on him, and a rope all ready to tie him up with. What do you think, Curly?"

"It's a good idea," said Gibson promptly. "Figgins won't be thinking of anything of the sort, and I think I could pull the wool over his eyes and get him into the proper place."

"Yes, that's what I was thinking of. You're such an innocent-looking little beggar, he would be almost bound to fall into the trap."

"It's risky," said Jameson.

"Can you think of anything better?"

"Well, no, unless we throw up the whole thing."

"We're not going to do that. Hallo, there's the bell! Let's get into dinner, and the moment it's over we'll lay for Figgins."

And the plot having been plotted, the young rascals went in to dinner with good appetites. And during the meal, Wally startled the fellows near him on several occasions by bursting into an irrepressible chuckle. It was evident that he was perfecting the plan in his own mind, and regarded its success as a foregone conclusion.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Disappearance of Figgins.

FIGGINS came out of the dining-room in the New House at St. Jim's, and almost ran into Curly Gibson of the Third. The little flaxen-haired, blue-eyed "infant" always looked the picture of innocence, and he had never looked so innocent as now. He tapped Figgins on the arm as he was passing hurriedly, to go up to his study for the sandwiches he was to take with him.

"Can you come and see Mr. Locke for a minute, Figgins?" asked Curly breathlessly, as if he had just rushed in with the message.

"Certainly," said Figgins, stopping. "Is the time altered?"

"I don't think so."

"Then there isn't much to lose. Still, I'd better come, I suppose."

"Come on, then."

And Curly Gibson led the way towards the gymnasium. It was quite deserted at that time—at all events, it seemed to be so. As the flag which Figgins was to take was to be placed in the gym., he had no doubt that Ferrers Locke was there to give him some final instructions before the boys gathered for the start. He followed Curly Gibson into the gym. without a suspicion.

He was hardly within the building when there was a sudden rush of feet, and a dozen figures, springing from nowhere, hurled themselves upon the New House junior.

Figgins was bowled over, as much by the surprise as by the assault, and went sprawling along the floor, with the heroes of the Third sprawling over him.

"Collar him!" gasped Wally.

"You young villains!" roared the amazed Figgins. "Let me up!"

"Rats! Collar him!"

Figgins struggled desperately, but though he could have crushed any two or three of the "Infants," united they were too many for him. He knocked four or five flying, but he could not loosen the grip of Wally and Jameson, who were clinging to him like cats, or of Curly Gibson, who had thrown an arm round his neck from behind, and was holding him down on his back. The Infants piled on him, those who were knocked over returning gallantly to the attack, and Figgins was crushed under the weight of numbers.

"Got him!" panted Wally.

"You—you young imps!" Figgins gasped. "What do you mean? Let me go!"



"Give me my toppah at once, you disrespeckful young boundah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Certainly," grinned Jameson. "Here you are!"

"Bring him along!"

"Let me go! I'll break all your necks for this!"

"Yank him along. Where's that rope?"

"Here it is."

"Tie him up, then, and yank him along. Keep a look-out, Carter, in case anybody comes along. If they see him the game's up."

Figgins's dignity as a Fourth-Former had hitherto prevented him from yelling for help; but now he opened his mouth to do so. But Wally was on the watch for it, and he promptly jammed a cake of soap into Figgins's mouth. The yell was never uttered; Figgins gasped and gurgled and foamed over the soap. Wally, with an amiable grin, tied a handkerchief over his mouth to keep the soap there, and secured it in its place with nearly half a ball of twine, winding it round and round Figgins's head and ears till he felt like a fly in the web of a spider.

Meanwhile, the others were fastening together Figgins's arms and legs with lengths of cord they had brought in their pockets for the purpose.

The chief of the New House juniors was a helpless prisoner.

"Yank him along!" repeated Wally.

Figgins had not the faintest idea what they meant to do with him. But he soon discovered. He was "yanked" along to a little room at the further end of the gym, where athletic apparatus was kept, and dumped down in the midst of steps and bars, and foils and Indian clubs, and other paraphernalia. There he lay gaeping.

There was a shout from Carter.

"Somebody's coming!"

"All right!" gasped Wally. "You fellows get out—quick! Don't look excited. Just loiter about. Some of you get on the vaulting-horse. Just look as if there wasn't anything going on, or I'll lam you!"

The Third-Formers obeyed as well as they could. Wally, without heeding the mute fury of Figgins, followed them out of the room and locked the door, putting the key in his pocket. Ferrers Locke glanced into the gym. The Infants, in spite of Wally's order, were looking red and excited enough, but Wally was equal to the occasion. He suddenly turned upon Jameson and smote him on the mouth; and Jameson, nothing loth, though very much surprised, smote him back, and in a moment they were fighting desperately. The others gathered round, cheering, and for the moment, as a matter of fact, forgot all about the junior imprisoned behind the locked door.

"It's all right!" whispered Wally in Jameson's ear, as he wrestled with him. "I—"

"Is it?" said Jameson, hitting out. "Take that! And that!"

Wally took them on the nose, but he still tried to explain. He got Jameson's head into chancery, and pommelled one ear while he explained into the other.

"It's all right, you idiot! Biff! It's only a game! Biff! I only hit you so that these dummies wouldn't give the show away! Biff! I'm only pretending! Biff, biff, biff!"

"Ow!" gasped Jameson, who was just as much hurt as if Wally hadn't been only pretending. "Ow! Leave off! Chuck it!"

"Right you are!"

Wally released his rumpled and damaged adversary. Ferrers Locke strolled towards the juniors, with an unconscious look on his face, apparently having seen nothing of the fight.

"Has anyone seen Figgins here?" he asked.

"Figgins!" said Curly Gibson thoughtfully. "I saw him just after dinner in the hall of the New House, sir."

"H'm! It is more than time," muttered Ferrers Locke. He strolled back towards the door of the gym, where he was joined by the colonel. Wally winked at his chums.

"It's all right," he murmured. "Let's get out of the gym, by the other door, and look as innocent as you can. I can't keep on hitting Jameson to keep up appearances."

"You'd better not!" said Jameson.

"Come on. They won't suspect that Figgins is there; and, anyway they can't get at him while the door's locked!" grinned Wally.

The Third-Formers scuttled out of the gym. Meanwhile, the Fourth Form and the Shell had assembled. It was past two, and high time for the scouting contest to begin. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were the first to join Ferrers Locke at the door. Blake and his chums came next, and then the Fourth and the Shell in a crowd, School House and New House fellows mingled.

"Do you know where Figgins is, Merry?" asked Ferrers Locke.

"It is high time he was here," said Colonel Carr-Hilton, pursing his lips. "I believe in boys being punctual, above all things."

"I haven't seen him, sir," said Tom Merry. "Do you know where Figgins is, Blake?"

"Haven't the faintest idea."

"Here's Kerr," said Monty Lowther. "I suppose he knows. I say, Kerr, where's Figgins? He's late. What's the matter with him?"

"Isn't he here?" said Kerr, looking astonished.

"No, he isn't."

"Blessed if I know where he is, then. I thought he was going up to his study to get the sandwiches," said Kerr, looking mystified.

"Perhaps he's stopped to eat them," suggested Blake.

"Oh, don't be funny, Blake. He must be here somewhere."

"Better go and look for him. Tell him he's a silly ass, from me, and add that he ought to have a prize thick ear for keeping us waiting."

Kerr deigned no reply to this kind message, but cut off towards the New House. He came back in a few minutes, with a packet of sandwiches in his hand, but no Figgins.

"Well?" said Ferrers Locke tersely. "Is he coming?"

"I can't find him, sir."

"You can't find Figgins?" repeated Ferrers Locke, in amazement. "Where can he be?"

Kerr shook his head hopelessly.

"I've looked everywhere in the New House, sir, but he's not there."

"Did you not say he went up to his study?"

"I thought he was going to. But he couldn't have gone, because I found this packet of sandwiches there. He was going up for them."

"This is somewhat annoying," said Ferrers Locke. "If Figgins chooses to absent himself, at the time of starting, it only remains to choose another here."

"I should be vewy willin' to volunteer, deah boys—"

"Figgins hasn't gone out, or anything, sir," said Kerr eagerly. "He wouldn't. Something must have happened to him somewhere. Perhaps it's a School House dodge?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "What's that?"

"Perhaps he has been kidnapped by some School House rotter," said Kerr. "That's the only thing I can think of."

"Rats!" exclaimed Blake hotly. "You know we wouldn't do a thing like that on such an occasion, Kerr. House rows are off."

"I know you wouldn't Blake. But some of your chaps might."

"Rot! None of them would."

"Well, where has Figgins got to, then?"

"Here's Wynn! Ask him!"

Fatty Wynn was coming up from the direction of the school shop. His bulging pockets showed that he had been laying in provisions for the run across country. A smear of jam on his plump face indicated, too, that he had bestowed some of the supplies inwardly. He was immediately surrounded by eager questioners.

"Where's Figgins?"

"Eh?" said Fatty Wynn. "Figgins! Isn't he here?"

"He's disappeared!"

"Oh, bosh! He can't have disappeared!"

"Have you seen him since dinner, Fatty?" asked Kerr anxiously.

"Since dinner? Yes; he was talking to young Gibson in the hall, and he went out into the quad with him, I remember," said Fatty.

"A School House kid!" exclaimed Kerr triumphantly. "He's been kidnapped. It's a School House raid!"

"Rats!" retorted Tom Merry. "It's nothing of the sort. If a chap on our side were to interfere with Figgins now, I'd scalp him."

"And I'd jump on his neck," said Jack Blake emphatically. "You're off the track this time, old chap. Try something else."

"Well, where's young Gibson, anyway? Let him speak up; he was the last with Figgins."

"Gibson! Where's young Gibson?"

But young Gibson was discreetly keeping out of sight. The moment he had heard his name mentioned by Fatty Wynn, he had scuttled off, and was now in cover in the bicycle shed. The excited juniors looked round for him in vain.

"I told you so!" exclaimed Kerr. "It's a School House raid!"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Well," said Ferrers Locke, glancing at his watch, "if no one can tell us where Figgins is, I should advise—"

"One minute, sir!"

It was D'Arcy minor who spoke. He came forward with his hands in his pockets, and a grin on his face, perfectly undisturbed by the excitement reigning round him. Jameson

and several other grinning Third-Formers were with him. Ferrers Locke looked curiously at the infant.

"Well, can you tell us anything about Figgins?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I know where he is!"

"Where is he, then?"

"Somewhere he won't get away from in a hurry, sir," said Wally coolly, "unless the Third Form take part in this show."

## CHAPTER 9.

### D'Arcy Minor Makes Terms.

WALLY spoke with perfect calmness, and for a few moments the import of his words did not fully dawn upon the assembled juniors. Ferrers Locke looked amazed, and then his face broke into a smile. The colonel chuckled.

But the juniors did not smile or chuckle. As soon as they realised what Wally's words conveyed, they pressed more closely round the hero of the Third.

"Do you mean to say," said Tom Merry, in measured accents, "that you've had the cheek to collar Figgins?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I weally believe my young bwothah has cheek enough for anythin'."

"He'll have bumps enough for anything if he doesn't jolly soon tell us where Figgins is!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"Where is Figgy, young shaver?"

"Guess!"

"Tell us where he is?"

"Certainly—on conditions."

"Collar the cheeky young beast!" exclaimed Gore angrily. "He'll tell you fast enough if you twist his arms."

Tom Merry pushed the bully of the Shell back. Ferrers Locke and the colonel, much amused, had stepped back a little, leaving the juniors to settle the matter among themselves. Gore scowled furiously. But he did not venture to advance after Tom Merry pushed him back. The gleam in Tom's eye meant business.

"There won't be any arm-twisting while I'm here, Gore," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Look here, we're not going to be cheeked by a Third Form kid."

"You're not going to bully him, anyway."

"Faith, and you're right," said Reilly. "But the young spalpeen ought to be made to tell us where Figgins is, all the same."

Jack Blake gripped the hero of the Third by the collar.

"Where is Figgins," he said persuasively. "I don't want to have any trouble with you, kid, so tell us quietly where Figgins is."

"You don't want to have any trouble?"

"No, but—"

"Then you'd better let go my collar," said Wally calmly, "or else you'll have trouble, whether you want it or not."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Jameson.

"Look here, young shaver," said Blake, releasing the Third-Former, "you've got to tell us where Figgins is."

"I told you it was a House raid," said Kerr.

"Then you were wrong," said Wally coolly; "it's nothing of the sort. It's a Third Form raid. School House and New House are together in it. I belong to the School House, but Jameson is in the New House, and we were the leaders in collaring Figgins."

"Just so," said Jameson, with a grin.

"It's a Form row," pursued Wally. "You wanted to leave us out of the contest. The Third Form at St. Jim's isn't to be ignored."

"Hear, hear!" said Jameson.

"We're standing together in this, and we've got Figgins. We've got him put away safely, and you won't see him again unless the Third Form joins in this show, on equal terms. So there you are!"

"Knock his head off!"

"Collar him!"

"Snatch him bald-headed!"

"Jump on him!"

Wally, with his hands still in his pockets, grinned derisively at the juniors. He knew that the presence of Ferrers Locke and the colonel would save him from any very severe ragging; but, in any case, he had plenty of nerve. The grin on Wally's smudgy face was distinctly exasperating to the Fourth Form of the Shell, and many were the threatening gestures round him.

"Better frog's-march him till he tells us where Figgins is," said Monty Lowther.

"Good idea!" said Blake.

"You can frog's-march me till you're black in the face, but you won't get a word out of me," said Wally determinedly.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Tell us where Figgins is, then."

"Find out!" said Wally cheerfully.

"Collar the young rascal!"

"Weally, deah boys, I object to my young bwothah bein' chawctawised as a wascal. I object to his bein' fwog's-marched. It is an infwaction of the dig. of a D'Arcy to be fwog's-marched. I pwotest—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wing off," said Arthur Augustus, ranging himself by the side of D'Arcy minor. "Any boundah pwesumin' to twy to fwog's-march my young bwothah will immediately weceive a feahful thwashin'."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Under the circumstances, there's only one thing to be done," he said. "We'd better give in, before Gussy thwashes the lot of us."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Let the Third Form come into the game," said Tom Merry. "They won't do any good, but they won't do much harm. Wally deserves it for his cheek, anyway."

"Oh, all right," said Jack Blake; "I don't mind."

"Is it a go?" asked Wally.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Yes, it's a go," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've wasted enough time already. Now, you young scalawag, where is Figgins?"

Wally produced a key from his pocket.

"You'll find him t'other end of the gym.," he said.

Kerr took the key and hurried into the gym.

"So the matter is settled?" said Ferrers Locke.

"Yes, sir," said D'Arcy minor. "The Third Form are taking a hand in the proceedings, and everything in the garden is lovely. Whistle up the fellows, Jimmy."

Jameson gave the whistle, and the Third Form gathered from all directions. Most of them were already near at hand.

"Very good!" said Ferrers Locke, smiling. "As you are now in the contest, I had better briefly explain the conditions to you. Figgins is the hare. He is to take a little flag from the gym., and is to be allowed five minutes in which to make his escape in any manner he pleases. Then the tracking commences. Figgins is to place the flag in the ruined castle on Rylcombe Hill, and to return to St. Jim's uncaptured. If he succeeds in doing so, he is the victor in the contest. If he is captured, his captor is the victor. A hand on the shoulder constitutes capture."

"Very good, sir; that's all quite clear."

Kerr and Figgins came out of the gym. Figgins's Norfolk jacket was very rumpled, and his hose were dragged nearly down to his ankles, and there was a rent in his knickers. He showed plenty of signs of the struggle with the Infants. He was looking very red and uncomfortable, too, and making strange twistings with his mouth, where the strong flavour of the soapy gag still lingered. A general grin greeted him.

"Hallo, here you are!" said Jack Blake. "Feel fit for the run? I don't mind taking your place if you're not."

"I'm fit enough," grunted Figgins. "I want to massacre some Third-Formers first, though."

"No time," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We're a quarter of an hour late already, Figgy. You shouldn't have allowed yourself to be kidnapped by a lot of infants."

"How could I help it when a dozen piled on me?" demanded Figgins indignantly.

"Oh, don't ask me ridd'es! Pull up your socks and get ready."

And Figgins, amid many chuckles and murmured remarks, pulled up his stockings, and prepared for the run. Ferrers Locke took out the flag. It was a tiny Union Jack, on a stick only nine or ten inches long, so that it could be placed in the pocket. In sight of all the juniors, Ferrers Locke placed it in the gym., and then asked Figgins if he were ready.

"Quite ready, sir," said Figgins, jamming the packet of sandwiches into his pocket.

"Then start! Five clear minutes are allowed for you to start."

"Very good, sir."

Ferrers Locke made a sign to the juniors, and they crowded back from the gym. Figgins was to be allowed five minutes before he was sought for. If he left the gym. in the usual way, and ran out of the gates, that would not take him more than a couple of minutes at the most, and then he would have three in which to gain cover and commence the flight.

Ferrers Locke and the colonel watched the clock in the tower. Figgins had entered the gym. when the clock indicated twenty minutes past two. The juniors watched it as anxiously, and the big hand crept on.

What was Figgins doing? The juniors were amazed. Three minutes had passed, and Figgins had not even come

out of the gym. He had left himself only time for a run to the gates.

Four minutes!

The amazement was now general. Had Figgins stopped to make some final preparation, or had he forgotten the flight of time? Did he think that he still had four minutes or so remaining, when, as a matter of fact, the last few seconds were ticking away?

The juniors looked at Ferrers Locke, hoping to read his thoughts in his face. But the famous detective's face expressed nothing.

What did it mean?

Five minutes!

"Start!" said Ferrers Locke quietly.

There was a general rush into the gym.

But Figgins was not to be seen. The flag was gone, and Figgins was gone, too.

The door leading into the little room where Figgins had been a prisoner was open, and Tom Merry rushed into the room.

The window was open, too. It was evident now which way Figgins had gone. Tom Merry gave a shout.

"Stole away!"

The next moment he was clambering through the window. The hunt had commenced.

## CHAPTER 10.

### On the Track.

FERRERS LOCKE and the colonel exchanged a smile. The contest had begun well, and Figgy's strategy had made the start far from easy for the pursuers. He had vanished from a window at the back of the gym, scuttled round the chapel unseen, and escaped over the school wall. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther followed by the same route, while Blake and others rushed out of the gates to pick up the trail in the road. Figgins was nowhere in sight, and the juniors spread up and down the road in search of him. It was certain that he would go through the wood, but there were more than a dozen different paths to choose from.

The hunters were soon widely separated. Kerr and Wynn went by the footpath, Blake and his chums by another track, and Tom Merry & Co. remained in the road looking for Figgins's tracks before they took up the chase. D'Arcy minor and a select party of the Third Form disappeared into the wood, as eager in the quest as any. Wally had provided himself with a bugle, which he used to keep his ink band together. A single blast was a rallying cry, two meant that he was on the track. Any Infant not obeying the call was to have his head punched after getting home. But the Third-Formers were all keen. They meant that the honour of capturing Figgins should belong to the Infants if possible.

Tom Merry searched for tracks along the ditch which Figgins must have crossed to enter the wood. He was satisfied at last that he had found them, and the Terrible Three took up the trail. On more than one previous occasion Tom Merry had played the scout in the woods round St. Jim's, especially at the time when the craze for playing Indians had seized the juniors. He knew a great deal of woodcraft, and a little keen observation in such matters will go a very great way.

Guided by slight indications, the chums of the Shell plunged into the heart of the wood. Under the thick trees, where the sky was half-hidden by heavy boughs, it was impossible to keep their bearings, except by knowledge of the ground, and by the use of the compass. Monty Lowther had brought a compass, and he consulted it every few minutes, but he did not seem to derive much guidance from it. The wood was so thick in places that it was impossible to keep a straight course, and the "sign" for which Tom Merry was keeping his eyes open led the scouts on a zigzag course.

Manners uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Look here!"

The Terrible Three halted. The winds of late October had carpeted the earth with leaves, soddened by rains, and in the pulpy mass any kind of a footprint showed clearly.

The ill-defined track the chums had been following through the bushes was now clear before their eyes. The print of two boots of considerable size rewarded their examination, and Tom Merry smiled a smile of satisfaction.

"Looks like Figgy's track," he remarked.

"Yes, rather; they're about his size."

"The tracks are fresh," said Tom Merry, cocking his head on one side and examining the trail with the air of Buffalo Bill. "They haven't been made long, kids."

"Then it must be Figgins."

"Let's make sure. Nothing like working the thing out. The tracks weren't made by a keeper, because they're a

boy's boots. They weren't made by a village boy, because they don't wear this kind of boot. Therefore, as no one else can be here, the tracks were made by a fellow from St. Jim's. We are ahead of all the fellows but Figgins."

"Ergo, it was Figgins."

"Yes; and the fact that the boots are of a jolly big size is additional evidence. It seems pretty clear that we have found Figgy's track."

"Looks like it; let's get on."

Eagerly enough the chums of the Shell followed the track. It was plainer and plainer as they followed it, till it ended in a thicket. And as the chums stopped to take breath before entering the thicket, they heard a sound beyond the thick bush. It was the sound of someone breathing.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"He's stopped to rest," he muttered.

"Sounds like it, Tommy."

"Look here, only one chap can capture him, the other two have to stand out."

"Yes; you and Manners remain here, while I—"

"Oh, come! You two remain here, while I—"

"Cheese it!" muttered Manners. "He'll get away while you're jawing. You two stay here, while I—"

Tom Merry chuckled silently.

"Let's get on together, then. The one who collars him first is the captor."

"Right you are!"

"Careful, now; don't give the alarm."

The Terrible Three acted with great caution. They dropped on their hands and knees, and wormed their way silently through the thickets. Manners murmured something as a keen thorn scratched along his face, drawing a streak of red in its track. Monty Lowther paused in a minute or so to listen. He had lost the sound of the quarry, and lost his bearings. He had passed out of sight of Tom Merry and Manners, and was lost in a maze of tangled thickets. He paused, and strove to find his way again, and in the midst of it he was startled by a wild yell from the bushes.

"Hang it! Tom's got him!"

Tom Merry had crept on with more judgment. He had carefully noted the spot whence the sound he had heard proceeded, and he carefully kept it in mind as he crept. With the single idea in his mind, with his whole faculties concentrated on the work in hand, Tom Merry threaded his way on hands and knees, creeping like a redskin on his prey.

The dim outline of a head and shoulders appeared through the tangled greenery, and Tom Merry's heart beat faster.

There was his quarry!

He smiled quietly, and crept on with renewed caution. To get behind Figgins, and quietly tap him on the shoulder, and announce that he was a prisoner, was his object. He could imagine the jump Figgins would give when he felt the hand upon his shoulder.

Closer and closer!"

Tom Merry reached cautiously forward through the tangled twigs, and suddenly clapped his hand on the shoulder before him.

"Caught!" he yelled.

The sitting figure sprang up with a startled yell.

Tom Merry sprang up, too, and the next moment he uttered an exclamation of angry disappointment.

It was not Figgins!

A pair of big spectacles turned towards Tom Merry, and he recognised Skimpole, the amateur Socialist of the School House.

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "You—you startled me, Merry!"

"Skimpole!"

"It was really very injudicious to suddenly tap a fellow on the shoulder, without warning him of your intention," said Skimpole. "You have really given me a most unpleasant start."

"You—you utter ass!" grunted Tom Merry. "What do you mean by sticking here, and making me think you were Figgins?"

Skimpole blinked at him.

"Really, Merry, I did not make you think I was Figgins. I had no intention whatever of impersonating Figgins. Are you looking for Figgins?"

"Yes, ass! It's all right, kids, come on; it's only that ass, Skimpole!"

"Really, Merry, I cannot but regard that expression as almost rude. I am sorry that Figgins is not here, as you seem to want him, but—"

"Ass, he's the hare!"

"Oh, yes, I remember; you are playing some game, I think—"

Tom Merry glared at him.

"Ain't you playing, too?" he demanded.

Skimpole shook his head.

"No, I was thinking of doing so, but I thought it better





"Caught!" yelled Tom Merry.  
 "Dear me," gasped Skimpole, "You—you startled me, Merry!"

not. You fellows would have had no chance against me, you know, and so it would have been hardly fair to the rest of the school for me to enter into the contest. I thought I would withdraw into a secluded spot this pleasant afternoon, and complete the notes for the three hundred and thirty-fourth chapter of my book on Socialism."

"Come on, kids!"

"You have somewhat disturbed my thoughts, and caused me to drop my pencil," said Skimpole. "If you are inclined for a brief rest, I should have great pleasure in reading out some of my notes to you. In the three hundred and thirty-fourth chapter of my book I deal with the subject of racial degeneracy, from the point of view of Determinism. The combined influences of heredity and environment—"

"Oh, come on!" gasped Tom Merry.

"The combined influences of heredity and environment—"

The Terrible Three ran on through the wood. Skimpole blinked after them solemnly, and shook his head.

"Curious how these feeble intellects fly from the great

problems of modern existence," he murmured. "I should have been pleased to enlighten them upon the subject of racial degeneracy, considered from the point of view of a Determinist, and could have proved that degeneration, like everything else, is an effect to be traced to a cause, and that the cause is incontrovertibly the producer of the effect. This is the great truth of Determinism which I must labour to make clear in my three hundred and thirty-fourth chapter."

And Skimpole groped in the grass for his pencil, and sat down with his notebook again, and forgot the existence of Tom Merry and everyone else in the keen interest inspired by his great theme. Meanwhile, the Terrible Three, having escaped from the bore of St. Jim's, ran on; but the track was lost. Whether the tracks they had been following all along had been made by Skimpole or not, there was certainly no trace of Figgins to be discovered. No sight, nor sound, nor sign of the fugitive.

"Better push on for the old castle," said Tom Merry, at last. "Figgins is bound to go there, and we may pick up the track afresh."

"Good!" said Lowther.

From the distance in the woods rang the ta-ra-ra of a bugle. It came from D'Arcy minor, calling together his inky-fingered band. The sound showed that Wally was well on his way. The Terrible Three, giving up the attempt to find the tracks of Figgins in the wood, made direct for the ruined castle on Rylcombe Hill, and came in sight of it at last.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Arthur Augustus is Captured.

"Bai Jove, deah boys—"

"What's the matter with you?"

"I am beginnin' to feel wathah exhausted—"

"Sit down, then."

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sinking upon a big root that cropped up out of the ground. "I feel weally as if I want a west, you know. I won't keep you more than a quartah of an hour."

Jack Blake grinned.

"You won't keep me more than a quarter of a second," he replied. "Come on, kids!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

Herries and Digby followed Blake as he went on. D'Arcy jumped up quickly enough, and followed them.

"Weally, Blake, I undahstood that you were goin' to west, too."

"Something wrong with your understanding, then. No time for rest."

"In that case, I shall not remain behind."

"Follow your leader, then, and don't keep on complainin' like a girl," said Blake severely. "Keep a stiff upper lip, and don't grouse."

"I wufuse—"

"Oh, come on!" said Blake, plunging into the thickets.

"I uttably wufuse to allow dispawagin' wemarks concernin' girls to be made in my wufence. I have wemontstated with you before on this mattah, Blake."

Jack Blake did not reply. He had dropped on his knees in the bushes, and was examining a mark in the soft soil, thick with fallen leaves. Arthur Augustus leaned over him, and tapped him on the shoulder, and Blake gave a jump.

"You ass! Keep away! I think I've found the track!"

"The mattah must be settled—"

"Well, I'm examining it—"

"I mean the othah mattah—"

"What other matter, ass? Shut up!"

"I wufuse to shut up. I mean your diswepful allusion to girls. I cannot allow such an expwession to pass in my wufence."

"Drag that lunatic away, Herries."

"I wufuse to be dwagged away. If you lay a fingah on me, Hewwies, I shall lose my tempah and stwike you. Blake, I wuequest you to wifthdraw your words."

"Shut up!"

"I distinctly wufuse to shut up. As one gentleman to another, I wuequest you to wifthdraw your diswepful allusion to girls."

"Kill him, somebody," said Blake. "Look here, somebody's been this way. The marks are as deep as anything in the soil. Look!"

"I insist—"

"Are you going to ring off?" bawled Blake.

"No, I am not goin' to ring off. Undah the circs., I have no alternative but to distinctly wufuse to ring off."

Blake jumped up. He made a sign to Herries, and the two of them collared the swell of the School House. The next moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was reposing on his back in a prickly bush. Blake looked at the track again.

"This looks promising," he remarked. "We had better follow it up, anyway. Come on!"

"Help, deah boys! My twousahs are gettin' torn—"

But the chums of Study No. 6 did not heed. They were hot on the track, and they dashed off through the wood, and D'Arcy was left to extricate himself. This he did, with some difficulty, and with more than one rent in his beautifully-creased trousers.

He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked round discontentedly for his hat.

"Bai Jove," he murmured, "that was feahfully wough of those wottahs, and I wuegard them as havin' acted like beasts in shovin' me into that bush. I doubt wethah I can continue to wuegard the wottahs as fwends. Where is my beastly hat? Upon wuefection, I think it is wathah a mistake to come out scoutin' in a silk hat."

The hat was discovered impaled upon some thorns. Arthur Augustus brushed it, and replaced it on his head, and then followed his chums. He was very indignant, and had half a mind to abandon the whole affair; but the thought that his comrades would probably get into some trouble without him

made him keep on. But Blake, Herries, and Digby had vanished in the wood, and D'Arcy could not find a sign of them. He halted at last in some dismay.

"Bai Jove, those weckless wottahs have lost themselves!" he murmured.

Ta-ra-ra-ra!

He started as the bugle note rang through the wood.

"Bai Jove, I wondah what that is!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "Deah me, I wish I could find those wottahs! They will get into some mischief."

He pursued his way, plunging through bush and briar; but there was no trace of Blake and his companions to be discovered.

A rustle in the bushes suddenly caught his ear.

He was in a very thick part of the wood, where there was no track, and he had to push twigs and branches and huge ferns out of the way with his hand, in order to make any progress. The rustle he heard came from behind him, and D'Arcy looked back. He frowned a little as he scanned the impenetrable mass of greenery behind him.

"It is those wottahs playin' a trick!" he murmured. "They are followin' me, and probably mean to jump on me suddenly. I weally wish Blake would wemembah what I have so fwequently told him, that pwactical jokes are in very bad form. I shall take no notice of the wottahs."

And Arthur Augustus walked on.

The rustle behind him continued at intervals. It was evident that he was being stalked through the wood. The note of a bugle rang out twice in succession. Then came rustles from different quarters, as if a number of fellows were closing in.

Arthur Augustus stopped, and looked round him.

And as he did so, there was a trampling and crashing in the thickets, and half-a-dozen figures rushed upon him.

In a twinkling he was bowled over, and dragged to the ground, and the inky-fingered fags were swarming over him.

"Got him!" yelled Wally.

"Bai Jove!"

"It isn't Figgins!" shouted Jameson.

"My hat!"

"It's your beastly brother!"

"My only Aunt Jane, so it is!"

D'Arcy writhed and gasped under the weight of the excited fags.

"Pway let me up!" he panted. "You howwid young wascals, wewease me at once! Wally, I shall give you a feahful thwashin' if you do not immediately get off my chest! You are uttably wuinin' my waistcoat!"

"You howling ass!"

"You young wascal!"

"What do you mean by going sneaking about as if you were the hare?" demanded Wally wrathfully, as he moved off his brother's chest. "I took you for Figgins!"

"Weally, Wally, you could surely nevah have mistaken my figh for that of Figgins!"

"I couldn't see you, ass! I was following you by sound, and tracking you. If I could have seen you I should have known that there was only one dummy at St. Jim's capable of going out scoutin' in a white shirt and a high collar and a silk hat."

"Your language is uttably diswepful!"

"Oh, rats! It's a frost, you chaps!"

D'Arcy rose to his feet. The fags of the Third Form glowered at him. They had been disappointed, and they were annoyed. Jameson picked up D'Arcy's hat.

"If you say wats to me, Wally," said Arthur Augustus, "I shall forget that you are my youngh bwothah, and administah a feahful thwashin'. I wuegard you and your fwends as a set of inky little weptiles!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said D'Arcy minor disrespectfully.

"I've a jolly good mind to tie you to a tree, you ass!"

"Weally Wally—"

"You've led us on the wrong track, and now that rotter Figgins will be quite gone, or somebody else will have colared him!"

"Well, here goes his topper, anyway!" said Jameson.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shrieked.

"Give me my toppah at once, you diswepful young boundah!"

"Certainly!" grinned Jameson. "Here you are!"

And he punted the topper over to D'Arcy. Excepting that the toe of his boot went through the crown, it was not damaged. D'Arcy caught the topper, and looked at it speechlessly, and made a rush at Jameson. But the fags closed round him, and he was hurled back into the thickets, and then the Third-Formers rushed on into the wood.

Arthur Augustus regained his feet, but his enemies were gone, and the bugle of D'Arcy minor was ringing through the wood far away. And the swell of St. Jim's, gasping for breath, sat down upon a knoll to brush his topper.

CHAPTER 12.  
A Ducking all round.

"THERE he is!"

Jack Blake gave the sudden shout, as he came out on the bank of the Feeder—the little stream that flowed through the heart of the wood. By the glimmer of sunny waters a figure was visible, trotting steadily along to the little plank bridge that crossed the Feeder in its narrowest part. Blake, Herries, and Digby had lost the track, and Jack was beginning to doubt whether it had been Figgy's track at all; but when he caught sight of the long-limbed junior, that settled all doubts.

There was Figgy in the flesh, making for the plank, after crossing which, the run to the ruined castle was a short and easy one through the wood. Blake's eyes gleamed as he came out of the thickets and caught sight of Figgins, and he involuntarily shouted to his comrades.

It was not a cautious thing to do. Figgins heard the shout, as well as Herries and Dig, and he looked round. He caught sight of Blake, and was evidently surprised to find a pursuer so near at hand. He had been going at a trot, but now he quickened his pace, making a rapid run for the plank bridge.

"After him!" panted Dig.  
The three School House juniors sprinted down the grassy, uneven bank of the Feeder. They knew that Figgins would remove the plank after crossing, and the stream was deep at this point, though narrow. Figgins dashed on towards the plank, but suddenly he was seen to halt in dismay.

"Headed off!" yelled Blake, in delight.  
Two figures had burst from the wood on to the bank of the stream, ahead of Figgins, and cutting him off from the plank by which he had intended to cross.

They were Kerruish and Reilly, and they caught sight of Figgins at once, and dashed towards him.

"Arrah, and we've got him intirely," gasped Reilly.  
Figgins halted, his eyes gleaming.

Reilly and Kerruish were in front of him, and Blake, Herries, and Digby behind. The wood on his left was alive with pursuers, and on the right was the deep Feeder, and he was cut off from access to the plank bridge.

But it was only for a few seconds that Figgins hesitated. Then he turned to the stream and waded in.

"My hat, he's taken to the water!" exclaimed Blake.  
"Good old Figgins! It's a bit chilly this time of the year! But we'll have him yet!"

Figgins tramped through the stream gallantly. The water came with a swish over his knees, then up to his waist, and in the middle it was up to his armpits. Then he drew to the other side, only his shoulders unwetted. He dragged himself through the rushes, and scrambled ashore, and, turning round, waved the little Union Jack defiantly at the pursuers, and then disappeared among the trees.

"Faith, he's gone!" howled Reilly. "Aft'her him!"  
And the Irish boy plunged recklessly into the stream. Kerruish, a little more prudent, crossed by the plank bridge, and the chums of No. 6 followed his example. They were rushing into the wood on the other side when a piteous yell came from Reilly:

"Help, help!"  
Jack Blake looked round.

Reilly had lost his footing in the bed of the stream, having inadvertently stepped into a hollow, and for a moment his head went under water. It came up again, and the Irish junior, struggling to save himself, was borne down the stream by the current towards the plank bridge.

"Young ass!" growled Blake.  
The plank bridge crossed the stream at not more than the elevation of a foot above the water. It was a broad, massive plank, sunk at either end in the deep mud and rushes. The juniors rushed to the plank to collar Reilly as soon as he should reach it. The pursuit of Figgins was momentarily forgotten.

Reilly came down with a rush, and the four juniors on the plank were ready to clutch at him. But Reilly himself was clutching at the plank. He caught at it, and the current bumped him on it, with the natural result that it was dislodged.

"Look out!" yelled Blake.  
The warning came too late!

Reilly had bumped on the plank near the end, and the bump unsettled it, and the next moment it was torn from its place. Four splashes sounded in the water, and four simultaneous yells rang over the trees.

Five juniors, clinging to the floating plank, went down the stream a dozen yards or more before they could get a footing, and when they scrambled out, they were on the wrong side of the water. Blake rubbed the water from his eyes. Herries lay in the grass and gasped. Digby gasped and sat up.

"Of all the howling idiots—" began Blake, with a withering look at the boy from Belfast.

"Faith, and you're right!" said Reilly. "Of all the

howling idiots, I think you chaps take the cake! What were you all standing on the plank for, like a lot of geese in a row?"

"You—you— We were there to save you, you young ass!"

"Blessed if I can see how you were going to save me by shoving the plank over!"

"We didn't shove it over! You shoved it over!"

"Faith, and it wouldn't have gone over if you hadn't been standing on it!"

"We should have pulled you out if you'd only had sense enough not to bump against the plank."

"Sure, and it was your own fault intirely!"

"It's an ass you are, Reilly!" said Kerruish. "What did you go into the water at all for?"

"I went after that spalpeen Figgins!"

"Why didn't you cross by the plank?"

"Faith, and I never thought of it!"

"Oh, come on, kids!" said Blake crossly. "We shall get dry running, I suppose. And we're not much wetter than Figgins, anyway."

"Faith, and ye wouldn't be wet at all if ye'd kept off the plank!"

"If you hadn't gone into the water—" began Kerruish.

"Faith, and I—"

"It's an ass you are!"

"I tell ye—"

"And I tell you—"

"Sure, and it's a thick ear ye're lookin' for intirely!"

"Rats! I've a good mind to shove you into the water again!"

"Ye couldn't do it!"

"Couldn't I!" shouted Kerruish. "I'll jolly soon show you!"

Blake, Herries, and Dig were replacing the plank. They crossed it again, leaving Reilly and Kerruish to argue the matter out to their satisfaction. Blake's last glance back showed him the two juniors fighting close by the water-side, and as he looked they slipped in the rushes and splashed into the Feeder. He lost sight of them as they were scrambling out. Wet as they were, the chums of Study No. 6 took up the trail with undiminished ardour. They had been very close on the track, but the time wasted in the Feeder had given Figgins a chance to get ahead—a chance of which the New House junior was certain to have availed himself.

"But he must have left a lot of wet behind him," said Blake, looking round carefully for tracks. "He must be dripping with water, you know, as much as we are. Look for that."

"Here you are!" exclaimed Dig.

The wet footprints of Figgins were clear enough on the fallen leaves. The chums of the School House preseed forward eagerly. There was no doubt that they were on the track—the trail was too plain to be mistaken. Wherever Figgins had gone he had left the water track. It grew fainter as they proceeded, but by the time it failed them they were in sight of the slope that led up to the gateway of the ruined castle.

"Come on!" muttered Blake.

And, without troubling any further about tracks, he led the way at a run towards the castle. The solitude showed that they were the first of the hunters to reach it, but there was little doubt that Figgins had been there. Was he there still? It was very probable, for Blake was sure that he was not far behind, and it was likely enough that Figgins would stop for a few minutes to rest.

Blake made a sign of caution to his comrades. If Figgins was in the ruins, the best plan was to surprise him. The rules of the contest allowed him any amount of dodging, so long as a hand was not actually laid on his shoulder. Amid the rugged ruins of the ancient castle there was room for a hundred fugitives to dodge and twist, and, once given a start, Figgins might yet baffle his hunters.

The juniors ran on the thick grass of the track to the castle without a sound. The exercise and the sun helped to dry them, and they no longer squelched out water as they ran. The huge stone gateway of the castle, with its crumpled and shattered arch, rose before them. On those ancient stones could still be seen the traces of the cannon-shot that had battered down the castle and left it a wreck more than two hundred years before.

Blake, Herries, and Dig paused for breath, and then crept silently in at the shattered gateway. A faint sound reached their ears, and they grinned—it was the sound produced by a pair of hungry jaws hastily champing sandwiches.

They stopped, and, peering round the masonry, looked into the ruins. There was Figgins! He sat on a block of stone. The little Union Jack was planted in a prominent position on a block of masonry, where it would immediately catch the eye of anyone entering the ruins. Figgins was sitting near

it, eating the sandwiches with which he had been so thoughtfully provided by Fatty Wynn.

"Got him!" murmured Blake.  
But Figgins was on the watch. The School House juniors had to dash across a dozen yards of open space before they could reach him, and Figgins had the eyes of a hawk. He certainly did not know that his hunters were so close at hand; but, nevertheless, it would not be easy to take him by surprise.

"We'll separate!" muttered Blake. "I'll stay here, and cut him off from the path; you two go one each way, and get in through the holes in the walls on either side of the boulder. Then, when we make a rush—"

"But whose prisoner is he?"

"We'll toss for that afterwards."

"Good!"

And the three chums separated. Herries and Dig crept away silently. If the plan were carried out, there was not much chance for Figgins. But just then a piercing sound awake every echo of the old castle.

Ta-ra-ra-ta-a!

Jack Blake gritted his teeth. It was D'Arcy minor's bugle, and the sound was at the foot of the acclivity. Figgins sprang to his feet, his mouth half full of bread and ham, his face quite full of alarm.

Ta-ra-ra-ta-a!

Figgins jammed the rest of his sandwich into the pocket of his Norfolk jacket, and looked quickly round him. The next moment he had caught sight of Blake's shadow in the gateway, and was dashing away. The carefully-laid scheme of the three chums had come to nothing, owing to that unlucky bugle blast. Blake gave a yell.

"Come on!"

And he dashed recklessly after Figgins. There was no further use of caution. The race was now to the swift.

## CHAPTER 13.

### Cunning Figgins!

F IGGINS gave a quick look round as the three juniors dashed in from different points. Then he sprang away from the ruins, clearing a fragment of ancient wall with a bound that a roe might have envied, and coming down on the other side with a clatter. Blake, Herries, and Dig did not take the bound; they lacked the long legs of Figgins, and they had to scramble over. But Figgins did not lose an instant! He scrambled up another mass of the old wall, on the further side of which lay the open hill. Clutching at the thick tendrils of the ivy, Figgins dragged himself to the top.

True to the caution of a scout, he looked quickly over the wall before he showed himself on the outer side. It was well that he did. Three youths were just emerging from the wood on that side of the castle, and Figgins recognised Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. He crouched into the thick ivy, and lay low. It was only for a moment that the chums of the Shell were in sight. They passed beyond a mass of masonry, making their way round to the castle entrance, and Figgins breathed a deep breath of relief. He swung himself from the ivy, and dropped on the outer side of the wall.

He was none too soon. The Fourth-Formers were already scrambling up the inner side, and in less than a minute more Jack Blake's grip would have been on him.

Although Figgins had let himself down part of the way by means of the ivy, it was a good drop, and he rolled over on the ground. He was up again in an instant, and darting away. Into the woods in the direction of St. Jim's he did not dare venture. They were alive with the belated hunters who had not yet reached the old castle. His return had to be by a different route, or he would infallibly be captured. He had rested only two or three minutes at the castle, but those two or three minutes seemed likely to cost him dear.

He ran down the slope, and there were three distinct thuds on the earth behind him as the chums of the Fourth dropped from the wall after him. Blake gave a shout.

"There he goes!"

The shout reached the ears of the Terrible Three, who were entering the ruins. Tom Merry quickened his pace. He caught sight of the little flag planted by Figgins, and knew that Figg had been and gone. He dashed on after Blake, and in a few moments the chums of the Shell were panting on behind the Fourth-Formers. A minute later, and Wally and his dusty band entered the castle, and Wally made the ruins ring with blasts on his bugle. And then, minute after minute, dusty and weary trackers came in, in twos and threes; and most of them stopped in the castle to rest before resuming the chase; but there were some who did not rest.

Blake was dashing on in full sight of Figgins now. On this side of the castle the hill was thinly wooded, and the lanky figure of the New House junior was visible almost all the

time as he ran on. It was a case of sprinting now. Blake put on speed. Herries dropped a little behind, but Dig kept pace with his chief. There was a rapid patter of feet behind them, and Tom Merry came on gallantly, and was quickly running neck and neck with Blake. Jack gave him a sidelong glance. But he had no breath for speaking. He wanted it all for the race.

Figgins was keeping his distance. He covered the hillside, and reached the wood at the bottom of the hill, which lay in a wide sweep towards the Wayland Road. Blake snapped his teeth as the lanky figure disappeared into the trees. He had hoped to settle the matter there and then by a burst of speed; but Figg's long legs stood him in good stead at that critical moment.

"The boulder!" gasped Blake. "We'll have him yet!"

The juniors rushed into the wood. But here the thick undergrowths hid Figgins from view, and speed was no longer useful. Had Figgins kept on at a run the crackling of the underwoods would have been a sufficient guide to his pursuers. But not a sound came to their anxious ears. Figgins was evidently adopting a more cautious method. It was pretty certain that he was close at hand. But where? Blake listened for a few moments, and then gave that up, and looked for tracks.

The autumn winds had carpeted the ground with leaves, and in those seldom trodden recesses the tracks were not difficult to find. A call from Tom Merry showed that he had picked up Figgins's trail. He followed it swiftly, and the other juniors followed him.

"We'll have him now!" muttered Lowther. "He can't be far off."

"The track's plain enough in these leaves."

"By Jove, it's awfully plain!" said Blake. "Figgins must be fagged; he seems to have let his trotters come down like hammers."

"Looks like it!"

The track was indeed easy. The footmarks were deeply stamped into the beds of fallen and rotting leaves, and the juniors could have followed them almost by touch, so deeply imprinted were they. They hurried on triumphantly; but all of a sudden Tom Merry halted with an exclamation. The juniors, who were following him quickly in single file, halted too, bumping into one another.

"Go on!" called out Blake. "What on earth are you stopping for? This isn't a time to go to sleep, Tom Merry."

"Why don't you follow the track?" exclaimed Digby.

"There isn't any more track."

"What?"

"I've come to the end."

"Oh, rot," said Blake. "Let me look!"

He looked, but he had to admit that Tom Merry was right. The deeply-printed track ended in a dense thicket. Up to the thicket it was plainly marked. On the other side there was no track at all. It was evident that Figgins had gone no further. The juniors looked at one another in blank amazement. There was no large tree close at hand which Figgins could have climbed. Where was he?

"My only hat!" said Blake, mystified. "He can't have vanished into thin air, I suppose."

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"I think I have it! We ought to have guessed it from the tracks."

"What do you mean?"

"He's gone back the way he came."

"There's no back tracks."

"No; don't you see, it's a scouting dodge. He's gone back, backwards, treading in his own tracks—walking backwards the way he came," said Tom Merry. "That prevented him making any more tracks, and made the old ones deeper."

"My hat—the deep beast!"

"He was only a few minutes ahead of us, so he can't have gone far," said Tom Merry. "He went backwards along the track a little way, and then I imagine he pulled himself into a tree, and got off the track without making any fresh sign. It's a scouting dodge, but I didn't look for that in Figgins."

"The artful dodger! Let's get back and look."

They followed the trail back again, scanning the ground on either side for traces of the spot where Figgins had left the trail. But traces could not be found. There was no fresh track in the wood. It was pretty clear that Tom Merry's surmise was correct. Figgins, standing in his tracks, had pulled himself up from the ground to a low branch, and had clambered through the trees for some distance before descending to the ground again. Baffled as they were, the juniors could not help grinning at the ingenuity of the redoubtable Figgins.

"The only thing is to hunt for the tracks," said Blake.

"Let's get to work."

But it was a long task. The wood was thick, and in some

places the ground was hard, and bore little sign. It was always possible, too, that Figgins was concealed in the thick branches of one of the trees, and had made no fresh tracks at all. Half-an-hour passed by, and the numbers of trackers was increased by those who had rested in the old castle, and then taken up the trail again. Kerr and Fatty Wynn arrived on the scene, and Gore and Norton and Smith. Then came D'Arcy minor and his band. The Third-Formers were now reduced in number. Half of them had dropped off before the ruins were reached. Half of the remainder had stayed there, too fagged to go farther. Of those who still followed D'Arcy minor, most were tagging behind at various distances. They were realising that a race with upper Form fellows was a little above their weight. But Wally was as resolute as ever. With half-a-dozen companions, he was still well to the fore, and he arrived on the scene, breathless but undaunted, while Tom Merry and his companions were still searching for the vanished Figgins.

"Blessed if I'm going to waste time," said Wally decidedly. "Those chaps won't find the trail in a month of Sundays. Let's go on."

"Yes, but where?" asked Jameson.

"We'll have a run up the Wayland road. Figgins is certain to go that way, and cut across the moor among the chalk pits home. We can get the quickest out to the moor, and perhaps nail him there."

"Right-ho!" said the Infants.

And the Third Form band dashed off. Tom Merry had heard the sapient remarks of D'Arcy minor, and he rose from his examination of the trackless ground.

"There's something in that," he remarked. "If we waste much more time here, Figgins will be home before we've started."

"Come on, then," said Blake, starting off. The same thought had occurred to him. The juniors were soon streaming away after Tom Merry, only Fatty Wynn remaining sitting on a knoll, eating a pork-pie he had extracted from his jacket pocket. Kerr waved his hand to him excitedly.

"Come on, Fatty!"

"Wait a minute, Kerr. I'm so fearfully hungry, I must have a feed before I start. I've got another pork-pie here, if you'd like—"

"Rats!" said Kerr; and he dashed away after the rest. Fatty Wynn gazed after him for a moment doubtfully, and then recommenced his pork-pie.

"Hang it all," he murmured, "I must have some grub! No good fainting by the way, and giving them the job of carrying me home. I must finish the pie, and I may as well have the other, as Kerr wouldn't stop."

And he had the other.

## CHAPTER 14.

### Very near it.

**T**OM MERRY came out of the wood on the Wayland Road. Leaving the high-road some distance from the market town, the hero of the Shell followed the path to the moor, Lowther and Manners keeping pace with him in a steady trot. Blake & Co. had taken a different track, but a good many juniors were streaming on in the wake of the Terrible Tree. The moor was one of the loneliest places in the county, and very dangerous after dark, owing to the existence of numerous pits from which chalk had been taken in past times, and which mostly remained without even a fence to guard the sudden precipices.

"There's a short cut over the moor," Tom Merry remarked. "I don't know whether Figgins knows it. I discovered it for myself, and if Figgy doesn't know it, it will give us a good chance of getting level."

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Good! Blake's gone round through the wood, but he'll have no chance."

"I fancy not. We shall be in at the death, if anybody is."

"Or that young boulder Wally," grinned Lowther. "He's the chap for sticking to it. He's ahead of us now."

"He can keep ahead. He's passed the spot where the short cut leaves the track."

At a spot where the rugged moor seemed to be delved on all sides with the dangerous pits, Tom Merry left the beaten track. Lowther and Manners followed him without question, but the rest of the juniors behind them halted.

"You're going wrong," bawled Gore; "you're off the track."

The Terrible Three deigned no reply, but kept on along the verge of a yawning gap in the earth. The juniors hesitated a time, and then went on, following the beaten track.

Tom Merry laughed as he looked back.

"They think we're losing ourselves," he remarked.

"Are you sure you're not?" said Lowther, with a rather

uneasy glance round at the wild and desolate moor, russet in the setting sun. "Looks a perfect wilderness to me."

"It's all right; I've been over the track before. A shepherd chap showed it to me."

"Well, if you're sure—"

"Of course I'm sure. Hallo, if that isn't young Wally!"

The hero of the Third had evidently retraced his steps, for he was pounding along now behind the Terrible Three. Jameson and Curly Gibson were following him, with panting breath and crimson faces. The Terrible Three kept on at a steady trot, a pace that covered the ground pretty quickly without fagging them, but which put the Third-Formers to their biggest efforts to equal. D'Arcy minor came fagging up breathlessly.

"I say, Tom Merry?" he gasped.

"Hallo, kid!"

"Aren't you going off the track, or is this a short cut?"

"Short cut."

"Where does it bring you out?"

"Close by the pine-wood near Rylcombe."

"Good! The regular track takes you to the pine-wood if you follow it far enough."

"Exactly!"

"Sure this is a short cut, or is it some of your rot?" asked D'Arcy minor.

"I haven't time to box your ears now—"

"Jolly lucky for you, as I haven't time to punch your nose, either."

Tom Merry laughed, and ran on. Wally fell back a pace or two, and allowed his perspiring companions to get level. The Third-Former's face was glowing with exertion and satisfaction.

"It's a short cut," he said. "We shall manage all right, if we don't fall into the chalk-pits, and if we don't give in."

"Go hon!" gasped Jameson.

"I—I can't stick it out any longer," said Curly Gibson, whose heart was pounding against his ribs like a hammer.

"I—I shall have to rest."

"Oh, keep on!"

"I can't run."

"Crawl, then."

D'Arcy minor dashed on. Jameson, heavy-footed but determined, plodded on steadily only a pace or two behind. But Curly Gibson was done. He dropped upon a mound of chalk, and remained there, gasping and gasping. The Terrible Three were well ahead of D'Arcy minor now. But Wally was sticking it out grimly. If he were not in at the death, he did not mean to be far behind.

The short cut led through dangerous ground, but it saved more than a mile of difficult country. The spire of Rylcombe church rose to view far away on the left against the setting sun, and ahead of the Terrible Three were the shady recesses and sweet-scented glades of the pine-wood. They ran on under the trees, and reached the spot where the beaten track across the moor joined the footpath through the wood.

There at last they halted, pretty well spent with the long and hard run.

Tom Merry dropped on his knees and examined the ground.

"Has Figgy passed?" he said. "He had a jolly good start of us, I think, but he had an extra mile of the most difficult running country in Sussex. I'm rather inclined to believe that we've headed him off."

"Better keep out of sight, then, in case he comes along," exclaimed Lowther, looking along the track towards the hazy moor.

"Good! You two get into cover while I look for tracks!"

Manners and Lowther drew into the shade of the pine-wood. Tom Merry searched for tracks, but there was nothing to indicate that Figgins had passed that way. Tom Merry had a mental picture of Figgy's footprint. There were a good many footprints here, but most of them hazy and indistinct. Whether Figgy's was among them he could not tell for certain, but he thought not.

He rose to his feet, and joined Manners and Lowther in cover. The chums of the Shell were breathing very hard.

"I don't think he's passed," said Tom Merry. "I really think he hasn't had time to get ahead of us, seeing how much we've gained. And there's another point; you see how dusty our boots are from the moor—chalky dust."

"Yes, rather. But what—"

"Look here; we're leaving dusty, white marks in the grass. Well, Figgy has come the same way, and he's had more of the chalk. If he had passed there would be some sign of it."

"My hat! You would make a scout, and no mistake, Tommy," said Lowther admiringly. "I didn't think of that, but you're quite right."

"Good!" said Manners. "Figgy hasn't passed, and if we lay for him here, he's a gone coon."

"So I believe. Let's have a rest."

"He might leave the track," said Lowther dubiously, as he sank down with his back against a tree trunk. "If he left the track five minutes from here, he could turn off to the left and get into Rylcombe."

"So he would if he knew we were ahead of him; but he thinks he's got a clear course. He won't go home through Rylcombe if he can help it; the place will be swarming with our fellows who have come back direct from the castle. They'll be all over Rylcombe and the lane up to St. Jim's."

"I suppose so."

"Figgy would be snapped up in a tick if he went that way. I think we're pretty sure of him here."

"Well, we shall soon see."

The chums of the Shell were glad of the rest. But it did not last many minutes. There was a sound of pounding feet on the path, and they looked out from the trees to see the lanky form of Figgins approaching their hiding-place from the direction of the moor.

Tom Merry's deductions had been exactly correct.

Figgins was coming on, without a suspicion that the Terrible Three were ahead of him, and was running directly into the ambush.

Tom Merry laughed quietly.

"Stand ready, you cnavs! We shall have to settle afterwards whose prisoner he is."

"Right-ho!"

With bated breath the Terrible Three stood, ready to rush out into the path the moment Figgins should pass. From the straggling bushes which hid the short cut across the moor came a sudden sound, piercing through the air.

Ta-ra-ra-ra-ta-a!

It was the note of Wally's bugle.

Figgins stopped, like a stag suddenly startled by the horn of the hunter, and without a second's pause swung round, and ran back the way he had come.

The bugle note was quite enough to warn him that there were enemies ahead, and that he had been cut off from St. Jim's in that direction.

Tom Merry was speechless for a moment. The prize was almost within his grasp, when that unlucky bugle note had ruined everything; and Figgins, who was still some twenty yards from the ambush when he received the warning, had a good start in his fresh run.

"The young villain!" gasped Tom Merry. "Come on; run for it!"

Wally came panting up, bugle in hand. Jameson was lagging far behind, and it was for his benefit that the blast had been blown.

"Seen him?" gasped Wally.

For reply, Monty Lowther seized him by his collar and the back of his waistband and tossed him bodily, bugle and all, into a prickly bush. Wally woke the echoes of the pine-wood with his yells, while the Terrible Three, a little relieved in their feelings by the handling of Wally, resumed the chase.

## CHAPTER 15.

### Still Running!

**F**IGGINS had been warned only just in time. But his start was again a good one, and he made the most of it. He had had a long run, but the effect seemed to be little upon his slim, muscular frame. He was breathing deeply and steadily as he turned from the path to the pine-wood, and struck off to the left, with the spire of Rylcombe church rising into the sunset before him.

A burst of speed, which taxed his endurance, but carried him well ahead, brought him upon the lane leading to the high-road; and there, for the first time, he paused and looked back. The lane behind him was winding, and looking through a gap of the hedge, he saw the ground he had passed over, and saw the forms of the chums of the Shell coming steadily on. Far behind them were two smaller figures. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had been left a little behind by Figgy's burst, but they were coming on at a pace that promised to make up for lost ground. Their rest, brief as it was, had refreshed them, and Figgins was keen enough to see that Tom, at least, was fresher than himself.

The New House junior ran grimly on, but as he ran he revolved in his mind various plans for circumventing his pursuers. He had been forced to rely upon his speed, but it was by scout's strategy that he hoped to escape. In a race to the gates of St. Jim's, Tom Merry would have him, even if he were not stopped on the road, as he was pretty certain to be. He came to the end of the lane, and turned into the high-road towards Rylcombe, and at the same moment a butcher's cart came dashing by, going towards the village.

Figgins's eyes gleamed with hope. Any strategy was permitted to a scout, and if he could get a lift, it might be the

saving of him, and was quite within the rules of the contest.

He ran out into the road and threw up his hand. The butcher, who happened to be the local merchant who supplied St. Jim's, stopped at once.

"Can you give me a bit of a lift?" panted Figgins.

The butcher looked at him curiously. Figgins was damp all over, and the dust had clung to the damp of his clothes. His boots and stockings were chalky, his face red and perspiring. He looked as if he had "been through it" with a vengeance.

"Jump in!" said the butcher.

Figgins jumped in, and the cart dashed on. Tom Merry came bounding out of the lane a minute later, and gazed after the disappearing cart with feelings too deep for words.

Figgins looked back from the cart and waved his cap.

"Row with the Grammar School kids?" asked the butcher, who knew the little ways of the St. Jim's juniors very well from long neighbourhood.

"Oh, no; scouting," said Figgins. "Boy scouts, you know."

"Oh, I see. Shall I take you right on into the village?"

"Oh, no. The fellows are bound to be there watching for me. I've got to get in somehow without being collared. I can't go through Rylcombe. It's allowed to gain any kind of information from natives of the country," continued Figgins. "Can you give me a tip, Mr. Simmons?"

The good-natured butcher grinned.

"They're behind you and in front," he remarked, "what about getting down to the Ryll and having a boat? You could pull to the boat-house at the school, and cut in there."

"My hat! What a ripping idea!"

"Then I'll drop you at Water Lane."

"Thanks, awfully! I'll do them yet."

Water Lane was a rutty little path that led down from the road to the banks of the Ryll, the river that flowed under Rylcombe Bridge, and past the grounds of St. Jim's.

Figgins would have to pull against the current to get home, but he was a powerful oarsman. Besides, although

## YOU CAN ENTER THIS COMPETITION TO DAY.



On pages iii. and iv. of the cover of this issue Nos. 1-42 of the puzzle-pictures are reproduced. Fill in your solutions of these on the numbered form on page 28, and keep the list by you until notice is given to send in.

he was getting tired in his legs, his arms were as fresh as ever. The butcher drew up at the end of Water Lane, and Figgins, thanking him warmly, dropped into the road, and disappeared down the narrow path. The butcher drove on into Rylcombe, and Figgins hurried down to the river.

In a couple of minutes the junior came out on the towing-path, and turned along it in the direction of St. Jim's. Unless someone suspected his design, there was likely to be no one to spot him till he drew near the village bridge. There he was pretty certain to be seen, and there he would have to have a boat, if he was to escape. He ran lightly along the towing-path, looking out for a craft. In scouting among the enemy, Figgins felt that he could not afford to stand upon ceremony. He would have to borrow a boat and find the owner afterwards and compensate him. A sudden exclamation started him as he came in sight of the bridge.

"Bai Jove! It's Figgins!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye and stared at Figgins.

Figgins halted, and stared at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove! It's weally Figgins!"

"My hat!" muttered Figgins.

He was nonplussed for the moment. To go on meant capture, for capture merely consisted in being tapped on the shoulder, and there was no room to dodge in the narrow towing-path. To turn back was as bad, for he knew that one at least of his pursuers would have turned down Water Lane, even if the others went on to the village.

"Fancy meetin' you!" said D'Arcy. "I came along here for a stwoll, after leavin' the othahs."

"Oh, did you?" said Figgins.

He rather wondered that D'Arcy did not advance upon him, tap him on the shoulder, and claim him as a prisoner. In the desperate hope of getting out of his fix, he was willing to parley and gain time.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! Blake tweeked me with

(Continued on page 22.)

# GRAND FOOTBALL PUZZLE-PICTURE COMPETITION.

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**What Competitors have to do.**—The Competition is very simple. We are publishing thirteen sets of Puzzle Pictures, each set consisting of six pictures. This is the Eighth Set. Keep this set until you have all the others. Each of these pictures represents the name of a well-known Association Football Player.

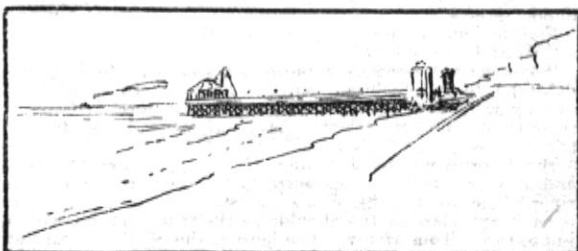
All you have to do is to write carefully under each picture the name of the Player you think it represents—it is NOT necessary to add the name of the player's club. Then place the set away until the others have appeared, when the latest day for sending in competitions will be announced. The Editor of the GEM LIBRARY will not be responsible for any loss or delay in transmission or delivery of the lists by post, nor for any accidental loss of a list after delivery. There will be attached to the final list a form to be signed by each competitor, whereby he agrees to these conditions, and no list will be considered unless this form shall have been duly signed by the competitor. No questions will be answered. Read the rules. The Editor's decision is final.

The easiest way to solve the Pictures is to get the issue of "The Boys' Realm" now on sale, price 1d. During the next thirteen weeks "The Boys' Realm" will publish a column of brief biographies of notable footballers, in which will be included all the names of the Players illustrated. Girls may compete. All competitors may get anyone to help them.

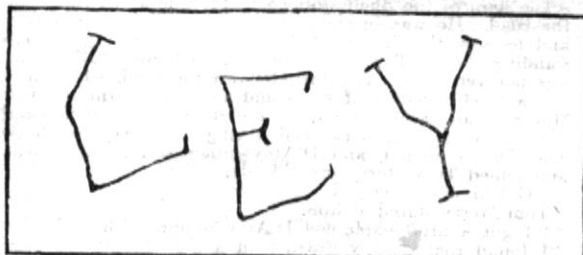
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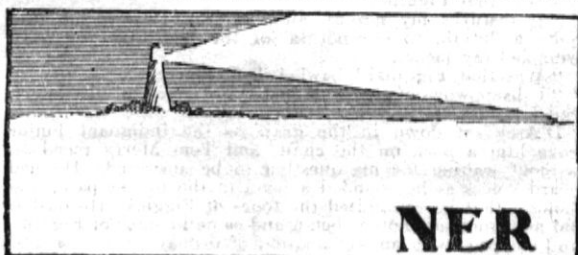
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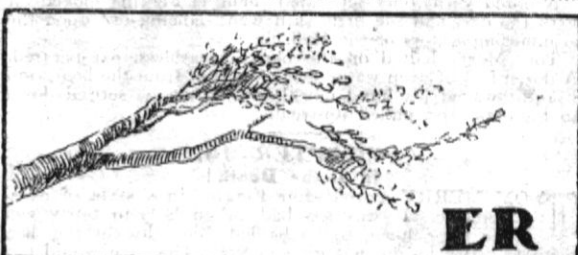
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shockin' wudeness, and I am afwaid that I can no longah wegard him as a friend. Hewwie was vewy wude, too. Dig was not wude, but he laughed when they bumped me into the bush. He did woally."

"Too bad!" said Figgins.  
 "Yaas, you see, it wasn't tweatin' me with pwopah wespect. That's weally why I gave up the chase. I was tweated with gweat diswespect by some young wottahs in the Third Form, too. They bowled me ovah, thinking I was you."

"Did they really?"  
 "Yaas, watah! Of course, I wemonstwated! I took it as an insult."

Figgins's eyes gleamed.  
 "But they jumped on me without seein' me, you see," explained D'Arcy; "that accounts for it. Wally didn't weally mean to hurt my feelings when he said that he had mistaken me for you."

"Well, Gussy, you've captured me," said Figgins grimly.  
 "But it's an excellent opportunity for me to give you a hiding for your cheek."

"I weally do not compwehend," said D'Arcy. "I have not captured you, deah boy."

"Ass! You've only got to tap me on the shoulder. I can hear one of the rotters behind me, so it's all up!" said Figgins.

"But I'm out of it, deah boy. I haven't been to the wined castle, and accordin' to the wules I should have to follow you there before I could capchah you."

Figgins started.  
 "You—you haven't been to the castle!" he exclaimed.  
 "Then I can't be captured by you. You young ass, why didn't you say so before?"

"You didn't ask me, deah boy."

Figgins burst into a laugh.  
 "Well, I didn't. Let's get by. I'll let you off that hiding."

He ran, and D'Arcy ran after him excitedly.

"Figgins! I say, Figgins! Pway wait a moment; it is important—"

Figgins looked back.  
 "What is it—quick?"

"You have spoken of a hidin'. I wish you to fully undahstand that, undah any circs, whatever, I should have uttably wufused to weceive anythin' of the sort, and that I should, on the contwawy, have given you a feahful thwashin'—"

But Figgins was not listening. He was sprinting on again, and D'Arcy was left to discourse to the towing-path and the river. The swell of St. Jim's was startled the next minute by a heavy clap on the shoulder. He swung round with a jump, to see Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell was panting for breath.

"Was that Figgins, Gussy—"  
 "I weally wish you would not stwike me on the shoulDAH in that extwemely wude and wuff mannah, Tom Mewwy."

"Was that Figgins?"  
 "It disturbs my nerves, and, in fact, thwows me into quite a futtah, to say nothin' of the fact that you have wumpled my jacket."

"Was that Figgins?" bawled Tom Merry.  
 "I disappwove of this wuff method of gweetin' absolutely, and I wufuse—"

D'Arcy sat down in the grass as the indignant junior gave him a push on the chest, and Tom Merry raced on without waiting for his question to be answered. He had heard voices as he rounded a bend in the towing-path, and thought that he recognised the tones of Figgins. He dashed on, and rounded another bend, and came in sight of Figgins, and stopped, with an exclamation of dismay.

Figgins was casting off the painter of a small boat moored to the bank. He cast loose, jumped in, and picked up an oar as Tom Merry came racing on.

Figgins saw him, and looked up with a grin.  
 A dozen yards only separated them as Figgins shoved off with the oar, and the little skiff went dancing out upon the glimmering waters of the Ryll.

Tom Merry halted on the bank, breathless, exasperated. A dozen feet of deep water separated him from the boat, and Figgins waved his hand mockingly. Then he settled down to his oars, and pulled upstream.

**CHAPTER 16.  
 In at the Death!**

**T**OM MERRY stared after Figgins in a state of exasperation. It was too bad, when he had fairly run the hare down, to be baffled like this at the last moment. But he did not give in yet. The race would not end until Figgins was safe home at St. Jim's, captured or uncaptured.

Tom Merry went off along the towing-path. Figgins was pulling against the current, and it was quite easy for Tom Merry to keep pace on the bank—so long as the path was clear. There was a yell from Rylcombe Bridge as Figgins pulled underneath it. The bridge and the road were crowded with fellows returning that way from the old castle. Kerr and Gore, and Reilly and Kerruish clambered on the parapet, and yelled at the scout below, and Mellish brought his pea-shooter into play. But Figgins did not even heed. He pulled on steadily, while some of the fellows scrambled round to the bank to take up the pursuit on the towing-path. Tom Merry followed the path under the bridge, and kept on steadily. Past the bridge, the wood came in sight, which extended along the Ryll as far as the grounds of St. Jim's, and then the boathouse of Rylcombe Grammar School. Tom Merry set his teeth and prepared for a desperate dash. If there were any of the Grammarians near the boathouse, he knew that he would not be allowed to pass easily.

And fortunately for Figgins—unfortunately for his pursuer—the Grammarians were there. Three youths in Grammar School caps had put up a boat, and were carrying the oars ashore, when they caught sight of Tom Merry.

"Look out!" shouted Monk. "Collar him!"

Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the three Grammarians, dropped the oars and made a dash at Tom Merry. They did not waste time in words. The rivalry between the two schools was keen, and led to actions, not words, when the rivals met. Tom Merry halted.

Figgins pulled steadily on towards St. Jim's.

Only for a moment did Tom Merry stand hesitating on the towing-path. To allow himself to be collared by the Grammarians would be the end of his chase. They blocked the way, and he took the only possible course. He left the towing-path, and made for Rylcombe Lane through the wood. The Grammarians, not in the least understanding how matters stood, but seeing that the "Saint" was fleeing, ran after him with gleeful shouts. Figgins chuckled as he rowed on towards St. Jim's.

Tom Merry went along the track through the wood as if he had been on the cinder path. The Grammarians followed him for a quarter of a mile or more, but Tom Merry gradually distanced them, and at last Monk and his comrades gave it up. Tom Merry did not slacken his pace. He had to go a long way round now to intercept Figgins, and he could not afford to lose a second.

He left the footpath, and followed a beaten track which he knew well, which would lead him to the road within a few minutes of the gates of St. Jim's. If he were in time, he would yet be able to intercept Figgins, who would be bound to land at the boathouse and come up the path to the school.

He came out into the road. A dozen or more juniors were in sight, but they were all fellows who had given up the chase before reaching the castle, and so were out of it. Tom Merry had had the longest run, but he was home before any who had returned directly from the turning point.

The hero of the Shell stopped to breathe as he came into the road. He was in sight of the gates of St. Jim's now, and he saw the figures of Ferrers Locke and the colonel standing there. That was enough to tell him that Figgins was not yet home. He started down the road, when there was a sudden clatter of hoofs and a yell of warning. Tom Merry sprang aside as a donkey clattered by with a youth clinging to its bare back, and urging it on with his heels. The donkey reared, and D'Arcy minor slid from its back and joined Tom Merry breathlessly.

"Got him?" he gasped.  
 Tom Merry stared at him.

"I got a lift," explained D'Arcy minor, with a chuckle.  
 "I found that donkey grazing in a field beside the road, and I commandeered him. Blessed if I know whom he belongs to, but I dare say he'll find his way home. Jolly lucky for me I learned to ride bareback at Eastwood, wasn't it?"

"You reckless young bounder!"  
 "Have you got him?"

"No, I haven't. He's not in yet."  
 "Good! Then I'm in at the finish. I told you the Third Form meant business this time, my pippin!"

"Did you? I don't remember."

"Well, if I didn't tell you, I thought it," grinned Wally.  
 "I'm in at the death! My only Aunt Jane! I think Figgys must be pretty nearly dead by this time. Where is he?"

Tom Merry did not reply. He dashed forward as a distant footstep caught his ear. If he did not cut Figgins off from the school, the hare would baffle him yet. Wally dashed after him. The hero of the Third meant to be, as he expressed it, in at the death.

A path ran down from the gates of St. Jim's to the river,



where the school boathouse stood. Figgins was coming up the path, having left his skiff at the boathouse. The breathless fugitive was within three minutes of home—but there was a lion in the path, in the shape of Tom Merry.

"There he is!" suddenly yelled Wally.  
There he was—for a second—but there he was not, the next. Figgins had caught sight of Tom Merry, heading him off from St. Jim's, and in a second he had dashed off in a new direction, without pausing a moment. Leaving the path, he ran across the fields, and Tom Merry plunged through a gap in the hedge and cut across to intercept him. Wally made a rush to keep up with him; but the Third-Former was quite spent. He reeled as he plunged through the ditch, and sank into a bed of fern, and sat there gasping.

"My only Aunt Jane!" gasped D'Arcy minor. "I'm done!"

A strong hand plucked him from the ditch and set him on his feet. It was that of the colonel, who looked at him with an approving smile. Ferrers Locke patted him on the shoulder.

"Well, done, my lad; you've stuck it out well."  
"Not so bad," panted Wally. "In at the death, you know; only one other chap in front. Not so bad."

The detective strained his eyes after Figgins. The New House junior, suddenly cut off from his goal, had taken to the fields. He gained some distance by crossing a wide, full ditch, and then tossing the plank into the water. Tom Merry lost a minute in going round, and Figgins made the most of it. He could not make for the gates of the school, for D'Arcy minor was there, ready to collar him if he appeared. Yet he was not "home" unless he was within the walls of St. Jim's.

He ran on swiftly, though now with labouring breath. The long struggle was telling on him, as it was upon Tom Merry. But Figgins was always game to the finish. There was a spot where the wall had many a time been crossed by the juniors, after locking-up. That was Figgy's only hope now.

From the inside, the crossing was easy, by means of the ivy and a slanting oak-tree near the wall. From the outside, the climb was possible to only few, and then was very difficult. But Figgins had no other chance.

He came out of the fields into the road again, and made for the well-known place, and Tom Merry, guessing his intention, put on a spurt to overtake him. Each of the juniors put his last ounce of strength into that last desperate effort.

Figgins came up to the wall. There was no time to think of cautious climbing—the footsteps of the pursuer were too close behind.

He came on gallantly, and without stopping made a spring, and his hands closed in a grip on the top of the wall.

Only one effort more was required to drag his legs over; to roll over the wall and drop down on the inside, the victor in the long contest.

But the spring had pumped him out, and he hung to the wall, utterly spent; without the strength to move a finger, let alone to pull himself up.

It was only for a few seconds, but those few seconds were all that Tom Merry required. He came up, almost reeling in his run with fatigue, but grimly determined. Figgins strove to drag himself up, but a strong pair of hands closed on his ankles.

"Got you!" gasped Tom Merry.

Figgins set his teeth. He was not captured unless a hand was laid on his shoulder—and that was safe so far. He made a desperate effort to drag himself up. But it was easier for Tom Merry to throw his weight on the New House junior, than for Figgins to pull himself away.

"Got you!"

Figgins gasped, utterly winded.

"Right-ho! Let go, or I shall come down on my napper!"

"You're my prisoner?"

"Honest Injun!"

Tom Merry let go. Figgins dropped into the road, and reeled against the wall. The hero of the Shell tapped him on the shoulder.

"You've done me!" gasped Figgins. "Jolly close thing, too!"

"Yes, rather; it's all right! My hat! I'm fagged! I shouldn't have done it alone, old Figgy; if young Wally hadn't been at the gate you could have run straight on and buzzed in."

"Well, that's so, too."

"Honours are easy!" said Ferrers Locke, as he came up. "But by the rules of the competition Tom Merry is the victor in the contest."

"Oh, yes, that's all right!" panted Figgins. "I'm done, I did my best."

"And a splendid best it was, too," said Ferrers Locke, patting the exhausted junior on the back. "Tom Merry has won the contest, and becomes Chief Scout of St. Jim's, but I should advise him to choose you for second in command."

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry.

The amicable rivals, Tom Merry leaning on Ferrers Locke's arm, and Figgins on the colonel's, entered the gates of St. Jim's. And as the juniors came crowding in, and the result of the contest was learned, there were loud cheers for Tom Merry, and cheers almost as loud for Figgins. It had been a splendid contest, and, as Ferrers Locke put it, honours were easy.

Jack Blake gave Tom Merry a hearty thump on the back when he came in, as a sign that he took his victory in good part.

"Sorry I didn't rope him in," he said. "But I'm glad it's a School House kid did it, any way. That's something."

"Yaas, wathah!" D'Arcy remarked. "And do you know, deah boys, my young bwothah was next in aftah Tom Mewwy—young Wally. He was weally! Upon the whole, I wegard the young boundah with pwide, and I shall not give him the feahful thwashin' I was goin' to give him for his feahful cheek. He is a little scallywag, you know, but he sticks to a thing, weally, as wesolutely as I do myself."

"Well, it was a good run," said Blake. "We should probably have had Figgy if Gussy hadn't been with us—"

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"Still, it's no good thinking of that now. It was a good beginning for the scouts of St. Jim's."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Jack Blake's opinion was shared by all the boy scouts.

THE END.

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## A THRILLING TALE OF THE COAL-MINES.

By MAX HAMILTON.

### THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

David Steele, fifteen years of age, is forced through circumstances to leave the little North-country village which had been home to him all his days.

Wrexborough is his destination. He tramps on hour after hour, but at last, being too tired to move, falls to sleep on the banks of a canal. He is awakened by voices, and overhears a vile plot. He resolves to frustrate it, and is successful in saving the victim's life.

The next morning the rescued man tells David he is Mr. Scott, a wealthy Wrexborough mine-owner. He exacts a promise from the boy not to say a word about the attempt on his life, and orders Mr. Grafton, his manager, to find David some work to do. He also gets Mrs. Nichols, the wife of one of his men, to board and lodge him.

Becoming aware of another plot, David proceeds one night to a disused mine, where two scoundrels are awaiting Mr. Scott. In attempting to warn the latter, David is captured by the plotters. Mr. Scott duly comes, is overpowered by the two ruffians, who prove to be his own brother George, and Markham, and confined in the old shaft. David, who has been stunned and left in a burning shed, escapes, much hurt, with his news into Wrexborough. On telling his tale he is faced by George Scott, who is impersonating his brother. The latter roughly bids him be silent, but recovering himself, lays his finger on the boy's pulse.

(Now go on with the story.)

### The Old Mine—Lost in the Darkness.

"You're right, the boy's in a high fever," said Scott. "Will you take him home, Grafton, and see that he has the doctor? You can tell the people where he lodges that I will be responsible for what he wants while he is laid up."

And with a curt nod he turned on his heel, and strode rapidly away. Once out of sight of Grafton and his companion he stopped and ground his heel savagely into the road.

"Curse the boy!" he muttered. "He has as many lives as a cat. When I saw his face I thought for a minute that the game was up. Evidently, though, he has no suspicion of the real state of things, so he cannot have overheard much of what I said to Markham last night. Still he knows that there is something wrong and is just the sort of youngster to peer about till he finds what that something is. It is a fortunate thing that he is ill. Everything he says can be put down to delirium; but he will need watching—ay, and something more than that—will Master David Steele."

The doctor's verdict was that David Steele had had a narrow escape of a serious illness. He forbade all work for at least a week; and for seven days David was fussed over as an invalid by kindly Mrs. Nichols. The generally accepted theory of his absence from the house during that eventful night—a theory which the doctor leaned to, was that he had wandered out in an attack of delirium.

This theory David, for his own reasons, did not contradict.

It was idle for him to pretend that the treatment he had received from the man he thought to be Scott had not altered his feelings towards his employer. In fact, he was bitterly disappointed in him. He had saved Scott's life at the risk of his own, and Scott—so he thought—having escaped from the second snare laid by his enemies—had left the lad to whom he owed so much to their tender mercy.

Of Markham, since that night on the moor, David had seen nothing. He had suddenly announced his intention of changing his lodgings, and moved to a house some distance up the street. His place in the household was, for the

present, supplied by Micky Jones, who, on Mrs. Nichols's recommendation, had obtained the situation of errand boy at a neighbouring grocer's shop.

It was not until after he had returned to work that David saw his former fellow-lodger again, and then in an unexpected manner.

Turning a corner of one of the galleries, suddenly he came upon two men engaged in conversation—the one Markham, the other—was it or was it not—Scott? David could not see, so quickly did he turn away and hurry off; but from his dress he could tell that it was no miner.

They had ceased speaking the instant the lad appeared, but not before some words of Markham's had reached his ears.

"To-night I can manage it all right when the others have left the pit."

David started.

"Something new up now," he muttered. "To-night—he can manage it all right when the others have left the pit. What can he mean? Upon my word the whole thing is absolutely maddening. Twice Markham has tried to murder Scott, and now, if I am not mistaken, here they are as thick as thieves again."

It might have been imagined that after the narrow escapes he had already had, David would have been chary of again interfering in Markham's affairs. Such was not the case, however; but it was more than curiosity that spurred him on—a determination to bring to book the cowardly ruffians who had twice all but murdered him. With this end in view he turned over Markham's words in his mind. The conclusion to which they pointed was obvious—Markham had some secret project, which was to be carried out in the mine after working hours. What it could be the lad could not even guess; but he very soon made up his mind that he would find out, and fixed upon a plan of action.

Plainly Markham intended to remain in the pit; he—David—must therefore do the same. The boy did not disguise from himself that this meant practical imprisonment underground till next day with a man who, should he suspect his presence, would not hesitate to rid himself of it. It behoved him, therefore, to use the utmost care against discovery.

A little reconnoitring showed him that Markham would have no difficulty in carrying out his part of the scheme. The miner was at work at the end of a narrow gallery, and his mates, when they left off work, would naturally imagine he was following them. He had only to lie low till they were gone for his absence to be entirely unnoticed.

Further investigation showed the boy that a short distance from the spot at which Markham was working was a cross gateway intersecting the gallery. This cross gateway Markham would be bound to pass in whatever direction he was going, since there was no other exit from the gallery. It was at this spot accordingly that David resolved to station himself.

His heart beat fast when the hour for knocking off work approached. It was with some difficulty that he avoided his mates as the stream of miners began to pour towards the shaft.

No one noticed him, however, and crouching down at the angle of the intersecting tunnels, he peered round the corner.

So far David had judged correctly. Markham was still there, sure enough. The gleam from his lamp was visible some few yards away.

David himself had not dared to bring his lamp, since its light must infallibly betray his presence. His only guide through the mazes of the pit, therefore, would be the lamp carried by his enemy.

For some moments the gleam of light that denoted Mark-

ham's whereabouts remained stationary. Then, the miner having probably come to the conclusion that his mates had left the coast clear, it moved and advanced to the spot where David was crouching.

The boy shrank back as it neared him, prepared to take to instant flight should Markham turn in his direction. The miner, however, kept straight on, and David, slipping out of his hiding-place, followed him, keeping on his heels as closely as he dared. A few yards further down the gallery and the light was suddenly eclipsed. Markham had turned off to the right, and David had to stumble forward in darkness till he reached the opening up which the miner had gone.

This manoeuvre was repeated two or three times, by which time a considerable distance had been traversed, and David began to ask himself whither his involuntary guide was leading him. So far as he could make out, Markham was making straight for the worked-out portion of the mine, and would soon find himself face to face with the "goaf" or choked-up passages, which must surely stop his further progress.

Suddenly Markham stopped. As David had surmised, he had reached a wall of broken rock.

He set down his lamp upon the ground, and David, a few paces off, watched him breathlessly.

The miner knelt down, and the boy gave a gasp of surprise as he saw him lower himself through a hole in the ground.

Down he went till only his head was visible; then, stretching out his hands, he gripped the lamp, and the next moment he and it had disappeared.

It did not take David long to grope his way to the edge of the opening through which Markham had vanished. Kneeling above it, he could plainly hear the miner stumbling among loose stones and fragments of rock.

He waited till the sounds grew fainter. Then, with a beating heart, he lowered himself through the opening and dropped as quietly as he could to the ground below. He drew a breath of relief as he saw that Markham's lamp was still visible some little distance away.

The task of stalking his unconscious guide had now become more difficult; it needed extreme caution to make no noise in the darkness, since the ground was plentifully strewn with rubble, over which the boy more than once nearly fell headlong. David could pretty well guess where he was. He knew that at more than one point the workings which had been reached from the old shaft on the moor practically intersected those of the modern Wrexborough pit; but he had as yet no glimmering of Markham's object in visiting these disused and dangerous tunnels.

On they went through the narrow and crumbling passages, where the masses of rock which had fallen from the decaying roof often made it difficult to squeeze a way. More than once, as the ground sloped, David plunged knee-deep into water; but still Markham held steadily on, and David held as steadily on his track.

The boy was beginning to wonder how much longer this strange progress was to continue, when Markham paused at an intersecting tunnel, and turned sharply off from the one he had been hitherto traversing. David was only a few yards behind him; and as the light vanished he hurried forward, feeling his way with outstretched hands. As he did so, however, his foot caught in a loose stone, and he fell forward on his knees.

He started up, and stood listening anxiously, expecting Markham to return and ascertain the cause of the noise. If so, how should he escape him in this maze of darkness? And as the question presented itself to him, the boy realised, for the first time, the full rashness of his undertaking.

If the sound had reached Markham's ears, however, he had probably put it down to a fall of stones from the roof; and after waiting a moment and hearing no returning footsteps, David hastened on again. He reached the opening down which Markham had disappeared, turned the corner, and then stood still in blank horror.

Markham and his light had vanished. There was nothing before him but darkness—the darkness of the tomb!

### Help!—A Strange Discovery.

The boy's heart stood still.

For an instant a horrible foreboding almost paralysed him; then, forgetting even his fear of Markham in his overwhelming sense of loneliness and darkness, he staggered forward as fast as the uneven nature of the ground would allow him.

"There must be another turning a little further on. I shall see the light in a minute. I shall—I shall!" he muttered, with dry lips.

But would that turning never come? The gallery seemed endless.

He felt it at last, an opening on his left—but felt it only. No sign of a light! Which way, then, had Markham gone?

His brain was reeling as he dashed across the tunnel. Yes; there was another opening on the right. There were three ways, then; either of which the miner might have taken.

To find his way back without a light through all the turnings and twistings of the disused mine was a sheer impossibility. His safety depended on discovering the man who was at once his enemy and his guide, and every moment's delay lessened his chance of overtaking him. In blind desperation he stumbled forward.

On and on he went. He thought no more of caution; better that Markham should discover—ay, kill him—than that he should be left to wander through that blind and pitchy darkness, through endless turnings, until exhaustion overcame him, and he lay down to leave his bones where no man would ever discover them. The perspiration dripped from his forehead as he ran, falling now and again, and picking himself up, heedless of his bruises, to recommence his frantic chase.

"Markham!" he called at last. "Markham!" Better to throw himself upon his enemy's mercy than to wait for death in a living tomb.

But no answer came to his despairing cry. It echoed along the gallery and died away slowly, as if in mockery of the boy's agony.

Again he began his hopeless journey—this time to find his way blocked by the fallen roof. Back he turned; but he was almost exhausted now—his limbs were trembling, and his breath came in long-drawn sobs. For some ten minutes or so he staggered onwards through the darkness; then he felt that his strength was failing him utterly. He had lost all hope that Markham was within hearing; but a last desperate cry for aid rose involuntarily to his lips.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Help—for mercy's sake, help!" As the echo of his own accents died away, he stood motionless, his heart thumping against his ribs, his every sense on the alert.

Had he or had he not been answered? Was he dreaming? Had his ears deceived him, or had he in truth heard a human voice give back an answering shout?

For a moment he stood thus, scarcely daring to hope or breathe. And then a cry—a cry of hope and relief—sprang to his lips.

There was no mistake. He had heard aright. A voice had answered him. He hurried forward in the direction whence it seemed to come.

"Where are you?" he shouted. "Call again!"

Again the cry was repeated, sounding louder and louder as he went on; and, as it grew clearer, David felt a thrill of hope, as it was borne in upon him that the voice he heard was certainly not Markham's.

Whose was it, then? Who else but Markham could be wandering about these gloomy, disused tunnels?

As the question flashed through his brain, he reached an intersecting passage, and, to his unutterable joy, a streak of light met his eyes. Never was light more welcome to a human being than it was to David at that moment.

And, as he neared it, he saw that it was, in fact, a streak of light—such a streak as comes through the hinges of a door. More, it was a wooden door against which his fingers at length brushed, a door that yielded to his touch; the door, as he afterwards discovered, of what had formerly been one of the stables of the old mine.

Comparatively dim as was the light in this shed, it dazzled his eyes, so long accustomed to utter darkness. For the first moment he could not make out anything of his surroundings, and he stood blinking in the doorway until a cry of amazement fell upon his ears.

"Good heavens! David Steele!"

There was no mistaking that voice. And, as the mist cleared away from the boy's sight, he stared in utter astonishment at the figure before him.

On a rough bed, which was nothing more than a heap of straw, lay William Scott—his cheeks sunken, his eyes unnaturally large, his whole appearance telling of suffering and confinement. A jar of water and a hunk of bread were placed upon the floor beside him. The bare shed was lit by a lamp hanging from the roof; and by its light David perceived, as Scott started into a sitting posture, that a slight but strong-looking chain ran from his right wrist to a staple firmly secured into the wall.

"Mr. Scott!" he stammered, unable to believe his eyes.

"David, my dear lad! It does me good to see your face again. Thank Heaven you have come! But how did you find out where I was? How did you manage to get here?" And the mine-owner stretched out a thin, wasted hand.

"I have been in a torment about you," Scott went on, "ever since that night—how long ago is it? I have lost all count of time. Whenever Markham has visited me, I have

implored him to tell me what they had done with you—whether you were still alive. But, I suppose by my brother's orders, he refused to give me an answer."

"Your brother!" cried David, a light breaking in upon him. "Then it is your brother that is living at Wrexborough, while he keeps you here—here!"

Scott nodded sadly.

"Yes," he said, "my enemy is my own brother George. It was he who tried to kill me on the railway-line, and he who, by a forged letter, purporting to come from a friend of mine, lured me to the old shaft!"

David stood thunderstruck. All that had appeared to him so incomprehensible in his employer's conduct was clear to him now.

"Do you wonder, now," Scott went on bitterly, "that I wished to keep secret the horrible story of his attempt upon my life? But tell me, how did you find me out, David?"

In a few words as he could, David related his adventures—his tracking of Markham, and his horrible experience in the darkness of the mine. When he had finished, Scott grasped his hand warmly.

"You are a plucky fellow, Dave!" was all he said; but there was a heartfelt ring in his tone.

"It's lucky you did not come across Markham," he continued, after a moment's pause. "He had only left me about ten minutes before I heard your cry. He came to replenish my scanty stock of provisions," and he pointed to the bread. "They keep me on pretty short commons, Dave. I suppose my brother thinks that by starving me he will get me down to his terms, and bring the money he wants out of me. Whatever happens I cannot have a public scandal. I cannot denounce my brother.

"My father is dead, but my mother is still alive; and, David, she still hopes that George will one day reform, and I will not bring this fresh misery upon her if I can prevent it. I shall want you to help me to get out of this, my boy; but my escape and return to Wrexborough must be managed without compromising my brother. You understand?"

He broke off suddenly, and sat listening, with a raised forefinger.

"Hush!" he whispered. "I hear footsteps. Markham is coming back!"

David sprang to the door, with the intention of slipping away into the darkness.

"Too late!" whispered Scott, checking him with an anxious gesture.

He was right. The opening of the door would have revealed the boy's figure against the light in the shed for the whole length of the gallery.

The footsteps were growing nearer. There was not a moment to be lost!

David looked round the bare little shed. Its four blank walls—three of them of planking, the fourth formed by the rock face—offered not the faintest shadow of a hiding-place. Quickly his mind revolved. The possibility of taking Markham by surprise, and sliding past him as the door opened; but Scott cut his plans short.

"The straw, Dave!" he whispered excitedly. "The straw—quick—quick!"

David understood.

The prisoner's bed was nothing more nor less than a heap of straw. It was just possible that a boy of David's size might effectually conceal himself beneath it.

The idea had only occurred to Scott just in time.

However, when the door was opened, nothing was visible of the boy, and the prisoner lay on his primitive bed.

As Scott had surmised, his visitor was Markham.

"Hallo," he said coolly, "I didn't expect to see you back so soon!"

"And you wouldn't 'a done," returned the miner, "if I hadn't ha' left my knife. I was cutting your bread with it, and I suppose I have dropped it! I'm not goin' to leave it handy for you, you bet!"

"It's not here," replied Scott quickly.

Perhaps his eagerness to prevent Markham making a search for his lost property was too obvious, for the miner replied roughly:

"I didn't expect you to tell if it was. Not such a fool. I'll see for myself, thank you! I may have dropped it as I went along; on 'tother hand, you may have got it shoved away in your straw, ready to stick it into me when you get the chance. Sit up, will you, and let us have a look!"

Scott, as he lay across David's prostrate body, felt the boy stir in readiness to spring up, and pressed his elbow against him as a sign to lie quiet for the present. Then:

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" he said quietly.

"You won't, won't you!" returned the miner grimly.

"We'll see about that!"

He placed his lamp upon the floor, and leant over Scott, intending to raise him by main force—an easy task, he imagined, with one not only shackled, but weakened by short rations and confinement. As he did so, however, Scott, raising his right arm, struck the miner with all his strength upon the forehead. The padlock by which the chain was secured about his wrist, added to the force of the blow, and Markham sank down in a heap, the blood spouting from a deep cut above the eye.

"Now, Dave," he cried, "up with you and run! Stop! Wait a minute; I've knocked him senseless!"

It was true. Scott had only hoped to make a momentary diversion in David's favour, but, with the aid of the padlock he had done better than he had intended.

"Good luck!" exclaimed David gleefully, as he bent over his unconscious enemy.

"It is good luck!" Scott replied. "Now he will never guess that you have been here at all; but you must take advantage of it, and be off at once. Listen! Turn to your left outside this door, and about ten yards straight on you will find yourself at the foot of the old shaft. As I told you there is a rope ladder; it reaches to within twenty feet of the surface. After that there are iron stanchions driven into the rock right up to the top. The way is simple enough, though no one would ever guess at it. Now, up you go. Come down when you think it is safe, when you are sure you are not watched, and until you see me again do not breathe a word of what you know to a living soul."

With a last grip on the hand, David slipped to the door, following Scott's directions, and found himself at the foot of the shaft. Mounting a rope ladder is not so easy as it sounds, and before he had gone half way, the boy's legs were aching, and his knuckles bruised by contact with the surface of the rock.

"Thank goodness!" he muttered, as he reached the end of the ladder, and put out his hands to feel for the stanchions of which Scott had spoken. As he gripped the first, two or three little stones which he dislodged went rattling down into the depths, and, following on the sound, came another, at which the boy started.

"That you, Markham! What a time you've been."

David looked up. Over the edge of the pit a head protruded, distinctly visible against the sky.

David stopped short. He knew instinctively whose was the

voice he had heard, and whose the head that protruded over the pit's mouth. George Scott, and he alone, knew of Markham's visit to his brother's prison.

"That you, Markham?" was repeated in a louder tone.

Needless to say, the question received no answer. In fact, it was hardly out of the speaker's mouth before David had begun to climb down the toilsome way by which he had lately ascended. He thanked his lucky stars George Scott had spoken before he had betrayed his presence by walking straight into his enemy's arms. As it was, it would be easy enough to lie concealed in the darkness in the bottom of the shaft until Markham had made his ascent, and with his fellow-conspirator cleared off from the neighbourhood.

*How do you do?*



**WHOM TO WRITE TO:** The Editor,  
"GEM" Library, 23-9, Bouverie  
Street, Fleet Street, London, who will  
be pleased to hear from you.

**"THE FIFTH AT ST. JIM'S."**

*The memorable day at the old College is commemorated with great gusto. But friend D'Arcy is not so pleased as he might be.*

*I leave you to guess why!*

The EDITOR.

P.S.—All the £50 Competition Pictures are reprinted this week for the convenience of new readers.

But in laying his plans he had reckoned without his host. Scarcely was he half way down the ladder than a sudden tightening of the rope warned him that a fresh strain had been placed upon it. He looked down, and far below him a spark of light shone like a tiny moving star—the light from the lantern carried by Markham. He was between two fires, one enemy on the watch at the top of the shaft, the other with every second advancing on him from below. For a moment he remained nearly paralysed with terror, and then a second time he began to climb upwards. His only chance, he felt, was on reaching the pit brow, to scramble to his feet, and take to flight as quickly as might be; but he knew that the chance was a very faint one. His legs were aching horribly from the tedious climb, and he could hardly doubt that if he succeeded in getting past his enemy in the first instance, the latter would easily be able to overtake him. Yet to stay where he was, and fall into Markham's clutches, was simply madness.

He had almost reached the top of the shaft, and was nerving himself for the necessary dash, when his upturned eyes fell upon a thick bush that overhung the edge of the pit-mouth, a short distance to the right of the spot where he was gaining the surface. He remembered noticing that very bush when he had stood at the top, and remarking inwardly that its roots were fixed on the very edge of the gulf.

If he could get a firm hold of those roots, and if they were strong enough to sustain his weight, it would be quite possible for him to hang from them unseen, leaving the way clear for Markham, who, unless he by chance turned his lantern on the boy as he passed, would be unaware that his young adversary was close to him in the darkness.

The experiment was a risky one. It was quite probable that David's weight might break or uproot the bush, in which case a swift death, scores of feet below, was all that he could hope for.

"But that will be my fate in any case if I'm nabbed by any of these beauties," he reflected. "It's only a choice of risks, so here goes!"

Gripping one of the big iron rails tightly with one hand, he stretched out the other, and took a firm hold of the bush just above the earth, then, with his heart in his mouth, swung off his foothold, and hung dangling by the arms.

Sheer beneath him was a drop of quite a couple of hundred feet, and for one awful moment, as the branches creaked beneath his weight, he believed himself about to fall. The bush was a sturdy one, however, and its roots had a fast grip of the soil, and so long as the boy's arms could support his weight, he was safe. Further, its overhanging thickness effectually concealed him from the sight of anyone above him.

The strain on his arms was tremendous; only the desperate knowledge that his life was at stake enabled him to support it.

Quietly as he had moved, he had not been able to transfer his weight to the bush without a perceptible rustling and cracking sound—a sound that brought George Scott once more to the edge of the pit.

"Markham, are you there?" he called once more.

*(To be continued.)*

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**20** *cut.*

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B

No. 13.



No. 14.

ER



No. 15.

LEY

Wed

No. 16.



No. 17.

D



No. 18.



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GG

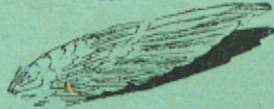


No. 19.

MAN

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No. 20.



No. 21



No. 22.

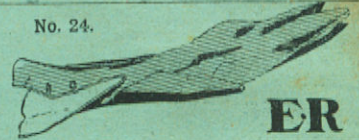
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No. 23.

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ER



No. 25.

D

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No. 27.

45  
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No. 28.



No. 29.



S

No. 30.



B

N°31



N°32.



N°33



N°34.

H



N°35

B



N°36

R

N°37

N°38



N°39.



ET

S

N°40.



N°41.

L

N°42.

