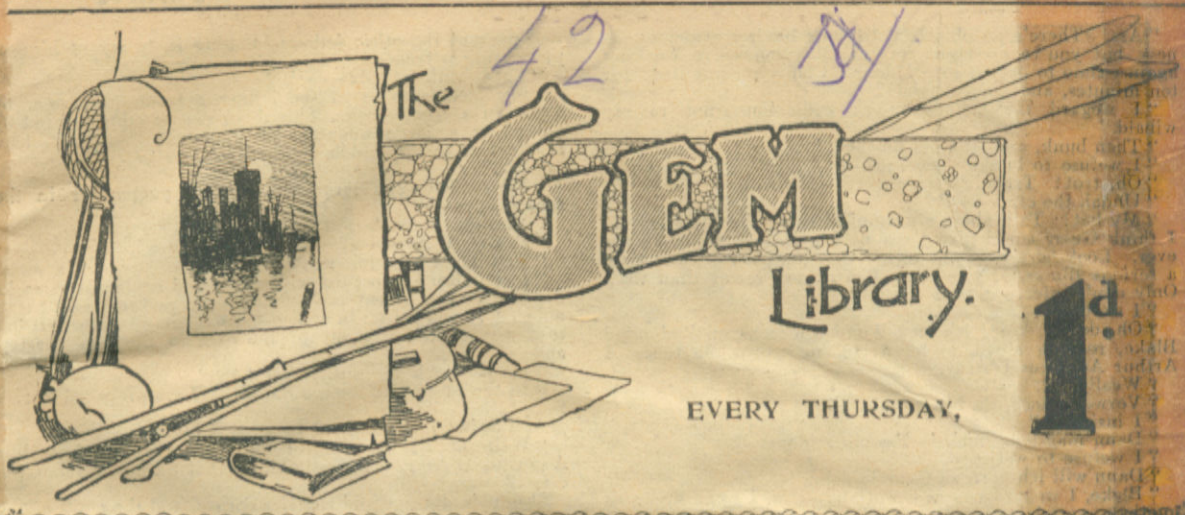

Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!

"Fatty" No. 2

A Splendid Complete School Tale of

TOM MERRY & CO.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy Does Not Feel Well.

"I SAY, deah boys——"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark as he came into Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's. Three voices interrupted him with singular unanimity.

"Don't!"

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle in a leisurely way, and glanced at Blake, Herries, and Digby, who had looked up from their books to ejaculate that monosyllable, and then looked down to them again. D'Arcy's glance was withering, but it only took effect upon the tops of three heads.

"I say, deah boys——" he repeated, with slightly more emphasis.

"No, don't," said Jack Blake, without looking up this time.

"Don't what, Blake, deah boy?"

"Don't say! Don't say anything! Cut!"

"I wefuse to cut," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "and I wegard your weply as wotten in the extweme. If a fellow on the verge of a sewious illness can't look for sympathy in his own study, I should weally like to know where he can look for it."

Jack Blake stared at the swell of the School House.

"On the verge of a what?" he asked politely.

"A sewious illness. You know, deah boys——"

"I know I've got to get this impot done by six o'clock, or else have old Schneider on my track," grunted Jack Blake. "There's a hundred lines, and we're doing thirty three each, against time. Shut up!"

"I decline to shut up. A sewious illness is a matter of more importance than a wotten German impowition."

"You'll get a serious biff in the neck if you don't trave!" growled Digby. "You're interrupting the washing. Buzz off!"

"I wish I had my dog Towser here," murmured Herries.

"I am extwemely glad that you haven't your dog Towser here, Hewwies. I——"

"Come and lend a hand!" exclaimed Blake. "Schneider never knows one fist from another, and that's the best of these spider-leggy German characters. Four can get done quicker than three."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Here's a pen. You can go on from here—'Und Schlag auf Schlag.'"

"Undah the circs.——"

"Are you going to lend a hand?" roared Blake, getting exasperated.

"I feel that it is imposs. A fellow on the verge of a sewious illness——"

"Look! There's no objection to your having a serious illness, but you've no right to start it when we're working against time to get an impot done. Can't you put it off for ten minutes, and lend a hand?"

"I wegard the suggestion as widiculous, not to say wibald."

"Then bunk, and let's get finished."

"I wefuse to bunk. You see——"

"Oh, trot! Travel!"

"Undah the circs.——"

"My hat! Talk about a gramophone, or the little brook! I think Gussy could give them both points at going on for ever. Look here, you can go out into the passage, and have a serious illness, if you like. I can't say fairer than that. Only don't interrupt your uncle."

"I wefuse——"

"Oh, dear! Werd ich zum Augenblicke sagen!" shouted Blake, reading aloud, as he wrote, to drown the tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Verweile doch, du bist so schon."

"I insist——"

"Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen."

"I wefuse to wetire——"

"Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn."

"Blake, I wegard you as a wottah! Dig, I wegard you as a beastly wottah! Hewwies, I despise you as a gwinnin' Jackanapes!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned on his heel and shook the dust of Study No. 6 from his feet.

Jack Blake grinned.

"I thought the German would squash him," he remarked. "Get on. We'll have this impot ready in time for old Schneider, though the ceilings fall!"

And three pens scratched away industriously. It needed a trained eye, perhaps, to distinguish the writing as German characters, but Herr Schneider knew what to expect when he gave out impots to the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and he never or never read them through.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sniffed with indignation as he left Study No. 6. He had come there for sympathy, and surely a fellow had a right to expect sympathy in his own study. We have seen how D'Arcy's expectations were

"By Jove!" he murmured. "I wegard them as wottahs! I am not often ill, and when I am on the verge of a sewious illness, I should think they might tweat me with a little wespect. What I weally want, is to be looked aftah carefully. Pewwaps Tom Mewwy—— Ah, is that you, Skimpole, deah boy?"

Skimpole, of the Shell, was coming down the passage. He was walking quickly, as usual, and, as usual, being extremely short-sighted in spite of his spectacles, he ran into D'Arcy. Then he stopped and blinked.

"Oh, come, is that you, D'Arcy? You are just the fellow I wanted to see."

"Weally, Skimmy——"

"You are aware," resumed Skimpole, fixing his glimmering spectacles upon D'Arcy, "that influenza is rife in this House?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"A number of the boys, and some of the masters are down with it, and a lot of fellows think they are catching it."

"Yaas. I myself am on the verge——"

"It is a serious case," said Skimpole, shaking his head, "and I wanted to consult you——"

"I am on the verge of a sewious——"

"You see, if——"

"Illness, and——"

"I have a great scheme for curing the epidemic at one swoop," said Skimpole, who was the brainy man of the Shell, and a genius in many ways. "What you want to drive out influenza is a shock to the system——"

"I am on the vewy verge of a sewious illness, and——"

"That is what I wanted to see you about, D'Arcy. Unfortunately, I have no money to carry out my scheme, but I have no doubt that you would lend me five pounds for the purpose of curing the whole School House at one swoop."

"Yaas, wathah, but I am on the verge of a sewious illness, and——"

"Dear me! Are you catching it, too?"

"Yaas, wathah! I have felt a slight ache over my left eye all the afternoon, and a stwangely dwy feelin' in my thwoat, you know."

"Probably early symptoms. This is very fortunate," said Skimpole, rubbing his bony hands.

D'Arcy glared at him.

"Weally, Skimpole——"

"I mean, fortunate in the sense that you will now be quite willing, undoubtedly, to aid me with cash in curing the epidemic in the School House. If it is cured in time, it will prevent the other fellows catching it, to say nothing of preventing it from spreading to the New House."

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

"My idea is to expel the influenza from the system by means of a great shock. This shock can be administered by exploding a large quantity of gunpowder in the school sanatorium in the middle of the night——"

"Eh?"

"By exploding a large quantity of gunpowder in the sanatorium——"

"You uttah ass!"

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"You dangewous lunatic!"

"I can afford to regard with scorn and contempt remarks dictated by one of any remarkable brain power," said Skimpole. "If you refuse to help me, I have no resource left but to represent the urgency of the case to the housemaster, and——"

"He will kick you out, you duffah!"

"In the cause of suffering humanity I am prepared to risk that."

And Skimpole rushed off in a great hurry.

"Well, of all the feahful duffahs," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I weally think that Skimpole takes the cake!"

Skimpole disappeared round a corner, and the swell of the School House went on his way to Tom Merry's study.

CHAPTER 2.

No Sympathy.

TOM MERRY was sitting on the corner of the table in his study, shaking his forefinger solemnly at Manners, when the swell of the School House looked in. The Terrible Three did not observe D'Arcy for the moment. There was a severe expression upon Tom Merry's face, and Monty Lowther, too, was looking serious.

"It won't do, Manners," said Tom Merry.

"That it won't," said Lowther, nodding his head.

Manners, who was sniffing and snuffling in a handkerchief, blinked at his chums.

"Eh? What?"

"It won't do!"

"That it won't!"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"We can't have you catching the epidemic, if you're going to stay in this study."

"That's it."

Manners snorted.

"Who's catching the epidemic?"

"You look as if you are."

"Oh, rats! I suppose a fellow can sniff if he likes, in his own study?"

"Well, yes," said Tom Merry doubtfully. "No great objection to your sniffing a bit, as far as that goes. But when it comes to catching influenza, and spreading it round the study among your harmless and necessary chums, that's where a line ought to be drawn."

"Exactly," assented Lowther.

"Oh, bosh!"

"You forget your manners," said Tom Merry severely.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy burst into a chuckle, and thus made his presence known to the chums of the Shell Form.

"Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as wathah funnay!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked round.

"Oh, you regard that as wathah funnay, do you?" said Lowther disparagingly. "You ought to be a judge, you funny merchant!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Wait a tick, before you come into this study," said Tom Merry, holding up his hand. "Have you got the flu?"

"I weally hope not, Tom Mewwy, but I have had a feahful ache over my left eye, and a wathah dwy taste in my thwoat."

"Looks as if you're catching it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then keep your distance."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, as one who is on the verge of a sewious illness, I expect——"

"You can expect a thick ear if you come in here!" said Tom Merry warningly. "We're not going to be laid up in the sanatorium to please you. Here's Manners going about trying to catch the flu already——"

"I'm not!" growled Manners.

"Well, you look like it. A heap of fellows are down with it already, and we're going to keep this study clear, or know the reason why."

"Yaas, but——"

"If you've got a dry taste in your left eye and an ache in your throat, you can buzz off, Gussy!"

"I haven't anything of the sort! I have a dwy ache in

As Fatty Wynn spread out his arms, a packet of sandwiches dropped from under his jacket. The fat Fourth Former made a frantic clutch to save them, and his foot slipped on the wet stone. Splash!

my thwoat—I mean, a dwy pain over my left eye—that is to say——"

"Well, go and tell Blake about it. As your chum, he ought to know, and take precautionary measures—such as suffocating you in time, or something of that sort."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Fourth Form flu is barred in a Shell study," said Tom Merry, with a wave of the hand. "It's bad enough to have Manners trying to get ill——"

"I'm not!" yelled Manners.

"Then you shouldn't look as if you were. You've been snuffing and sniffing for five minutes on end, and you'll be talking about a dry ache in your left eye soon."

"Look here——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard your wemarks as vewy unsympathetic. I——"

"Why don't you go and see Blake about it?"

"I have done so, and I have weceived no sympathy whatevah," said Arthur Augustus. "I am on the verge of a sewious illness, and I haven't weceived a scwap of sympathy fwom my own chums."

"Then you can't expect to get any here," said Tom Merry. "If we had any sympathy to give away, we should give it to Manners, who's trying to work up an illness——"

"I'm not!" shrieked Manners.

"Yes, rather!" said Monty Lowther. "That would be supporting home industries, as it were. We haven't any sympathy to waste on outsiders."

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs!" said D'Arcy. "Considerin' that I am on the verge of a sewious illness, I weally think——"

"Can't you go and have your serious illness in your own study?"

"Lowthah, I wegard you as a bwute!"

"We can't have more than one invalid in the study, you know!" expostulated Tom Merry. "Here's Manners doing his best to work himself into a——"

"You utter ass, I'm not!"

"Then what are you snuffling for?"

"Because I spilt some pepper just now in putting it into the castor."

"Oh, I see. That alters the case. Still, we can't have one of Blake's invalids on our hands. Take a little run, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle, and gave the chums of the Shell a withering glare, and then walked away, followed by three distinct chuckles. The swell of the School House was not meeting with much success in his search for sympathy. He went rather disconsolately down the passage, and met Darrel of the Sixth, the second prefect of the School House, at the corner. Darrel glanced at him.

"What's wrong with you, D'Arcy?" he asked. "What are you looking down in the mouth for?"

"Weally, Dawwel, I was not aware that I was lookin' down in the mouth. But I am not feelin' vewy well, you know. I think I am on the verge of a sewious illness——"

Darrel started back.

"Are you catching it?"

"I am afwaid so. I have a slight ache over my left ear, and a dwy eye in my thwoat—I mean, a slight eye over my left thwoat, and a—that is to say——"

"Better go and ask Mr. Railton to send you into the sanatorium," said Darrel, walking away.

"Bai Jove," murmured D'Arcy, "there's pwecious little sympathy knockin' about for a fellow who's on the verge of a sewious illness! I say, Goah, deah boy!"

Gore of the Shell stopped.

"Hallo, fathead!"

"I object to bein' addwessed as a fathead, Goah! I say, deah boy, I feel pwetty wotten, and I wathah think I am on the verge of a sewious illness——"

"Catching the flu?"

"Yaas, I am afwaid so, and—don't go—Goah, I say——"

But Gore was gone.

"Bai Jove, that was wathah wude of Goah!" murmured D'Arcy, and he strolled out into the dusky quadrangle. "Hallo, there's young Wally!"

D'Arcy minor, of the Third Form at St. Jim's, was just coming up the steps of the School House. He had been round to feed his mongrel, Pongo. He gave his elder brother a cheeky grin.

"I say, Wally," said Arthur Augustus, "don't be in a huwwy. I suppose you know there's an epidemic of influenza in the School House?"

"Yes, rather!" said Wally. "Lots of fellows in the Third are catching it. I've told Jameson that if he gets it I'll give him a thick ear."

"Weally, Wally——"

"Gibson's got it already, and he's gone into sanatorium."

"I'm afwaid I'm gettin' it, Wally. I feel as if I were on the verge of a sewious illness," said D'Arcy.

Wally snorted unsympathetically.

"Well, you must be a mug, Gus!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Yes, a mug! Fancy going round raking up a chance to catch the flu! Why don't you take care of yourself?"

"You young wascal, I——"

"Don't you come near me!" said Wally, backing away. "I'm not going to catch any of your beastly diseases——"

"It is not a disease——"

"Well, it ain't much better."

"Besides, I haven't got it yet. I have a feelin' that I'm on the vewy verge of a sewious illness——"

"Then you can have it on your own!" said Wally, walking away.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, and he drifted on through the dusk in the quadrangle.

Three figures in running-garb loomed up through the gloom. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—Figgins & Co., of the New House.

"Hallo, fathead! Don't get in the way!" said Figgins. "Can't you see we're sprinting?"

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Hallo, it's the one and only! What are you doing out without your keepers, Gussy?"

"I wegard that wemark as diswespectful, not to say wibald, Figgins! I suppose you are aware that there is influenza in the School House?"

"Yes, and in the New House, too!" grinned Figgins. "There's a dozen fellows down with it."

"Catching it?" asked Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah! I feel as if I were on the verge of a sewious illness——"

"Rotten!" said Fatty Wynn. "What you want is a good feed. If you like, I'll come to the tuckshop with you when I've changed my things, and we'll have a bit of a feed. That's practically the only efficacious remedy for influenza."

"Weally, Wynn——"

"Oh, there's another remedy," said Figgins. "A shock to the system will drive out the seeds of disease. Bump him!"

"Ow—wow! Leggo! Oh!"

In a moment three pairs of hands had seized the swell of the School House, and he was bumped down in a sitting posture on the hard ground. Then Figgins & Co. sprinted on chuckling, leaving D'Arcy staring after them in bewilderment.

CHAPTER 3.

Good News.

KILDARE, of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, came out of Mr. Railton's study with a serious expression on his face. Matters were going from bad to worse in the School House. The influenza was spreading, and Mr. Railton, the housemaster, was the latest victim. The captain of St. Jim's walked slowly away, and knocked at the door of Tom Merry's study, and entered.

Manners was sniffing, and his nose, rubbed hard with his handkerchief, had assumed the hue of a beetroot. Kildare looked at him suspiciously.

"Have you got it, Manners?"

"Got which?" said Manners.

"The influenza."

"No. Only some spilt pepper."

"Oh! I suppose this study is clear of it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "We're pretty fit, and you don't catch the flu, as a rule, if you're in good condition."

"Unless you're unlucky," agreed Kildare. "Mr. Railton is pretty fit, but he's caught it."

Tom Merry looked concerned.

"Railton! Oh, that's rough!"

"By Jove, I'm sorry!" said Monty Lowther. "I'd rather Manners had it than Railton—I would really."

"Thank you!" grunted Manners.

"I've just seen him," said Kildare. "It's coming on, and he's going into sanatorium. I dare say you know that the housemaster of the New House is down?"

"Ratcliff down with the flu?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know," said Tom Merry. "I'm not surprised. A skinny subject like Ratty, who never takes any exercise—ahem!—I mean, I'm sorry to hear it."

Kildare laughed.

"Well, both housemasters are down," he said, "and the master of the Shell isn't well, either. The Head has decided——"

"To catch it as well?" asked Lowther.

"No, Lowther. You will catch something if you are too funny, though! The Head has decided that the school will break up for a time, until the influenza is over. The boys who have caught it will remain in sanatorium, and the rest will either be sent home, or placed out at the farms round about for a week or so."

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled.

"My hat! That's a ripping idea!"

"And you can take your choice which," said Kildare, with a smile. "I have to see to it, as Mr. Railton is just on the sick-list. Parties of a dozen or so will be made up to go away together of the boys who elect not to go home."

"Ripping!"

"Spiffing!"

"Grand!"

"If no one in this study has the flu——"

"Oh, we're all right," said Tom Merry hastily. "Manners spilt a little pepper, that's all. If he dares to get the flu we'll squash him!"

"Good! There are several farms on the school list as

places for convalescents to be sent to," explained Kildare. "You would rather go to one than be sent home?"

"Yes, rather! We want to hang together, you know."

"Good! I'll put your names down for the Quarry Farm. That is about five miles from here, and the first party will be sent there early in the morning."

"Ripping! I say, Kildare, can you let us have a word in making up the party?"

The Sixth-Former reflected.

"Well, I don't see why not," he said.

"You see, if a chap like Gore or Mellish is in our gang, there's bound to be ructions," explained Tom Merry, "and of course our object is to have a perfectly quiet and peaceful time."

"Oh, of course, it always is!" laughed Kildare. "Still, I don't see why you shouldn't have a voice in the matter to a certain extent. Give me the names you think of, and I will see if I can put them on the same list."

"Well, first of all there's those four bounders in Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, Digby, and Gussy D'Arcy."

"Very good. That makes seven of you."

"And, I say, suppose we had Figgins & Co. in the same party?"

Kildare looked doubtful.

"You would start House rows with New House boys along with you," he said. "You were looking forward to a quiet and peaceful time just now."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, of course we don't want it to be too quiet," he said. "Besides, you know our rows with Figgins & Co. never amount to much; we pull jolly well together."

"Very well, then, if you think they'd like the arrangement. I can fix it with Monteith, their head prefect. He is looking after the arrangements, now Mr. Ratcliff is laid up."

"Oh, I know they'd like it."

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther.

"That makes ten. You want two more to the dozen."

"Oh, we'd be satisfied with ten. Still, you might shove down Reilly, of the Fourth; he's a decent chap, and always in good spirits."

"And Kerruish," said Lowther.

Kildare shook his head.

"Kerruish is on the sick list."

"Too bad! Well, we are seven—I mean eleven."

"I may as well put down Skimpole as the twelfth."

"Oh, Skimpole! I don't know about Skimmy. Can we make it a condition that he doesn't talk Socialism or Determinism, or build any airships?"

"You must settle that with Skimpole," said Kildare, laughing. "That's the dozen."

And the captain of St. Jim's quitted the study. The Terrible Three looked at one another with expressions of great satisfaction.

"I say, this is ripping!" said Tom Merry. "Better than grinding Latin in the class-room, or nursing the flu in the sanatorium."

"Yes, rather! I expect there will be some rows, though, with those cheeky kids from Study No. 6 along with us, to say nothing of the New House bounders," said Manners.

"Well, what's the good of a holiday without a row?"

"Ha, ha! Something in that."

"Let's go and see Study No. 6 about it. I expect they will be glad to be in the same party."

And the chums of the Shell lost no time in presenting themselves at the door of Study No. 6. Jack Blake, with a roll of foolscap in his hand, came bolting out at the same moment in a great hurry. He rushed right into the Terrible Three, and sent Tom Merry reeling against the opposite wall, and Manners staggering along the passage. Lowther sat down on the hard linoleum with a bump.

"Oh," exclaimed Blake, reeling back into the doorway, "you utter duffers!"

"You shrieking lunatic!" howled Lowther.

"You dangerous dummy!"

"You fearful ass!"

"What do you mean by blocking up my doorway when I'm in a hurry?" gasped Blake. "If I don't get this impot in to old Schneider by six, I'm done in."

"You ass——"

"My word!" said Digby, within the study. "Six's striking, Jacky."

"Scott! So it is!"

Blake plunged through the chums of the Shell and scuttled along the passage. Six was booming out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's. The Terrible Three gasped for breath, and stared wrathfully after Blake's flying figure.

One, two, three!

Blake dashed on recklessly. If he didn't deliver that famous impot before six, he would probably be told to do it over again. And after three juniors had slaved away getting it done, that would be cruel. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming in from the quadrangle, and coming upstairs to the study, met Blake half-way. He did not get out of the way soon enough, and Blake rushed on, leaving him sitting on the stairs. Near Herr Schneider's study Skimpole made a grab at Blake.

"I say, Blake, I have a scheme for curing the——"

Biff!

Skimpole gasped, and sat down on the floor with a bump. The last stroke of six was booming out from the clock-tower when Blake tapped at Herr Schneider's door, and opened it hurriedly.

"Ach! Vat is tat?"

"My impot, if you please, Herr Schneider," gasped Blake breathlessly.

"Ach! I tinks tat it is after six pefore, ain't it?"

"No, sir; six just striking."

The final stroke of the hour was dying away. Herr Schneider smiled grimly and took the imposition, and laid it on his table.

"Ach! I tinks you have brought him to me just in time, ain't it, mein poy? You may go."

And Jack Blake went, gladly enough.

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus Feels Better.

TOM MERRY and his chums were waiting in Study No. 6 for Blake when he returned. Digby was roasting chestnuts, and the chums of the Shell were helping to eat them. Jack Blake came in rather breathlessly.

"Done it!" he announced. "Just in time."

"Good!" said Digby. "Have some chestnuts?"

"I'm glad you were in time," said Tom Merry. "Under the circumstances, we will not lick you for biffing into us."

"That's lucky for you, isn't it?" said Blake pleasantly. "If any licking were to start, there are some bounders who would go out of this study on their necks."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther

"Did you say rats to me, Lowther?"

"Yes, I did, and——"

"Then I will——"

"And I——"

"Hold on!" interposed Tom Merry. "Peace, my children. Blake, we've come here to tell you of a pleasant surprise we've arranged for you kids."

"Who are you calling kids?"

"I stand corrected; I mean you respectable and estimable young gentlemen of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's."

"That's better. What's the pleasant surprise? Is Lowther going to give up making rotten jokes, or is he going to get a new set of puns?"

"Look here——" began Monty Lowther.

"Well, what is it, then?"

"We've arranged a little holiday for you," said Tom Merry. "Railton is on the sick list, and Kildare and we have been talking about it, and we've decided that we're going to have a week or so on a farm in the country till the epidemic has passed off."

Blake's eyes sparkled.

"I say, is that honest Injun?"

"Yes. The kids who have the flu are going to stick in the sanatorium, and those who haven't it are either going home or going to be sent in parties to the farms on the school list."

"My word!" said Digby. "That's ripping!"

"Yes, rather!" said Herries emphatically. "I shall be able to give my bulldog a run, and he wants change, Towser does."

"I don't see how you'll be able to take your bulldog," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

"Why not?" demanded Herries, in a rather belligerent tone.

"Because we've arranged for you kids to come with us to the Quarry Farm, so that we can look after you, and bulldogs are barred."

"Oh, don't say that!" said Blake. "You'll start Lowther asking us why bulldogs are like football boots."

"Look here——" began Lowther again.

"If I go, my bulldog goes," said Herries obstinately. "I'm not going on a holiday to leave Towser behind. How do I know he would be properly looked after."

"You could tip Taggles a bob to do it."

"I'm not going to trust Towser in the hands of a school porter. He might not get his meals regularly, and you know how bad it is for dogs to have their meals at all sorts of irregular times."

"Poor Towser!"

"Well, if a fellow keeps a dog he ought to look after it."

"Then you stay at St. Jim's and look after it," said Blake. "We can't have that mongrel in the party."

"Lot you know about dogs. Towser is a pure bred bulldog."

"I suppose I can call him a mongrel if I choose?"

"Oh, you can be as big a duffer as you like."

"Look here, Herries——"

"Oh, rats! What you don't know about dogs——"

"Oh, do be quiet!" said Tom Merry. "If you quarrel like this, you'll make me sorry I've decided to take you on a holiday."

Blake and Herries left off their dispute to glare at the hero of the Shell.

"If you want to go out of this study by the window," said Blake darkly, "you're going just the right way to work, Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!" said a voice at the door. "I wegard Tom Mewwy's wemark as decidedly impertinent, you know." And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into the study.

"Hallo!" said Blake affably. "You were taking a rest on the stairs when I saw you last. Weren't you comfy?"

"I wegard the way you pushed me ovah on the stairs as uttahly wude and wuff."

"Well, is it settled about my bulldog?" said Herries. "If I go, he goes."

"But where are we goin', deah boys?"

"We're going to stay a week on a farm, to get away from the flu, Gussy, and we're going to take these Shell bounders along to look after them," said Blake.

"Bai Jove, that's wathah a good idea! Of course, it's undahstood that Tom Mewwy behaves himself, and doesn't bwing us into diswepute."

"I say, seriously," said Tom Merry, "Kildare has put our names down all together, as well as Figgins & Co.'s. Skimmy and Reilly make up the dozen."

"Well, that's all right!" said Jack Blake. "We'll see Figgins about it, but I've no doubt they'll be glad to come."

"I do not wish Figgins & Co. to be included in the party, deah boys. They have just tweated me with gweat wudeness in the quadwangle."

"Horrid!" said Blake solemnly. "Is it possible that they have treated the one and only Augustus with anything approaching to rudeness?"

"Oh, pway don't wot, deah boy."

"Still, we ought to take them along," said Tom Merry. "They can learn better manners from watching the elegant manners and customs of Gussy at close quarters."

"Yaas, bai Jove, there's somethin' in that!"

"Then it's settled," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas. And now, deah boys, I want to point out to you that I shall wequire lookin' aftah, you know, as I feel myself on the verge of a sewious illness."

"My hat! Then Gussy's out of it."

"I fail to compwehend you, Tom Mewwy."

"You see, all the fellows who have the flu are to be left behind in the sanatorium," explained Tom Merry. "If you are ill, you can't come to the Quarry Farm with us."

"Bai Jove!"

"I'm sorry for you, Gussy; but, you see——"

"Yes, rather," said Blake; "I'm sorry, too. We shall miss Gussy."

"Weally, deah boys——"

"It would be cruelty to drag him away if he's seriously ill," said Digby, with a shake of the head. "He'd better go into the sanatorium at once."

"Yes, I'll speak to a prefect about it immediately."

"Weally, Blake——"

"We shall think of you, Gussy, when we're having a ripping time at the farm," said Blake sadly; "we shall think of you cooped up in the sanatorium, feeding on gruel and horrid medicine."

"Bai Jove——"

"But we couldn't drag you away with us when you're seriously ill."

"Certainly not."

"I didn't say I was sewiously ill, you howwid wottahs! I said I was on the verge of a sewious illness!"

"That's all the worse. If you are just going to burst forth, as it were, in a conglomeration of horrible diseases——"

"I wefuse to allow such expwessions to be applied to me, Blake! I wegard anythin' like a disease with howwah! A fellow can be ill without havin' a disease!"

"He can't be ill in a holiday party, anyway. You'll have to have your serious illness in the sanatorium, along with the other invalids."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. On second thoughts, it is pwob. that I am feelin' only a bit wun down, and am not goin' to be ill at all."

"We can't take you away on chance like that. You can't come unless you are quite certain you're not going to be ill."

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "I'd rather take Herries' bulldog than an invalid."

"As a mattah of fact, I feel vewy much bettah now, and pwobably shall not feel ill again at all."

"In that case, we'll let him come," said Blake. "But mind, don't you go hunting round for sympathy, or you'll get it in the neck."

"Weally, Blake——"

"I think we'll go over and see Figgins about it," said Tom Merry. "Hallo! What's this animal in the doorway?"

The animal in the doorway was D'Arcy minor—inky and untidy, as usual. He grinned coolly at the juniors.

"I say, Gus——"

"Weally, Wally, I wish you would not pwesent yourself in this study without havin' washed your face for a considewable pewiod," said the elegant swell of St. Jim's, in a tone of remonstrance. "You are the most disweputable young scallywag in the Third Form, and that is sayin' wathah a lot."

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

"As your eldah bwothah, Wally, I——"

"Oh, don't! I say, I hear you are making up a party to go to the Quarry Farm for a week to get away from the flu. It occurred to me that I had better come with you."

"Then something else had better occur to you," said Blake promptly. "We can't have any cheeky Third Form kids in the party."

"Oh, rats!" said D'Arcy minor. "Jameson and Gibson are both on the sick-list now, and I'm stranded. I may as well come, and look after Gussy."

"Weally, Wally, you young wapscallion——"

"It will be ripping fun," said Wally. "I'll show you fellows how to explore the quarries, and how to snare rabbits, and——"

The juniors united in a crushing glare at the cool "Infant," which had absolutely no effect upon the younger brother of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Is it a go, Gus?" asked Wally cheerfully.

"No, Wally, it is not a 'go,' as you vulgahly put it," said D'Arcy, with stately dignity. "I should be vewy pleased to take you, if you pwomised to dwess and behave in a wespectable mannah, and twy to bwing cwedit on me, but othahwise——"

"I expect it would be otherwise, too, Gus."

"Then I must wefuse you my permish. to come."

"Perhaps I can manage without it," said Wally. And with a cool nod all round, he walked out of the study. Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"For pure, undiluted nerve, I think that infant takes the bun!" he remarked. "I should half like to have him in the party; he would keep us lively. Well, so-long; I'll go over and see Figgins!"

And Tom Merry proceeded to visit the chief of the New House juniors in his quarters, and, needless to say, Figgins & Co. jumped at the idea.

CHAPTER 5.
Off.

"HERE'S the brake!"

It was Tom Merry who uttered the words as the brake from Rylcombe came up to the School House with a flourish, and stopped on the gravel.

It was morning—a keen, cold morning—and half a dozen of the party for Quarry Farm were standing outside the School House, waiting for the brake.

Tom Merry, in coat and cap and scarf, was stamping on the stone steps to keep his feet warm, when the brake rolled up, and the driver touched his cap with a cheerful grin.

"Here we are!" said Jack Blake. "Where's Taggles? Why doesn't Taggles bring down those boxes? Taggles, you villain, where are you?"

"Which I'm 'ere, Master Blake."

"Then why don't you buck up?" said Blake severely. "Do you want me to help you with that box?"

"Which it's 'eavy, Master Blake," said Taggles, who was carrying a rather large trunk, belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, on his shoulder.

The swell of the School House was following close behind, with an anxious eye upon the receptacle of his sartorial treasures.

"Pway be careful, Taggles!"

"Which it's 'eavy, Master D'Arcy!"

"It's all right," said Blake; "I'll lend a hand! I don't want to stand by idle while a nice, industrious man like Taggles is working!"

Nemesis was fast overtaking the unconscious Wally.

"Same here," said Monty Lowther; "I'll lend another hand!"

"So will I!" said Manners.

"I don't want to be lazy," said Digby; "I'll lend a hand too!"

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Thank you kindly, young gentlemen, but——"

But the juniors were all lending hands. Blake pulled the trunk one way, and Lowther pulled it another. Digby gave Taggles a bump on the chest, and Manners poked him in the ribs. The school porter gave a gasp and staggered, and the trunk went with a bump on the stone steps.

"My heye!" gasped Taggles.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave almost a wail of anguish.

"Bai Jove, my twunk!"

He dashed forward to save it. But he was too late. The trunk rolled from step to step to the bottom, and crashed on the ground, and there burst open.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Who'd have thought it?"

"You wottah!"

"It has busted!" said Monty Lowther, with an expression of great astonishment. "I say, Gussy, your trunk has come open!"

"You feahful beast!"

"Why, he's blaming us!" said Manners, in surprise. "If that happened when we were helping Taggles, what would have happened if we hadn't helped?" And Manners shook his head as much as to say that in that case the catastrophe would have been much greater.

"My heye!" said Taggles again.

D'Arcy gave the juniors a withering look.

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs!" he said. "I wegard this as a joke in the vewy worst of taste! My beastly twunk has come open, and I have not the slightest doubt that my clothes are all wumpled!"

"Oh, we'll help you pack them in again!" said Lowther going down the steps. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dashed after him in frantic haste.

"Stop! Lowthah, I forbid you to touch my clothes!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I am convinced that you would delibewately wumple my garments!" said D'Arcy. "I have not the slightest doubt that you have some intention of that kind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"If we were not just settin' out on a journey," said D'Arcy, "I would give you all a feahful thwashin'! I do not wish you to pwesent yourselves at Quawwy Farm with black eyes and thick eahs, howeveh!"

"Narrow escape for us!" grinned Digby.

Arthur Augustus turned his trunk over, and commenced to cram the displaced articles back into it.

Meanwhile Taggles had brought out the other boxes, and they were placed in the brake. Then the juniors began to take their places. There was a sound of loud and furious growling, and Herries came in sight, leading his bulldog by the chain.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, as he rose from his trunk again, "I can't fasten that beastly thing now! The lock is bwoken, and I haven't any stwaps! Hewwies, you are not goin' to bwing that beastly savage animal into the bwake!"

"Rats!" said Herries.

"I insist——"

"Bosh!"

"I appeal to all the gentlemen in the bwake," said D'Arcy, looking up to the vehicle. "Is Hewwies to bwing that howwible dog?"

"No!" roared half a dozen voices.

"Stuff!" said Herries.

"Now, look here, Herries——"

"G-r-r-r!" said Towser.

"Be reasonable, old chap! Taggles will look after that beast!"

"Are you calling my Towser a beast, Digby?"

"I mean that nice, pleasant animal! Taggles will look after him."

"No, he won't."

"He will if you ask him."

"I'm not going to ask him. It's not necessary, when I'm going to take Towser to Quarry Farm," explained Herries.

"Now, just look here——"

"Rats! Bosh!"

Herries lifted his terrible pet into the brake. The juniors looked at the formidable rows of teeth Towser was showing, and did not feel inclined to push him out. Towser sat down in the bottom of the brake and growled.

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as a feahful cheek of Hewwies' to want to bwing that feahful beast along with us! He has torn my twousahs twice!"

"Blow your trousers!"

"Yaas, but weally, Hewwies——"

"I think you're a lot of selfish rotters!" said Herries heatedly. "Going on a holiday yourselves, and wanting to leave a poor old doggie all alone behind!"

"Yes, but—you see——"

"Suppose he was to catch the flu?"

"Dogs don't catch the flu."

"Don't they? That's all you know!"

"Well, if Herries means it, I suppose we must have the beast," said Tom Merry. "Anything for a quiet life! I vote for Towser."

"Oh, certainly!" said Blake resignedly. "If Herries wants the beast, let Herries have the beast. If the brute bites me, I shall commit doggicide on the spot!"

"He won't bite you if you don't look at him," said Herries. "I admit Towser doesn't like being stared at."

"I object to the pwesence of Towsah in the bwake!"

"You can go up beside the driver, Gussy."

"I wefuse to go up beside the dwivah!"

"Then go and eat coke! Hallo, here's Figgins—and blessed if he hasn't got his rotten little mongrel with him!"

Figgins & Co. came up, cheerful and smiling. Figgins had a ragged-looking grey mongrel in his arms. It was a cur he had rescued from a ruffian a short time before, and had since then kept as a pet. He had named it Spot, and Spot had grown much fatter and cleaner during his residence at St. Jim's. There was a fresh chorus of protest as Figgins came up to the brake.

"You're not going to take that mongrel, Figgins."

"Yes, I am," said Figgins.

"You can't have the snarly little beast in the brake."

"He's not a snarly little beast."

"Bai Jove, we're not goin' to turn the beastly bwake into a beastly dog show. Figgins, I insist upon your leavin' that wotten mongwel behind."

"You can go and eat coke, Gussy."

"I wefuse to go and eat coke. I mean——"

"Make room, there!"

"It can't be done!" exclaimed Herries indignantly. "You know how my bulldog always quarrels with any other dog that gets near him. You can't have that mongrel here. He will worry Towser."

"Well, of all the nerve! You've got that savage beast of yours."

"Of course, I must take Towser with me!"

"Yes, and I must take Spot with me."

"That's different, of course."

"Look here, if you have a rotten bulldog, you can have a pretty little chap like my dog," said Figgins. "That's what I say."

"Yes, rather," said Kerr. "If no dogs are admitted, let Herries' bulldog get out, and Herries himself, for that matter."

"Do you want a thick ear, Kerr?" roared Herries.

"Rats!"

Towser pricked up his ears and growled at the word "rats." The mongrel yelped as Figgins tossed him into the brake and clambered after him. Towser gave a ferocious growl, and Herries had just time to grip his chain before he could pin the stranger.

"Keep that beast off, Herries!" exclaimed Figgins.

"I'm holding him," said Herries. "If he gets loose, it will be all up with your mongrel, that's all, Figgins. I've warned you!"

"If he touches my Spot, I'll brain him!"

"Then I'll jolly soon brain you!"

"You School House rotter——"

"You New House pig——"

"Jolly nice friendly party, ain't they?" sneered Gore, who was one of the crowd who were standing round the brake, laughing at the argument. "They'll have a nice friendly quiet time, I don't think."

"Shut up, you chaps," said Tom Merry. "If Kildare hears you, he may send you New House fellows back at the last moment."

"Yaas, wathah! And weally——"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to shut up, Tom Mewwy!"

"Where are those other bounders?" exclaimed Blake. "We're all here except Skimpole and Reilly! Time we were off!"

"Faith, and here I am!" exclaimed Reilly, coming out of the House. And the boy from Belfast clambered into his seat.

"Skimmy! Where's Skimpole?"

"Help!" yelled a voice, and a spectacled junior came flying out of the School House, with Knox, the prefect, in fierce pursuit. It was Skimpole, of course.

Skimpole had half a dozen books under his arm, and was shedding some at every step.

"Stop, thief!" roared Knox.

"Ow! Help!" yelled the affrighted Skimpole.

"This way!" shouted Tom Merry. "This way, Skimmy!"

Skimpole made a rush for the brake. The last of the books dropped on the School House steps, and the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's clambered hurriedly into the brake. There was a fierce growl from Towser, and Herries jerked his head back just in time from Skimpole's skinny calves.

"Let me get at him!" roared Knox.

"What on earth's the matter, Knox?"

"The young villain has been collaring the books out of my study! I'll skin him!"

"Skimmy, you ass——"

"I—I really fail to see the cause of this excitement of Knox's," gasped Skimpole. "He has struck me several times already in a brutal manner."

"Let me get at him!" roared Knox, stopping at the back of the brake. But Herries lifted Towser's head, and the bulldog's teeth made the prefect hesitate to jump in.

"I was simply borrowing Knox's books to take with me to the Quarry Farm," panted Skimpole. "I was inclined to take up the study of Greek, and as I have no books, I was taking Knox's books. As a Socialist, I am, of course, as much entitled as Knox is to use his books, and I cannot see why Knox is angry. I should have returned them in due course, unless any accident happened to them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young villain!" roared Knox. "I'll teach you to raid a Sixth Form study! Get out of that brake!"

"Under the circumstances, Knox, I refuse to get out of the brake. I am somewhat short-sighted, but it appears to me as if you meditate violence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I—— Oh, let me get at him!"

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Towser.

"Take that beast out of the way, Herries!"

"He doesn't like prefects," said Herries calmly. "My dog Towser always bites prefects."

Knox glared at Herries, and at his dog Towser, and then gathered up his books and went in. He had already bestowed several mighty cuffs upon the amateur Socialist in his flight, and vengeance was partly satisfied.

The juniors yelled with laughter as Skimpole rubbed his bruises.

"Bai Jove, I wegard that as wathah funnay," said D'Arcy. "But I think now we are all here, we may as well start, or we may lose the beastly twain, you know."

"Hold on a minute!"

It was the voice of D'Arcy minor.

Wally came up with a run, arrayed for going out. He had a large strapped bag in his hand, which he skilfully

tossed into the brake. D'Arcy gave a howl as it plumped on his knees.

"Wally! Weally——"

"Hold on! I'm coming!"

"You are not comin', you awfully impertinent young wascal!"

"Rats!" said the cheerful infant. "Prefect's orders! Kildare says so."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake.

"Fact, my son. I'm to go along with my brother, so that he can look after me," grinned Wally. "Fancy Gus looking after me! My only Aunt Jane!"

"As your eldah bwothah, of course, I shall be always willin' to look aftah you, Wally, so long as you tweat me with pwopah wespect."

"That's the trouble. I don't suppose I shall," said Wally coolly. "But I'll try to bear with you, Gus."

"Weally——"

"Make room, there! I can't sit on your legs!"

The juniors made room in the brake for Wally. It was Kildare's direction, and had to be obeyed; and, as a matter of fact, they were not sorry to have the lively young rascal with them. Wally climbed into the brake, and a sudden whistle burst from his lips, of a piercing shrillness that made the juniors stop their ears. A ragged cur came tearing up to the brake.

"Pongo! Good old Pongo! Make room for Pongo!"

There was a perfect roar of protest.

"He can't come in!"

"Kick him out!"

"No more dogs! We've got two already!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, if you think I'm coming without Pongo——"

"Don't come, then!"

"I'm coming, and so will Pongo! Good old doggie! Come, then! Nice dog!"

"He sha'n't come in here!"

"Oh, let him in!" said Herries. "It will save me something in dog biscuits. Towser is bound to have him sooner or later."

"If your savage beast touches my Pongo——"

"He's bound to. He always kills mongrels."

"Then how is it he has let you alone so long?" demanded Wally.

"Why, you cheeky young rotter——"

"Pongo! Pongo! Come on, old dog!"

Wally lifted Pongo into the brake. There was immediately a strain on Towser's collar as the bulldog tried to get at the new-comer. Spot, too, made a spring, but Figgins held him by the ears. Pongo, to do him justice, had plenty of pluck. He showed an intense desire to go for both Towser and Spot.

"Well, we are a happy family, and no mistake," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Drive on, there, before we get any more dogs in the brake."

And the brake drove out of the gates of St. Jim's, followed by a cheer from the crowd, and amid an accompaniment of barking and growling. During the short drive to Rylcombe, each of the dog-owners kept a tight hand on his pet. There wasn't much room in the brake for a dog-fight. They dashed up to Rylcombe Station in good time, and caught the train, and were soon buzzing off towards their new quarters. The three dogs, not without some misgivings on the part of their owners, were entrusted to the guard. Nearly half an hour later the train stopped at the little country station of Quarrymere.

CHAPTER 6.

Wally Signalises His Arrival.

"LOOKS all right!"

That was Master Wally's remark as he stepped out of the train at Quarrymere.

The station was a little old-fashioned country one, with evergreens growing along the back of the platform, and so open that a view of the country on all sides could be obtained.

It did, indeed, look, as D'Arcy minor expressed it, "all right."

The country was very green and wooded, with hills fading away into dusky blue in the distance. Between the grassland and the hills lay the brown moor, pierced by the quarries, from which the district had taken its name.

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry. "Mr. Johnson was to have a waggonette or something here to meet us. Where is there a porter?"

"I don't suppose they have porters here," said Monty Lowther, looking round him. "If they have, I expect he's asleep somewhere."

"Bai Jove, I can see the porter," said D'Arcy. "I will question him on the subject of the waggonette, you know."

In a corner of the platform a man in a porter's cap was sitting asleep on a truck. The stopping of the train, apparently, had not awakened him. Wally grinned at the sight of him, and crossed over to him, and suddenly emitted the shrill whistle with which he was accustomed to call his dog, close to the sleeper's ear.

"Ow!" gasped the porter, starting into wakefulness. "Ow! Wot's that—fire?"

"Good-morning!" said Wally blandly.

"I heerd a fearful noise," said the porter, staring round him.

"Weally, Wally——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! I say, porter, don't you usually wake up when a train comes in?"

"Yessir," said the porter. "Yessir! My word! There's the train!"

And he walked forward in a leisurely way to help the guard put out the boxes.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "They take things easy here! I suppose this is what they call leading a quiet life?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hallo, where's my dog?"

Wally ran towards the guard's van. Herries and Figgins were making for it, too. Herries dragged out his bulldog, the guard glaring at him the while.

"He tried to bite me," said the guard. "I'd 'a' brained 'im, young gentlemen, only——"

"That's all right," said Herries. "I expect you looked at him. Towser doesn't like people looking at him."

"Which they've all been a great trouble to me, and——"

Figgins slipped a shilling into the guard's hand.

"Thank you kindly, sir."

"Come on, Spotty! Come on, old Spot!"

"Pongo! Pongo!"

"Quiet, Towser!"

There was a growling and barking on the platform, but the three dogs were kept from one another's throats by main force. The train crawled out of the station again, and Tom Merry questioned the porter as to the waggonette from the Quarry Farm.

"Mr. Johnson's waggonette," said the porter, scratching his head. "There's a waggon been waiting outside for some time, young gents, from Mr. Johnson's farm. Perhaps that's what you want."

"I dare say it is," said Tom Merry. "This way, kids!"

They poured out of the station. A farm waggon that had seen much service was waiting there, and a waggoner in a smock frock was chewing a straw and gazing meditatively at his two horses. He turned round slowly and looked at the juniors.

"Be you the young gents from t' skule?" he asked.

"We be," said Monty Lowther.

"Then I'm 'ere to take you to the farm, young gents."

"You are from Mr. Johnson's?"

"Yees."

Tom Merry looked at the waggon rather comically. It had a good deal of hay and straw in it, and a side of bacon lay near the driver's seat.

"I understood that there was to be a waggonette or something," said Tom Merry.

The driver slowly shook his head.

"Farmer says to me, says he, 'Garge,' says he, 'you'll take the 'ay up to the station,' he says, 'and bring back the young gents from t' skule,' he says; that's what Farmer Johnson he says to me."

"Oh, it's ripping!" said Manners. "I like the smell of hay, and there's a side of bacon ready if Fatty Wynn gets hungry."

"I am jolly hungry," said Fatty Wynn. "I always do get a keen appetite this time of year. I've got some sandwiches, though."

"You ate about two dozen in the train."

"Nothing of the sort. I ate only nine, and I've got nine left."

"Gimme a 'and with these 'ere trunks, Garge," said the porter.

"That I will, Willyum," said Garge.

The luggage of the juniors from St. Jim's was piled into the waggon. Arthur Augustus kept an anxious eye upon his trunk. It was not fastened, and it had to be lifted into the waggon with extra care. It was safely accomplished, and D'Arcy breathed freely. Then the juniors clambered in, and the dogs were brought up. Monty Lowther suggested that they should run behind, a suggestion that was treated with utter scorn by Herries, Figgins, and D'Arcy minor. The waggon was pretty full at last, and Garge climbed slowly to his seat, and took up the reins. The horses moved off in a decidedly slow and leisurely way. The horses, like everything else apparently at Quarrymere, were slow and leisurely.

Gr-r-r-r!

"Keep that brute quiet, Herries."

"I don't see why a dog shouldn't growl a bit if he likes," said Herries. "It does a dog good to growl sometimes."

Yap, yap, yap!

"Wally, I insist upon that howwid bwute stoppin' that wotten snarlin'."

"Yes, rather," said Herries; "it sets my teeth on edge."

"Oh, go and eat tin tacks!" said Wally.

Gr-r-r-r!

"You'd better let him run behind," said Herries warningly. "I've got a feeling that Towser will get loose soon, and then it will be all up with your mongrel."

"Throw the savage beast out into the road, then."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that Hewwies should thwow the savage beast out into the woad. I don't like the way he is lookin' at my twousahs."

"There's something about you that annoys him," said Herries, patting the huge head of his favourite. "We're rather crowded here, and Towser doesn't like being crowded. I suppose you couldn't get out and walk, D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and gave Herries a look that ought to have bored a hole in him like a gimlet.

"I should hardly be likely to walk, Hewwies, for the sake of a beastly bulldog," he said, with great dignity.

"Well, Towser doesn't like being crowded," said Herries, with a dissatisfied look. "It's hard on a dog that likes plenty of room."

"Oh, blow Towser!" said Blake. "I'm getting fed up with Towser."

"Towser will get fed up with you if you don't give him a little more room."

"Yaas, I suggest that Hewwies should be wequested, in the name of evewy gentleman pwesent, to sling the howwid bwute into the neawest quawwy."

"Catch me!" said Herries.

Gr-r-r-r!

"There's something worrying him," said Herries. "It must be you, D'Arcy. I think you ought to walk. Perhaps he's niffing that bacon, though. Down, doggie!"

Gr-r-r-r-r-r!

Towser made a sudden leap, and dragged Herries half across the waggon. The bulldog's jaws closed upon a parcel in Fatty Wynn's lap, from which the fat Fourth-Former was in the act of extracting a sandwich.

Fatty Wynn gave a yell, and got his hands away in time. Towser dragged the parcel down into the bottom of the waggon, and tore it open with his teeth and paws, and buried his muzzle among the sandwiches.

"Oh, that's what he wanted!" said Herries. "It's all right now."

"All right!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "He's got my sandwiches!"

"Yes, he'll be quiet now."

"Quiet! I'll brain him! I'll smash him! Somebody lend me a knife."

"Look here, Wynn——"

"He's got my sandwiches!"

"Well, he's hungry," said Herries, in a tone which implied that he regarded that as a sufficient explanation and excuse for anything that Towser might happen to do.

"Hungry! I'm hungry, too!" shouted Fatty Wynn excitedly. "What do you mean, you School House rotter? He's not going to have my sandwiches. I'm simply famished."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Your sandwiches won't be worth much now, Fatty."

"The—the beast—I'll—I'll——"

Fatty Wynn stooped down towards the bulldog. Towser looked up, showing a set of teeth over the mutilated sandwiches that made the fat Fourth-Former jump back quickly.

"Call the beast off, Herries!"

"Well, the sandwiches wouldn't be any good now if I did."

"He oughtn't to be allowed to have them, though."

"Well, he's hungry."

"I—I—I'll give somebody a bob to shoot that dog," said Fatty Wynn wildly. "The—the savage beast oughtn't to be allowed to live."

"I quite agwee with my fwiend Wynn on that point. The sandwiches aren't of much importance, but I am in continual tewwor that the feahful beast will take a bite out of my twousahs, you know."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Figgins. "I think Herries ought to bring up his dog better. Now, my Spot wouldn't think of touching any grub except when I feed him myself, and—— Hold on! Come back! Quiet, you little beggar!"

But Spot had got loose at last, and he flung himself upon the sandwiches. In a moment Towser had him by the neck, and was pinning him to the floor-boards. Before they could be separated, they were rolling over and over among the feet of the juniors, with a terrific snapping and yelping and snarling. The boys jumped to their feet, and Pongo took the opportunity of escaping from Wally, and hurling himself upon the sandwiches. While Towser and Spot were fighting furiously, Pongo bolted the sandwiches at express speed. Wally burst into a roar.

"Look at him!" he gasped. "Only look at him! Ha, ha, ha! Good old Pongo! Good old Pong! *The artful* little beggar! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Call your beast off, Herries!" yelled Figgins.

"Well, call that mongrel away! I warned you that Towser didn't like having other dogs near him."

Herries whistled and called, but Towser was deaf to the voice of the charmer. Herries dragged at his collar, and dragged him up, but Towser's teeth were in the fur of the mongrel. Figgins tried to drag his favourite away, and Towser promptly snapped at him. In doing so he let go Spot, who wriggled away, and was glad to get on Figgins's knees out of danger, having had enough of the fighting. Pongo had just finished gobbling the last sandwich.

"Pongo takes the cake," grinned Wally. "Hallo, here's that rotten bulldog getting obstreperous again. Keep him off my Pongo, you ass!"

"Oh, blow your Pongo!"

Towser's fighting blood was up, and doubtless he was disappointed about the sandwiches. He made many efforts to get at Pongo, and Herries had plenty to do to hold him in. A tremendous effort at last tore Towser's collar loose, and he hurled himself upon Pongo with a fierce growl. Pongo went over the side of the waggon into the road, and Towser went after him. In a second the two dogs were tearing down the road in a cloud of dust in a hot chase.

"Confound it!" said Herries angrily.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Wally. "Pongo can dodge anything on four legs."

"I'm not thinking of your rotten Pongo. Suppose my bulldog gets lost?"

"Jolly good thing, too, I should say."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This is what comes of having Third Form kids in the party," growled Herries.

"Faith, and it's not sorry I am to be rid of the bastes!" said Reilly. "There's rather too much of that bulldog of yours intirely."

Herries only grunted.

"I don't think there is any danger of the bulldog getting lost," remarked Skimpole. "All you have to do is to follow his tracks in the dust, Herries. You know my skill as an amateur detective. I should be glad to place it at your disposal."

"Oh, you go and eat coke!" said Herries ungratefully.

"Really, Herries, I cannot help regarding that remark as almost rude. Not," continued Skimpole, beaming upon Herries through his spectacles—"not that I blame you for

your rude and brusque manners, Herries. They are attributes of yourself, and yourself—the final ego—must be admitted to be the outcome of the combined influence of heredity and environment, and therefore——"

"Cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "If you start Determinism now, Skimpole, we'll drop you out of the brake, to walk."

"Really, Merry, that is not a logical method of ending an argument."

"Well, it's a quick way."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Skimpole as a feahful ass and an awful bore. It may be the wesult of his hewedity or his beastly enviwonment, but in eithah case the fact wemains the same."

Wally rose and stretched himself, and of course in doing so knocked Arthur Augustus's silk hat sideways. D'Arcy uttered an exclamation.

"I weally wish you would be a little more careful, Wally, I——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus! I'm going to walk. I suppose that white building yonder behind the trees is the farm. Is that the Quarry Farm, Garge?"

"Yees, zir."

"Good! I'm going to have a trot. Can't be cooped up like this with a lot of old fogies."

And Wally dropped behind the waggon. The juniors looked at him expressively. Tom Merry & Co. were not exactly pleased at being regarded in the light of old fogies.

The waggon was proceeding at a very leisurely pace, and the Infant's brisk walking took him on ahead. At a pond near the gateway of the farm a flock of geese were disporting themselves, and of course Wally had to take it upon himself to drive them into the farmyard, for no reason except that he had no business to do so.

With a terrific quack-quack-quacking the startled geese fled before the shouting junior, who raved and waved his arms frantically in pursuit.

"Young ass!" growled Blake, seeing Wally's action from the waggon. "What a fearful row! He'll have the whole farm on his track in a minute."

"Yaas, wathah! My young bwothah is an extwemely mischievous young wascal, you know!"

"Hallo," exclaimed Tom Merry; "there's Nemesis on the track!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A stout gentleman of the farmer persuasion had appeared from an outbuilding, doubtless attracted by the uproar of the quacking geese. He stared blankly at Wally for a moment, as if petrified by the sight.

"My geese," he gasped; "my prize geese! Oh, the young villain!"

Quack, quack, quack!

"My prize geese!"

"Boo!" roared Wally. "Boo! Yah! Hurrororororooo!"

Quack, quack, quack, quack!

The farmer dashed towards the junior. Wally did not look round, and the sounds of the farmer's heavy boots were drowned in the quacking of the geese. Quack, quack, quack, went the birds, as they flew and ran in every direction. From the waggon the St. Jim's juniors watched the scene with interest.

Nemesis was fast overtaking the unconscious Wally.

"Hurroo—hurroo-o-o-o-o!"

Quack, quack, quack!

"You young willain!" roared Farmer Johnson.

He gripped Wally by the shoulder, and his stick descended upon the young rascal's shoulders with a sounding thwack.

CHAPTER 7.

Fatty Wynn the Second.

WALLY swung round with a startled yell. The farmer made rapid play with the stick, and Wally jumped and squirmed and wriggled.

"You young willain! My prize geese!"

"Leggo!"

Quack, quack, quack!

"Lemme alone, you duffer!" roared Wally. "I was only driving in your geese for you! You ought to be grateful!"

"You young rascal!"

The farmer let D'Arcy minor go at last—not so much because of his expostulations, as because the stout gentleman was becoming breathless from his exertions. With a very red face, he glared at the youthful scion of the house of D'Arcy.

Wally glared at him in return, apparently inclined to commit assault and battery on the spot, in spite of the farmer's stick.

"Young willain!" gasped Farmer Johnson. "My prize geese!"

The waggon came to a halt, and the juniors tumbled out

Higher and higher went Tom Merry, climbing steadily higher and higher, while Figgins watched him from below with his heart beating like a hammer.

of it. They were laughing aloud, and Wally received scant sympathy.

"Hold on, Mr. Johnson!" said Tom Merry. "Is that how you usually receive a guest at Quarry Farm?"

The farmer turned round and looked at him.

"Dang me," he said, "is it the young gents from the skule?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah sir!"

"And is this young willain one of you?" asked the farmer.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not exactly," said Monty Lowther. "He's a kid in a lower Form who's been allowed to come along with us."

"Rats!" said Wally.

"You were quite right to punish him," said Lowther calmly, "and if you like to give him some more, we shall be glad to stand round in a circle and applaud."

"Certainly," said Figgins. "We will hold him if you like while you lay it on."

"Faith, and I agree wid ye intirely!"

Wally pushed back his cuffs.

"Who's going to hold me?" he asked, in a casual sort of way.

Farmer Johnson grinned. He was naturally a good-humoured, stout gentleman, and the punishment of Wally had quite appeased him.

"It's all right, young gents," he said. "I'm sorry I gave it him so hard, seeing as he's one of the party, but I can't abear having my prize geese disturbed."

"I was only driving them in for you," said Wally. "I thought you'd like a fellow to make himself useful."

The farmer looked at him doubtfully.

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We're all glad to see you, Mr. Johnson, and we think the place ripping. We shall have a good time here, and we'll do our best to keep D'Arcy minor in order."

"Yaas, I shall certainly make it a point to keep an eye on my youngah bwothah," said Arthur Augustus. "He is a young wascal, I am sowwy to say!"

"Now, don't you begin, Gus!" said Wally.

"Weally, Wally——"

"It's ripping air down here!" said Fatty Wynn. "Don't you find it gives you a jolly good appetite, Mr. Johnson?"

Mr. Johnson smiled.

"Yes, I do, young gent; and I suppose you are ready for some lunch too?"

"Well, we could do with some," said Fatty Wynn. "I ought to have had a solid meal before starting on the journey, but Figgins was hurrying me so."

"I thought you did yourself down pretty well," said Figgins.

"Oh, come now, Figgy!" said the fat Fourth-Former, in a tone of deep reproach. "You saw what I had—just the usual school breakfast, and a gammon rasher and some sausages besides, and a couple of kippers. There was absolutely nothing else, excepting the cake and tarts, and the ham. You know that!"

Farmer Johnson looked at Fatty Wynn curiously.

"Lunch is ready in the kitchen," he said. "You won't object to the kitchen, young gents? You see, there ain't room in the other rooms."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Right-ho, Mr. Johnson! Don't stand on ceremony! Kids, follow your leader!"

"Who are you calling kids?"

"Yaas, Tom Mewwy, pway answah that question! I weally——"

"Cheese it, Gussy, and come in! Can't you see you're keeping Mr. Johnson waiting? When I decided to bring you Fourth Form kids here, I naturally expected you to mind your manners," said Tom Merry severely.

D'Arcy could think of nothing sufficiently crushing to retort for the moment, and he followed his companions into the farmhouse. The trunks were piled in the spacious porch for the time being, until they could be taken to the juniors' room. Garge drove the waggon away. Neither Towser nor Pongo had yet put in an appearance, and the juniors—with two exceptions—were beginning to hope that they were lost for good.

The long, spacious kitchen of the farmhouse looked very bright and cheerful, and the glimpse of the dairy was refreshing. The beams of the kitchen were solid, old, British oak. The Quarry Farmhouse had been built at a time when builders were really builders. The other rooms of the farmhouse were very small and poky, and it was plain that there was no room for the whole party of visitors, except in the farm-kitchen. But the juniors had understood that they would have to "rough it" a little in the country, and they were not disposed to grumble.

A lunch of bread and cheese and beautifully pure milk was ready, and the juniors did it full justice.

Dinner, which was served at midday at Quarry Farm, was to follow later. After lunch had been disposed of, the boys were shown their quarters. Accommodation was somewhat limited, but everything was clean and neat as a new pin. Mrs. Johnson, a stout and cheerful lady with cheeks like ripe apples, was evidently a careful housewife, and even Tom Merry's old governess would have been satisfied with his new surroundings, if she could have seen them.

The chums of the Shell had one room, Figgins & Co. another, and Blake and his friends a third. Reilly, Skimpole, and D'Arcy minor had a fourth room, and the four occupied a whole floor of the farmhouse. Above were the attics. Tom Merry looked out of the little gabled window of his room over a rolling expanse of green and glowing country.

"Ripping!" he said. "And we'll have a trot over to those quarries one day, kids, and see what they're like. Something like the chalk-pits on Wayland Moor, I expect."

"Hallo! What's that row?" exclaimed Lowther, glancing down from the window towards the farmhouse door. "My hat, look there!"

"Phew! Gussy's trunk!"

The trunks had been left outside for the time, until Garge should have leisure to carry them up the narrow, creaking stairs of the farmhouse. It will be remembered that D'Arcy's trunk had a broken lock, and the lid was unsecured. Garge had plumped the trunk down in a way that jarred the lid partly open, the disturbed articles inside preventing it from quite closing again.

A huge porker had come along on a voyage of investigation, apparently. The juniors gazed at the pig in admiration. They had never seen so absolutely fat and barrel-like a specimen of the porcine species. The huge porker was nosing into the trunk with his snout, looking probably for something to eat.

The half-open lid was pushed back, and the pig dragged a curious assortment of collars and ties out of the trunk. Disdaining them as articles of diet, he continued his investigations.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with laughter. There was a sudden cry from the adjoining room, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went tearing down the stairs. He dashed out of the porch, the juniors watching from the window almost in hysterics.

"Shoo!" gasped D'Arcy, throwing up his hands at the pig to frighten him off. "Shoo! Yah! Bah! Groo!"

The porker did not seem to be scared by the junior's ejaculations and excited gestures. He gave Arthur Augustus one look, and then turned to the trunk again with a grunt.

"Bai Jove, the filthy wottah will wuin my things!" cried D'Arcy. "Help! Bai Jove! Shoo! Get away! Wun away, you howwid animal! Shoo! Shoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the chums of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins & Co., from their window.

But Arthur Augustus was too excited to heed their laughter. He picked up a broom which chanced to be in the porch, and rushed at the porker. A mighty swipe made the pig turn round from the trunk with a loud grunt, and he waddled straight towards D'Arcy. Whether he meant to attack him or not cannot be said, but he went straight at him, and D'Arcy, in dismay, dropped the broom and fled. Unfortunately, in his haste, he caught his foot in a rut in the brick floor of the porch, and went down headlong.

"Help!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's faintly.

He sat up. A snout was thrust into his face, and a puff of strongly-scented breath fanned his face. The swell of St. Jim's squirmed away like an eel and tore into the house. The juniors at the window were shrieking. The porker, satisfied with having routed his assailant, returned to the trunk and pursued his investigations.

"My hat," gasped Tom Merry, "this is too funny! I say, kids, have you ever seen anybody like that porker before?"

"Yes, rather," grinned Lowther; "Fatty Wynn! He might be his twin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners. "The likeness is amazing! Fatty Wynn the Second!"

The chums of the Shell shrieked at the idea. From that moment the prize porker had his name—Fatty Wynn II.

CHAPTER 8.

No Chance for Skimpole.

WALLY came into the farmhouse kitchen as D'Arcy fled into it. He gave his elder brother a poke in the ribs to stop him, and D'Arcy reeled upon a settle.

"Bai Jove! Have you seen that howwid bwute? He's woutin' out the things in my twunk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You unfeelin' young wottah——"

"Oh, I'll sheer him off for you, if you like!" said Wally.

"I should be extwemely gwateful——"

Wally went out through the wide, brick-paved hall. Fatty Wynn the Second was routing into the trunk again. Wally had heard a bark in the distance which he knew well, and he knew that Pongo was returning. He gave the shrill whistle which always made the juniors stop their ears, and Pongo came racing up.

"Good dog, Pongo! Fetch him!" shouted Wally.

And Pongo went for the prize porker like a shot.

Fatty Wynn the Second grunted excitedly, but he was no match for Pongo. The dog barked and yapped round him furiously, and the porker turned tail, and made off at a *trot*, with Pongo snapping in pursuit. The two of them disappeared round an angle of the farm buildings.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy "I am beginnin' to think that country life is not all wose-coloured, you know. My neckties are simply wuined."

He gathered up his treasures ruefully. Some of them certainly were not good for much now. The swell of St. Jim's jammed them back in the trunk, and jammed down the lid. Garge came up, touching his cap with a grin.

"Carry the trunks up now, zir?" he said.

"I weally wish you had cawwied them up before, my good man," said Arthur Augustus. "Some of my things have been absolutely wuined by that howwid animal."

Garge grinned again, and carried in the trunks. The juniors came out, grinning in what D'Arcy could only regard as a very unfeeling way. They occupied the wait for dinner in looking round the farm and its surroundings, and they found many things to interest them.

Skimpole, who was of a scientific turn, investigated the dairy, and explained to Mrs. Johnson some improvements he had thought of in the art of making butter. He confided to Tom Merry afterwards that he did not think these improvements would be adopted at the Quarry Farm.

"Women are so conservative," said Skimpole, with a sigh. "I could, at a trifling immediate expenditure, save half the cost of butter making. I was trying to explain to the dairymaid that with the aid of the apparatus I should devise, her labour would be quite dispensed with, and Mr. Johnson *would* save the cost of her wages, and she interrupted me quite—well, quite brusquely."

"Amazing!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, isn't it? I think people are very slow in the country—very slow indeed."

"I suppose so. They ought to be so jolly glad to have their jobs taken away, so that their employers can save their wages."

"Of course, the individual would suffer, as in the case of all great improvements," said Skimpole. "Whenever a machine is invented, it throws a certain number of hand labourers out of work, and under present social conditions they starve. This is rather rough on the individual——"

"Go hon!"

"But, of course, it could not be allowed to interfere with the progress of science and invention. Under Socialism——"

"Oh, ring off, old chap!"

"Under Socialism," said the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's, unheeding—"under Socialism, my dear friends, the State will see to that. You see—— Merry! Dear me, how curious it is that even an intelligent fellow like Merry is more interested in looking at a kitchen garden than in the deepest social questions of the day!"

Tom Merry was gone. The chums of the Shell strolled round the farm, giving Skimpole a wide berth. The amateur Socialist spotted Herries, and bore down upon him. Herries was looking rather worried, but Skimpole was too preoccupied with the social questions of the day to notice that.

"How beautifully quiet it is here, Herries!" he remarked. "Do you not feel that it is a spot destined, as it were, by Nature for study and the improvement of the intellect?"

Herries grunted.

"If you care to hear me," said Skimpole modestly, "we will retire behind this haystack, and I will read you the four hundred and forty-fourth chapter of my forthcoming book on Socialism. It deals with——"

Herries grunted more expressively than before.

"It deals with the subject of the curious obtuseness of intellect on the part of those who fail to perceive the glorious truths of Socialism at the first glance."

"Have you seen——"

"Yes, I have seen the whole thing at the first glance, and I should be happy to explain to you——"

"Ass! Have you seen Towser?"

"Eh?" said Skimpole.

"Have you seen my dog Towser?"

"I was speaking of the glorious truths of Socialism."

"I was speaking of my dog Towser. He hasn't come in yet. That rotten mongrel of D'Arcy minor's has come in, but old Towsy seems to be off somewhere."

"Ah, yes; I am sorry. But, as I was saying, in taking up the subject of Socialism, you naturally commence with the land, for instance. The alternative at once presents itself to you——"

"I wonder——"

"The alternative of private ownership of land, or of the nationalisation of the same. In order to put the matter into simple words, suitable to your intellect, I will——"

"I wonder whether Towser has gone back to St. Jim's?"

"I will explain that by nationalisation I mean making the land legally the property of the nation, as undoubtedly it is by right. My friends, what right can a private individual possibly have to fence round a part of England, and say——"

"Rats!" said Herries, walking away.

Skimpole rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"The indifference of Merry and the obtuseness of Herries are remarkably trying," he murmured. "Ah, there is Blake! Perhaps—— I say, Blake!"

"Hallo!" said Blake. "I'm getting peckish."

"There are a great many people peckish in this cold weather, Blake, who, under the present social system, have not the wherewithal to satisfy their hunger. I——"

"Br-r-r-r!" said Blake, walking off.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "What can Blake possibly mean by that utterly unmeaning remark? Digby! I say, Digby!"

"No, don't!" said Digby; and he followed Blake.

"Dear me! Having just read up the subject of the land, it is very hard that I cannot fully explain my views before I have forgotten it. D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

"I was speaking on the subject of the nationalisation of the land to Herries——"

"Pway go and continue, deah boy."

"What right has a private individual to fence round a part of England, and say——"

"Bai Jove!"

"No, no, nothing of the sort. And say, 'This is mine; this belongs to me, and not to the British nation.' My dear friends and hearers, such a contention is absurd on the face of it. Who cultivates the land? The nation. Who protects it from foreign aggression? The nation. Who imparts to it all the value it possesses? The nation. To whom, therefore, does the land belong?"

"Is that a conundwum, deah boy?"

"It is not a conundrum, D'Arcy. It is one of the deepest and most searching questions of modern times."

"Bai Jove? And is there any answah to it?"

Skimpole blinked witheringly at the swell of St. Jim's through his glasses.

"Yes, scion of an over-fed and pampered aristocracy, there is an answer," he squeaked. "To whom then does the land belong? To the nation. Imagine two men on an island——"

"Weally, Skimpole——"

"Scion of a bloated aristocracy, I——"

"I uttahly wefuse to be wegarded as bloated."

"Imagine two men on an island. One——"

"What island, deah boy?"

"Any island. One cultivates the soil, and the other——"

"But what two men are you speakin' of?"

"Any two men. I am simply giving an illustration——"

"Dinner's ready!" called out Wally.

"These two men on the island——"

"Bai Jove, Skimmy, you're awfully intewestin', old chap, but I weally think I had bettah go in to dinnah," said Arthur Augustus; and he went.

"Skimmy, have you seen Wynn?" called out Figgins.

"No. Figgins, if you have a minute to spare——"

"I haven't," said Figgins.

The New House junior was looking for Fatty Wynn. The fat Fourth-Former seemed to have vanished. He questioned Tom Merry as the latter came towards the house.

"He went round towards the pigsties a short while back," said Tom Merry.

Figgins looked puzzled.

"What on earth could he want at the pigsties?"

"Fellow-feeling, perhaps," suggested Lowther blandly.

Figgins hurried off. The chums of the Shell walked with him, curious to know what Fatty was delaying so long round the pigs' quarters for.

"My hat!" suddenly yelled Lowther. "Look there!"

The juniors had come suddenly upon a curious scene. There was Fatty Wynn, sitting down just in front of the

huge porker who had ruffled the serenity of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

There was an almost loving expression upon the face of Fatty Wynn, and his gaze was fixed dreamily upon the huge porker.

"My word," murmured Fatty, "what ripping sausages he would make!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn looked round.

"Hallo, you fellows! I say, look at this pig! Isn't he a ripper?"

"No time to be introduced to your relations now," said Monty Lowther. "Dinner's ready."

Fatty Wynn jumped up with alacrity.

"Is it? Good! But, I say, isn't he a ripper?"

And Fatty Wynn cast more than one loving glance backward at the prize porker as he went towards the farmhouse.

CHAPTER 9.

A Shock to the System.

TOM MERRY was looking very cheerful as he jumped out of bed the next morning. He jerked the bedclothes off Manners and Lowther, and was rewarded with two ferocious growls.

"Time to get up," he said cheerily. "I say, life on a farm agrees with me. Let's go and see if those Fourth Form kids are moving."

"G-r-r-r!" said Lowther. "There's no rising-bell here. Why can't you let a chap alone for a few extra minutes?"

"It is against my principles to encourage laziness in young people," said Tom Merry severely. "I regard you as being under my charge, and——"

"Oh, cheese it, old chap!"

The chums of the Shell did not take long over their toilet. They went out on the little landing, and bumped at the door of Blake's room.

"Come in!" sang out Jack Blake.

Tom Merry looked in. Blake, Herries, and Digby, in various stages of deshabille, were proceeding with their toilet, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still in bed. The swell of St. Jim's was sitting up, with his knees drawn up under the clothes, and his eyes fixed on his chums with an expression of intense indignation.

"If you thwow any more cold watah in this diwection, Blake," he was saying, "I shall no longah wegard you as a fwiend."

"Get up, then!"

"I wefuse to get up. It's a cold mornin'——"

"Do you expect a tropical morning at this time of the year?"

"Certainly not, but I am not in my ordinawy state of health. A fellow who is on the verge of a sewious illness——"

"My hat, are you beginning that again?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Where do you feel the pain?"

"There is an ache ovah my left eye, and a slightly dwy taste in my thwoat."

"Ah! Is it a dry feeling, as if it had been—been rasped over?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Yaas, wathah; that descwibes it vewy accuwately."

"Then I can tell you what's the matter. You've been talking too much!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"That's what it is, you may depend upon it," said Tom Merry seriously. "It isn't influenza, it's simply the effects of over-talking—what may be termed jawitis."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "I shouldn't wonder!"

"Tom Mewwy, I considah——"

"You can consider the thing settled. It's jawitis right enough. All you have to do now is to limit the output of speech. It's the same as in the manufacturing line, you know—when suffering from over-production, you limit the output."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see anythin' to laugh at in Tom Mewwy's wude and wibald wemarks. I wegard him as an unfeelin' beast!"

"I've diagnosed the case for you, and given you a prescription," said Tom Merry. "I don't see how a fellow can do more than that!"

"I wegard jokes as bein' in the worst of taste, diwected towards a fellow who is on the vewy verge of a sewious illness!"

"Perhaps Skimpole's idea of a shock to the system would work all right," said Monty Lowther, with a grin.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Did I hear you mention my name?" said Skimpole, looking in at the door. "Is my assistance required? If I can unravel any knotty point in the science of——"

"Yes, you're wanted, Skimpole. Gussy is ill—he's on the very verge of a serious illness—and it's pretty certain to be the flu. What would you recommend?"

"A shock to the system, to drive out the seeds of disease, unquestionably," said Skimpole. "If a large quantity of gunpowder were exploded under D'Arcy's bed, I have not the slightest doubt that it would make an end of his complaint."

"And of Gussy too, I should think!" yelled Blake.

"Of course, there would be a certain amount of risk in the experiment, but D'Arcy would be willing to face that for the sake of a quick and perfect cure."

"You uttah ass!" said D'Arcy, throwing all the scorn he was capable of into his voice. "I wegard you as a dangewous lunatic, Skimpole!"

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Got any gunpowder?" asked Blake, in a business-like tone.

"Unfortunately, no; but in a few days some could be procured."

"We cannot leave Gussy to languish in the grip of the flu for a few days," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "He is now on the verge of a serious illness. He has a pain just over his left toe——"

"My left eye, Tom Mewwy!"

"I stand corrected. A pain just over his left eye, and a dry taste in his right throat——"

"You uttah ass! A dwy taste in my thwoat!"

"Ah, that's it! A pain just over his left ear, and a dry taste in his eye. But it really doesn't matter where he's got 'em; so don't interrupt me again, Gussy. The point is, he's got 'em! We haven't any gunpowder, so how are we to give him a sufficient shock to the system to buzz out the seeds of deadly disease?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"The only way I can think of is by turning the bed over——"

"I uttahly wefuse to have my bed turned ovah! I wegard you as beasts! I am on the verge of a sewious illness, and I wequire lookin' aftah. I want my bweakfast in bed this mornin', and I don't feel as if I could eat anythin' but kidneys. I want them devilled, and pway see that they are done nicely, because——"

"You see, it's a bad case," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "His mind is beginning to wander already."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy! I suppose I can have my bweakfast in bed if I like, and devilled kidneys for bwekkah if I choose?"

"Yes—I don't think! It would be quicker and easier to cure you with a shock to the system. Shall we start Skimpole explaining to you the reasons why Socialism should be adopted, or shall we turn your bed over?"

"Really, Merry——"

"Oh, let's be merciful!" said Blake. "Turn the bed over!"

"Stand back, you wottahs! If you touch this bed—I tell you—weally—ow! You feahful beasts!"

Strong hands seized the side of the bed, and in the twinkling of an eye it was turned on its side, and D'Arcy and the bedclothes rolled on the floor. Then the bed was yanked over, and inverted on top of the swell of St. Jim's. A muffled voice came from beneath the pile.

"You feahful wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I no longah wegard you as fwiends!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus struggled out from under the mass of bedclothes and mattresses. He groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye. In his many-hued pyjamas, which seemed to have borrowed their colour-scheme from Joseph's coat, he made a charming picture in the morning sunlight. His indignant and scornful glare only brought fresh yells of laughter from the juniors.

"You wotten wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as wank outsidahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words failed the swell of St. Jim's. He turned away, and began to make his toilet, sniffing with indignation. The idea of having breakfast in bed was dropped, and for some time nothing more was heard of the serious illness that hung over the swell of St. Jim's.

Skimpole had hardly commenced milking, when a sudden change came over the cow. Her head went down and her heels went up—and Skimpole shot skyward.

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole Milks the Cow.

SKIMPOLE was looking very thoughtful. The juniors had poured out of the farmhouse after breakfast, sniffing up the pure air of the meadows. Life on a farm, as Tom Merry had said, agreed with them. It was a very pleasant change from the class-rooms at St. Jim's. Master Wally looked longingly at the geese round the pond, but he remembered Mr. Johnson's stick, and let them alone. He whistled shrilly to Pongo, who was inclined to worry the brown cattle grazing in the meadow.

"Come here, you young bounder!" said Wally, shaking a warning finger at his ragged pet. "Haven't I told you before never to worry cattle near the farmhouse? You'll get a stone on your napper; farmers don't understand dogs! Come along with me, and we'll look for some rabbits! I say, Garge, are there any rabbits hereabouts?"

Garge grinned, and touched his cap.

"Heaps, zir—heaps and heaps!" he said.

"Good! There won't be so many in an hour or two," said Wally. "Come along, Pongo!"

And the hero of the Third Form at St. Jim's walked off, with his mongrel at his heels. Figgins was giving Spot a run, and Herries wore a worried look. Towser had not turned up yet. Herries was beginning to be afraid that the bulldog was lost. He questioned everybody, and everybody answered that he hadn't seen Towser. Skimpole, as we have said, was looking thoughtful. He was gazing at a cow in the meadows, and apparently thinking out some problem connected with her.

"I am thirsty," he remarked presently. "I say, Herries——"

"Well, there's the pump!" said Herries.

"I should prefer a drink of pure milk, fresh from the cow. Will you hold that animal while I milk her?"

"Not much!" said Herries.

The cow did not look very amiable, and she had a business-like way of lowering her horns as she looked at the juniors.

Herries did not feel inclined to come to close quarters with her.

"Really, Herries—— I say, Tom Merry, will you hold that animal by the horns while I obtain a modicum of fresh milk?"

"I don't think!" said Tom Merry.

"D'Arcy—D'Arcy!"

"What is it, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning round. The swell of St. Jim's seemed to have forgotten his impending illness for the present. He was clad in a really natty garb for the country, and his gaiters fitted him like gloves, and the cap he wore looked as elegant as his topper.

"I am thinking of milking yonder cow," said Skimpole, who always talked in book-language, unless he was in a great hurry. "I wish to obtain a modicum of lacteal fluid for my refreshment."

"Why don't you ask Mrs. Johnson for some milk, deah boy?"

"I prefer to obtain it fresh from the cow. I have a glass here, and if you will aid me by holding the cow by the horns, I shall be able to obtain a supply of the lacteal fluid in a few minutes."

Arthur Augustus was always obliging, and ready to run risks for the sake of politeness, but he looked at the cow and hesitated.

"Bai Jove, I don't see how I could hold the beast by the horns without the wisk of soilin' my gloves!" he remarked.

"You could take your gloves off."

"Yaas, but that would only make mattahs worse; I should wun the wisk of soilin' my hands."

And D'Arcy, who seemed to think that he had propounded an unanswerable poser, shook his head and turned away.

"Wait a minute, D'Arcy! Suppose you stand beside the cow, and keep her attention upon you, while I am milking her?"

"Yaas, wathah! I shall be vewy pleased to do that, Skimmy! I have heard that animals can be quelled by the powah of the human eye. I shall be vewy pleased to quell that old bwute by the powah of my eye, if you like!"

"Good! Let us proceed," said Skimpole. And they proceeded.

The cow regarded them with some surprise as they came up—Skimpole with a glass in one hand, and a milking-stool in the other. She looked at them, and then trotted off.

"Bai Jove, we shall have to wun aftah her, Skimpole!"

"Yes. The animal apparently does not understand. Let us pursue her."

They pursued her.

The cow stopped presently, and began to graze. Skimpole cautiously approached behind, while D'Arcy went in front of her. The cow looked at them, but remained still. There was a glimmer in her eyes which meant mischief, but the juniors did not observe it.

"Wight you are now, Skimmy! I am quellin' her with the powah of my eye," said D'Arcy, planting himself before the cow.

"Good! She certainly seems very quiet."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Skimpole placed the stool in position and sat down. The cow certainly was very quiet, but it was only the calm before the storm. Skimpole began to milk into the glass. He had hardly commenced, when a sudden change came over the cow. Her head went down, and her heels went up—and Skimpole shot skyward.

Arthur Augustus started back.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

The glass came down and shattered on the ground. The cow dashed off to another part of the field. Skimpole came down on the ground with a bump that was sufficient, according to his own theory, to shock out of his system any seeds of disease he might have had.

"Ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Dear me! I—I am hurt!" Skimpole stared about him blankly. "I—I trust that was not an earthquake, D'Arcy?"

"No, old chap, it was only the cow."

"Dear me! I feel very much upset!"

D'Arcy could not help grinning. Skimpole looked very much upset, too. The amateur milker blinked round him in amazement and bewilderment.

"Where—where is the cow, D'Arcy?"

"She's gone."

"Dear me! I do not think this would have happened if you had held her tightly by the horns, as I requested you in the first place, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove, I might have gone up into the air instead of you, deah boy. I pwefer it as it is," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I twust you are not hurt."

"I—I feel as if I had had a shock."

D'Arcy helped the genius of St. Jim's to his feet.

"I—I think I will take a rest," said Skimpole. "I will lean upon your arm, if you do not mind, until we reach yonder bench. I do not feel quite strong enough at present for going out. I—I think I will take the opportunity for completing the four hundred and forty-fourth chapter of my book on Socialism. If you like, D'Arcy, I will read aloud to you my notes for that chapter."

Arthur Augustus made a grimace.

"Thanks, awfully, Skimmy, but—but I think I'd bettah go and see what Hewwies is lookin' so wowwied about."

"Oh, that is nothing. He is only thinking of his beastly bulldog, and I could improve your mind wonderfully; and the need for such improvement must have occurred to you. I say, D'Arcy—D'Arcy! Dear me, he is gone!"

Herries was indeed looking worried. Arthur Augustus detested the very sight of the bulldog, but he had a feeling for a chum in distress. He tapped Herries on the arm.

"Haven't you found the bwute yet?" he asked.

"No," grunted Herries.

"Wathah singulah that he hasn't found his way here," remarked D'Arcy. "My young bwothah's mongwel came home all wight."

"My dog Towser isn't always snuffing after his master like that rotten mongrel," said Herries crossly. "He's independent. He comes home when he thinks he will."

"Why don't you teach him to obey ordahs?"

"Oh, of course he obeys my orders!" said Herries hastily. "He never leaves me—I—I mean, except sometimes. What I'm afraid of is that he's gone back to St. Jim's."

"But he couldn't find his way along the wailwoad."

"Towser could find his way anywhere. Don't you remember how he tracked down the burglars who robbed the chapel at St. Jim's?"

"Ya-a-a-as," said D'Arcy doubtfully.

"He could find his way back if I took him a hundred miles. Of course, if he's at St. Jim's he's all right, but—but you know people have a prejudice against Towser. Blessed if I know why. He's a nice quiet dog enough, and never bites you if you don't look at him."

"If you like I'll help you look for the wotten bwute, Hewwies. You know I am pwetty good at followin' twacks."

"You may as well come," said Herries.

It was not a flattering way to accept D'Arcy's offer, but Gussy made allowance for the stress of mind the owner of Towser was labouring under. They set out in search of the bulldog, and did not come in to dinner. It was nearly sunset when Herries and D'Arcy reappeared at the Quarry Farm, looking extremely fatigued and very dusty. But they came without Towser, and D'Arcy confided to Blake that he would see Towser in Timbuctoo before he would be dwagged all ovah the countwy lookin' for him again.

CHAPTER 11.

Rather Wet.

"WHO'S coming to have a look at the quarries?" Tom Merry asked at breakfast the next morning.

"Oh, I'll come and look after you Shell-fish!" said Blake. "I believe it's a rather dangerous quarter. Isn't it, Mr. Johnson?"

The farmer nodded.

"It is that," he replied. "My dun cow fell into one of the quarries time the fence was broke, and she stayed there for two days and nights afore we found her."

Blake whistled.

"Rather rough on the dun cow," he remarked. "I shouldn't like that to happen to you, Merry. I'll come and look after you."

"Thank you for nothing. You can come if you like."

"The quarries ain't worked now," said Mr. Johnson. "There's the old crane and the truck lines still there, but they ain't been worked since they was flooded last spring. The company hasn't raised the money, I hear. It's a dangerous place, and I don't recommend you young gents to go there."

"Oh, we shall be all right!" said Tom Merry. "I shall keep an eye on the youngsters."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"It's a five-mile walk," said the farmer.

The juniors grinned at the idea of a five-mile walk deterring them.

"Then you have to cross the stream on the stepping-stones," said Mr. Johnson, "and the water's high at this time of the year. The stones is slippery, too."

"Well, if we slip off we can pull one another out of the water."

"Faith, and ye're right!" said Reilly. "Sure, I'm for going to the quarry intirely! Maybe we shall find the bull-dog there."

"How could he get there?" said Herries.

"Sure, he might have fallen in like Mr. Johnson's dun cow."

Herries snorted.

"My dog Towser isn't likely to fall into a quarry," he said. "You can trust my dog Towser to look after himself all right."

"Yes, you can trust him to get lost," said Figgins. "I shouldn't wonder if he's at the railway station all the time, waiting to be called for."

"Look here, Figgins——"

"Very likely," said D'Arcy minor. "Ask Mr. Johnson to let Garge inquire for him when he goes up to the station again."

"You young ass, I tell you——"

"Any rabbits in that direction, Mr. Johnson?" asked Wally.

The farmer looked at his hopeful guest.

"Yes," he said, "there is; but it ain't allowed in these parts to poach rabbits."

"Oh!"

"There's been complaints yesterday and the day before," said Mr. Johnson, "that rabbits have been killed round here. I hope that it isn't any of the dogs belonging to you young gentlemen."

Wally gave an expressive whistle. Every eye was fixed accusingly upon him, but he never turned a hair.

"I say, it's rather hard that a dog can't have a rabbit now and then," he remarked. "It's their nature to, you know. My dog Pongo——"

Mr. Johnson looked very significantly at the hero of the Third.

"Mr. Hunk has said to me, he said yesterday, if he catches any dog after his rabbits, he is goin' to hang him in his barn, he said to me."

Wally's eyes gleamed.

"If he starts hanging my Pongo, there will be trouble," he exclaimed. "Why shouldn't old Pongo have a rabbit or two?"

"Because it's poaching, young gentleman, and poaching's no better than stealing," said the farmer quietly.

"Of course, I'd pay for any old rabbits," said Wally, "or Gussy would, which amounts to the same thing."

"Weally, Wally——"

"But I don't think a dog ought to be kept short of rabbits. I suppose Mr. Hunk doesn't want Pongo to grow into a ninny," said Wally, with an injured expression.

"You'd better keep Pongo on a chain," grinned Figgins. "Now, my dog Spot never goes after bunnies unless I tell him."

"He wouldn't know how to if you did tell him," sniffed Wally.

And when the juniors sallied out after breakfast, Wally kept a keen eye on his shaggy favourite. Every minute or two his terribly shrill whistle burst forth to recall the wandering Pongo. Arthur Augustus bore it for some time, stopping his ears whenever he saw Wally pursing his lips up, but at last he could bear it no longer, and he remonstrated.

"Weally, Wally, I must wequest you to stop makin' that fearful wow!" he exclaimed. "It thwows me into quite a fluttah."

"Do you want Pongo to get lost?" demanded Wally.

"That is a mattah of extweme indiffewence to me, Wally, but I weally cannot stand that awful wow you call a whistle. I am on the verge of a sewious illness alweady, and my nerves weally will not stand it."

"Why don't you put a chain on him?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, he'd slip his collar then!"

"You could make the collar tighter."

"He wouldn't like that."

"Well, I agree with young Wally there," said Herries. "I don't believe in making a dog uncomfortable because Gussy has nerves."

"Weally, Hewwies——"

Wally gave a piercing whistle again. Pongo was apparently on the track of a rabbit, for he suddenly darted off through a hedge and disappeared. Arthur Augustus stopped his ears. Thrice Wally sent forth that ear-splitting note, but Pongo did not return. D'Arcy minor made a grimace.

"He's off!" he said, in a tone of resignation. "He's after a bunny."

"You should bwing the little wottah up bettah, Wally. I cannot say I am sowwy that he is off."

"Better go after him," grinned Kerr. "You remember he's sentenced to be hanged by the neck until he's dead if he's caught rabbiting."

"I suppose I'd better," said Wally. "Don't you fellows get into mischief at the quarries, if you go without me."

And D'Arcy minor followed the track of the truant. The juniors resumed their way.

Figgins tapped Fatty Wynn on the shoulder. The fat Fourth-Former was gazing back at the farmyard with a rapt look.

"What are you mooning about, Fatty?" asked Figgins. "Making up some more rotten poetry for 'Tom Merry's Weekly?'"

"Oh, no. I was thinking——" Fatty Wynn sighed.

Figgins looked at him in amazement.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Only——"

"My only hat! Have you caught Gussy's complaint? Are you in love?"

"Oh, rot!" said Fatty Wynn. "I was thinking—— Can't you see that splendid great porker from here? He's routing in the garden."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled Blake. "Fatty Wynn the Second."

"Doesn't he look prime?" said Fatty Wynn feelingly. "Have you ever thought what ripping sausages he would make, Figgy?"

"You cannibal!" said Tom Merry. "Fancy Fatty acting up as a fratricide."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Fatty Wynn. "I was dreaming about that porker last night. The thought of the beautiful sausages he would make seems to haunt me."

"Oh, come on!" said Figgins. "You'll make me hungry if you keep on."

"I'm getting rather peckish myself," said Fatty Wynn, as he reluctantly turned his back on the farmyard. "You fellows were in such a hurry that I didn't have time to make much of a breakfast."

"I saw you put away four rashers of bacon."

"And seven eggs," said Kerr.

"Only five, Kerr, and the rashers weren't big ones. That was all I had, except the cold beef and the bread-and-butter and marmalade. I get awfully peckish at this time of the year, too. Luckily, I thought of asking Mrs. Johnson for some bread and cheese and some sandwiches."

"You weren't likely to forget that."

"Well, it's no good getting into a low state for want of food, when you can afford enough to eat," said Fatty Wynn philosophically. "Do you know, I feel very much for the unemployed in this sharp weather. The poor chaps get hungry, and haven't any grub to eat, you know. It must be awful." And for some time Fatty Wynn looked quite depressed.

The path of the explorers lay towards the hills, that loomed blue in the distance. The quarries, as they came nearer, could be more distinctly seen—great ragged rents in the ground, mostly without a vestige of fence to secure wayfarers from falling in.

"Nice place for a stranger to walk about in on a dark night!" Jack Blake remarked. "There seems to be a lot of trusting to luck in the country!"

"I'm not surprised that the dun cow went in," said Digby. "I don't see how she got over this stream, though."

"The water was low, perhaps; it's low in the summer. Here are the stepping-stones," said Blake, halting. "They don't look too safe, either."

"Bai Jove, wathah not!"

The stepping-stones certainly did not look inviting. The water in the stream was high, and was washing over the surface of most of the stones. They were a very irregular row, of different shapes and heights, at various distances apart. The water made them slippery, and they were very uneven at the best of times.

"Bai Jove, you know, it looks as if we shall get our beastly boots wet!" Arthur Augustus remarked doubtfully.

"Which would be horrid," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I should feel extwemely uncomfy. if my boots were to be dirty for the west of the mornin'!"

"We might carry D'Arcy over," suggested Figgins, with a humorous twinkle in his eye. "I should be pleased to lend a hand."

"Certainly," said Lowther immediately. "I'd be happy to lend another."

"Faith, and it's myself that will help wid pleasure!" said Reilly.

"Bai Jove, that's wathah a good ideah, you know! Would you be vewy careful to hold me quite safely, deah boys?"

"Certainly," said Lowther. "You could depend upon us to——"

"To let you drop into the water," said Figgins blandly.

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Faith, and that's what I was thinkin' myself!"

"I wegard these jokes as bein' in extwemely bad taste."

"Come on, Gussy, we're ready!"

"I uttahly wefuse to be cawwied acwoss the watah! I am on the verge of a sewious illness alweady, and I wefuse to endangah myself!"

"You are quite wrong, D'Arcy," said Skimpole. "A sudden plunge into icy water would probably furnish the shock to the system required to drive the seeds of disease from your system. It would probably have as efficacious an effect as a quantity of gunpowder suddenly exploded under your bed."

"You uttah ass!"

"Well, are you going to be carried?" asked Figgins.

"No, Figgins, I am certainly not goin' to be cawwied."

"Let's get on!" said Tom Merry. "Who's going first?"

Skimpole blinked at the stepping-stones.

"If you like, Merry, I will go first. Crossing a stream in this way, like everything else, simply requires a little brain-power brought to bear on it. I shall have great pleasure in crossing first, and showing you fellows how to do it."

"Go ahead, then!" grinned Tom Merry.

Skimpole stepped gingerly on the first stone. He slid a little and jumped to the second, and the water came up over his ankles, and a splash went back behind him over Herries, who was following. Herries gave a howl.

"You ass! Be careful!"

Skimpole turned round and blinked at Herries.

"Did I splash you, Herries?"

"Yes, you did, you dummy!"

"I am very sorry, and I really think that those expressions are almost rude, Herries. A little happening of that kind should be taken with patience. A true Socialist——"

"Are you going on?" yelled Herries.

"Certainly. But as I was saying, a true Socialist——"

"Get on!" shouted Blake from the bank. "Do you think the middle of a beastly river is the proper place for a speech?"

"Really, Blake——"

"Get on, or I'll shy this rock at you!"

"I am about to proceed," said Skimpole.

And he stepped gingerly on. Whether by luck or care, Skimpole stepped from stone to stone in safety, and drew nearer to the further bank. Herries stepped after him, with his hands in the air, feeling his way a good deal like a tightrope-walker. The others followed, one by one.

"It's all right," said Fatty Wynn; "you've only got to be careful—ow!"

As Fatty spread out his arms, a packet of sandwiches dropped from under his jacket. The fat Fourth-Former made a frantic clutch to save them, and his foot slipped on the wet stone.

Splash!

Fatty Wynn took a header into the stream. The wave made by the immersion of the plump junior soaked the legs of the two or three fellows nearest him, and a chorus of gasps followed.

"Oh!" "Ow!" "Groo!"

"You ass!" roared Blake. "My trousers are soaked!"

"Look at mine!" hooted Manners.

Fatty Wynn came up gasping. Kerr lent him a hand to drag him out. Wynn jerked it, and Kerr's foot slipped on the slippery stone. The next moment he had joined the fat Fourth-Former in the water.

"My hat!" roared Tom Merry. "Are you New House bounders practising diving with your clothes on?"

"Help!" gasped Kerr.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!" gurgled Fatty Wynn.

Figgins and Tom Merry dragged them out. They were dragged into the grass ashore, where they lay gasping like landed fish. Manners, Blake, and Reilly stood gazing down at their trousers, which were wringing wet.

"Well, of all the dummies!" said Jack Blake, in measured tones.

"How c-c-could I help it?" stuttered Fatty Wynn. "I s-s-saw the sandwiches going!"

"Blow your sandwiches! We shan't be able to keep on now. We shall catch our death of cold in these wet bags!"

"I'm going back!" growled Manners.

"Faith, and I think I'll go wid ye!" said Reilly, shivering.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, undah the circs., I think I will accompany you!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I have a feelin' that I shouldn't get acwoss that stweam without wuinin' the polish on my gaitahs!"

And the wet contingent set out for the farm, making remarks all the way to Fatty Wynn. Fatty Wynn, however, bore them philosophically. The sandwiches were gone, and Fatty had no desire to continue the excursion at the risk of finding himself hungry at the quarries, without the wherewithal to satisfy his appetite. Meanwhile Tom Merry and the others who had crossed in safety continued their way.

CHAPTER 12.

In the Quarry.

"THE quarries at last!" said Tom Merry.

The explorers halted. The numbers of the party had been considerably reduced before the quarries were reached. Blake and Manners, Wynn and Kerr, Reilly and D'Arcy had gone back to the farm. Skimpole had not kept on far beyond the stream. He was no pedestrian, and he soon halted to rest, and announced his intention of getting on with the four-hundred-and-forty-fourth chapter of his great book, while he waited for Tom Merry & Co. to return. They promised to come back the same way, and tramped on to the quarries.

Right up to the verge of the excavations grew the rich, green grass, and on the verge flourished ferns and creepers. The juniors halted on the brow of a precipice, which dropped a sheer forty or fifty feet to the lower level.

"Breezy here!" Digby remarked. "A strong wind would shove you over the edge in no time, I fancy!"

"Better keep away from the verge," said Tom Merry. "I'm going to look down, but——"

"So am I," said Lowther; "but you kids——"

"Oh, go and eat tin-tacks!" said Figgins. "I'm going to look down, of course!"

"Now, don't be reckless!"

"Rats!"

And the juniors crawled on their hands and knees towards the edge of the cliff. It was almost as level as a table, and from the clear-cut edge the drop was sheer. Far below they looked into the old quarry.

Far—far below, it seemed! Here and there water glistened in the sun, showing where the remnant of the flood remained. Down below was the remnant of the lines the trucks had run upon when the quarry was working, and an old truck could still be seen, turned partly upon its side, and half-full of rain-water. Opposite the cliff rose a huge crane, with the rope still dangling from the pulley, and, by stretching out his hand, Tom Merry could almost have touched the swinging rope.

"There must be some way of getting down there," Digby remarked.

Tom Merry glanced along the pits.

"Farmer Johnson says it was blocked up with falling rocks when the quarries were flooded," he said. "All the same, I should like to go down."

"Jump on to that rope," suggested Figgins. "You could catch it, and swing yourself down."

Tom Merry shivered at the idea.

"Let's go and look for a way down," he said.

The juniors crawled back from the verge.

A walk of about a quarter of a mile brought the juniors to the slope leading down into the abandoned quarry. As Tom Merry had said, the flood had wrought havoc there, and beams and shattered machinery were mingled with masses of earth and rock.

Tom Merry whistled as he looked at it.

"Rather a climb down there!" he remarked.

Figgins's eyes glistened.

"I'd like to try," he said. "Who's game?"

"Oh, we're all game!" said Herries. "Come on!"

And the juniors set themselves to the task.

They were game enough, but if they had foreseen the extent of the task, it is probable that they would not have undertaken it.

The climb down would not have been an easy one for monkeys. Their clothes were soon muddy from head to foot, and their hands dirty and bruised, and their breath coming in short, quick gasps. They climbed, rolled, and slid down among the debris, Tom Merry and Figgins in the lead.

Suddenly Tom Merry uttered an exclamation. They were clambering down a specially steep spot, and Tom Merry had

just discerned the alarming circumstance that just ahead of them was a sheer drop. How deep it was, he could not say; but there it was, and he shouted to his comrades to stop.

"Hold on!"

"I—I can't!" gasped Figgins. "I—I'm going!"

A tuft of grass he was grasping had given way, and Figgins, clutching vainly at the debris round him, rolled down the steep.

"Good heavens!" gasped Tom Merry.

There was a shout from beyond the drop, and his heart beat again. For a moment his face had gone pale as death.

"All right!"

It was Figgins's voice. It sounded at a good distance, but is showed that Figgins had not broken his neck, as Tom Merry had at first feared.

"All right?" sang out Tom Merry, in return.

"Yes. Hold on there, though—there's no way of getting out again!"

"My hat! Hold on, you chaps!"

"I'm sticking on," said Herries. "Mind yourself—you're going!"

"Phew—great Scott!"

The jutting slate to which Tom Merry was clinging began to slide. Figgins's fall had disturbed the masses of debris, and Tom Merry's hold was gone.

"Stand clear, Figgy!" he yelled. "I'm coming!"

"My hat!"

Figgins stood clear, and Tom Merry came sliding down in the midst of a shower of stones and earth and dust.

The hero of the Shell bumped on the ground, but fortunately the ground here had been sodden into softness by puddles of rain-water, and grass was growing thickly there.

The shock jarred every bone in Tom Merry's body, but he was not otherwise hurt, and in a minute he was on his feet, with a helping hand from Figgins.

"My only hat!" he gasped.

He looked up the way he had come.

There was a sheer drop of eight or nine feet, and beyond that the slope was steep, and, what was more serious, insecure. The whole mass looked as if it only wanted a touch to bring it down in an avalanche.

Tom Merry looked at Figgins, and Figgins looked at Tom Merry, in dismay.

"How on earth are we going to get out again?" ejaculated Tom.

Figgins shook his head.

"Blessed if I know!"

Tom Merry looked up again. He could see nothing of his followers, but it was evident that they were holding on in safety higher up the slope.

"I say, Lowther!"

"Hallo!" sang out Lowther. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, all serene."

"Good! Shall we come on?"

"No; there's no way of getting out again."

"My Aunt Sempronia! What are you going to do then?"

"Haven't an idea."

"Phew!"

"You chaps had better climb back before you get rolled in after us," said Tom Merry. "Go back to the place where we looked into the quarry; we shall be able to see you there."

"Right you are."

"We'll look round for a way out. There may be some other way."

"I hope so. Ta-ta!"

"Ta-ta!" said Tom Merry.

And the sound of the juniors clambering back followed. Tom Merry and Figgins stepped further away to escape the shower of fragments that came rolling over the verge.

"Well, this is a nice go," said Figgins, with an expressive whistle. "I suppose there must be some other way of getting out."

"I hope so," said Tom Merry ruefully. "We'd better look. What's the matter?" he added, as he saw Figgins's features a little contracted.

Figgins grinned rather dubiously.

"I gave my wrist a knock," he said. "It's all right; it's not sprained. It hurts a bit, though. But it's all right. Only——"

"Only what, old chap?"

"Only I don't know how I shall be able to do any climbing, that's all."

"Phew!"

"Anyway, let's look for a way out. There may be an easy climb."

"I don't expect so. But we'll look, anyway."

The two juniors began to search. But it was in vain. Steep walls shut them in, and the galleries piercing the cliffs when they explored them, all ended in blank walls.

They moved along, fatigued with tramping over uneven masses, and came at last under the cliff whence they had first looked into the excavations. Three figures were visible on the top of it, and Herries, Digby, and Lowther waved their caps.

Tom Merry waved his handkerchief in return.

The distance was too great for speech, with the rough wind that was blowing over the moor and through the hollows of the quarry. A shout was caught up by the wind and carried away. Tom Merry saw Lowther's lips moving, but he could hear nothing.

"My hat!" said Figgins, holding his left wrist in his right hand, to ease the pain by compressing it. "It looks as if we're done in."

Tom Merry looked very grave.

It was already close on noon, and if the juniors above had to go for help to the farm, it was probable that the two boys would never get out of the quarry before dark. A cold night in the quarry was not an attractive prospect.

"We must get out somehow," said Tom Merry.

Figgins shrugged his shoulders.

"There's no way out that I can see."

Tom Merry did not reply. He was looking at the rope that dangled from the abandoned crane. His eyes were fixed upon it, and his brow was thoughtful. Figgins, with a look of alarm, nudged him.

"What are you thinking of, Merry? You can't climb that."

"Perhaps——"

"You can't! Anyway, I can't, with my wrist! Don't be an ass!"

"I think I could."

"You can't! You'll break your neck! You sha'n't!"

But Tom Merry's face was setting in an expression of grim determination.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom's Climb.

THE three juniors above, on the brow of the cliff, were watching anxiously. They saw Tom Merry standing with his eyes fixed on the rope, and guessed the thought that was in his mind. Monty Lowther shouted, but his voice was carried away by the wind.

Figgins caught the hero of the Shell by the sleeve.

"You can't do it," he said, again, and his face was white.

Tom Merry gave a short nod.

"I think I can."

"But—but——"

"Look here, Figgy, we can't get out of the quarry, can we?"

"Doesn't look like it, but——"

"If those chaps go for help, when will they get back?"

Figgins looked dubious.

"Before dark, I hope."

"We shouldn't be got out of this before dark. They'll have to get ropes, long and strong ones, too, and I think we should be here till morning."

"I shouldn't wonder. But——"

"You can't climb the rope with your gammy wrist," said Tom Merry quietly. "Of course, if you stay, I stay. But I think if I get out we can get you out."

"How?" asked Figgins.

Tom Merry pointed up to the crane, where the end of the long arm projected towards the edge of the high cliff.

"You see how the rope hangs there. If I get up to the level of the cliff, I can swing myself to a footing."

Figgins shuddered.

"You'll break your neck."

"I hope not," said Tom Merry, with a faint grin. "I'm pretty steady in the napper, you know, and I don't think I'm likely to lose my nerve. Of course, it all depends on the nerve."

"I—I suppose so, but——"

"If I get landed there, with a grip on the rope, we can detach it from the crane, and pull you up on it, Figgy; in a safer spot than this, of course."

"Merry, suppose the rope has rotted; it's been exposed a jolly long time!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It hasn't. It is used to bearing heavy weights; twenty times my weight. It will stand a strain like that easily enough."

"But—but if it should break."

"We'll put our weight on it and see. If it will stand the pair of us at the bottom, it will stand me alone, that's a cert."

"Well, that's so," admitted Figgins.

And the two juniors caught hold of the dangling rope and threw their whole weight upon it. The rope bore the strain easily enough, and would evidently have borne a dozen times as much. So far as the rope breaking was concerned, Figgins's fears were relieved.

"It's all right, you see, Figgy."

"Ye-e-es. But—but I don't like your climbing it. If my wrist was all right I wouldn't let you."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You'd have more confidence in yourself?" he said, laughing.

"Well, not exactly, but——"

"It's all right. I'm going."

"If you lose your nerve——"

"Come, old chap, you don't think me a coward."

"A jolly brave man might lose his nerve swinging up there on a rope," said Figgins, with a shiver. "Don't you understand that if you let go you would be smashed as flat as a pancake down here?"

"I sha'n't let go!"

"I—I don't like it."

"That's all right. Hold the end of the rope to keep it steady, and I'll go up like a monkey on a stick," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

Figgins made no further demur. It was clear that Tom Merry had made up his mind. And if the feat was possible it was the best thing to be done. It would probably rain in the night, and in the quarry there was no shelter. And the juniors would soon be cold and hungry. But could it be done?

Tom Merry grasped the rope with firm hands. He had climbed ropes before, over the wall at St. Jim's, but they had generally been knotted ones. But this rope was thick and easy to hold.

The weight at the bottom held it steady. Figgins watched the School House junior with his heart in his mouth.

Tom Merry slowly but steadily climbed the rope.

Lowther, Digby, and Herries could see him from the top of the cliff, though he looked almost like a speck below at first. They were as white as chalk.

"He'll be killed!" muttered Lowther. "Tom, go back—go back!"

But Tom Merry did not hear. If he had heard he would not have heeded. He climbed steadily, slowly, swinging on the rope, his eyes steadily upward. He knew that if he looked down he would probably fall, yet by a curious perverseness of the imagination, he felt an intense longing to turn his gaze downward. He resisted it, however, and his eyes were on the sky and the edge of the cliff above him.

The extremity of the abandoned crane was on something like a level with the verge where the three juniors stood, but well out of their reach. There was little danger of the crane moving. In the wreck of the quarry-works it had been jammed and rendered useless, and had remained in its present position for months. But if Tom Merry should slip from his hold!

The juniors watched him breathlessly. Higher and higher went Tom Merry, climbing steadily. Higher and higher, while Figgins watched him from below with his heart beating like a hammer.

Higher and higher!

The juniors on the cliff could see him easily now; see his hard, white face, set with determined effort.

Higher and higher!

Now he was near to them; could come within reach by swinging on the rope.

"Buck up, Tom!"

Tom Merry could hear Lowther's voice plainly enough now.

"Stand back!"

They understood. Back from the verge they crowded in haste, to give him plenty of room.

The junior began to swing on the rope. To and fro he went like a pendulum, at every swing almost touching the edge of the cliff.

They watched him with thumping hearts. Thud!

"Tom! Oh, Tom!"

The swinging junior had knocked heavily against the cliff. But it was hard and fast there; no crumbling, no giving way.

Again he swung at it, and this time he sprawled on the summit, still clinging to the rope, and he did not swing back.

Below, Figgins gave a gasp.

"My hat! He's done it!"

Lowther, Herries, and Digby rushed forward to seize the hero of the Shell. Still keeping a firm grip on the rope, Tom Merry was pulled back from the dangerous verge.

"Hold the rope!" he gasped.

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther.

The rope was pulled up from below. As much as possible was dragged in, and cut off with Herries's knife. It would be enough to rescue Figgins, in some rather less thrilling spot at the sides of the old quarry.

Tom Merry sat on the grass and gasped for breath. His arms were aching, and his heart was throbbing fast.

CHAPTER 14.

Pongo's Peril.

LOWTHER slapped his chum on the back, as he staggered to his feet at last.

"I almost thought you were a goner," he remarked. "Thank goodness you scraped through. My heart was in my mouth most of the time."

"So was mine," said Tom Merry, with a faint grin. "Now we've got to lug old Figgins out. He's damaged his wrist, and can't climb."

"We'll soon do that."

Lowther spoke briskly; but the task was not so soon accomplished. It took some time to find a spot where the rope could be lowered down a less precipitous slope, and Figgins could be dragged to the top.

But it was done at last, and Figgins rejoined his chums on terra firma. Half climbing, half dragged, he came to the top, and sank down on the grass panting.

Tom Merry slapped him on the shoulder.

"Well out of that, Figgy, old son!"

"Yes, rather," gasped Figgins; "and I don't want to get into it again, either. I've not got an ounce of breath left in me."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Lucky it wasn't Fatty Wynn," he remarked. "Four of us would never have pulled him up, and he couldn't have remained down there without becoming a cannibal. I should have got nervous when Fatty got hungry. Anybody got my grub?"

"I've got some sandwiches," said Figgins. "Fatty filled my pockets as well as his own before he started out, in case of accidents."

"Then we'll forgive him for being a giddy cormorant. I'm hungry."

And the juniors disposed of the sandwiches with great satisfaction. Then they set out on the homeward journey. Skimpole was still making his notes for the four hundred and forty-fourth chapter of his famous book when they sighted him again. He looked up with a start as Tom Merry smote him on the back.

"Dear me! Is that you, Merry? You haven't been long gone."

"Only three or four hours," grinned Tom Merry.

"Dear me, is it possible! I do not notice the flight of time when I am engaged in composing my book. I am, however, getting hungry."

"Nothing to eat nearer than the farm."

"Then I think we had better return," said Skimpole, getting up, and shoving his big notebook into a capacious pocket. "I have, I think, fully thought out the question of nationalising the land, Merry. To a casual observer, there seem to be some few small difficulties at first in taking that step, but in my book I shall prove clearly that these difficulties exist only in the imagination."

"Yes, let's get on."

"The difficulties, in fact, will be only felt by the present so-called owners of land, who are in a great minority," said Skimpole. "They will suffer to a certain extent—"

"We want to get in before dark."

"But then, under Socialism they will be given an opportunity of working for their living at decent wages, which surely is better than sitting in the marble halls and tessellated

staircases of their palaces, and living upon the labour of others."

"I don't believe that landowners, as a rule, sit upon tesselated staircases," said Lowther. "They have chairs and sofas, like the rest of us."

"I was speaking figuratively, Lowther."

"Then don't. Don't speak at all. March!"

"I wish I could enlighten you as to the——"

"Rats! Get on!"

And Skimpole, with a sigh, gave it up. It was dusk when the adventurers arrived at the farm, and they found Mrs. Johnson growing anxious about them. The tale of their adventures excited great interest. They devoured a high tea with great relish. They were hungry.

"Bai Jove," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, "it is weally wemarkable that you fellows can't go anywhere without me without gettin' into some mischief!"

"It's very singular," assented Blake. "I had a feeling that something would happen to the kids if we left them on their own."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Faith, and I'll kape an eye on you in the future, Tom Merry!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "Where's young Wally?"

"He's been out all day; he hasn't come in yet."

"I expect he's got into some mischief," grinned Tom Merry. "Why don't you keep an eye on him, Gus?"

"Bai Jove——"

"I'm surprised at you, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I suppose I could not be expected to go chasin' all ovah the countwy in search of a young wapscallion and a wotten mongwel."

"I suppose that dog of his'n has led him a dance," said Farmer Johnson. "It will get him into trouble one of these times. Mr. Hunk he said to me that it was the most troublesome little beast he ever see, he said to me."

"We'll go and look for him, if he doesn't get in by dark," said Blake. "I suppose you chaps are too tired to come."

"Then there's something wrong with your supposing apparatus," said Figgins pleasantly. "He's not worth the trouble, but we'll come."

"And we can have a look for my bulldog," said Herries.

"Oh, he's gone for good!" said Figgins. "You should have taught him to stick to you, as my Spot does, you know. Dogs want a lot of teaching."

"You don't call that thing of yours a dog, do you?" asked Herries politely.

"Order!" said Tom Merry.

After the meal—which they made a pretty solid one, very nearly clearing the farmer's hospitable board—the juniors went out to look for Wally. Skimpole remained at home to start the four hundred and forty-fifth chapter of his book, but all the rest went out with Tom Merry. Fatty Wynn cast a glance in the direction of the pigs' quarters.

"Oh, come away!" said Lowther. "You can't have Fatty II. in the party."

"I was thinking——"

"Thinking of pork sausages, or ham sandwiches?" asked Lowther. "Blessed if I believe you ever think of anything else."

"Mr. Johnson has promised me a string of sausages to take back to St. Jim's with me," said Fatty Wynn, unheeding. "While you chaps were fooling about in a quarry today, I've been looking about, and I've learned a lot of things. They make their own sausages on this farm, you know, and I've been watching 'em. They make 'em of real pork, too—nothing like the Chicago stuff, you know. I am going to let Dr. Holmes know about it, so that Mr. Johnson can supply St. Jim's regularly with sausages."

"Splendid!" said Tom Merry. "Very thoughtful of you, Fatty, and the Head is bound to be grateful."

"Well, I think of these things, you know," said Fatty Wynn modestly. "I think a fellow ought always to keep his eyes open to learn things, and to make himself useful. It will be a great benefit to St. Jim's to have really reliable sausages. They're very uncertain articles, you know. There's the butcher in Rylcombe—well, after I learned that he took all the stray dogs of the neighbourhood, I never liked his sausages. Of course, he may have been simply a humanitarian. But a chap in that line of business ought to be like Cæsar's wife—above suspicion, you know."

"My word!" said Digby. "When Fatty starts on the subject of grub, he's as bad as Skimpole on Socialism. Chuck it, Fatty!"

"Oh, I don't expect you to understand these things!" said the fat Fourth-Former, with a sniff. "There's an art in cooking, and an art in eating, and fellows like you don't understand. You just gorge like an animal, without noticing what you eat. Why, there is room for a poem on the subject of sausages alone. Then, to speak of kidney pies——"

"Let's get off before he gets on to the kidney pies." And the juniors quickened their pace, and Fatty Wynn, with a sniff of scorn, dropped the subject.

"We'd better separate, and go round hallooing for Wally," said Tom Merry. "Hallo, hallo, who's that? Talk of the Prince of Darkness!"

A figure loomed up out of the dusk, running towards them at top speed. It was that of Wally. He looked a shocking sight. Pongo had evidently led him a dance. He was wet and muddy from head to foot, his clothes were torn, his boots caked with mud. His face was thick with mud and dust and perspiration, and flaming with excitement.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Wally stopped, with a gasp, and reeled. Tom Merry threw out an arm and caught him. The junior breathed in great gulps, his heart beating like a hammer. Arthur Augustus was at his brother's side in a moment. He could see that there was something wrong.

"What's the mattah, Wally, old man? Is anybody aftah you?" he exclaimed. And D'Arcy clenched his gloved hands, ready to do battle with the supposed pursuer. The rascalities of the scallywag of the Third Form were forgotten for the moment.

"N-no!" gasped Wally. "I—I—oh, will you help me?"

"What's the matter?" said Tom Merry. "What's happened?"

"It's—it's Pongo."

"Pongo! Where's Pongo? What's the matter with Pongo?"

"Yaas, wathah! Explain yourself, deah boy."

"They—they've got him!" gasped Wally. "The little bounder's been leading me a dance all day. Old Hunk's got him."

"Phew!" whistled Tom Merry. "Farmer Hunk?"

"Yes; he's got him."

"Poor old Pongo!" said Figgins, looking sincerely sorry. "It's hard cheese. I suppose he has been killing rabbits?"

"Well, he killed a few rabbits," said Wally. "They've got him, the brutes. I begged the old rotter to let him off, and offered to pay for all the rabbits."

"If Wally offahed to pay for the wabbits, that makes it all wight, as far as Farmah Hunk is concerned," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Of course, it's wathah wuff on the wabbits."

"I don't suppose the farmer is thinking about the roughness on the rabbits," grinned Lowther; "he's on the track for vengeance. I don't see why he wouldn't let himself be squared."

"He's a beast!" said Wally. "He's given Pongo to two of his hands, and they're going to hang him in the barn."

"Poor old Pongo!"

"I was coming to ask you chaps if you'd lend me a hand to rescue him," panted Wally. "I—I went for the brutes, but there were two of them—big fellows—and they chucked me into a muddy ditch and laughed at me. Oh"—the junior clenched his hands furiously—"oh, if they hang Pongo, I'll—I'll——" He broke off with a sob. "They're going to hang him now."

"Bai Jove——"

"We can't stand this!" exclaimed Tom Merry decidedly. "Come on, kids, and we'll rescue Pongo, on condition that young Wally keeps him on a chain while we're staying at the farm."

"Yaas, that's a weasonable condish., Wally."

"I agree—I agree to anything—only come."

"Lead the way, then, kid!"

Wally turned, and led the way. The juniors—some of them rather dubious, but all of them game—followed him. Wally burst through hedge and ditch, bush and briar, running as if he were on the cinder-path, and the others were rather put to it to keep up with him. Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins kept close, and just behind them were Kerr and Reilly, running hard, and the others were strung out at various distances.

A light gleamed ahead. Wally turned round, with an excited gesture.

"That's the place! Oh, I can hear him!"

Through the night silence of the countryside rang the quick, short, terrified yelp of a dog.

"Hurry! Oh, hurry!"

Wally tore on blindly. The barn-door was wide open, and the light of a lamp glimmered from it. The Third-Former of St. Jim's rushed fiercely in.

Pongo was in the sorest strait of his chequered career. Two rough fellows had him in their grip. One had slung a rope over a beam, and the other was holding the dog and adjusting a noose round its neck. He had tied a rag over its mouth, by way of a muzzle, to keep it from biting.

"Ready, are you?"

"Yes; pull the beast up!"

The rope tightened. It was at this moment that Wally dashed into the barn. He ran right at the two executioners,

and the man who held the dog went reeling to the floor under a fierce thump on the chest. The other let go the rope, and grasped Wally, with an oath.

"It's that young imp again!"

Wally clutched up the dog into his protecting arms.

"Help!" he yelled.

CHAPTER 15.

The Sausage Supper.

TOM MERRY and Jack Blake dashed into the barn. Figgins was only a moment behind. They arrived only just in time.

In a few moments Wally would have been hurled out, and Pongo would have been swinging on the rope. But the coming of the juniors of St. Jim's changed the aspect of affairs. In a twinkling the two hangmen were hurled into a heap of straw, and before they could get out of it, the rest of the juniors were pouring into the barn.

"Better go slow," said Tom Merry coolly.

Wally grasped Pongo in his arms. The dog crouched there, whining. The two men gained their feet, but the odds against them were too great. One of them grasped a pitchfork, and the other a broom. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy poured oil on the troubled waters.

"Pway calm yourselves, my deah fellahs," he remarked. "My young bwothah is goin' to take care that his wotten beast doesn't wowwy anybody in future, and you can tell your wespected mastah that, with my compliments. You have been wathah wuffly handled, but these chaps are wathah wuff wottahs, you know. Pway accept this half-soveweign to dwink our health, and say no more about the mattah!"

The glistening golden coin decided it.

"Thankee kindly, sir," said the hero of the pitchfork, dropping the weapon and taking the coin. "It's all right, sir."

"It be," assented the other promptly. "Thankee kindly, sir!"

And they touched their caps, grinning, as the juniors crowded out of the barn. Wally caressed his favourite tenderly.

"Good old Pongo! All right now, old boy! Safe and sound! I say, Tom Merry, I suppose you were joking about keeping Pongo on a chain?"

"I wasn't," said Tom Merry grimly; "and if I find him loose again, I'll—I'll hang him myself."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors made their way back to the Quarry Farm. Wally was a fellow of his word, and during the remainder of the stay at the farm, Pongo was kept from the track of the unfortunate bunnies—much to his discontent.

. . . . . .

The week on the farm ended, as all good things end at last. News from St. Jim's told that the influenza was almost gone there, and so the stay in the country was not prolonged. On the Monday, the juniors climbed into the farmer's waggon with their trunks to go to the station, and Garge took the reins.

Fatty Wynn II. had not been visible for some days, but Fatty Wynn I. carried a special basket, to which he devoted great care during the drive to the station. Whenever Spot or Pongo came near it, Fatty was on the alert. As for Towser, he had not turned up yet, and Herries was almost in despair.

The juniors alighted at the station. There was a sudden howl, and a bulldog rushed forth and greeted Herries. The junior gave a yell of delight.

"Towser!"

Towser it was!

"Towsy! Good old Towser! He's turned up again!"

"I've been lookin' after him for you, sir!" grinned the porter. "He come back arter you left the station the other day, sir, and he didn't seem able to find his way to the farm, so I took care of him for you, sir!"

Herries slipped a two-shilling-piece into his hand.

"Thanks," he said; "you are very good! But you might have let him come to the farm."

"He couldn't find his way, sir."

"Perhaps he didn't want to come," said Herries, with a nod. "As for not being able to find his way, of course, that's all piffle! Towser could find me anywhere, if he liked; couldn't you, Towsy, old boy?"

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Towser.

The juniors entered the train. Herries smuggled Towser into the carriage with him. In spite of his faith in Towser's powers, he didn't mean to lose sight of him again. Towser showed a great and intense interest in the basket carried by Fatty Wynn. The fat Fourth-Former put it up on the rack, and Towser growled.

"He wants that," said Herries, in a tone that implied that he thought Fatty ought to let the bulldog have it.

"I dare say he does," said Fatty Wynn, grinning. "There's pork sausages in that basket, and I saw 'em made myself!"

"Towser likes sausages," said Herries suggestively.

"He won't have any of this lot!"

"I think you might give him half a dozen."

"No fear! I say, you chaps, we'll have a sausage-supper in our study in the New House to-night!" said Fatty Wynn, beaming round upon the juniors. "I hope you'll all come! We shall be back in good time for me to get the cooking done!"

"Good wheeze!" said Tom Merry & Co. heartily.

"Yaas, wathah! Do you know, deah boys, I wathah think I shall not have that sewious illness aftah all. I feel vewy much set up by my stay in the countwy, and, as you know, when I went there I was on the vewy verge of a sewious illness. I feel vewy much bettah, and I shall be vewy pleased to come to the sausage suppah!"

And in the New House that evening the sausage supper was a great success. And when it was over, Tom Merry proposed the health in lemonade of the founders of the feast—Fatty Wynn, and Fatty Wynn II.—and the toast was drunk with much laughter and enthusiasm.

THE END.

Please tell your Friends about this Story.—Ed.

BRITAIN INVADED!

A Powerful and Stirring War Story.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

The Greyfriars School Cadet Corps, commanded by Captain Sam Villiers, scout, are standing about in small groups, talking anxiously, when the clattering of hoofs is heard, and a young farmer from one of the homesteads on the cliffs comes galloping in on a sweating horse, and reins up hastily.

"The furriners are on us!" he cries. "There's a whole fleet o' tugs an' barges an' ships o' war headin' in for Frinton Gap, wi' thousands o' men aboard! They're Germans, an' they're goin' to land!"

Captain Sam Villiers was at his side in a moment.

"How far off are they?"

"Four mile out when I left, an' comin' in fast. I seed the men aboard 'em wi' my owd telescope, an' the sun glintin' on their helmets; an' I've tried to send messages at the telegraph-offices, but none can't get through. They tells me all the wires is cut. Let me go! I must push on!"

. . . . . .

The first German column attack and capture the school after a stiff fight.

However, Sam Villiers and his brother, Steve, manage to escape and gain the Colchester garrison, who have turned out and entrenched themselves for the defence while the main forces come up.

The boy scouts tell their story to the British general, and, after a good sleep, go out and reconnoitre.

Through very powerful field-glasses, Sam Villiers sees that the German commander has pitched his tent on a round patch of flagstones, where a long tunnel he knows of ends.

"By gum, there's no time to explain to you now," said Sam, to his brother. "But come back to camp! I'm going to see our general.

Some minutes later Sam enters General Nugent's tent.

"Well, Villiers," said Sir Sholto, "what is it?"

"If you give me a chance I think I can bring you news worth hearing of the German camp."

General Nugent tapped impatiently with his foot.

"What news can you get me? The position of the enemy is already known. My scouts have informed me of that, and its strength in guns. If you were a wizard, and could tell me the German commander's plans, or capture me the dispatches and plans from his tent table, I might employ you," said the general, with a short, irritable laugh.

"Done!" said Sam.

"Stop him! The boy's mad!" said the general. "He sha'n't——"

But Sam had saluted, and slipped quietly out of the tent, nor did the sentry know which way he had gone.

He left the British lines, and made his way rapidly and silently eastwards in the direction of the German camp.

. . . . . .

Arranging with his brother to be in readiness with two horses to help him escape, Sam gains the old Roman conduit, and walks along the tunnel until he finds himself under the tent of General Von Adler, commander of the Kaiser's Fifth Army Corps. The general was there alone for the moment, so, with a powerful heave, Sam sent the stone toppling over backwards, and swung himself nimbly up through the opening. The German general turned in his chair, extending his hand, to grasp a heavy revolver that lay on the table.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Capture of the German Plans.

Before the German's fingers could touch the weapon, Sam sprang in with a left-handed drive that took the general full under the side of the jaw, and fairly lifted him from the ground.

All the force of the young Britisher's sinewy body went into that blow, and the heavy German was laid flat on his back, striking his head sharply against the corner of a despatch-box on the ground.

Almost at the same instant, roused by the cry, the sentry who stood at the tent-flies rushed in with a guttural shout, and threw his rifle to his shoulder.

Sam had already snatched up the revolver, and a quick snap-shot, without aim, was only just in time to topple the sentry on to his face. The rifle exploded, and the man dropped on his hands and knees, coughing and sinking slowly, with a dead-white face.

The instant the shot was fired Sam darted to the table, and, with a quick glance at the papers on it, caught up a couple of bundles of them and an open map, which he

crammed into the breast of his half-buttoned Service jacket.

Two or three men came rushing into the tent, and Sam, without waiting to greet them, made one leap through the opening of the aqueduct, a bullet whistling over his head as he did so, and landed on his feet in the tunnel. Stooping low, and clasping the precious despatches close with one hand, he whipped an electric torch from his side-pocket and switched the light on as he ran.

He heard the furious oaths of Von Adler overhead, and the shock as one or two of his pursuers jumped down through the opening after him.

He had thrown down the revolver in the tent to have his hands free for the papers, and was weaponless. A couple of pistol-shots spat viciously down the dark tunnel without effect, and he heard his pursuers blundering and swearing in his wake. The foremost man came along as fast as Sam himself; but the young scout, only keeping his electric torch lighted till he had dodged past the pile of stones and bricks, snapped it out as he scuttled round the curve, and left the tunnel in darkness.

Five seconds later, what he had expected occurred. His pursuer, blundering along at full-speed, tripped over the unseen pile of bricks, and came down with a crash of accoutrements and side-arms that made the tunnel echo. A moment later the man behind fell over him, and Sam suppressed a grim chuckle as he sped onwards, and heard them groaning and swearing in the dark.

Once fairly round the curve he switched on the lamp again, to be sure of making no mistake himself.

Speed was everything. He knew they would be scouring the neighbourhood outside to try and find where he emerged, and his best chance was to get to the opening first.

In a very short time the white star of light grew larger and larger, and when at last the entrance was reached Sam threw down the silver lamp, and buttoning his jacket over the despatches, prepared to make his dash for life.

He paused a moment behind the screen of bushes, heard a body of mounted men gallop by, calling to each other, and as soon as they had passed he left the tunnel swiftly and dashed out among the gorse-bushes, crouching low as he heard another patrol approach.

One glance across the hillside showed him that the main hue-and-cry was well away to the right, where half a regiment was searching busily among the bushes with fixed bayonets, and mounted men were directing the operations. Up the hillside the whole German camp was humming, like a wasps' nest stirred up with a stick.

"The beauties don't count on that curve in the tunnel," thought Sam, as he seized his chance and streaked across the open ground to the wooded slopes on the other side. "And until those beggars who followed me get a light, they'll be a jolly long while groping their way through!"

Away he went among the trees, and at that hour Sam seemed to have eyes all round him. The neighbourhood was full of straggling scouts, all thrown out to seek for the audacious raider of the general's tent. Three times he had to crouch, and wait while they rode past, one big chestnut charger leaping clean over the bush in which he lay hidden.

Capture meant death, swift and certain—a return to the German camp as a prisoner; a firing-party; a volley; and within the hour he would be in a newly-dug grave.

In spite of all the risks, Sam thought he was clear of it all till he had to cross a bare, open space on the crest of the slope. A shout was suddenly raised by a scout on foot some distance away, and the man waved frantically to the nearest mounted squad.

They were four hundred yards off—a little posse of six Uhlans—and wheeling as they saw the fugitive, they set spurs to their horses, and came after him as fast as they could gallop.

"My kingdom for a horse!" thought Sam, as he dashed away at full-speed. "Can I reach Cooper's Spinney in time? Will Steve be there?"

He ran as he had never run before. Dashing through a hedge, he led the Germans over the most broken country he could, cutting through belts of trees and sedgy bottoms, and so quick an eye had he for country which would give him the advantage, that he kept ahead for some time. Still the pursuers gained fast, and the lances behind him came closer and closer, while Cooper's Spinney—a little hollow in the next valley—was still distant.

It was only by a clever dodge through the middle of a farmyard, breaking off to the right and losing sight of his pursuers for a minute or less, that Sam was able to reach the spinney at all, and as he entered it the lances were not two hundred yards behind. It was his last hope. Would Stephen be there, and had he managed to steal the horses?

Sam's heart leaped wildly as he saw at the end of the little wood the alert form of his young brother sitting on a smart bay hunter, and holding the bridle of a second horse—the black charger they had captured the day before. Stephen waved to his brother, who came sprinting through the wood towards him as the Uhlans galloped round the sides to cut him off.

"Come on, Sam; they're after you!" cried Stephen, as if his brother did not know it too well. He had only just caught sight of the pursuers.

"Ride!" cried Sam, throwing himself into the saddle of the black, and shaking the rein free. "Ride, if you never rode before! I've got the papers!"

Out of the wood they plunged like an avalanche. Both the boys' horses were fresh, and fretted with waiting; those of the Uhlans were already half winded with their ride over heavy ground. But two of them had doubled the end of the wood, and came thundering down upon the boys just as they cleared the hedge. The Germans were just a fraction too late, and the lance of the nearest whistled past within a yard of Sam's back as the Uhlan crossed behind him and made a wild thrust.

"Verfluchte Britisher!" shouted the German savagely, wheeling round to follow, as Sam dashed away like an arrow on the black charger, and the rest of the Uhlans joined in the chase with a shout. Stephen wheeled away to the left, right across their line, trying gallantly to draw them off his brother, that the despatches might be saved. But they did not follow him, having orders to hunt down the escaped raider at all costs.

Sam urged his beast along madly, clearing the fences in his stride. His horse was fresh but heavy, and he had no whip or spurs. The Uhlans rowelled till their horses' sides ran with blood, and slowly they drew upon him.

He measured the distance with his eye, and saw they must catch him on the open ground below the British camp at the pace they went. He was beginning to despair of reaching his goal. The lances were close behind him, when a ringing shout was heard away on the right. Sam gave one glance, and an answering cheer broke from his lips.

Right down upon the Germans swept a full patrol of ten British Hussars, their horses' bellies to the ground, and their swords flashing in the sun. They suddenly burst round the bend of a belt of trees, and before the Uhlans realised that the tables were turned, the Hussars dashed into them with a cheer.

Sam, galloping furiously on up the rise, only saw the conflict out of the tail of his eye. The Uhlans went down, horse and man, in the encounter, but the young scout could not wait to see it. His business was to reach his general with the papers, and Stephen, on the bay hunter, was close behind him.

Right into the British lines he rode, past the sentries, who let him through, for their officers on watch had seen the encounter below; nor did Sam pause till he pulled up his smoking horse before Sir Sholto Nugent's tent. He threw himself off, and, being admitted at once, strode inside and pulled out his precious packet, which he handed to the general.

"The despatches from General von Adler's table, sir," he said briefly.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed the aide-de-camp, putting up his eyeglass. "You don't say so!"

How No. 3 Battery Covered the Retreat.

General Nugent took the packets from Sam's hand, and glanced at them. For a moment he seemed too surprised to speak.

"Are you trying to play with me, Villiers?" he said, with a stern glance at the boy.

"Just look through them, sir," said Sam, pointing to the packet.

Sir Sholto opened the despatches quickly. The colour leaped to his cheek, and his eye brightened at the first look.

"My word," he muttered, "this must be a miracle! Tell me quickly, boy, how did you come by these? I must be sure of this!"

"It was quite simple, sir," said Sam, as Sir Sholto rapidly ran his eye over the despatches. "My brother and I know this country well, and we noticed this morning through a pair of glasses that the German commander had pitched his headquarters tent over the paved top of an old aqueduct that Steve and I discovered last term. It opens a long way from the camp, so I went through it, and bobbed up in General von Adler's tent.

"There was a bit of a scuffle, and I had to shoot the sentry, an' the general got damaged, too; but I grabbed as many of the papers as I could, and bolted down the aqueduct. My brother was waiting for me with horses, and we were chased

up to the hill here, where one of your patrols saved us from capture. Those papers came from General von Adler's table, and I hope they're the ones you want," said Sam simply.

The general scarcely seemed to hear. He was running through the despatches and maps rapidly, as though life depended on it. In dead silence he examined them all, and then, turning quickly to his aide-de-camp, he gave his orders rapidly.

"Send two companies of Engineers instantly to prepare to blow up the bridges over the Colne! Warn Captain Creighton to place his battery at once on the spur of hill on our right flank, the Devons and Rutlands to withdraw instantly towards Wivenhoe, under cover of the rise, and guard the retreat of the line regiments. The German Fourth Army Corps is closing in on us from Manningtree, while Von Adler attacks from the front!"

He whirled, and suddenly grasped Sam's hand in his with a quick grip.

"Your pluck and nerve have saved us from being caught like rats in a trap!" he said. "There is no time to tell you now of the service you have done us. These despatches hold the whole key to the German plans. Sentry, my horse—quickly!"

The whole force was buzzing in less than a minute, as if Sam's news to the general had dropped a bombshell in it. Not knowing what was in the captured despatches, neither of the boys were sure what had happened; but the orders flew round like hail, for Sir Sholto was a man of action, not of speech, and Sam saw that the plan of defence was changing. It was just then that they met the aide-de-camp galloping back as they hurried out of the tent, and Stephen held his horse as he entered, and quickly emerged again.

"I believe I've got to touch you for £50!" grinned Sam.

"You shall have it at my quarters to-night, if we're both alive!" said the aide, springing into the saddle, "for I never paid a bet so willingly. You're good 'uns, you two, bai Jove!"

He galloped away in a cloud of dust, just as a scout whirled in to report.

"The Germans are moving on us, sir!" he cried, as the general appeared. "Their advance guard has started!"

"An' we're just in time, thanks to the kids!" said the general, in his moustache, as he cantered away.

The first scream of the German shells was heard overhead, and instantly two British batteries replied. The whole formation had been altered, and the boys were at sea as to what was going on, till they came upon their acquaintance, the adjutant, who for the moment was waiting with a company while two battalions of infantry filed rapidly by.

"Hallo, kids!" he said cheerfully. "You're just in time to see us skedaddle."

"Skedaddle! What do you mean?" said Stephen indignantly. "Skedaddle before a pack of Germans!"

"Not exactly that," said the adjutant; "but we've got to take up a position where we can whack 'em better. The old man's got news—deuce knows how—that another German Army Corps is moving down from the north to cut us off, which would make this place just a rat-trap for us, with old Von Adler in front. There's just time for us to get through, an' place ourselves on the other side of the Colne, where we can hold out against both lots of 'em, and sock 'em in the neck if they tackle us. Another half hour, and we'd have been cut off and wiped out to the last man; but, thanks to this news, we're safe, most of us. Oh, lord, but I'm sick about it!"

"Why?"

"Why? Because I've got to retreat with my regiment to the new position. There'll be eight squadrons of mounted infantry an' a battery left here to hold Von Adler back while we get away, an' they'll have all the fun."

"What'll happen to 'em?" said Steve.

"They'll get wiped out, I'm afraid," said the adjutant gravely. "They've got to be sacrificed, that the bulk of the brigade may be saved."

"By gum," exclaimed Sam, "they're the forlorn hope, then! Ain't there any hope for them?"

"I should say not, for the Germans'll be closin' in from the north by then. There's just a sportin' chance—say, twenty to one. Some of the mounted infantry'll be able to scatter an' save themselves at the last, maybe, but I think the battery's safe to get mopped up. There goes the bugle! I'm off! You'd better come too, kids!"

But the boys remained where they were, close to the tracks of the troops, and one by one, at a rapid march, the line regiments and cavalry filed by, making, with all speed, for the distant line of the River Colne and the slopes behind it up to Colchester. Every now and then German shells came soaring high over the rising ground that sheltered the march, and burst with rending crashes close to the serried ranks of men. One exploded in the midst of a squadron of Lancers, and killed a dozen men and horses; but that was mere chance, for the gunners were firing by guess.

"It seems beastly," sighed Stephen, "to be hooking it like this."

"We aren't hooking it, you young ass! We're takin' up a stronger position, an' the general's as smart as they make 'em! It takes a jolly good man to make up his mind an' do the right thing in such a hurry. He's hit on the only plan for saving the bulk of his forces. Gosh, there comes another shell! Listen to our guns hammering back at 'em!"

"The doomed battery," said Stephen, "the one that's got to stay an' be wiped out. They've got to stay an' face it."

The boys glanced at each other.

"Then we'll stay, too," said Sam. "Who knows, we might be useful. If it comes to a ride for our lives at the end of it, we're equal to that. We've had a bit of practice."

"I'm game," said Stephen. "With a horse each we can hang on till the last minute, an' we shall learn somethin'. We've had no orders, an' we're on our own."

"Where are the horses? What did you do with 'em?"

"I took 'em out of harm's way behind the lines, an' tethered 'em to a tree while you gave the general your despatches. Come on, I'll show you!"

"Blow it all, somebody'll have collared them, an' we can't do anything without horses! You oughtn't to have left them, kid!"

On hurrying to the spot, however, they found one of the horses—the Uhlan's black charger they had captured at Greyfriars. Stephen's horse, the chestnut hunter, was gone.

"Serves you right!" said Sam, loosing the black. "Some thief of a mounted infantryman has bagged him, of course, because his own mount's gone lame."

"Well, you can't talk, after helpin' yourself to everything you could lay your hands on," said Stephen. "Shall I go an' steal another?"

"No chance of that now—the whole camp's gone. The black'll have to carry us both, like he did before, if it comes to a run."

The boys made a wide circle, and went round to the back of the battery, which had placed itself on a high spur of ground. They did not go right up to it, nor let themselves be seen, for fear of being ordered away; but, taking advantage of a hollow in the rear, Sam made the black charger lie down—as all dragoon and scout horses are trained to do—well under cover, and the boys laid themselves flat behind the whin-bushes, where they could see all without being seen.

"My great James," muttered Sam, "this is war at last! Look at the beggars coming!"

Right away across the rolling plain, like the inhabitants of a score of anthills on the march, came Von Adler's army corps. The German legions, spreading out or closing in in all directions, were moving steadily towards the British position, while three batteries on the heights sent a hail of high-power shells pelting over the slope. They came screaming overhead, and bursting with a fiendish noise, and the continuous crash was deafening.

The mounted infantry General Nugent had left behind were answering with a cool, steady fire from the trenches. Their horses were behind the hill, held ready for the final dash for life, one man to every four beasts, where the rifle-fire of the enemy could not reach them. One hissing shell burst within thirty feet of the boys, flinging the dirt and stones over them, and one of the British guns was already silenced and its crew shattered.

It was war—the grim, deadly reality, bringing death and disaster with it, and it was the first the boys had seen of a great force advancing in full strength, and in fighting formation. So terrific was the hail of rifle-bullets and the destruction dealt by the guns, that the boys were dumb-struck and bewildered. Far away to the right, on their own rear, a dull boom was heard, and another.

"See!" said Sam, pointing back where the smoke rose. "Nugent's sappers are blowing up the bridges over the Colne. They're only leaving one. He's got the most of his forces across already."

The Germans saw the move by which the British general had tricked them, and were pushing ahead their men with all speed to try and cut off the retreating columns. As Nugent's troops passed rapidly to the Colne and over it, the German batteries played on them heavily, and inflicted a good deal of loss, but the range was long and the time short.

Our mounted infantry and the plucky British gunners left behind to cover the retreat, directed their whole efforts on keeping back the enemy's legions that were racing to prevent Nugent's regiments from getting across.

Our battery, taking no notice of anything else, poured its shells into the attacking German battalions which threatened to cut up the retreat. The German guns hammered them, and they hammered the oncoming regiments and cavalry. It was a race as to whether the German guns silenced our

(Continued on Page 27.)

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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.

THE TWELFTH SET.

No. 67.....

No. 68.....

No. 69.....

No. 70.....

No. 71.....

No. 72.....

KEEP THESE PICTURES BY YOU UNTIL NOTICE IS GIVEN TO SEND IN.

BRITAIN INVADED! (Continued.)

own before the latter could check the invaders, who were striving to stop Nugent's troops from getting safely across the Colne.

"We're holding 'em!" cried Sam excitedly, as the oncoming legions were thrown into confusion by the British shells. "Our men are all but across!"

"There go two more of our guns!" groaned Stephen, as two crews were demolished and their pieces dismounted.

"But they've done their work!" cried Sam, as the last of the British battalions doubled over the Colne, and a minute later a muffled boom told that the bridge by which they had passed was blown up by Nugent's sappers. "The brigade's saved! We've done 'em!"

Steve raised a cheer, when suddenly he wheeled round and pointed to the northward.

"By gum, look there!"

Moving down on what would have been the British left flank if Nugent had stayed, came a second mighty force, even bigger than Von Adler's. They were yet far distant; but already an advance guard of cavalry was sweeping towards the hill.

"The other German army corps from Manningtree!" exclaimed Sam.

"Gosh, now they'd have wiped our brigade out if Nugent hadn't had the news in time!" returned Stephen excitedly.

"Now they'll only wipe us out instead," said Sam grimly. "See ..."

He pointed to three German battalions and a squadron of cavalry from Von Adler's force that were making ready to charge the hill, as the last British guns were silenced. One of these was still firing, till a shell from the overwhelming force of the German batteries wrecked it and killed the gallant crew that served it. The other had swung round to face the oncoming squadrons from the north, and was pouring its fire into them. Then the breechlock jammed, and a withering hail of shrapnel cut down the gunners who served it. The last British gun was silenced.

"They've got us!" said Sam grimly, as the converging squadrons of cavalry came sweeping in on either side, their swords flashing in the sun, and the loud "Hoch, hoch!" of the German troopers rent the air. "Get your little rifle to work, Steve; we may as well go out fighting."

How the Black Charger Saved the Last Gun!

Stephen grasped the Lee-Metford he had beside him, his heart beating wildly.

Perhaps, at that moment, both the boys wished they had left with the rest of the forces. The sudden onslaught of the Prussian cavalry, sweeping in from both sides, seemed to cut off all chance of escape.

The ghastly scene before them on the little hilltop—the torn bodies and the wrecked guns—spoke plainly of the fate that awaited them. For a moment Sam had thought of making a dash for it, with his brother, on the black horse; but so forlorn a chance did it seem, now that the second squadron of cavalry appeared on the rear side, that he thought it useless. Their only chance was to hide in the gun-bushes, and hope to be overlooked.

A cry from Stephen roused him.

"They're horsing the gun! They're goin' to try and save it!"

To the surprise of both the boys, a team of four fine horses, with a gunner astride the off-leader, came dashing up to the only gun that was standing—the one whose breech had jammed—and, swinging round, were hitched on in a moment. Sam had thought her whole crew was killed—the driver alone remained, and, with the man on the leader, had the great piece round in a twinkling, and dashed off at a gallop as the flashing German squadrons came thundering up the slope.

"By gum! If they can try it, we will!" cried Sam, pulling the black charger to his feet, and springing into the saddle. "Up behind, Steve, quick! There may be a way across the river yet!"

Away they swept, like a whirlwind, dashing down the slope, straight for the distant stream. To go that way had seemed folly to Sam—it was the only way open, but now the bridges were gone, and the enemy pressing forward, he had thought it madness.

But the gunners—the only ones surviving of the whole gallant battery—thought otherwise, and Sam guessed they knew what they were doing. The gun was no mere field-gun, but one of the powerful Royal Artillery pieces, and it was worth any desperate venture while a chance remained of saving it from the enemy's clutches. It went thundering down the hillside in great jerks and bounds, the stout horses with their bellies to the ground, and the man on the limber drove as only the horse-gunners can drive.

Taking a sweeping curve round the base of the hill, the gunners gained a long lead, for they had already a good start, and the German hussars behind were thrown out by the rough ground, and had to make a circuit. Sam and Stephen, left behind by the team, galloped furiously along in its rear.

There was no one to help either gunners or boys. The mounted infantry had been nearly demolished, and the survivors had already fled to the westward. A vicious hail of bullets sang round the fugitives from a German battalion that had gained the hilltop, but the two squadrons of cavalry were now away behind, riding like the wind to capture the prize.

"If there's a way across, the sweeps won't catch us;" cried Sam. "They'll save the gun, an'—ah!"

With a lurch and a stagger the off-lead horse of the gun went down heavily, shot through the head. The wheels passed over the body of the gunner who rode it, and the gun was checked.

"They'll never do it with three horses!" cried Sam, in dismay. "They're as good as caught——"

"Then let's give 'em ours!" shouted Stephen. "Bring up alongside!"

"Well done, Steve!" cried his brother.

There was no time to think of their own chances, or speculate on the odds. The deed was no sooner thought of than done. Sam shouted to the driver, the next moment they had pulled up alongside the gun, and Stephen had jumped down.

The horse-gunners do not need telling what to do in an emergency. In a twinkling the driver had taken the traces off the dead horse and hitched the black charger in his place as off-leader.

"You'll have to ride him!" shouted the gunner to Sam, bounding to his place again on the gun. "Keep him on the right leg, an' sit for your life! Jump up here on the limber, kid!" he cried, pulling Steve up as he lashed the horses to a gallop again. "Here's the Dutchies down on us!"

Away went the gun in a cloud of dust, the horses flying like mad things. The delay had been all but fatal, for the pursuing squadron was now close upon them; the furious drumming of the horses' hoofs making the very ground shake. Stephen cast a look behind, and saw the flash of the sabres, and the grim, bronzed German faces glowering as they swept on in a cloud of dust.

"Brace your feet on the limber, kid!" cried the driver, steering with amazing skill; his eyes bent fiercely on the course before them. "If you get jolted off, you're done for! Scott, I'd give both my eyes to do the beggars now! There's the river, ahead!"

"Can we get across?" exclaimed Stephen. "Is that a way in front?"

"It's the last bridge!"

"I thought they were all blown up!" gasped Stephen, the words jerked out of him as the gun bounced and tore along over the rough mead.

He stared ahead through the dust, bewildered by the noise and speed, and, to his surprise, saw right in front, the pile-built wooden bridge over the Colne, with three or four khaki-clad figures on the far side watching the chase anxiously.

"Them's sappers! They've mined the bridge, but they've holdin' up to let us get across!" coughed the driver hoarsely. "By snakes, but if we can keep in front till we reach it, those pigs behind'll get a good old surprise!"

"They've got us!" thought Stephen, but he did not say so.

It seemed to him hopeless, as he took another glance back, that they could escape the swords behind. But that the German horses had travelled far, and were nearly spent, the gun would have been captured before now.

"On, on!" yelled the leader of the troop, a purple-faced.

white-moustached German, spurring his beast till its sides were red. "Spurt on, some of you, and cut them off!"

"We have them, right enough!" growled a deeper voice beside him, nearly drowned in the roar of the hoof-beats.

"Hi, you on the leader!" shouted the driver. "D'ye see the bridge ahead?"

"Yes!" called Sam, without looking.

"Keep that black beast o' yours straight, then, if you love your life! It's touch an' go!"

The galloping squadron was not twenty yards behind when pursued and pursuers dashed up to the bridge; and, shortly before they reached it, the men in khaki on the other side suddenly left their places, and ran swiftly, shouting to the driver as they went.

"They've fired it!" cried the artilleryman, lashing his horses into one last effort. "Now for the harvest of war! It's us, or they!"

Stephen scarcely understood what he meant, for the noise drowned the shouted warning of the sappers. The gun thundered across the bridge, Sam lashing the black charger with the slack of the reins. One furious dash, and they had gained the other side. The Colne was passed, and a fierce shout broke from the driver's throat as Stephen looked back.

He had barely time to catch one glimpse, when an amazing thing happened. The on-rushing Germans reached the bridge and dashed on to it at full speed. It disappeared beneath their horses' hoofs, and then came a mighty, ear-splitting crash. Men, horses, and timber were blown bodily into the air by a fearful explosion, that seemed to rend the very sky.

In that single fraction of a second, bridge and troop were wiped from the face of the earth, and the rescued gun, barely out of reach of the explosion, swept onwards along the base of the hill, as the maddened horses broke from all control.

The gun was saved!

The Germans in Check.

The fearful shock of the explosion made Stephen reel so, that he all but fell under the gun-wheels. By luck and instinct, he managed, somehow, to cling on as they went flying along at the hardest pace yet, for the crash behind had sent the gun-horses nearly frantic. At last, by turning them straight up the steep slope, the driver stopped them, and Sam slipped down from his lathered horse as the driver and Stephen sprang off the limber.

"Put it there!' roared the artilleryman, holding out his horny hand, and giving Sam a grip that nearly broke his fingers. "You, too, kiddy!" he said to Stephen. "By the living hookey, we owe it to you an' your horse that the dirty Dutchies didn't get the gun! Blazes, but you're a plucky pair o' kids!"

"It was a near thing!" said Stephen, looking very white, as he glanced back, for the river was an uncanny sight to see. Nothing remained of the bridge but its two ragged ends, and the sluggish stream was half-choked with the ghastly remnants of the disaster to the Prussian troop. The few remaining, who had not reached the bridge when the fatal moment came, were galloping for their lives back to the distant German lines.

"Well done, the horse-gunners!" called the four engineers in khaki, running up as the gun came to a standstill. "They deuced nearly had you that time, driver! Why, hallo! Those are the kids who rode into camp yesterday with the news!"

"Kids they may be, but old Nugent owes 'em this gun!" said the artilleryman. "You never saw anything so smart——"

"Oh, stow it, an' let's get into camp," laughed Sam, adding: "The horses aren't good for much more. How was it the bridge blew up just in time?"

"We laid the mines to it long before," said the subaltern of the engineers, "and when we saw you chaps making a dash for home, we waited for you. As soon as you'd cleared the bridge, I signalled my men in the rear to touch it off—it's done by electricity, you know—and he lifted the whole lot of 'em into the air. It's a fine score."

"I thought you were firing the mine with fuses, sir," said the artilleryman. "I never reckoned they'd come on when they'd spotted you—expected they'd see what was up."

"Not they; they were too keen on cutting you off. They'd nearly got you, as it was. Our gunners with the brigade couldn't fire while you were so close to the Germans—the range was too long, an' they'd have wiped you up as well. Nugent's all right now; his guns command the whole river, and there isn't a bridge left. Come along into camp; we've got to report. I say, you kids must join the engineers when you grow up."

"Grow up? Confound your cheek!" said Sam.

"Sorry!" said the subaltern, laughing; "but I mean we'd be jolly glad to have you. Ours is the corps, you know."

"Engineers be blowed!" growled the artilleryman, under his breath. "They must be horse gunners, o' course."

"We're scouts, if we're anything," said Sam, laughing.

"Well, that's better fun than either, I dare say," replied the subaltern. "None of the other guns got away, did they?"

"Wiped out, sir," said the gunner laconically. "There's better men than me left up on the hill there."

Stiff and weary, the little party journeyed on to the British position, Sam once more astride on the black charger; and as they trotted in past the sentries, a ringing cheer was raised on every hand. The young adjutant was the first to receive them.

"By Jove, you youngsters are going it!" he said. "We saw the whole thing, an' there isn't a corps in the brigade that wouldn't fight to have you. I can tell you that! The general wants to see you at once!"

Sam and Stephen went straightway to the headquarters, where General Nugent received them heartily.

"I'm ceasing to be surprised at anything you two youngsters do!" he said. "I never expected to save one of those guns. As for the rest, I'm free to tell you that by getting me those despatches from Von Adler's camp, you enabled me to pull my brigade out of the ugliest trap ever laid."

"Are our forces all right now, sir?" asked Stephen.

Sir Sholto laughed.

"It isn't usual for a C.O. to answer questions like that," he said; "but after what you've done for me, I'll tell you that we've a position here that can hardly be taken, and with reinforcements and fresh batteries hurrying from the west to support us, we can keep the Germans in check till we're strong enough to strike. They've got us at a disadvantage, you see, by this sudden raid, and they're three to one. But the Kaiser has a tough job in front of him before he leaves his mark on England," added the general grimly.

The boys listened eagerly. Like most of those who are in the thick of things, and doing the fighting, they had heard much less of the outside news, or how the great invasion had been brought about, than those who were out of it, and had nothing to do but wait and read the news. Then Sam broached the subject he had at heart.

"Will you give us something to do, sir, if you think we're good enough?"

"Yes," said the general decisively. "It's irregular to use youngsters who are under age, and not in the Service; but plague take the regulations! Now you've shown what you can do, I shall use you. I've lost several scouts in this affair, good men all of them, but they didn't know the country in the way you do. I'm going to give you a dangerous job, and one that I believe only you boys could do."

(Another long instalment of this splendid war story next Thursday.)

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