"TOM MERRY'S TRIP" & "BRITAIN'S REVENGE."

VOL. 4. NO. 89.

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Grand Long Complete Tale by Martin Clifford.

The Story of the
ST. JIM'S JUNIORS.

FATTY WYNN GETS HIS OWN BACK!

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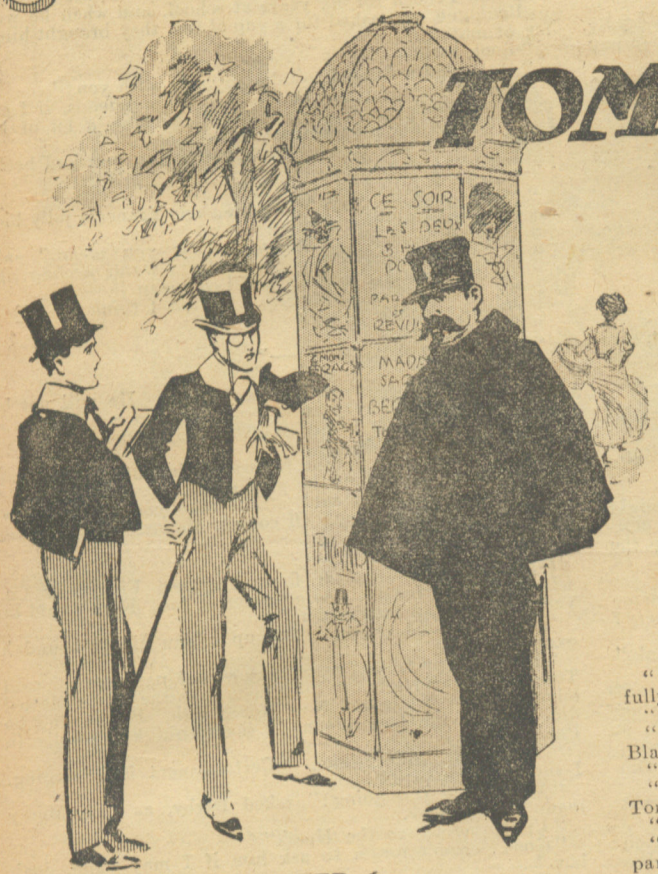


TOM MERRY'S TRIP

A Grand, Long Complete Tale of the Juniors of St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.
Great News.

"TOM MERRY!"

No reply.

"Tom Merry!"

"Tom Mewwy!"

"Wake up, you ass!"

Tom Merry started.

He was sitting in the window of his study in the Shell passage of the School House at St. Jim's, with his legs dangling inside, and his shoulders resting in the ivy that clung round the window-frame. It wasn't a safe place to choose to sit in, but Tom Merry apparently hadn't thought of that. He had a letter in his hand, and he was reading it with close attention, when three or four juniors appeared at the door of the study, and bombarded him with remarks.

They were Blake, Herries, and Digby and D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form. They had looked in to speak to Tom Merry, but they found the hero of the Shell so absorbed in his letter that he was quite deaf to their remarks.

Hence their remarks rose crescendo till Tom Merry at last looked up.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the junior in the window. "That is a wathah dangewous posish, deah boy, and any sudden shock might send you down into the quadwangle, you know."

"Turn your face away, then," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"I wegard that wemark as oppwobwious. I——"

"What's the matter with you, Merry?" demanded Jack Blake. "Here I've been——"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake."

"I know that, Gussy. Here I've been shouting at you, Tom Merry, for five minutes——"

"Bai Jove, we haven't been here a minute, you know."

"Well, one minute, then," said Blake. "I'm not particular about a minute or two. Here I've been shouting at you for one minute, as Gussy is so exact——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"And you haven't answered a word. What's in that letter—tin?"

"No."

"Who's it from?"

"The chap who wrote it," said Tom Merry blandly.

"Look here, this is no time to be funny. We've called upon you on important business——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we don't want any funny remarks. Is there any tin in that letter?"

"What-ho!"

"Much?"

"Yes."

"Jolly good," said Blake, with keen satisfaction. "The fact is, we are stony in Study No. 6, and we are out to borrow. Gussy has been wasting his money in the most reckless way possible——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"He lent a sovereign to Gore——"

"Well, he wanted it, and I didn't know you were looking."

"I'm always looking after you," said Blake severely. "Nice state you'd get into if I took my eye off you."

"On the contwawy, it is I who——"

"Don't interrupt. You see, Tom Merry, Gussy has blued the study funds in a reckless and riotous way, and we've got to raise the wind somehow till our allowances come. How much tin is there in that letter?"

"Heaps."

"Quids?" asked Blake, with great interest.

"No; banknotes."

"Fivers?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Five."

"Oh, come off!" said Jack Blake incredulously. "Who's been sending you five fivers? Don't be funny, you know."

"Honest Injun."

"My hat! Gussy's governor sometimes wastes fivers on him, but he has never sent him more than two at a time."

"Wathah not; and he is cuttin' down the fivahs since that wotten Budget came in, you know. I am payin' the supah-tax out of my pocket-money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah, Tom Mewwy. It is weally vewy hard cheese that a chap of fifteen should have to pay the supah-tax out of his pocket-money."

"Awfully rough," agreed Blake. "It comes rough on the whole study, for that matter. We are thinking of sending a round robin to D'Arcy's governor on the subject."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Meanwhile, we are stony. If you've got so many fivers knocking about, you can chuck one of them this way."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Certainly."

He extracted a flimsy oblong of paper from an envelope, and flicked it across to Blake. The Fourth-Former caught it, and stared at it in wonder.

For it was really a banknote.

"My only hat! A fiver!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, hang!" said Digby. "We don't want all that, you know. Blake was joking. But is it a fact, Tom Merry? Have you got five fivers there?"

"Solid fact."

"Where on earth did they come from?" demanded Herries. "I suppose you haven't been robbing a bank?"

"Oh, no!" laughed Tom Merry. "I've just had a letter."

"With five fivers in it?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

"Sure it was for you?" said Blake anxiously. "It might have been delivered in your study by mistake. The post-office people are asses, and Binks is always mixing up the letters. It might have been for me."

"It was from my Uncle Frank."

"I've got an Uncle Frank,' said Digby. "Sure the name on the envelope wasn't Arthur Digby, and not Tom Merry? The names might look alike."

"Ha, ha! No, it's for me. You remember Uncle Frank."

"I didn't know you had one."

"Well, I haven't, as a matter of fact."

"Eh? Then how do you get letters and collections of banknotes from him?" demanded Blake.

"It's Mr. Francis Fawcett, the brother of my old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett," Tom Merry explained. "You remember him. We always called him Uncle Frank."

"Yaas, wathah! I wemembah he was a vewy decent sort."

"He's in Paris now," said Tom Merry. "He's there on business, and has to stay there for some weeks. It's occurred to him that it would be a good opportunity for me to see something of Paris, if I could get the Head's permission to join him there for a week or two."

"Bai Jove!"

"Jolly thoughtful of Uncle Frank," said Blake, with a grunt. "I wish I had a few Uncle Franks in my family. I had an uncle going to Margate last vac., and when I hinted that I liked Margate, he said—— Well, I won't tell you what he said. It wasn't polite, and didn't show a proper appreciation of his nephew. Look here, Tom Merry, I've got an Uncle George and an Aunt Selina. I'll swap for your Uncle Frank."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Are you goin', deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, polishing his eyeglass.

"What-ho!"

"Has the Head given his permish?"

"Yes. Uncle Frank obtained that before he mentioned the matter to me. He didn't want to risk my counting upon going, and then being disappointed."

"Jolly thoughtful of him," said Herries. "Hallo, what are you screwing up that mug about, Gussy?"

"I wasn't aware that I was scwewin' up a mug, Hewwies," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "Pewwaps I was lookin' thoughtful. Of course, if Tom Mewwy is goin' to Pawis, I shall have to go."

"Why?"

"Well, I don't like the ideah of twustin' Tom Mewwy in Pawis alone," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "You wemembah how he was always gettin' into twouble in Livahpool, and how all you fellows got lost the time I took you to London. I should nevah expect to see Tom Mewwy again if I let him go abwoad alone."

"Well, there's something in that," remarked Jack Blake. "Of course, you wouldn't be any use, but——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"But a chap like me would be wanted. Tom Merry couldn't vewy well get on without a chap with him speaking French."

"I speak French all right!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Blake shook his head.

"It's always surprised me that your Form-master was satisfied with your French," he remarked. "Besides, it's a different thing speaking it in the country. I knew a chap who had French for six years at school, and when he went to Boulogne, and asked for a cup of tea, they brought him a leg of mutton."

"Look here——"

"Have you arranged to take anybody with you?"

"My uncle says I had better have a few friends, if I can get the Head's permission. He will be busy a lot of the time, and he doesn't want me to be lonely."

"Good. As you will need an interpreter, you had better put my name down.'

"Rats!"

"Now, look here, Tom Merry, je parle Francais jolly bien—I mean tres jolly—I mean——"

"You see, nobody will know what you mean," said Digby. "That's the point. Tom Merry wants a chap like me. Quand je parle le Francais, I—I mean je——"

"Oh, ring off!" said Herries. "What I think is——"

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Shut up, Gussy."

"I wefuse to shut up. I——"

"I say——"

"I insist upon goin' with Tom Mewwy He will not be safe without me to keep an eye on him, and my Fwench is first class. Je parle Fwancais extwemely bien——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see any weason for wibald laughter. I——"

Tom Merry slipped off the window-sill.

"It's all right," he said. "I'll take you all if I can. That's the best I can say. Of course, Manners and Lowther come first."

"Rats!"

"Manners and Lowther first. I expect Figgins & Co. will want to come, too. As a matter of fact, Kerr would be very useful as an interpreter."

"I'm surpwised at you settin' up a New House boundah ovah——"

"Rats! Kerr talks French like a real parley-voo," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "I'd like to take the whole blessed school, School House and New House both. But it can't be did. I'll do the best I can. I should think it's jolly in Paris."

"Tres jolly," said Blake. "Certainement it is ripping. I simply must come."

"Where are you going?" asked Digby, as Tom Merry made for the door.

"I'm going to see the Head."

"Good! Don't forget to ask him if I may come, deah boy."

"Rely on me."

"Pewwaps I had bettah come with you," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I could explain mattahs bettah to Dr. Holmes."

"Oh, rats!"

"I wefuse to—I mean, I wegard that wemark as wude. As a mattah of fact, you will pwobably fail to impwess upon Dr. Holmes the gweat necessity of my bein' in Pawis to look aftah you."

"Quite likely."

"It would be bettah for me to see the Head, and I could explain mattahs, and weally put it to him like an old sport, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will come——"

"Oh, chain him up!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I'm off!"

Tom Merry, with the letter and the banknotes in his hand, quitted the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made a motion to follow him, and was promptly grasped by Blake and Herries and Digby.

The swell of St. Jim's struggled in the muscular grasp of his chums.

"Pway welease me, deah boys!"

"Hold on!"

Kern took Figgins by the hair, and methodically bumped his head on the carpet. "You dangerous lunatics! Lemme gerrup!" gasped Figgins, "I've got news!"

"I decline to wemain here. I think I ought to see Dr. Holmes, and put it to him as a sportsman."

"Ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I——"

"You'd only mess it up, you duffer."

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the sort, and I decline uttahly to be chawactewised as a duffah. If you do not immediately welease me, I shall no longah wegard you in the light of fwiends."

"Horrid!" said Blake. "But we'll risk it. Hang on to his ears, Dig!"

"Certainly!"

"Ow! I wefuse to have Dig hangin' on to my ears."

"Collar him by the short hairs, Herries!"

"Right-ho!"

"Ow! Welease me, Hewwies! If you exaspewate me I shall stwike you."

"Go hon!"

"Look here, deah boys——"

"Bring him along to the study!"

"I wefuse——"

"Quick march!" said Blake.

And the chums of the Fourth quick-marched in the direction of Study No. 6, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, vainly resisting, quick-marched with them.

CHAPTER 2.

Affectionate Chums.

TOM MERRY seemed to be walking on air as he went along the passages towards the Head's study.

He liked St. Jim's, and his life there was a happy one. But the prospect of a run abroad was naturally attractive and exciting to a lad of his age.

And Paris, too!

Tom Merry foresaw what he would have described as a really ripping time in the Gay City, especially if he could take a party of his chums with him.

That was the question. And that would require some diplomatic handling with the Head. Tom Merry would have liked to have taken a couple of dozen of the fellows, but that, of course, was impossible. The only thing was to take the greatest number that could be managed. How was he to put it to the Head?

Dr. Holmes was a very kind old gentleman. But he might fail to see why a crowd of juniors should absent themselves from their studies for a couple of weeks.

The matter would require some diplomatic managing, and Tom Merry thought it out as he made his way along the School House passages.

He was so deep in thought that he did not observe three fellows belonging to the Shell, who were standing in the passage, and regarding him with considerable interest as he came up.

They were Kangaroo—otherwise Harry Noble, the Cornstalk chum—and Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn, the chums of the end study.

Tom Merry, with his eyes on the ground, and his brows corrugated in lines of deep thought, walked straight into them, and the three juniors made no movement to get out of the way.

Tom was first aware of their presence when he cannoned right into Kangaroo, and staggered back from the shock with a breathless exclamation.

"Oh!"

Kangaroo threw his arms around Tom Merry, and hugged him tight to his chest, under pretence of having saved him from falling.

"Just in time!" he exclaimed.

"Ow! Leggo!"

"I'm saving you from tumbling over."

"Yow! Chuck it!"

"Rats!" said Kangaroo, compressing his grasp until Tom Merry felt as if he were enclosed in tightening iron bands. "I'm saving you!"

"You ass! Leggo!"

"Sure you're all right?"

"Ow! You're busting my ribs!" gasped Tom Merry, struggling in the grip of the Cornstalk. "Leggo! I'll dot you on the nose if you don't!"

He made a terrific wrench to get away, and at the same moment Kangaroo opened his arms and released him. Tom Merry went spinning with the force of his own effort, biffed against the wall, and sat down with a bump on the linoleum.

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

"Ow! You ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Glyn. "Look here! Blessed if he isn't shedding banknotes on all sides!"

He picked up a rustling fiver. Dane picked up another, and Kangaroo collared one in each hand. Tom Merry still held one with the letter.

The chums of the end study stared at the banknotes in blank astonishment.

"Been robbing a bank?" demanded Kangaroo.

"No, ass!"

"Then where on earth did you get twenty-five pounds from?"

Tom Merry picked himself up, and dusted his clothes, and set his collar straight.

"My uncle sent it to me," he said.

"Oh, my prophetic soul! My uncle!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "What on earth did you put in to raise twenty-five quid on? It wasn't your silver watch."

"You ass!"

"Must have been the family plate," said Bernard Glyn. "How much interest will you have to pay your uncle on twenty-five quid, Merry?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I suppose you mean Uncle Solomons, three brass balls, vat can I do for you, shentlemens?" said Kangaroo.

"No, ass! It's my Uncle Frank."

"Where does he live?" asked Kangaroo anxiously. "Is he a bachelor, and looking out for a nice boy to adopt?"

"Ass! He's in Paris, and he's sent me this cash to go over on a holiday there, and to take a few friends with me."

With one accord Cornstalk & Co. fell upon Tom Merry's neck and hugged him. They hugged him on all sides, dragging him hither and thither in the exuberance of their affectionate demonstration.

"Stop it!" roared Tom Merry. "Oh! Ow! You utter idiots! Chuck it!"

"He's going to take a few friends with him," murmured Kangaroo. "He came along here 'specially to ask us. I always loved Tom Merry."

"So did I," said Glyn affectionately. "The dear boy was always the apple of my eye. I'm fond of white rabbits and fried onions, but I love Tom Merry more than both of them put together."

"Just so!" said Dane. "We are really his best friends, and Lowther and Manners are only cheap imitations. We are going with him to Paris."

"Chuck it!"

"Rats! This is the scene where we love you."

"You utter asses!"

"I call that ungrateful; but never mind, we love you all the same, if you're going to Paris."

Tom Merry jerked himself away at last.

The exuberant affection of Cornstalk & Co. had left its mark upon him. His collar was torn out, his necktie was streaming over his shoulder, and his hair strongly resembled a mop in appearance.

He glared wrathfully at the three.

"You silly chumps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You dangerous lunatics!"

"If that's not love, what is?" sighed Kangaroo. "Let's embrace him again!"

"What-ho!"

Tom Merry dashed down the passage at full speed. He had had enough of the embraces of Cornstalk & Co. They dashed after him, and overtook him at the corner, and the four of them rolled on the floor.

Tom Merry struggled violently. Two Shell fellows came along the passage, and Tom yelled to them.

"Manners! Lowther! Rescue!"

Manners and Lowther rushed to the rescue at once. They didn't know what the trouble was, but they weren't likely to let a call from a chum pass unheeded.

Their attack took Cornstalk & Co. by surprise.

Kangaroo, Dane, and Glyn were rolled off Tom Merry, and bumped along the linoleum, before they knew what was happening, and Tom Merry was dragged to his feet.

"Now, what's the row?" demanded Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry gasped for breath.

"Nothing; only those duffers playing the giddy goat."

Kangaroo sat up, and rubbed a swollen nose.

"Ow! I was only showing Merry how fond I was of him. I love him like a brother—when he's going to Paris."

"Paris!" exclaimed Manners and Lowther together.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry. "I'm going to see the Head about it."

He hurried off towards the Head's study, with Manners and Lowther at his heels, leaving Cornstalk & Co. dusting themselves down and chuckling.

"I say, is it honest Injun," exclaimed Lowther, "you're going to Paris?"

"Yes. Uncle Frank's there."

"Taking anybody?"

"A few friends—as many as the doctor permits."

"My hat!" said Lowther. "I'm jolly glad I chummed with you now, Tom, though it has been a bit of a trial to my feelings at times."

"Same here!" said Manners. "It's a source of satisfaction to me that I've put up with Tom Merry patiently ever since we came to St. Jim's."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Of course, you come first," he remarked. "I shall manage as many of the others as possible. I shall have to put it diplomatically to the Head."

Lowther gave a whistle as they stopped at the Head's door.

"Are you going in to see the Head in that state, Tom?"

Tom Merry started.

He had forgotten the state his tussle with Cornstalk & Co. had left him in. He looked down at his dusty and dishevelled attire, and groped for his collar and tie.

"Oh, hang! I shall have to go and get tidy, I suppose. Bless those silly asses!"

"I'll see the Head for you if you like," suggested Lowther. "I dare say I could put it to him in—well, a more convincing manner."

To which Tom Merry's reply was contained in the ancient and classic monosyllable "Rats!" and he hurried away to the Shell dormitory to make himself tidy for the interview with the Head.

CHAPTER 3.

Figgins & Co. Want to Go to Paris.

FIGGINS, of the Fourth, burst into his study in the New House at St. Jim's with a wildly-excited face and an air of excitement. Kerr was sitting at the table, engaged in a deep and exacting mathematical problem, and Fatty Wynn was at the grate, turning some sausages over in a frying-pan to give them a final artistic browning.

Figgins's sudden entrance, and the wild war-whoop with which he accompanied it, had disastrous results.

Kerr gave a jump, and scattered a fine variety of all sorts and conditions of blots over his paper. Fatty Wynn twisted round suddenly in alarm, and shot the contents of the frying-pan into the fire.

There was a terrific sizzle instantly, and a wail of anguish from Fatty Wynn.

"The sosses!"

"You ass!" roared Kerr, jumping up. "Look at that!"

"I say——"

"Look at my paper!"

"Look at the sossingers!"

"Never mind——"

Sizzle, sizzle!

Kerr and Wynn glared speechlessly at Figgins.

After spoiling Kerr's paper and wrecking Wynn's sausages, he said "Never mind!" and their feelings were too deep for words, but not too deep for action. They exchanged a glance, and fastened on Figgins like two bulldogs.

"Bump him!" shrieked Kerr.

"Hold on——"

"Have him down!"

"Jump on him!"

"Look here——!"

Bump!

Figgins went down bumping on the carpet. Fatty Wynn squatted on his chest, and when Fatty Wynn sat on anybody that body was pinned down quite safely. Fatty Wynn was not a light-weight.

Kerr took Figgins by the hair, and methodically bumped his head on the carpet. Figgins squirmed and yelled, but with Fatty's weight upon him he could do nothing more.

Meanwhile, the sausages were burning and sizzling in the fire, and the smell thereof was simply appalling.

It pervaded the study with the thickness almost of soup, and blackness settled in clouds upon everything.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "You asses——"

"Bump him!"

"You dangerous lunatics, lemme gerruo! I've got news."

"You've spoiled my paper!"

"My sossingers are messed up!"

"Look here——"

"Great Scott, what's the matter here?" exclaimed a voice, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, looked in at the open door. "Place on fire, or what?"

"Bump him!"

"You young asses!"

The prefect strode into the room, and seized Kerr and Fatty Wynn each by the back of the collar and jerked them off Figgins. Figgins sat up ruefully, and rubbed his head.

"Thanks, Monteith!"

"What's the matter? Are you dotty?" demanded the senior.

"Oh, we were only bumping him for playing the giddy goat," said Kerr. "It's all right."

"This smell is not all right. Open the window, you young sweeps, and clear that mess off the fire! Take fifty lines each."

"Oh!"

And Monteith, nearly suffocated, stamped out of the study and banged the door behind him to keep the blacks and the scent from following him into the passage.

Kerr ran to the window and opened it, and Fatty Wynn scraped the remains of the sausages off the glowing coals with the shovel, and pushed them to the back of the grate. Figgins glared at his chums.

"You silly cuckoos——"

"You utter ass!" growled Kerr. "What's the matter with you? What do you mean by bursting in on a chap like the wild man from Borneo?"

"Those sossingers were beautifully done——"

"I've got news."

"Blow your news!" growled Fatty Wynn discontentedly. "Look at those sosses! I had them done almost to a turn."

"Never mind——"

"Never mind!" howled Fatty Wynn. "But I do mind. I'm hungry. I haven't had anything since dinner except a mutton pie and a beefsteak pudding, and some rice cake. I'm simply famished, and the sosses were just ready."

"Never mind——"

At the repetition of those obnoxious words Fatty Wynn looked positively dangerous. He picked up the frying-pan and made a step towards Figgins.

"Hold on, Fatty!" exclaimed Figgins, dodging round the table. "It's all right!"

"All right, you utter ass——"

"I mean, never mind!"

"My hat! I'll—I'll brain him!" gasped Fatty Wynn, rushing round the table after Figgins. "I'll—I'll——"

"Keep your wool on——"

"You—you long-legged ass——"

"It's all right—I mean, never mind the sosses. I've got news—great news! Keep your wool on, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn lowered the frying-pan and glared over it wrathfully at Figgins.

"Well, don't say never mind again, or you'll get this on your napper!" he said. "It's bad enough to have one's sossingers ruined without being told to never mind."

"Of course! Never—ahem—I mean, listen to me," said Figgins. "I've got news. I've just had it from Blake, of the School House."

"What's the news?" asked Fatty Wynn, showing some interest at last. "Are they getting up a feed?"

Figgins sniffed.

"Trust you to think of a feed!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you said it was great news."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr. "There's only one kind of great news for Fatty, and that's news of a feed."

"It's better than a feed, Fatty," grinned Figgins. "Tom Merry is going to Paris."

"Tom Merry—Paris!"

"Yes, and he's taking a few friends with him."

"Ahah!" said Kerr.

"Number's limited, of course," said Figgins; "but it immediately occurred to me that we were jolly good friends of Tom Merry's, and that we were bound to go."

"What-ho!"

"It appears that nearly everybody in the School House has made up his mind to go," continued Figgins. "Of course, the number will be limited. The Head won't let a dozen chaps off, though I know he'd do a great deal to prevent Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's dear old friend, from coming here again. He respects her very much—at Laurel Villa—and likes her first-rate, so long as she stays at Huckleberry Heath. I believe he would let half the Shell and the Fourth Form come to Paris with us rather than have Miss Fawcett come to St. Jim's to persuade him."

Kerr and Wynn chuckled.

They remembered clearly Miss Priscilla's last visit to the school. She had taken up her abode in the School House, and the New House fellows had not suffered much from her kind determination to better things all round, but they had heard of the dire trouble caused in the School House, and Figgins had declared that the doctor's hair was whiter since the visit of Miss Fawcett.

"The question for us to settle is how to get permission to go with Tom Merry," said Figgins. "Of course, we must go."

"Yes, rather!" said Kerr emphatically.

Fatty Wynn rolled his eyes.

"I've heard that the Parisian cooks are simply marvellous," he remarked. "I've often studied menus, you know, when I've wanted something interesting to read. The ways they can turn a thing out are amazing. I shall very likely pick up a lot of tips from the restaurateurs. You chaps won't mind if I chum up with a waiter, will you—garsong, I think they call them?"

"You shall chum up with anybody you like, from the President to the newsboys on the Pont Neuf," said Figgins. "The only question is, how to get included in the party. Tom Merry is a reasonable chap in some ways, but he is almost certain to pick School House chaps to go with him."

Kerr shook his head gravely.

"I shouldn't wonder! We shall have to put it to him straight. Of course, the thing has got to be managed somehow. If a School House party went to Paris, and the New House were left out, it would be one up against the House. They would send us picture-postcards to rub it in, you know."

"Suppose we stand him a feed," suggested Fatty Wynn. "It would put him into a good temper, and we could talk him over. It always makes me feel very affable having a good feed."

"It mayn't have the same effect on Tom Merry, but we'll see," said Figgins, rubbing his nose thoughtfully. "Let's go over and interview the chap, anyway. If we're first in the field we may get a promise from him, you know."

"Good egg!"

"But, I say——" began Fatty Wynn.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Kerr, who was putting on his cap.

"Why, you see——"

"Buck up!"

"We haven't had tea——"

"We can have tea afterwards."

"Yes, but I'm hungry," said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "You don't seem to understand that. I haven't had anything since dinner except a mutton pie and a beefsteak pud——"

"And everything else you could lay your hands on, I suppose," grunted Figgins. "You can gorge presently. Let's get out."

"But——"

"Come on!" exclaimed Figgins, leaving the study. Kerr followed him, and Fatty Wynn, after a moment or two of hesitation, did likewise.

CHAPTER 4.

New Friends.

FIGGINS & CO. reached the School House in the growing dusk. There were lights in most of the windows gleaming out upon the old trees in the quadrangle. Several juniors were seated on the broad stone balustrade of the School House steps, and they greeted the New House trio with grins and catcalls as they came up—that is to say, three of them did so. The fourth was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, and catcalls were far below his dignity. He simply jammed his eyeglass into his eye and fixed a stare upon Figgins & Co.

"By Jove!" he remarked, as soon as they came within hearing. "It's the New House boundahs! I wondah what they want on the wespectable side of the quadwangle?"

Jack Blake waved his hand.

"Sorry, but we haven't anything to give away," he remarked. "Try the kitchen door."

Figgins & Co. glared.

"We've come to see Tom Merry," said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, you know, I wegard this as wathah funnay!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The boundahs have come ovah to see Tom Mewwy! It's wemarkably funnay! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake and Herries and Digby.

"What on earth is the cackle about?" demanded Figgins, mystified. "Why shouldn't we see Tom Merry if we like?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has he gone out?"

"Oh, no; he's in, right enough."

"Where is he, then?"

"Up in the Shell dormitory, I believe. He went up there to get tidy, after Cornstalk & Co. had been showing their affection."

"Well, we're jolly well going in to see him!" said Figgins defiantly.

Blake waved his hands to the open portal of the School House.

"Go in, and welcome, my sons! The more the merrier."

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at! But we're going in, anyway. Come on, kids!"

And Figgins & Co. marched into the School House, leaving the chums of Study No. 6 sitting in a row on the balustrade and laughing hysterically.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, met them in the hall, and stopped them. The big, handsome Sixth-Former was smiling, as though there were some joke going on.

"What are you juniors doing out of your house?" he asked.

"We want to speak to Tom Merry," said Figgins meekly. "Rather important business."

Kildare chuckled. He had evidently heard of the projected trip to Paris, and guessed what was the important business of Figgins & Co.

"Can we go up?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Oh, yes, only don't make a row!"

"We haven't come here to make a row, Kildare."

Kildare laughed.

"Oh, these things happen!" he remarked. "Be careful, that's all. There's enough row going on now in the Shell quarters."

The chums of the New House went upstairs. They were feeling very mystified; but as soon as they entered the passage in which the Shell dormitory opened, they understood.

The passage was crowded.

The dormitory door was apparently locked, for junior after junior tried it, and it did not open. Reilly, of the Fourth, was bawling through the keyhole as Figgins & Co. arrived, and a dozen or more other fellows were standing round, most of them with excited faces.

"Tom Merry! Alanna! Tom Merry, ye omadhaun!"

"Hallo!" came a voice from within the dormitory.

"Open the dure."

"Rats!"

"Faith, and I'm wanting to speak to ye!"

"More rats!"

Reilly shook the handle of the door.

"Is it thrue that ye're going to Paris intirely. Tom Merry?" he yelled through the keyhole.

"What-ho!"

"Ye're taking some friends?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Faith, and its a bhoy like me you want wid ye!" called out Reilly. "Are you thinking of asking me to come?"

"Not half!"

"Do ye want me to come?"

"Of course I do. I'd be only too glad to have your chivvy in the train; but the Head won't let me take everybody. You can go to Belfast."

"Arrah, and I'll be lickin' ye soon, Tom Merry! Are ye going to give me first chance?"

"Not much."

"Faith, and I'll——"

"Oh, go and eat cokernuts!"

Reilly rattled the door and yelled through the keyhole, but elicited no further response. The sound of a chuckle was heard within, and that was all. Lowther, Manners and Tom Merry had locked the door at the first sight of a junior on the track, and it was just as well, or Tom Merry would have been mobbed. The idea of going to Paris had caught on in the School House, and everybody wanted to go. Fellows whom Tom Merry hardly knew had developed a suddenly strong and attached friendship for him; even chaps he had quarrelled with remembered that upon the whole they had always liked old Merry.

"Oh, get away with you!" said Kerruish, of the Fourth. "He doesn't want a wild Irishman with him in Paris. It's a lad from Manxland he really wants."

"Faith, and I——"

"Let me speak to him."

"You can speak," grinned Gore, of the Shell; "but it won't do you much good, I fancy."

Kerruish bawled through the keyhole of the dormitory-door.

"I say, Tom Merry!"

"Oh, go on your travels!"

"Were you thinking of asking me to come to Paris?"

"Not this evening."

"Look here, if you ask me to come, I'll have you for a holiday in the Isle of Man, and show you Douglas and Ramsey, and Port St. Mary, and the glens."

"I'll come, if you like, with pleasure; but never mind Paris. I'll take you to the North Pole when I go there. Is it a bargain?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Kerruish.

Macgregor minor pushed Kerruish aside, and yelled through the keyhole.

"Never mind all these duffers, Tom Merry. You'd better take me to Paris, you know, and I will be your interpreter. Je parley Frongsee ripping bien."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at?"

"Your Frongsee."

"You fathead——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no good," said Mellish, of the Fourth. "Tom Merry means to make up his party without consulting us. I vote that we rag him as he comes out. What do you say, Gore?"

Gore stared at the cad of the Fourth.

"I say shut up!" he replied curtly.

"Look here, Gore——"

"Oh, ring off!"

"My only new hat!" said Figgins. "There are candidates enough for the trip to Paris. Tom Merry will want a special train and a double-size boat to take the lot."

"Hallo! What are you New House bounders doing here?" exclaimed Hancock, of the Fourth.

"We've come to see Tom Merry."

"Well, of all the cheek! Do you think you're going to Paris with him?"

"Don't you ask questions, my son, and I'll tell you no fabrications," said Figgins loftily. "I suppose Merry's not likely to take any of you noisy kids, anyway."

"Who are you calling kids?"

"You School House monkeys! Why——"

"Collar the bounders! Kick them out!" shouted Kerruish.

"Hold on!" muttered Mellish. "Kildare has just been up here, and he said he would come up again if there was a row."

Figgins chuckled. The threatened rush was stopped; nobody there wanted the captain of St. Jim's to come up with a cane.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole of the Shell, coming along the passage blinking through his big glasses. "Has anybody seen Tom Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Here's another chap wants Tom Merry."

Skimpole blinked round him in surprise. He did not understand why his inquiry after the hero of the Shell should evoke such a howl of merriment. He was not yet aware that Tom Merry was the most-sought-after person at St. Jim's.

"I want to see him very much," he remarked. "I hear that he is going to Paris."

"Ha, ha, ha! Just heard it?"

"He is also going to take a few friends with him. It has occurred to me that he might like me to be of the party."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I really do not see any cause for merriment in that remark. I should like very much to go to Paris, as I hear that there is a strong Socialistic element there, and I should like to study the movement in that city."

"Tom Merry is sure to take you—I don't think," remarked Figgins.

"I should be of great use to him, for although I do not speak French very well, I should be the most intelligent member of the party, and should take the lead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Figgins——"

The door of the dormitory rattled, and there was a general turning of the juniors towards it. Tom Merry was coming out.

"Look out!" whispered Kerruish.

"He's coming!"

"Mind he doesn't get through."

"Collar him the moment he comes out."

Skimpole blinked round in surprise.

"Is Tom Merry in there?"

"Yes, ass! Stand back."

"But I want to speak to him."

"So do we all, duffer!"

"I want to go with him to Paris——"

"So do we all, ass!"

"Dear me!"

The dormitory door opened, and the Terrible Three came out. In a moment they were the centre of an excited throng.

CHAPTER 5.

The Rescuers.

TOM MERRY staggered back into the doorway of the dormitory, with three or four juniors grasping him. Manners reeled into the passage, in the grasp of as many more. Monty Lowther backed up against the wall and put up his fists, and hit out right and left, and two or three candidates for the Paris trip rolled on the linoleum.

Round the chums of the Shell the juniors surged excitedly.

"Am I coming to Paris with you, Merry?"

"Going to ask the Head to let me go?"

"Faith, and I'll come, and——"

"Look here——"

"Answer me, ye omadhaun. Am I——"

"Can't you speak, you image!"

"Bump him!"

"Yank him over, and make him speak."

"Here, hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "You blessed lunatic asylum, hands off! I——"

"Bump him!"

Figgins grinned at his comrades.

"This is where we come in," he whispered. "Heroic rescuers, you know—must be taken to Paris out of gratitude."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, and sock it to them!"

And Figgins & Co. rushed into the fray.

The sudden rush sent the juniors whirling. For Figgins & Co., added to the Terrible Three, formed a formidable band, and the odds were nothing to them. The candidates for Paris found the tables turned against them, and they were rushed along the passage, and half of them fled in various directions, and those who remained were bumped over mercilessly.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "This is getting exciting. Anybody hurt?"

"Faith, I'm kilt intirely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kick them out," said Monty Lowther.

"Good egg!"

And the Paris candidates were helped along with gentle shoves from heavy boots, and the passage was soon cleared of them.

"Many thanks, Figgy!" said Tom Merry. "You came just in the nick of time. I've only just cleaned up after the last row, and I didn't want to be bumped again. I've got to see the Head."

"Quite welcome," said Figgins genially; "as a matter of fact we had come over to see you, Merry."

"All right, wait in my study. I'm going to see the Head now."

"Half a mo!" said Figgins. "It's about Paris."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"What about Paris?"

"We were thinking that if you made up a party we'd like to come. Kerr can talk French like—like a parrot——"

"I've never heard a parrot talk French," said Monty Lowther.

"There's lots of things you've never heard," retorted Figgins. "I suppose parrots talk French in France. Anyway, Kerr can jabber away in French just as if he understood it——"

"I do understand it, you ass!" exclaimed Kerr indignantly.

"Ye-es, of course you do; I didn't mean that. You see, Kerr will do for the interpreting part of the job, and Fatty will give advice about the grub. I shall look after you generally, and take care of you if there are any rows."

"Thanks for nothing."

"Oh, come, now——"

"It depends on the Head," explained Tom Merry. "I shall take Manners and Lowther, of course. That's understood. If the Head will let me take any more, I'll take you chaps with pleasure. I should be jolly glad to have you with me, of course."

"You'll try and fix it with the Head?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good!" exclaimed Figgins, giving Tom Merry a slap on the back that made him stagger. "Jolly good, old son!"

"You utter ass! That's my backbone!"

"Excuse me—only a little exuberance," said Figgins.

"If there's any more exuberance like that somebody will get a dot on the nose," said Tom Merry. "Better wait for me outside the Head's study, and I can let you know the verdict. This way."

And the whole party proceeded towards the Head's study. It was just as well that Tom Merry had an escort, for juniors were lurking in all sorts of unexpected places to pounce upon him.

There was a sudden yell as he entered the Fourth-Form passage to go to the stairs.

"Here he is!"

And there was a rush of feet. A crew of Third Form fags, with D'Arcy minor—the younger brother of Arthur Augustus—at their head, rushed up.

"Line up!" exclaimed Figgins.

The fags halted at the sight of half a dozen juniors with their fists up. Even Wally D'Arcy hesitated.

"We want to speak to Tom Merry," he exclaimed.

"Speak away, my son!"

"You're going to Paris?"

"What-ho!"

"I'm coming with you."

"Your mistake!" said Tom Merry blandly. "You're not, you know!"

"Look here——"

"Rag him!" yelled the fags.

"Forward!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "If any fags get in the way tread on them!"

There was a yell of wrath from the fags, but the half-dozen marched on steadily, and pushed their way through. Wally gazed after them with knitted brows.

"Hold on!" he said. "I'm going, all the same!"

"So am I!" said Jameson.

"Me too!" said Curly Gibson ungrammatically, but very emphatically.

"I don't know about you kids," said Wally, shaking his head, "but I'm going! My brother Gus is certain to go, and I'm jolly well not going to be left behind!"

"Look here, young D'Arcy——"

"Oh, cheese it! I'm going to think it out!" said D'Arcy minor, and he marched off with wrinkled brows.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. reached the door of the Head's study without further mishap. Tom Merry tapped and entered, while Monty Lowther and Manners, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn waited outside anxiously for the verdict.

CHAPTER 6.

Figgins & Co. Rejoice.

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, wore a grave and thoughtful expression when Tom Merry entered his study.

One glance at the serious face, and Tom knew that the Head guessed beforehand the object of his call, and was prepared for it.

Tom Merry was just a trifle disconcerted, but he meant to do his best. The Head looked straight at him.

"Well, Merry?"

"You have heard from Mr. Fawcett, sir?"

"Yes, I had his letter some days ago. I have granted permission for you to join him in Paris for a week or two."

"Thank you very much, sir! My uncle—I mean Mr Fawcett—suggested that it would be a good wheeze—I—I mean a good plan, sir, to—to take a few friends with me, if you would give your permission, sir."

The Head smiled grimly.

"Quite right, Merry. I have already spoken to your Form-master on the subject. I presume that you wish to take your study-mates, Manners and Lowther?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Linton thinks that they will not suffer materially by a week's absence from classes, as they are both hard workers," said the Head. "You may take them."

"Oh, thank you, sir! And——"

"I think that is all, Merry."

"Oh, no, sir! I——"

"You will know when to start. You will leave St. Jim's to-morrow for home, and thence proceed to Dover. It appears that Miss Fawcett wishes to see you before you start to say good-bye."

"Yes, sir, but——"

"You may start for Huckleberry Heath by the first train, Merry, and take Manners and Lowther with you. They will have to communicate with their people, of course, but you can receive the replies at Miss Fawcett's residence before leaving."

"Very good, sir, but——"

"I think that is all. You may go."

"Yes, sir, but——"

"Really, Merry——"

"There is—is another matter I wanted to speak about, sir," stammered Tom Merry, hurriedly. "I—I——"

The Head made a gesture of resignation.

"You may go on, Merry."

"Thank you, sir. Don't you—er—think that it would be a good thing for some of the juniors, sir, to—to have a little run to Paris? It would—er—open their minds, and teach them a lot of—of foreign geography that they can't learn from books, sir."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"There is something in what you say, Merry. Foreign travel is an education in itself."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry encouraged. "That's exactly what I thought, sir; and this seems a good opportunity of—of taking some of the fellows abroad, sir."

"I suppose you mean that you wish to take a large party, Merry?"

"Oh, no, sir, not a very large party. I always think large parties are a mistake. Say a dozen or fifteen chaps——"

"Really, Merry, I should call that a very large party indeed. Your uncle would hardly be obliged to you for bringing so much responsibility upon his hands."

"Oh, sir, Mr. Fawcett's as good as gold—he's the real thing, sir! He's fond of boys, and he'd like it."

"Ahem! I could hardly allow you to inflict a dozen juniors upon him, even if his goodness were equal to the strain."

"But, sir, if you please——"

"Come, Merry, does it not occur to you that you are asking a little too much?" said the Head quietly.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Perhaps so, sir. I'm sorry!"

"Not at all! It is very kind of you to think of your friends when you are going on a holiday, and to wish to take them, but I cannot allow you to take away so many from their lessons, nor would it be fair to Mr. Fawcett. You must consider, too, the expense."

"My uncle has sent me twenty-five pounds for expenses, sir."

"That would hardly pay the fares for so many, Merry."

"Oh, we should all club together, of course, sir."

"Ahem! Now, Merry, you are one of the best of my pupils, and I wish to make this little excursion of yours a success. You are one of the boys I can trust implicitly. There are boys in your Form to whom I should not dream of giving this freedom, as you know. Now, suppose we say that the party shall consist of six? I am sure you will agree that I am going a great way to meet your wishes."

"Yes, sir. It is very kind of you."

"Then we will settle upon that number," said the Head. "You shall choose them as you please, subject to the consent, of course, of their Form-masters."

"Very well, sir."

And Tom Merry thanked the doctor again and left the study. He was both contented and disappointed. He had hardly expected to get permission for five comrades to accompany him to Paris, while at the same time he had hoped for more; and his promise to Figgins & Co. occurred uneasily to his mind. They would take it that they were to have first chance, and what about the chums of No. 6?

Lowther and Manners and the New House juniors met Tom with eager looks as he emerged from the study.

"Well?" said five voices in unison.

"Is it all right?" added Figgins quickly.

Tom Merry nodded.

"It's all right—in a way."

"How do you mean?"

"I've got permission to make the party up to six."

Figgins grinned gleefully.

"Jolly good! That makes it all right—we're six."

"Good egg!" said Kerr. "The Head's a brick!"

"Blessed if I wouldn't like to stand him a feed!" said Fatty Wynn enthusiastically.

"Phew!" said Manners and Lowther.

"Well, what are you phewing about?" demanded Figgins.

"I was thinking of Blake and the rest."

Figgins looked grave.

"Here, hang it, we had first chance!"

"That's all right," said Tom Merry quickly. "That's the compact. We must see what we can do about Blake and Gussy and Dig and Herries."

"And there's Noble," said Manners. "I'd like him to come."

Figgins looked at the Co., and made a heroic effort.

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"What is it?"

"Look here——" Figgins hesitated. "Look here, if you'd rather take Blake's lot we'll slide. I didn't mean to chisel you into taking us. I suppose you'd rather have School House chaps. It's all right. Take Blake."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Rot! You're coming."

"But, I say——"

"We'll fix it about Study No. 6 if we can," said Tom Merry; "but I said I'd give you first chance, and I stick to it."

"Well, if you think you will——"

"It's settled."

"Good, then," said Figgins. "We'd better wire to our people to-night, and ask them to answer at once."

"Answer to Laurel Villa," said Tom Merry. "We're starting from there."

"Good! We'll go and see about it. We may as well cut down to the post-office at once. What are you looking glum about, Fatty? I suppose you want to come to Paris?"

"Yes, rather!" said the fat Fourth-Former, with a start.

"Then wherefore that worried look, ass?"

"Well, I was thinking that—er——"

"If it's a question of tin, it's all right," said Tom Merry. "My uncle has sent me the money for the expenses."

"It isn't that, but—— Well, about those wires?"

"We're going to the post-office at once," said Figgins. "What the dickens is he bothering about?"

"Why, that," said Fatty Wynn, "it's all very well for you to say that we're going to the post-office at once, but——"

"But what?"

"I'm hungry?"

"You're hungry?" said Figgins, in measured tones.

"Yes. I haven't had my tea yet, and I've had nothing to eat since dinner except a mutton-pie and a beefsteak pudding and a——"

"You fat fathead!"

"I'm hungry. I——"

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

"I don't see anything funny in being hungry," grunted Fatty Wynn. "I think it's simply heartless of Figgins to suggest dragging me off to the post-office now, before I've had my tea. I—— Hallo! Leggo!"

But Figgins and Kerr had seized the fat Fourth-Former one by either arm, and were marching him off. The Terrible Three laughed heartily.

"I'm sorry about Blake & Co., though," Tom Merry remarked, as they walked away to their own quarters. "I wonder if we could fix it somehow?"

"Hallo! Look out!"

In the Fourth-Form passage four juniors were waiting—and evidently waiting for the Terrible Three. They were the chums of No. 6.

CHAPTER 7.

Like a Lamb to the Slaughter.

JACK BLAKE nodded affably to the chums of the Shell. The four juniors were lining up across the passage, and so it was impossible for the Terrible Three to pass on without a tussle. They halted.

"Been to the Head, Tom Merry?" asked Blake casually.

"Yes, I've just been."

"Got permission to take a party?"

"Yes, six."

"Leaving out Manners or Lowther?"

"Not much!"

"Hum! Well, I suppose one can't object to your taking your own study-mates," said Blake, with an air of reflection. "That's really only fair."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. were in the midst of packing when the door opened, and Skimpole blinked at them amiably. "Ah, I have found you at last!" he remarked.

"But it means one of us standing out," said Digby.

"Yes, that's the worst of it"

"You see——" began Tom Merry.

Blake & Co. had jumped to the conclusion that they were to make up the party, and it was a little awkward to explain. Tom Merry was not allowed time, either.

"All right," said Blake. "One of us stands out. It can't be helped. Hands up for volunteers."

"You see——" recommenced Tom Merry.

There were no hands put up.

"You are sure you want to go, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Sure you want to go, Dig?"

"Yes, rathor."

"You, Herries?"

"What-ho!"

"You wouldn't be able to take your bulldog," said Blake persuasively. "They wouldn't let a beast like that land in France, you know, and you'd have to pay a lot on him if they did. Now, the question is, do you think that Towser will be properly looked after while you're away?"

"Yaas, wathah! That's a vewy sewious question, Hewwies."

Herries grunted.

"I don't see why I shouldn't take Towser. He would like a run on the Continent."

"Imposs, deah boy."

"Well, Taggles would look after him for me. He's done so before, and Towser's none the worse for it," said Herries. "Anyway, I'm going to Paris."

"What about you, Dig? Do you think your father would be anxious about you?"

"No, I don't."

"What about your mother? I shouldn't like your mother to be anxious about you," said Blake, with great solicitude.

Dig snorted.

"Never mind my mother."

"But I must mind your mother. If she would be anxious——"

"She wouldn't."

"Then I suppose it's Gussy who will have to stand out. I'm sorry for it, as I shall miss Gussy; but——"

"I shall uttahly wefuse to stand out."

"Now, be reasonable, Gussy."

"I wefuse to be weasonable—I—I mean, I wegard you as a wank ass. I should like to know what will become of the

partay if I do not accompany it. You will get into some feahful twouble in Pawis. I have heard my governah say that there are all sorts of pewils there, though he did not specify what they were.

"What Tom Mewwy wequires with him is a fellow of tact and judgment. For Tom Mewwy's own sake I insist upon bein' in the partay."

"You see——" said Tom Merry.

"Undah the circs., the only thing is for Blake to resign."

"Now, don't be funny, Gussy."

"I am quite sewious. Of course, I shall miss you. But I will make it a point to send you a picture-postcard evewy day, so that you will, as a mattah of fact, see evewythin' that we see."

"You funny merchant!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a funnay merchant. I——"

"You see——" said Tom Merry.

"I say, suppose we let Tom Merry decide!" exclaimed Digby. "After all, it's his party, and he ought to have a voice in the matter, perhaps."

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther.

"Go ahead, Tom Merry, you're umpire," said Blake tersely.

"You see, you can't come," explained Tom Merry. "It's unfortunate, but I had promised Figgins & Co. first, and as there are only to be six, that makes up the number."

"Bai Jove!"

"What!"

"Of all the cheek——"

"I'm sorry," said Tom Merry. "It's unfortunate. But there you are. But I hope we shall be able to fix it up for you to come, too."

"It is absolutely necessawy for me to come. You will get into some feahful mischief if you go ovah there alone."

"Well, this takes the bun!" said Blake. "Fancy picking out New House fellows before chaps in your own House! I'm surprised at you, Tom Merry!"

"Well, it can't be helped."

"Suppose we bump them?" suggested Herries.

"Well, that's not a bad idea for a start."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, pax!" said Tom Merry. "There's been enough bumping. We've got to go and pack. If you chaps can think of any dodge for coming, I'll help you with all my heart. You know I'd like to take you."

"That is vewy gwatifying, Tom Mewwy, but——"

"Now let's get on."

The Terrible Three went on to their study. Blake & Co. looked very thoughtful.

"This is wathah wotten," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a frown of deep reflection. "It looks to me as if Tom Mewwy has been done by Figgins & Co. Suppose we have it out with those wottahs?"

Blake uttered an exclamation.

"Good egg! We'll make them resign in our favour."

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"We'll get Figgins in the study, and put him to the torture," said Blake. "That's a jolly good wheeze. The only thing is, how to rope him in."

The chums of the Fourth went into their study to talk it over and think it out. It seemed the only possible way of working the oracle, as Blake expressed it, and if sufficient pressure were brought to bear upon Figgins, he might be induced to resign in favour of Study No. 6.

But how was he to be "roped in"?

"Suppose I go ovah, and pull the wool ovah his eyes?" said Arthur Augustus. "I could take him in, you know. I am awfully deep."

"Yes, I know how deep you are," sniffed Blake. "You would give the whole game away at the start."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Suppose we invited them to tea?" suggested Digby.

"Oh, no, that would be playing it low down."

"H'm, yes! But how the dickens——"

"We might w'ite them a letter," said D'Arcy. "Something in this style: If Figgins will call in at Study No. 6 in the School House, he may hear of somethin' to his advantage. I've seen an advertisement or somethin' worded like that."

Blake sniffed.

"Ass! Do you think he would come?"

"I fail to see why he should not come."

"What I think is——"

"Hallo! Who's that?" exclaimed Blake suddenly, as the door was pushed open. "My only hat! It's Fatty Wynn!"

The fat Fourth-Former looked into the study. There was a sheepish expression upon his face. He blushed guiltily as he met the eyes of the chums.

"Have you chaps had tea yet?" he asked.

"Tea! Bai Jove, I'd forgotten tea!"

"So has Figgins," said Fatty Wynn ruefully. "I daresay you know that we are going to Paris with Tom Merry? We haven't had tea yet, and I've had nothing since dinner except a mutton-pie and a beefsteak-pudding, and some cakes and jellies, and things. I'm in a state of famine."

"Bai Jove! You must be!"

"I get so jolly hungry in this October weather," said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "I don't seem to feel it so much at other times of the year. Figgins was marching me off to the post-office to send rotten telegrams home, you know, but I dodged them in the lane, and got in again. There's nothing to eat in the study, and I've run out of tin, and Mrs. Taggles won't give me any more tick. When I approached her on the subject, she said I ought to settle my account there instead of spending money on a holiday in Paris. I thought it an awful cheek to poke her nose into a fellow's private affairs like that."

"Awful!" agreed Blake, gradually working his way round so as to get between Fatty Wynn and the door, without exciting the New House junior's suspicions.

"I looked in on Pratt," went on Fatty Wynn. "I had some words with Pratt this morning, about his getting offside, you know; but I'm not a fellow to bear malice, and I thought I'd make it up with Pratt. But the beast wouldn't make it up. He had the cheek to say that I only wanted to make it up because he had a feed going on in his study.'

"Rotten!" grinned Blake.

"I left the study at once," said Fatty Wynn. "As a—a matter of fact, they shoved me out into the passage. Then I thought of you chaps."

"That was vewy thoughtful of you, deah boy."

"You see, I thought——"

"You thought we'd be out of the study, and you could bone whatever grub there was in the cupboard," grinned Blake, as he suddenly shut the door and locked it. "I know you."

"Well, you see, I—I thought——"

"Bai Jove! He's a pwisonah now!"

"Here, I say——" began Fatty Wynn, in alarm.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Open that door!"

"Rats!"

"I'm not going——"

"Right, you're not! You're staying!"

The four juniors closed round Fatty Wynn with a business-like air. The fat Fourth-Former looked very much alarmed.

"Here, hold on!" he exclaimed. "What's the little game?"

"You came in here to please yourself," said Blake blandly. "You'll go out when it pleases us. You're a giddy hostage."

"A—what?"

"A hostage. Figgins is going to resign in our favour for the Paris trip."

"That he jolly well won't."

"Then we shall put you to the torture."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You asses! I——"

"Collar him!"

Fatty Wynn made a wild rush for the door.

In a moment four strong pairs of hands seized him, and he was yanked back into the middle of the study.

"Here, hold on——"

"We're holding on," grinned Herries. "What more do you want?"

"I—I mean leggo!"

"Rats! You're a giddy prisoner of war."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I came here to—to——"

"To raid the study," said Blake mercilessly. "Now you've been captured. Plank him down and tie him up."

"Ow! Yow! I won't——"

"Ow! Yow! You will!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Fatty Wynn was plumped into the armchair with a heavy bump.

As he gasped for breath, Blake drew a cord from his pocket, and the fat legs of the New House junior were fastened to the legs of the chair.

Fatty Wynn was a helpless prisoner; a hostage for Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 8.

Tom Merry Receives a Shock.

"BETTER get some packing done," said Tom Merry, as he reached his study. "We sha'n't have to do any prep this evening, as we're going away in the morning. We'd better get all the packing done to-night."

"Right you are!"

"Bags will do for us, as far as Laurel Villa, anyway," said Tom Merry. "We shall have to pack again there Now——"

"Hallo, Merry! Like to have a look at this?"

Bernard Glyn was standing at the door of the end study. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane were in the study, and there were grins upon their faces, but they were invisible to the chums of the Shell.

Tom Merry glanced along the passage at the Liverpool lad.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A new dodge."

"Oh, all right!"

Bernard Glyn was an inventor, of great renown in the School House. He had a playful way of startling quiet people by making electric bells ring in all sorts of unexpected places, and by giving them electric shocks at unexpected moments. He generally had a new "dodge" of some kind on, and Tom Merry took a great interest in his mechanical contrivances.

Manners and Lowther went in to begin the packing, and Tom Merry walked along to the end study to see the new dodge.

He looked into the room, and the faces of Noble and Dane became as grave as the countenances of magistrates upon the bench.

"Well, what's the dodge?" asked Tom.

"Look there!"

Glyn pointed to a large, softly padded armchair, and Tom Merry instinctively took a step backwards. He had seen something of Glyn's contrivances in that line, and he had no desire to be made a prisoner in the chair.

"Look here——" he began.

Before he could get further, Kangaroo gave him a gentle push, and he was twisted round at the same moment by a pull on his shoulder. Before he knew what was happening, he was sitting in the chair.

Then the expected happened!

The padded arms of the chair closed in, moved by a contrivance which was worked by a weight being thrown upon the seat. The arms closed upon his ribs, pinning him above the hips, so that he could not possibly rise from the chair.

Tom struggled in the grip of the padded arms, but the more he struggled, the more tightly they closed upon his waist.

The three Shell fellows stood before him in a row, and grinned.

"Find that chair comfy?" asked Clifton Dane.

"He seems to like it; he's sticking to it," said Glyn.

"Or it's sticking to him," grinned Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry ceased his efforts. He turned a very red face upon the chums of the end study.

"Let me go, you bounders."

"I don't think!"

"This is a trick——"

"Of course it is. You've walked into our little parlour like a giddy fly," grinned Bernard Glyn. "But it's all right; we only want a little talk."

"What about?"

"About Paris."

Tom Merry had guessed it.

"You see, we shall feel anxious about you, out there in the cold world alone," explained Kangaroo. "You may be taken away by some naughty chap in Montmartre, to be trained up as an organ-grinder's monkey——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or you may lose your way in the Catacombs, and never see daylight again. Or you may over-eat yourself with a fricassee of frogs, and expire in fearful agony. Now, you will admit that you ought to be looked after. Paris is a dangerous place for kids."

"Oh, go and eat coke."

"So we're coming with you. I hear that Figgins & Co. are going——"

"Yes; and the Head's limited the number to six. It's impossible. I'd like to take you, but it can't be did. Now let me go."

"H'm! Suppose you asked the Head to let you take three more?"

"He wouldn't."

"Suppose you take us instead of Figgins & Co.?"

"They wouldn't agree."

"H'm! It seems a serious matter," said Kangaroo, with a grave shake of the head. "We've got to go, and it will have to be fixed somehow. You can see that?"

"Rats!"

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Bernard Glyn. "Perhaps it's rather a big order to take the three of us. One of us shall go, and we'll toss up for it."

"That's fair," said Clifton Dane

"Quite fair," said Kangaroo. "We don't want to be exacting. What do you say, Tommy? Will you agree to take one of us?"

"Can't be did!"

"Let's settle which one is to go, then," said Kangaroo, as if Tom Merry had answered in the affirmative instead of in the negative. "Got a penny?"

"Here you are!"

"Toss it up, and odd man out!"

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry wriggled in the chair.

"Look here, you asses," he exclaimed, "it's no good your tossing up. You can't come, and that settles it."

"Head!" said Kangaroo calmly, as the coin came down, and Clifton Dane placed his hand over it, without seeing it.

"Tail!" said Glyn.

"Head!" said Dane.

And head it was. Bernard Glyn made a grimace.

"Oh, rats! I'm out! Never mind, I'll electrify Merry all the same, out of pure friendship."

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"You—you'll what?"

Dane tossed the penny again.

"Head!" said Kangaroo, again.

And it proved to be head.

Clifton Dane clinked the penny into the firegrate.

"Hang! You're the man!"

"It's all right I'll send you chaps picture-postcards, and——"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Now, Merry, it's settled. I'm coming," said Noble "Are you agreeable?"

"No! I——"

"I'm sorry you're disagreeable. Never mind, we'll persuade you. Turn it on, Glyn."

"You—you asses! What are you going to do?"

"Only give you a shock."

"Let me go!"

"Yes, when you come to terms."

"Rescue!" roared Tom Merry, at the top of his voice.

Kangaroo promptly closed the door and locked it. Bernard Glyn switched on the electric current, and coiled a wire round Tom Merry's leg.

The hero of the Shell twitched and wriggled.

The current was not very strong so far, and it did not trouble him much, but he saw that the inventor of St. Jim's could turn on a more powerful current any moment he chose.

"Look here, chuck it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I—I —— Ow—ow—ow!"

The current was stronger.

Tom Merry began to do a sort of galvanic dance in the chair, scraping it along the floor in his spasmodic movements.

The three Shell fellows watched him with grinning faces.

"Coming to terms, Merry?" asked Kangaroo cheerfully.

"Ow! Yow! You ass! Chuck it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you coming to terms, Tom Merry?"

"Ow! Yow!"

"Turn it on a little stronger, Glyn!"

"Right-ho!" grinned the Liverpool lad.

"Ow! Stop it! Yow! Ow! Gerrooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yarooh!"

"Well, why don't you come to terms, old chap," remonstrated Kangaroo. "I know electricity is a shocking thing——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you've only got to say the word."

"Gerooh! Yarooh!"

"Blessed if I understand him. Is he talking Esperanto."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo! Yow! Stop it!"

"You've only got to——"

"All right!" gasped Tom Merry."

Bernard Glyn shut off the current. Tom Merry ceased the wriggle, and he lay back in the chair glaring at Cornstalk & Co., his face wet with perspiration.

"You—you rotters!"

"It was really for your own good," explained Cornstalk. "You could never get on in Paris without me, you know."

"Groo! I'm stuck all over with pins and needles."

"Well, you've come to terms, and that's the chief thing. You are going to manage somehow to make me one of the party."

"Yes, hang you!"

The Australian junior chuckled.

"Good. I should advise that you go to the Head, and

put it to him that you might as well make it seven as six, and that a chap from a distant colony is specially entitled to a little run of this sort. When I get home to Melbourne, you know, I shall be too far from Paris for a week-end trip."

"I'll do my best," grunted Tom Merry. "Let me out of this confounded contrivance."

Bernard Glyn touched a spring, and the arms of the chair flew back. Tom Merry rose to his feet. He looked rather uncertainly at Cornstalk & Co. He was strongly inclined to call in the aid of Manners and Lowther, and wreck the study. But pax had been implied in his compact with the Cornstalk, and he restrained his wrath.

"Better go and see the Head," grinned Kangaroo.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh. As the electric shocks were now over, he could begin to see the humour of the situation.

"All right," he said, "I'll do my best."

"Right you are!" said Kangaroo. "Cut off!"

And Tom Merry cut off.

CHAPTER 9.

Put to the Torture.

FATTY WYNN stared helplessly at the chums of Study No. 6.

Exactly what they were going to do he did not know; but it was pretty clear that it would be something unpleasant to himself.

"I say, this has gone far enough as a joke," he said feebly, when he had been sitting in the chair for five minutes. "Better chuck it."

"Chuck what?" asked Blake.

"This rotten joke."

"Quite a mistake, my son," said Blake cheerfully. "This isn't a joke. It's serious business."

"What are you going to do?"

"Put you to the torture."

"Don't be an ass."

"Well, wait and see."

The chums of the Fourth busied themselves about the study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in anticipation of a trip to Paris, sorted out his silk hats, and began to polish them. Dig began to pack a bag with shirts and collars and other necessaries, and Blake hunted an old guide-book out of the cupboard, and sat down on the window-seat to peruse it.

Herries had a thoughtful frown upon his brow. He appeared to be thinking something out, and at last he spoke.

"Just how long shall we be away, Blake?"

Blake looked up from the guide-book.

"As long as we stay in Paris," he replied. "Add to that the time taken by the journey to and fro, and there you are."

"Oh, don't be funny! This is a serious matter. You see, I shall have to arrange with Taggles to look after Towser."

"Well, go and arrange with him, and don't worry."

"It's not so jolly easy," said Herries, with a snort. "Last time I was away, I fixed it up with Taggles and he ran out of Towser's biscuits, and gave him a rotten cheap kind till I came back. Towser was looking quite pale."

"Pale!" gurgled Blake.

"Well, he was looking off colour," said Herries. "I'm not going to have Towser neglected for the sake of a trip to Paris. Paris is all right, but Towser's got to be looked after. I want to know exactly how long we shall be gone, so that I can lay in a sufficient supply of biscuits for him."

"Better order a ton, in case we stay over Christmas."

"Look here," said Herries wrathfully, "there will be a row if you start being funny on this subject. It's a serious matter to trust one's dog into somebody else's hands."

"A serious matter for the somebody else, I should imagine, when the dog's like Towser," remarked Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I don't want to say anythin' against Towsah, but I must wemark that he is an extwemely wotten beast, and has no wespect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs."

"There's a prejudice against Towser in this study," said Herries, with a sniff.

"Yaas, wathah! I am fah fwom denyin' that, deah boy. A dog that has no wespect for a fellow's twousahs——"

"Here, you chaps," said Fatty Wynn, "I'm getting tired of this."

"Never mind, take it quietly."

"I'm hungry."

"That's no news."

"What's the little game?" demanded Wynn wrathfully. "I'm not going to stick here all the evening. Lemme go."

"Suppose we say a fortnight," said Herries thoughtfully. "You see, I don't want to lay in too many biscuits, or Taggles may feed his beastly dog on them. I don't want to throw money away. Shall we say a fortnight?"

"You can say anything you like, old chap."

"Look here——"

"Yes, look here," said Fatty Wynn, "I've had enough of it. I'm starving. If anything serious happens to me, you chaps will be responsible."

"Ha, ha ha!"

"It's all very well for you to cackle. This is a serious matter. I haven't had my tea, and I've had nothing to eat since dinner but a mutton-pie and a beefsteak-pudding, and a few odds and ends. I get jolly hungry in this October weather. If you're going to keep me here, give me some grub."

"My dear chap, we're putting you to the torture," said Blake affably. "I know you're hungry. We're going to keep you sitting here, to watch us have tea."

"You—you sweep!"

"A sort of tortures of Tantalus, you know."

"I'm not going to stand——"

"No; you're going to sit just where you are," said Blake. "I wouldn't expect you to stand. Put the kettle on, Dig."

"Right you are."

"Blessed if this guide-book's any good," said Blake. "I brought it here for lighting the fire, and it doesn't say anything about Paris in it, either."

"Why, it's a German guide-book!" exclaimed Digby, looking at it.

Blake glanced at the cover.

"By Jove, so it is! That accounts for there not being anything about Paris in it, I suppose. Seems to me jolly careless of the editor. He might have guessed that somebody who bought it might want to go to Paris. Never mind, it will do to light the fire with, and we can buy a new Baedeker. They're jolly expensive; but Gussy can buy one—it will always be useful to him when he goes to Paris."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Anybody want to put anything in this bag?" asked Digby.

"Yes, rather!" said Blake and Herries together.

"You too, Gussy?"

"No thanks, deah boy. I shall take a couple of twunks and a hat-box."

"You'll take a couple of thick ears and a flat nose if you start any of your giddy rot," said Blake severely. "Do you think we're going to charter a special steamer to carry over your blessed hats and waistcoats?"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Shove out the sardines, somebody. Let's have tea. I'm hungry; and, besides, it's time Fatty Wynn was put to the torture. Figgins and Kerr will be back from the post-office presently, and then they will begin making a fuss."

"Look here, you School House rotters——"

"Pour some milk down the back of his neck if he talks, Dig."

"Certainly."

Fatty Wynn relapsed into wrathful silence.

Blake and his chums proceeded to get tea in the study. The kettle was soon boiling, and the smell of the freshly-made tea made Fatty Wynn's mouth water.

The scent of the sardines, too, was very appetising to the famished junior.

The tea was not a particularly ripping one, but it was enough to make Fatty Wynn suffer more than the tortures of Tantalus.

The bread and butter alone would have been a great treat to him in his state of famine.

Blake poured out the tea, and the chums sat down round the table, and commenced the meal, while Fatty Wynn looked on in hopeless yearning.

He had an aching void within, as a novelist would say, and his feelings gradually worked up into a state of desperation as he watched the feasters.

The sardines were finished, Fatty Wynn watching them as they disappeared one by one with the hungry gaze of a cormorant.

Then Dig brought out the remains of a cake from the cupboard. It had been a huge cake, and there was still enough left to make a solid meal for three or four fellows.

Fatty Wynn eyed it hungrily.

"I say, you chaps," he broke out, "you might let me have a bit of cake."

"Certainly," said Blake, "when you have given your parole to resign in our favour."

"Look here——"

"You will have to give your word for Figgins and Kerr, too, of course. If you promise us, honest Injun, they will have to stand by it."

"Yaas, wathah! We should do the same, undah similah circs."

"I can't! I won't! I'll see you hanged first."

"Then you jolly well won't have any cake, that's all."

"Beast!"

"Weally, Wynn, I wegard that wemark as oppwobwious.

I shall have to untie you and give you a feahful thwashin' if you wepeat it."

"Beast!"

Arthur Augustus rolled back his cuffs.

"Pway untie him, Blake, deah boy, while I give him a feahful thwashin, will you?"

"Oh, sit down, Gussy!"

"I decline to sit down. I have been insulted by a New House wottah!"

"A prisoner of war is entitled to say what he likes," said Blake severely. "I'm surprised that you don't know better than this, Gussy."

"Oh, undah those circs——"

"Sit down."

"Look here," said Wynn, "I've had enough——"

"So have I," said Digby, rising from the table. "I've had enough, but I should hardly have thought that you'd had enough, Fatty."

"I've had enough of this foolery, I mean."

"Ready to give your parole?"

"No!" roared Fatty Wynn.

Jack Blake yawned.

"Very well. We'll take a stroll round, you chaps, as we haven't to do any prep to-night. No good doing prep when we're going on a journey."

"We mayn't be going," suggested Herries. "I——"

"Ass! We are going! Do you think we're going to be done by Figgins & Co.?"

"Well, it's not only that."

"Oh, the Head will agree, if Figgins & Co. resign in our favour."

"I wasn't thinking of the Head."

"What the dickens were you thinking of then?" demanded Blake.

"Towser. I sha'n't go unless it can be satisfactorily settled that Towser will be properly looked after while I am in Paris."

Blake snorted.

"Oh, I'm getting fed up with Towser!"

"That's all very well, but he had a bit of a cough this morning. Taggles believes in giving dogs medicine, and he may start shoving some of it down Towser's throat while I'm away. I can't help feeling anxious."

"I have a wippin' suggestion to make, deah boy."

"Go ahead."

"Suppose you have Towsah shot?"

"What!" roared Herries.

"Suppose you have Towsah shot?" repeated D'Arcy innocently. "That would put him out of his misewy, and save all furthah wowwy about the mattah. It would save a good many pairs of twousahs, too, as a mattah of fact."

"You unspeakable ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

Blake dragged his elegant chum from the study. D'Arcy looked round over his shoulder at the wrathful Herries.

"Have I said anythin' to make Hewwies angwy, Blake?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha! Of course not. Only your suggestion doesn't seem so ripping to Herries as to the rest of us."

"I wegard it as a good suggestion."

"So it is."

"Here, I say," shouted Fatty Wynn, as the gas was turned out, "you're not going to leave me here, you rotters!"

"This is the torture scene," said Blake. "We'll give you a look in presently to see how you are getting on."

"Beast!"

"Thanks!"

And the study door closed, and Fatty Wynn was left alone.

For several minutes Fatty Wynn filled up the time by saying things. The things he said we need not insert here; they were all uncomplimentary to the School House in general, and the chums of Study No. 6 in particular.

Having expended his available stock of breath in saying things, Fatty Wynn began to wriggle with his bonds.

He remembered that some of the knots had been tied by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and that gave him some hope that they were not as tight as they seemed.

And after he had been struggling with the cord for a few minutes, a grin overspread his fat face in the darkness.

The cord was getting loose.

CHAPTER 10.

Packing.

TOM MERRY came out of the Head's study with a look of relief upon his face. He had told Cornstalk & Co. that he would do his best with the Head, and he had done so. He had found the Head very reasonable. Kangaroo's argument that a chap from Australia ought to be included in the party, because it might be his only chance of ever seeing the Continent, seemed to have some weight with Dr. Holmes. He had given his consent to Kangaroo accompanying the party, and so the number was increased to seven already.

Tom Merry met Blake & Co. as he returned. Blake stopped him in the passage. Tom doubled his fists; but the chums of No. 6 were not on a warlike foray.

"Pax!" said Blake. "I told you I was coming to Paris, with you, I think."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes; and I told you you weren't."

"I suppose if Figgins & Co. resigned in our favour it would be all right?"

"They're not likely to."

"No; but if they did?"

"Oh, if they did, it would be all right, of course," said Tom Merry, considerably puzzled. "I should be glad to have you, of course."

"I wegard that as puttin' it vewy handsomely, Tom Mewwy."

"Thank you, Gussy!" said Tom Merry gravely.

"Not at all, deah boy."

"The fact is," said Blake, in a mysterious whisper, "we've got Fatty Wynn shut up in our study, and we're putting him to the torture to make him give his parole for Figgins & Co. See?"

"Ha, ha! What kind of torture?"

"Keeping him late for tea!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, I wegard it as wathah funnay; but Wynn seems to be takin' it sewiously I have no doubt that he will give in."

"I expect Figgins will be along to the rescue soon," grinned Tom Merry.

"Door's locked; key in my pocket," said Blake sententiously. "That's all right. Come and have a turn in the gym., you chaps."

"I'm going to look after Towser," said Herries.

"Oh, blow Towser!"

And Herries went to look after Towser, while his chums went to the gym. Tom Merry looked into the end study in the Shell passage to tell the news, and the Cornstalk chum executed a war dance round the table in his glee. He knocked over a chair, and sent one of Bernard Glyn's batteries crashing to the floor, and there was a roar from the Liverpool lad. They were arguing over the matter with raised voices when Tom Merry left them, and went into his own study to help with the packing.

Lowther and Manners had selected two big bags, and had been cramming things into them for some time. There were still more things to cram. Manners had just come downstairs with an armful of shirts and collars and underclothing, and it looked as if the largest size in trunks would be wanted instead of a couple of bags.

Lowther looked up with a grunt as Tom Merry came in.

"Nice ass you are, to leave us all the packing!"

"Well, I suppose I must be an ass to leave it to you, considering the way you're doing it," agreed Tom Merry.

"If you think I can't pack——"

"My dear chap, I don't think—I know you can't! Better turn those bags out on the floor and start fresh."

"I jolly well sha'n't!"

"But I will show you how to pack them properly."

Lowther snorted.

"I've put the camera in," said Manners. "Do you remember which bag I put it in, Monty?"

"No; don't you remember?"

"Well, it was one of them," said Manners rather hopelessly. "I want to know, because it would be better not to put the boot-trees and boots into the same bag. The camera might get a knock."

"It's pretty certain to get a knock," said Tom Merry. "Better turn the bags out and start fresh."

"Oh, go and eat coke."

"By the way, Kangaroo's coming; the Head's consented."

"Blow Kangaroo! Which camera did I put that bag in? I—I mean, which bag did I put that camera in?" exclaimed Manners.

"Shove your paw in and grope for it."

"I suppose I'd better."

Manners thrust his hand into the mass of conglomerated shirts and socks and undervests, and waistcoats and slippers and collar-boxes, and dressing-bags. He gave a yell, and dragged it out again.

"Ow! Ow!"

"My hat! What's the matter?"

"Ow! Ow!" Manners left off, to suck his fingers, and then started again. "Ow! Ow! I've pricked my beastly fingers! What silly ass put a fork in the bag?"

"I did," said Lowther. "I thought we might want one."

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

"Oh, you frabjous ass!" groaned Manners.

"Well, I told you I had put one in, at the time."

"You didn't tell me you had shoved it all ready for me to shove my beastly fingers on, you fathead!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Ass!"

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Manners——"

"Oh, hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "This is a packing competition, not a dogfight. Let's turn the bags out on the floor and start fresh."

"If you touch those bags——"

"But, my dear chap——"

"Look here——"

"Ass!"

The door opened, and a big, bumpy forehead and a pair of large spectacles glimmered in. The Terrible Three ceased the argument, which was growing warm, and turned three separate and threatening stares upon Skimpole.

Skimpole blinked at them amiably.

"Ah, I have found you at last!" he remarked.

"Yes; good-bye!" said Tom Merry.

"I am not going yet——"

"Your mistake; you are! Get out!"

"I hear you are going to Paris——"

"Go hon!"

"I am coming with you——"

"Rats!"

"You won't be needed there," said Monty Lowther. "They've got one like you in the Jardin des Plantes!"

"Really, Lowther——"

"Good-bye!"

"I must really come, Merry, because I want to, and ——"

"Jolly good reason," agreed Tom Merry. "You are a harmless ass, Skimmy, and I'd like to take you. Go and ask the Head. Put it to him that you want to go, and if he agrees, I'll agree like a shot."

"You know I am a Socialist, Tom Merry——"

"I know you are an asininist."

"As a sincere Socialist, I claim the right to go where I like, how I like, when I like, and as I like. If I choose to go to Paris, why should I be stopped?"

"There's no stopping you when it comes to jawing, anyway," groaned Tom Merry. "Go and put it to the Head."

And he gently pushed Skimpole into the passage.

"My hat!" he remarked, as he closed the door. "That chap—— Why, here he is again!"

Skimpole opened the door, and blinked into the study.

"Really, Tom Merry——"

"Get out!"

"If the Head consents, I suppose you will be glad of my company in Paris?"

"Overjoyed, dear boy! Now bunk. We're packing!"

"Then I will ask the Head, but I regard it as a matter of form," said the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's. "However, I will ask him."

"Buck up, then!"

"If you would like me to edit 'Tom Merry's Weekly' while you are seeing sights in Paris, I shall be very pleased to do so. I can do it in the train. I have an article here I want inserted in the next number. It will fill about half the number——"

"Good-bye!"

"Yes; but——"

The Terrible Three rushed at Skimpole, and rolled him into the passage. They jerked the manuscript out of his hand, jammed it down the back of his neck, and left him sitting on the linoleum in a very dazed and bewildered state as they slammed the door of the study. Skimpole slowly collected his wits and drifted away, and the Terrible Three were left in peace to tackle the problem of the packing once more.

CHAPTER 11.

Fatty Wynn Gets His Own Back.

FIGGINS and Kerr wore worried looks.

They had returned from the post-office, pretty sharp set, for they had had no tea, and the hour was growing late.

Figgins had brought in a little parcel with him, for he knew that provisions in the study had run very low, and that if any fragment remained in the cupboard, Fatty Wynn would have bolted it to the last crumb.

To their surprise, they did not find Fatty Wynn in the New House.

The study was drawn blank, and so was the common-room, and then they looked through the studies in vain along the passage. The only fragment of information they received was in Pratt's study. There were several fellows having tea with Pratt, and they cheerfully told all they knew in reply to the question as to whether they had seen anything of Fatty Wynn.

"He came mooching in here after some grub, while we were having tea," said Pratt. "We slung him out."

"Oh, you did, did you?" said Figgins wrathfully.

"Yes. The last I saw of him he was rolling like a barrel along the passage," said Pratt. "I— Oh!"

Figgins picked up a pat of butter that remained on the tea-table, and gently jammed it into Pratt's eye, and left the study with Kerr.

"I suppose he's gone over to the School House," said Kerr.

Figgins nodded.

"Ye-es. But it's late—the house ought to be closed up. I don't see how he can be there now. He must be hungry, too. He was hungry when we went out, an hour ago; and he dodged us in the lane to get some grub."

"Perhaps he's geting it in the School House."

"Well, we'll go and look."

Figgins had looked into the gym, where a good many fellows were congregated, but Fatty Wynn was not among them. The chums of the New House walked over to the rival house, and glanced up at the window of Study No. 6 in passing.

A low whistle from the dark window caught their ears. Figgins gave a jump.

It was the signal-whistle of Figgins & Co.

"He's there!"

The two juniors halted under the window. In the gloom they slowly made out the fat face of Fatty Wynn, looking down upon them.

"Hallo!" called out Figgins.

"Quiet!" came a whispering voice from above. "I'm all right. I'm going to get out of the window. The door's locked."

"What's the row?"

"They made me a prisoner, and kept me looking on while they had tea. They left me tied to an armchair, but I've got loose, see?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Poor old Fatty! How you must have suffered!"

"Well, Blake called it putting me to the torture. It was rough, and no mistake. They wanted to make me promise for all of us to resign the trip to Paris in their favour."

"My hat!"

"Of course I wouldn't; though if I had gone hungry much longer, I don't know what I mightn't have done," said Fatty Wynne pathetically. "But I held out!"

"Bravo!"

"My word!" said Kerr. "How hungry you must be now, Fatty."

There was the sound of a satisfied chuckle above.

"Not so very, Kerr. You see, I've finished up all the grub there was in the study. There was a ripping cake, and some other things. I've made a clean sweep."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've taken down the curtains, and twisted them up, and used a lot of straps and braces and neckties to make a rope," said Fatty Wynn. "I've tested it, and it's strong enough. Catch the end when I let it down."

"Ha, ha! Good!"

The end of the improvised rope came floating down. Figgins caught it and held it fast. The plump form of Fatty Wynn worked itself out of the window.

"Careful, Fatty!"

"What-ho!"

"You'd burst if you fell, you know."

Fatty Wynn only grunted in response to that remark. With one hand upon a rainpipe, and the other clutching a rope, he slowly and steadily worked his way downwards.

He was gasping by the time he came within reach of Figgins, and they grasped him and helped him upon his feet.

"Good!" panted Fatty Wynn. "Blake will snort when he gets in and finds me gone—and all the grub gone, too. This is where we smile."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!" whispered Figgins. "Here they come!"

Three forms loomed up in the gloom from the direction of the gym. They belonged to Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy, returning to the School House.

"Follow me," muttered Figgins. "Let's rush them and bump them over—it will be a joyful surprise for them!"

"Good egg!"

The New House chums waited close in the shadow of the wall till the School House three were near, and then with a sudden whoop rushed upon them.

Before they knew what was happening, Blake, and Dig, and D'Arcy were rolling on the ground, and Figgins & Co.,

The plump form of Fatty Wynn appeared at the window, and the end of the improvised rope came floating down into the quadrangle.

with a yell of laughter, were disappearing in the direction of the New House.

"Bai Jove!"

"M-m-my word! What was that?"

"My only hat!"

The School House chums sat up and blinked round them. From the distance came back a yell of laughter. Blake uttered an exclamation.

"Figgins & Co.!"

"Phew! They've rescued Fatty!"

"Bai Jove! This is extwemely careless of you, Blake."

"Here, let's get in and see!"

Blake rushed into the School House, with the others at his heels. In a few seconds he was at the door of Study No. 6.

"It's still locked," he exclaimed, in great relief, as he tried the door. "I couldn't see how Figgins could get a key to it, anyway."

"Bai Jove! It was not so careless of you aftah all, deah boy."

Blake unlocked the door.

"Hallo, Fatty!" he exclaimed, as he entered. "Sorry to have left you so long, but——" He broke off suddenly as he struck a match.

The chair was empty, and Fatty Wynn was gone.

Blake, with a grim look, lighted the gas. Fatty Wynn was certainly gone; and the open window, and the rope tied to the leg of the table and floating over the sill, showed the way he had gone."

"Bai Jove! You are an awfully careless ass, Blake!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Fatty's gone," said Digby, "and we needn't look to see if the grub's gone. It's gone inside Fatty."

"I suppose so," said Blake glumly. "How did the bounder get loose? This is what comes of letting Gussy tie some of the knots. I might have known that he would make a mess of it somehow."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Where the dickens did he get that rope? Phew! Blessed if he hasn't twisted up our curtains—they'll be torn into rags."

"Phew! The sweep!"

"And my braces—and phew!—Gussy's neckties!"

"Bai Jove! What?"

"Here they are, dozens of them, all knotted together."

"Gweat Scott! They will be wuined!"

"That's what's come of your idea of putting a chap to the torture, and making him give his parole," said Blake.

They stared at him.

"Well, of all the nerve!" gasped Digby. "It was your idea."

"Yaas, wathah. It was Blake's ideah, and a wotten ideah it was."

"Oh, don't you chaps begin to argue, at a time like this!" said Blake crossly. "The worry is, how are we to get to Paris now?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"My neckties are wuined——"

"Blow your neckties! I wish you would tie all your neckties round Towser's neck, and then drop him into the river."

"Weally, Blake——"

"And if you would put on all your silk hats, and jump in after him, it would be simply ripping," growled Blake.

"I wegard that wemark as——"

"Blessed if it doesn't begin to look as if we sha'n't get to Paris," grunted Digby.

"Bai Jove! And we haven't done our pwep, as we were startin' in the mornin'."

"I'd forgotten that. Better do some now——"

"Too late, deah boy—bedtime in ten minutes."

The chums of Study No. 6 looked at one another grimly. Paris seemed further off than ever; and the prospect of trouble with the Form-master in the morning was added to their other pleasures.

"Well, the only thing is, we've got to go," grunted Blake.

"But how?"

"Oh, don't ask me!"

Herries came into the study. He was looking somewhat discontented, and decidedly bothered.

"I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to come to Paris," he remarked.

Blake grinned.

"That's the conclusion we've all just come to, as Fatty Wynn's got away. But what's the matter?"

"Towser is looking very queer. He had an up-and-downer with young Wally's Pongo yesterday, and bit him pretty hard. It may be a case of poisoning."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You'd bettah tell my minah that."

"It might be through biting that mongrel. Anyway, Towser's looking very rotten," said Herries. "I don't like to leave him. I shall give up the idea of Paris."

"I expect we shall have to give it up, too," growled Digby. "We've got such a blessed jolly good leader in this study."

"Oh, rats! I'll think of a way," said Blake.

He was still thinking of a way when the Fourth Form went to bed, and he thought over it till he went to sleep; but he had not found the way.

CHAPTER 12.

Good-Bye to St. Jim's.

TOM MERRY was up bright and early in the morning. He was in a very cheerful mood, as if he already tasted the bright sunlight and the elastic air of Paris. Manners and Lowther turned out with equal cheerfulness. Kangaroo jumped out of bed with the activity of the animal he derived his nickname from. Four cheerier faces were not to be found in the school.

"Fine morning," said Kangaroo. "I hear that the autumn's considered the best time for visiting Paris, so it suits us down to the ground."

"Good."

Skimpole sat up in bed.

"There will be some slight difficulty about my expenses, Merry," he remarked. "Can I rely upon you to take my ticket, you to be reimbursed from the profits of my book on Socialism, which is to be published shortly?"

"Oh, rather!" grinned Tom Merry. "Has the Head given his consent?"

"I have not asked him yet. He had gone to his own house last evening, and I was refused admittance there. The Head did not apparently consider that I had anything of sufficient importance to speak to him about. These old gentlemen are very trying sometimes."

"I've known young gentlemen to be trying, at times, too," said Monty Lowther. "Never mind, Skimmy. Collar him before breakfast this morning, and put it to him straight."

"That is exactly what I intend to do, Lowther."

The Shell went down, and Tom Merry found Blake and his chums in the hall. Blake had his brow screwed up into a thoughtful frown. He was doubtless still thinking of a way to get to Paris—without success.

Tom Merry tapped him on the shoulder with a smile.

"How did it work?" he asked.

"Eh?" said Jack, with a start. "How did what work?"

"The scheme with Figgins & Co. Your idea of——"

"Oh, it wasn't exactly my idea," said Blake hastily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"I suppose that means that it went wrong—eh?"

"Well, it didn't work out exactly as Dig expected," confessed Blake. "You see——"

"Here, I like that!" exclaimed Digby warmly. "It was your scheme——"

"Oh, do let a chap finish, Dig! The idea didn't work out exactly as D'Arcy expected——"

"Bai Jove, Blake——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy, for a minute!"

"I wefuse to wing off. It was your wotten idea, and——"

"Well, it went rocky," said Blake. "Fatty Wynn got away—he bolted, and bolted all the grub too. Dig and Gussy were simply done."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Look here——"

"So you haven't come to terms with Figgins & Co.?"

"Well, you see——"

"As a mattah of fact, the whole ideah was a wank failure," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's no good disguisin' the facts. I wegard Blake as an ass."

"And I regard him as another ass," said Digby. "I—I mean as the same ass—that is to say, I regard him as an ass too."

"You duffers!"

Tom Merry chuckled and walked away, leaving them to argue it out. Skimpole passed him on his way to the Head's study, bolting along very quickly, as he usually did when he had a scheme to work out. Tom Merry spoke to him, but Skimpole did not answer; he was too busy with his plans.

Tom Merry went out into the quad., and punted a footer about with Manners and Lowther and Glyn and Kangaroo till the bell rang for breakfast. Then he came in, and the first person he saw was Skimpole. Skimpole was slowly and methodically rubbing the palms of his hands together, and his face was twisted up into an extraordinary expression.

The Shell fellows stopped to look at him in great surprise.

"What on earth's the matter?" demanded Kangaroo.

"Ow!"

"He seems to be hurt," said Lowther. "Where do you feel the pain, Skimmy?"

"Yow!"

"He's been arguing with the Head," exclaimed Tom Merry. "Is that it, Skimmy?"

"Wow! I regard Dr. Holmes as being an utterly unreasonable man, and dead to the perception of the first principles of logic. Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! I asked him in the politest manner possible if I could go to Paris with you. I said it was really only a matter of form to ask him, as, as a sincere Socialist, I had a right to do as I liked."

"And, of course, he saw it?"

"Ow! No, he did not appear to see it. He seemed to get quite excited about something. I added that there would be no difficulty about expenses, as some of you would pay any expenses I might incur."

"Jolly good! Of course, we should all rush to do that," said Manners humorously. "I was thinking of wiring to my pater for an extra twopence, for that very purpose."

"Ow! My hands are smarting! Yow! The doctor seemed to be annoyed—perhaps somebody had been checking him, or something—and he wreaked it upon me. He told me to leave his study, in a very loud voice—what would be described in a six-shilling novel as a voice of thunder."

"Good! And did you?"

"I had not finished explaining, so I could not very well do so. I went on to tell him that I had quite decided to go to Paris, and that I was sorry he was acting foolishly in the matter; and then he—it seems incredible, but it is true—he caned me, and turned me out of his study."

"Now, I wonder what could have been his reason for that?" said Kangaroo solemnly, while the others roared.

Skimpole blinked at them.

"I have been wondering, too," he said. "I can only conclude that the Head was annoyed about something, and that he wreaked it upon me. It was very unjust. My hands are smarting very much. I regard the Head as an extraordinary man. Ow!"

And Skimpole ejaculated "Ow!" about a hundred times during the course of breakfast.

After breakfast, Tom Merry & Co. were to start for Rylcombe, to take the train to Huckleberry Heath. Figgins & Co. came over with cheerful grins, and bags packed to bursting point. The Terrible Three and Kangaroo met them on the School House steps with genial greetings. Blake & Co. were there, too, and they were looking decidedly glum.

Blake had not yet thought of a way.

Figgins gave Blake a sympathetic look.

"I'm jolly sorry you're not coming," he remarked. "I've been trying to think of a dodge, but I can't."

Blake nodded.

"Can't be helped, old man. I suppose it was too much to expect. I should have gone instead of you if Fatty Wynn hadn't got away last night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally D'Arcy came up, with his hands in his pockets, and a smear of ink on one cheek. He had a very businesslike expression upon his face. He gave his major a dig in the ribs that made him gasp.

"Hallo, Gus, old cock!"

"Ow! Weally, Wally, you young wuffian, you have taken my bweath away, and thwown me into quite a fluttah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"I'm coming with you," said Wally.

"Eh? Where?"

"To Paris, of course."

"Bai Jove! But we're not goin' to Pawis aftah all, Wally."

"Not going!" ejaculated D'Arcy minor.

"No. We can't work it."

Wally gave the chums of the Fourth a look of the most unmitigated disgust.

"Well, of all the frabjous chumps!" he exclaimed. "Of course, I thought you'd have sense enough to work it."

"Weally, Wally——"

"Well, I suppose it wouldn't be safe for you to get too near the Jardong des Plong," said Wally, probably meaning the Jardin des Plantes. "They might keep you as specimens."

"I wegard that wemark as uttahly wantin' in pwopah wespect to your majah."

"Rats! I'm ashamed of you. Yah!"

And the hero of the Third Form walked away in high dudgeon. Blake & Co. hadn't a word to say. They felt that they ought to have "worked it" somehow, and Wally's sniffs at their expense were justified.

Mr. Railton came out of the School House to say good-bye to the juniors before going to the class-room. The School House master glanced at Blake & Co., and noted their doleful visages.

Blake took a desperate resolution, and approached the House-master.

"If you please, sir——"

"Well, Blake?"

"We want to go with Tom Merry awfully, sir," said Blake, colouring. "We——"

"We are afwaid he will get into mischief without us, sir," explained D'Arcy.

"If you would speak a word for us, sir——"

"I am afraid it would be impossible for four more juniors to get leave," said Mr. Railton, shaking his head. "I am sorry you are disappointed, but——"

"Only three, sir," said Blake; "Herries doesn't want to come."

"I should like to go," said Herries. "But my bulldog's ill, and I feel that I oughtn't to leave him. That's how it is."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Well, three, then. I am afraid it would be impossible. But, if you would like to see Tom Merry off, at Laurel Villa, I think I could get you a permit for a day off."

Blake brightened up.

"Oh, thank you, sir! You're a brick, sir—I—I mean, you're very kind, sir. That would be ever so much better than nothing."

"Then I will see."

And Mr. Railton did see; and the result was that when the travellers left St. Jim's, Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy went with them in the vehicle to the station, to go to Laurel Villa to see the last of Tom Merry & Co.

It did not seem a very great concession, but Blake was extremely gleeful about it.

"We've got out of school," he explained. "It gives us time to think of a dodge. See? Depend upon it we'll work it somehow."

"We'll all put our heads together over it," said Figgins.

And the juniors thought it out as the train rolled on to Huckleberry Heath.

CHAPTER 13.

Blake's Dodge.

MISS FAWCETT greeted the juniors affectionately when they arrived at Laurel Villa. Most of them had been down there only the week before, after Miss Fawcett's stay at St. Jim's; but the kind old lady was very pleased to see them again.

It was impossible, from Miss Priscilla's point of view, for Tom Merry to take a run abroad without going home first to have all his personal belongings sorted over, and carefully packed, and his health examined, and all sorts of arrangements made for his personal comfort and well-being.

Miss Fawcett hugged him affectionately as he entered Laurel Villa. He was looking the picture of health, but nothing would ever get the idea out of his old governess's mind that he was a delicate little fellow.

"You have a very high colour, Tommy," she remarked, with loving solicitude, as she held him at arm's length and looked at him.

"Walking from the station," said Tom Merry.

"But I sent a conveyance for you."

"We shoved the bags and the slackers into that, and walked."

"Dear me!"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, "I decline to be descwibed as a slackah. I did not walk because——"

"Because you rode. Exactly."

"Yaas, but——"

"I am afraid this colour is a little hectic," said Miss Priscilla. "I hope you are not catching a cold, Tommy darling."

"Oh, no; not a bit of it."

"If you had a cold, I would keep you here and nurse you, instead of letting you go to Paris, my dear," said Miss Fawcett affectionately.

"I'm perfectly well, dear," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "I've never felt so ripping in all my life."

"How is your cough?"

"I haven't a cough."

"Oh, my darling child! You remember when you were here——"

"That was only because some silly ass put some pepper on my cocoanut ice," said Tom Merry. "It wasn't a cough."

"Your chest is so delicate. You are sure you always wear——"

"Yes, yes!" said Tom hastily. "I say, Fatty Wynn is frightfully hungry, and he has been talking about nothing but dinner all the way down."

And Miss Fawcett, thus reminded of her duties as a hostess, ceased her inquiries after Tom Merry's health, and bustled about to look after her guests.

Fatty Wynn was indeed hungry; but he was in a satisfied mood. He knew what the "tuck" was like at Huckleberry Heath. He confided to Figgins that he had a hunger he wouldn't have taken a sovereign for, under the circumstances.

The remainder of that day was spent in packing and discussing plans. All the juniors put their heads together on the subject of a "dodge" for enabling Blake & Co. to join in the expedition.

But a plan was not easily found.

The Head had been asked, and he had made one concession in the case of Kangaroo. It would not have been form to ask him again, and it would have been useless. But what kind of a dodge could be devised?

Digby desperately proposed taking the bit in their teeth, so to speak, and bolting. But the suggestion was impracticable.

By giving them leave to come down to Laurel Villa, Mr. Railton had really placed them upon their honour, and they were bound to return to St. Jim's.

"Besides, it would cause a feahful wow," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "The Head would send after us."

"Yes," said Blake, with a gloomy nod, "it would be no good. We should find a couple of prefects turning up at Dover to yank us back again."

"That would be extwemely humiliatin', and would make us look widiculous."

"It seems rotten that you can't come, though," said Tom Merry. "Suppose we consult Miss Fawcett? She might be able to help."

Blake nodded despondently.

He was quite willing to consult anybody, but he did not think that Miss Priscilla was likely to be able to let in any light on the subject.

The juniors had talked it over in the garden, and it having been decided to ask Miss Priscilla's advice, they trooped in through the French windows.

Miss Fawcett was resting in an easy-chair, after having

been through the arduous task of aranging Tom Merry's linen for the journey.

She smiled sweetly at her ward.

"I hope you have had a good rest, Tommy darling."

"Well, I have," said Tom Merry. "I didn't need one, but I've had it. I——"

"Pray sit down, my darling boy. I want to give you some advice on the subject of your journey to Paris," said Miss Fawcett.

"Yes; but——"

"Pray listen to me carefully."

"Certainly, dear," said Tom Merry, resigning himself to his fate, and giving Miss Priscilla her head, so to speak.

"Paris is a very dangerous place," said Miss Fawcett, while the juniors all sat down and listened with great attention. "I have often heard say that Paris is full of pitfalls for the unwary. I suppose that these pitfalls are in some connection with the catacombs that exist under the city. I want you to be particularly careful not to fall into any of them."

Tom Merry suppressed a smile.

"I will be very careful, dear."

"You will probably ascend the Eiffel Tower," went on Miss Fawcett. "You must be very careful not to fall off."

"I will keep hold of him," said Figgins.

"Thank you, Figgins. You are a very careful boy. I remember that when we were on the mountain railway at the Franco-British Exhibition, you held Ethel's hand all the time, to reassure her, and I thought it was very careful of you."

Figgins turned crimson, and Arthur Augustus, who looked upon his Cousin Ethel as his own personal property, fixed his eyeglass on Figgins with a stony stare.

There was a chuckle from somewhere, immediately suppressed, however, and Miss Fawcett went on:

"You will, of course, keep with your Uncle Frank as much as possible, and take his advice in everything, my dear boy. He will look after you, and I am sorry he will not be able to be with you all the time. I wish there were some reliable person who would be able to keep with you every moment of the day."

"Bai Jove!"

"Did you speak, Augustus?"

"Yaas, wathah! I was thinkin' the same thing, madam. What Tom Mewwy weally wequires, is a fellow of tact and judgment, to look aftah him all the time."

"Yes, indeed, I should feel very much more at ease in my mind then."

"Then it must be awwanged somehow for me to go with him."

"Eh?"

"I am accustomed to lookin' aftah these youngstahs," said D'Arcy. "I have taken them about to vawious places—London, and Liverpool, and Coventwy, you know; and we had a twip to Amewicah, and I bwought them back quite safely. You can always wely on me, Miss Fawcett. I'm the pwopah chap for this."

"I was thinking of someone much older——"

"These old persons are not always weliable, Miss Fawcett," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "There's my eldah bwothah, Lord Conway—I have had a gweat deal of twouble with him. He nevah will take my advice, you know. It must be put stwaight to the Head, that you won't feel safe about Tom Mewwy unless I am with him; and then I am sure Dr. Holmes will see weason."

"Oh cheese it, you ass!" murmured Blake.

"I decline to cheese it, Blake. I——"

"That's what we were going to ask you, dear," said Tom Merry. "I want Blake and D'Arcy and Dig to come with me, and we can't think of a wheeze for getting them off. We should really be—be much safer in a larger party, of course."

"What-ho!" said Lowther. "We could hold each other's hands in climbing up the Arch of Triumph, and——"

Kangaroo tramped on his toe, and Lowther ceased.

"Dear me!" said Miss Fawcett. "I should like all your friends to go with you, Tommy darling. I wonder if I could persuade Dr. Holmes?"

"I wish you could, dear."

"I believe it could be worked," said Blake. "Suppose Miss Fawcett writes to the Head——"

"I would do that willingly, my dear."

"And tell him that unless he can see his way to letting us go, you will come to the school and talk it over with him."

Blake made the suggestion with the most innocent face in the world. After the havoc Miss Fawcett had caused in the School House on the occasion of her last visit there, he knew that Dr. Holmes would have given much to avoid another one. At the news that Miss Fawcett was coming to St. Jim's to talk it over, it was extremely probable that Dr. Holmes would wire permission to the three young rascals to go abroad with Tom Merry.

Miss Priscilla nodded thoughtfully.

"I consider that a good suggestion," she said. "I will write the letter at once."

And the juniors of St. Jim's cleared out into the garden while she wrote the letter, and then Tom Merry walked down to the post-office and sent it off by express.

And then they waited anxiously for the answer.

CHAPTER 14.

Off.

"IT is not often that I feel called upon to pwaise Blake for anythin' like forethought or sagacity," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, pausing as he was taking off his boots that night in the big bed-room at Laurel Villa. "In fact, it is vewy seldom. Blake's best fwiends must admit that he is usually an ass. But on this occasion I must weally wemark that Blake has played up in a weally exceptional mannah."

"Go hon!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I must weally make the womark, because I considah it your due, deah boy. This wheeze of spwingin' our wespected fwiend, Miss Fawcett, upon the doctah, is somethin' absolutely unequalled in wheezes. Of course, no diswespect is intended to Miss Fawcett. I twust that Tom Mewwy fully undahstands that?"

"Fully," grinned Tom Merry.

"I should be vewwy sowwy indeed to be supposed capable of anythin' like diswespect towards a charmin' and estimable old lady," said D'Arcy. "But I do not think diswespect is implied in spwingin' her on the doctah."

"Certainly not."

"Dr. Holmes will have to give in. We can count upon the twip to Pawis as a certainty, deah boys."

"I hope so, at all events," said Blake. "The only worry is, what are we to do with you? I suppose you will be willing to stay indoors at the hotel all the time we are seeing the sights?"

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eyes, and regarded Blake with a fixed and stony stare.

"I pwesume you are jokin', Blake?" he remarked frigidly.

"Not at all."

"It will be necessawy for me to accompany you all the time, as othahwise you will certainly get into some sort of mischief."

"Are you going to look after us all?" asked Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But suppose we separate into two parties? How will you accompany both?" asked the Cornstalk. "You can't keep one eye on the Arc de Triomphe, and the other on the Jardin des Plantes, you know."

"And another on the Pont Neuf, and another on the Rue de Rivoli, and another on the Luxembourg," grinned Blake.

"There's a great deal of 'I' about D'Arcy, but he hasn't so many eyes as all that," agreed Lowther. "As Herries' bulldog is off his feed, and won't be going out, Herries won't want his chain. I vote that we wire to Herries for Towser's chain, and keep it on Gussy. We could chain him to the banisters every time we go out.'

"Jolly good idea."

"I wegard you as an ass, Lowthah. I should uttahly wefuse to be chained to the banistahs. And I twust you will not cause me anxiety in Pawis by sepawatin'. I shall have enough twouble to look aftah you without that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to perceive any cause for wibald laughtah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Arthur Augustus sniffed and went to bed.

The juniors were up early in the morning. They felt pretty confident about the result of Miss Fawcett's application to the Head, but they were still a little anxious. Blake predicted a wire in the morning, and the general expectation was that the Head would telegraph in time to prevent Miss Fawcett from paying the threatened visit to the school.

After breakfast, the juniors watched the garden-path for the telegraph-boy.

It was Kangaroo who first spotted him, and he gave a yell that brought all the other juniors flocking to the window.

"Coo-ey!"

"Hallo! What's the row?" demanded Tom Merry.

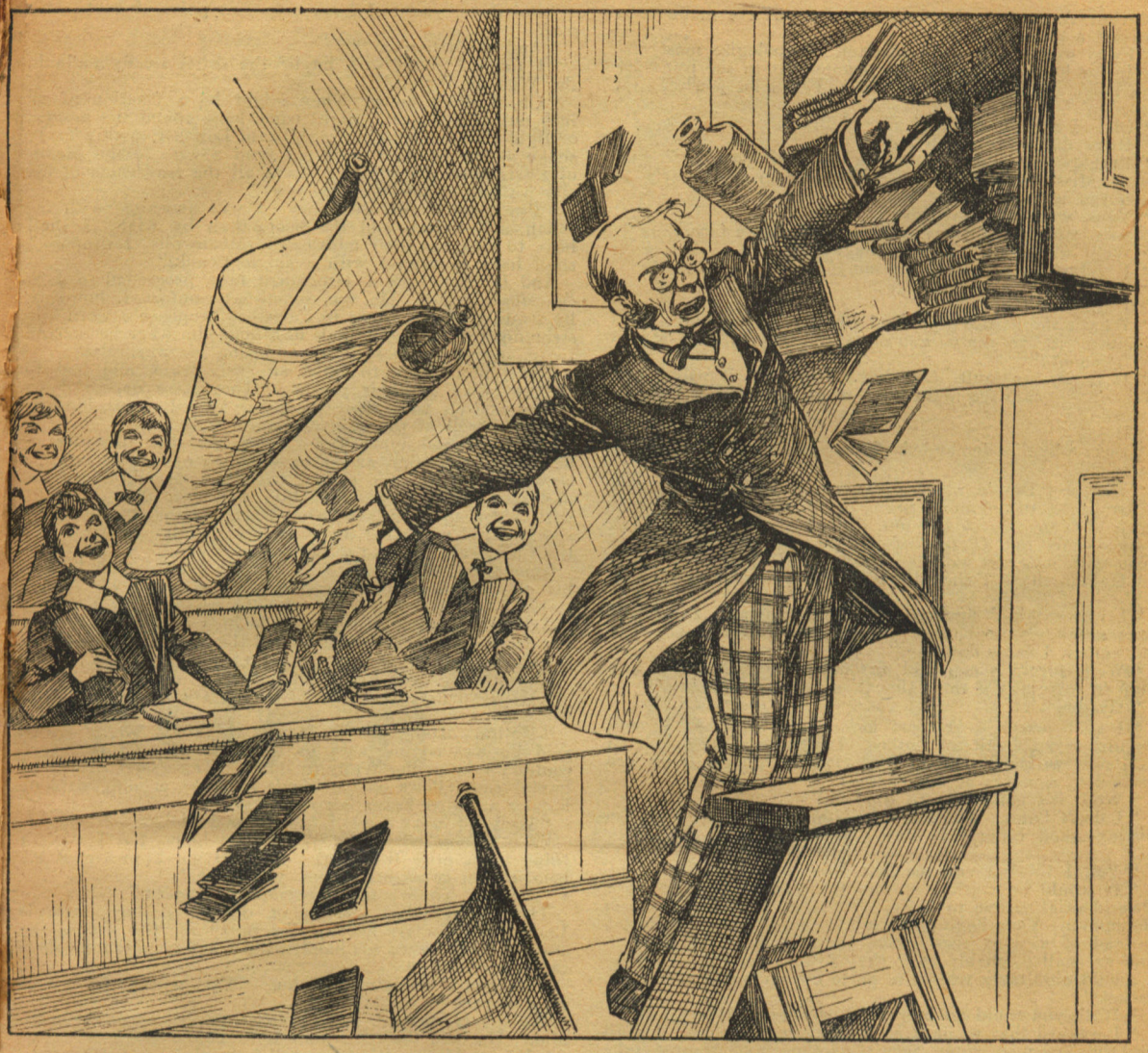
"A wire, my son."

"Hurray!"

The telegraph-boy came up to the House, and the telegram was duly placed in the hands of Miss Fawcett.

The old lady opened it with a slowness that was tantalising to the eager juniors. Then she called Hannah to bring her glasses, and Hannah could not find them for the moment.

"My hat!" said Blake, in an undertone. "This is like



In his search for the schoolboy's ventriloquial voice, Mr. Chesham flung out books and maps until he was enveloped in a cloud of dust. *(An amusing incident in "STAUNCH CHUMS," the grand, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., contained in "The Magnet" Library. Now on sale. Price one halfpenny.)*

waiting for an execution. Buck up, Hannah, there's an old dear!"

"Shall I read it for you, dear?" said Tom Merry.

Miss Priscilla smiled at him affectionately.

"Yes, Tommy, darling. How kind and thoughtful you always are!"

Tom Merry took the telegram.

It was from Dr. Holmes, and it ran as follows:

"Full permission granted Blake, Digby, D'Arcy accompany Merry.—HOLMES."

Tom Merry read it aloud, and the juniors gave a cheer that made Miss Fawcett tremble for the pictures and plaques on the walls.

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Dear me!" said Miss Fawcett. "I am so glad. It is such a pleasure to me to see you young people made happy, and to tell you the truth, dears, I am glad not to have to undertake a journey to the school. I do not feel quite equal to a journey by rail now, and I am very glad indeed it is not necessary."

Tom Merry kissed her on both cheeks

"You are a darling!" he exclaimed. "This is ripping!"

"Yaas, wathah! Miss Fawcett has played the game in a weally noble mannah. The Head is an old twump, too!"

"Come to my arms!" sobbed Blake, clasping D'Arcy to his breast, and waltzing round the room with him.

The swell of St. Jim's struggled frantically.

"Ow! Wow! Welease me, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welease me! You are wumplin' my waistcoat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are wufflin' my hair, and upsettin' my necktie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!"

Jack Blake released his ruffled chum so suddenly that Arthur Augustus sat down upon the carpet with a bump.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Gweat Scott! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy struggled to his feet.

"Blake, I have no wesource but to give you a feahful thwashin'. Kindly step out into the garden with me."

"Hold him, somebody! He's getting dangerous!"

"I insist——"

"Augustus, dear!" said Miss Fawcett gently.

Arthur Augustus calmed down at once. He made Miss Fawcett a graceful bow.

"Pway excuse me, deah madam. I apologise most sincerely for havin' displayed any excitement in the pwesence of a lady. Blake, undah the circs., I will let you off that thwashin'."

"Oh! I breathe again!" gasped Blake.

"Pway don't wot, deah boy!"

"Perhaps you had better see to your packing," suggested Miss Fawcett. "You will have to start early to catch the afternoon boat."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

An expression of dismay came over D'Arcy's face.

"Well, what's the matter, image?"

"I wefuse to be called an image."

"What's the matter, duffer?"

"I considah——"

"What's the matter?" roared Blake, shaking him. "Do you mean to say you've got some difficulty to start at the last moment?"

"It is not my fault, deah boy. I suppose it will be all wight if we catch the night boat, or go to-mowwow mornin' instead?"

"Rats!"

"But why?" demanded Tom Merry. "What's the matter?"

"You see, I'm in a doocid awkward posish," explained D'Arcy. "I came away fwom St. Jim's just for a wun down here to see you off, and did pwactically no packin'. I have only one change of clothes and two changes of linen with me, and only the hat I stand up in."

"Ha, ha, ha! I should like to see you standing up in it!"

"I was speakin' figuwatively, Tom Mewwy. I mean I have absolutely no change of headgeah except a cap and the toppah I came down in."

"Well, surely a cap and a topper are enough for any chap to wear at the same time?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall wequire at least two extwa toppahs. I shall wequire sevewal suits of clothes. I suppose a chap can't go to Pawis without some evenin' clothes? Suppose we are invited to a soiree at the Elysee?"

"Well, it's not likely to happen."

"I don't know. The Pwesident may hear that there are distinguished visitahs in Pawis, and may send wound for us."

"Yes, I think I can see him doin' it."

"It would be wathah wotten to have to turn up at a Pwesidential soiwee in a Norfolk jacket. Besides, there is the opewa. They have opewa all the year wound in Pawis, instead of a short season like the silly asses in London, and we shall pwobably go to the opewa a good many times. I should absolutely wefuse to go to the opewa in a Norfolk jacket."

"Well, you could go in your shirt-sleeves, at a pinch."

"I wegard that wemark as widiculous, Lowthah. I shall certainly wequire some evenin' clothes, and I must take at least one suit."

"Better get them in Paris," said Blake gravely.

"I may wequire them in a huwwy."

"You can get them jolly quick. Chap who has been in Paris told me that you can get evening clothes on hire in Montmartre, either to go to a ball or to get a job as a waiter!"

D'Arcy gave Blake a look that made the juniors shriek.

"If you think I could wear evenin' clothes on hire, Blake——"

"Well, if you liked you could pay a franc a week, you know, and make it hire-purchase," said Blake.

"I wegard you as an ass!"

"Well, I'm going to pack," said Kangaroo.

"But my clothes are at St. Jim's——"

"You'd better go and fetch them, then," suggested Tom Merry. "It's quite possible the Head may change his mind when you get there, and keep you at the school."

"Bai Jove!"

"But that won't matter, as we will send you picture-postcards of the places we see, and then——"

"Pway don't work that off on me, deah boy. On second thoughts, I will not weturn to St. Jim's for my clothes."

"Good! You'll find the hired evening clothes all right," said Blake. "They fit where they touch, you know, and there will be plenty of room to grow in them."

"I shall wire to a Pawis tailah to call on me at the hotel the moment we awwive there, and to put the work in hand at once."

"Good! What about a hatter?"

"Yaas, I will wire to a hattah, too."

"And a bootmaker?" suggested Blake gravely.

"Bai Jove, yaas! I have only two pairs of boots with me."

"And a shirtmaker?"

"I think I could wisk buyin' the shirts weady-made in the Wue de Wivoli."

"Oh, I don't know. They might be a fraction of an inch out of gear, and might come loose round the muzzle, or tight round the carburetter," said Lowther, with a grave shake of the head. "Why not send a wire to the Mayor of Paris, instructing him to have all the tradesmen of the city waiting at the hotel for you?"

"Pway don't wot, deah boy. I will awwange with the tailah and hattah and the bootmakah by wiah. I shall have to look out their addwesses. Meanwhile, I suppose I shall have to twavel with a single twunk."

And D'Arcy, with a despondent face, proceeded to pack the single trunk. He was somewhat comforted, however, by sending off telegrams to Paris—at twopence a word—instructing various individuals to attend him when he arrived there, for the purpose of replenishing his wardrobe.

The juniors were to catch an early train, and had to change twice on their journey. They were driven down to the station with their baggage, Miss Fawcett bidding them farewell at the gate of Laurel Villa.

She impressed upon Tom Merry the dire necessity of keeping his feet dry, and of never going out in the rain, or staying up after nine o'clock except on special occasions, and above all she cautioned him to beware of the pitfalls with which she had heard that Paris abounded, and which she believed might let an unwary pedestrian through into the Catacombs without a moment's warning.

Tom Merry promised to be awfully careful, and he left his old friend feeling reassured, as he drove off to the station.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was looking thoughtful during the drive, but as the brake neared the station he burst into a sudden chuckle.

The other fellows looked at him.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Tom Merry. "Anything gone wrong in the works?"

"Nothin', Tom Mewwy. I was thinkin'. Young Wally said he was comin' with us if we went. Of course, I couldn't take young Wally to Pawis. The wesponsibility of havin' you fellows on my hands is gweat enough, without having a Third Form fag wowwyin'."

"Well, he won't come now," grinned Blake.

"No. I am sowwy for Wally, you know, but I wathah think he is done this time. I could not appwove of his bein' absent fwom his lessons, you know."

"Hallo! There's that telegraph kid again."

The telegraph-boy was going down the lane towards Laurel Villa. As he saw the party for the station, he stopped, and waved his hand, with a buff-coloured envelope in it.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Blake. "That wire is for one of us, I expect."

The driver stopped, and the telegraph-boy came up, grinning. He held the telegram out to Tom Merry.

"Master Merry, it's for you," he said.

"Thanks," said Tom Merry, taking the envelope carelessly. As he opened it, however, he gave a long whistle.

"What's up?" said Blake anxiously.

"My—my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, in dismay.

"What's up, ass? Quick!"

"It's from Uncle Frank!"

"Bai Jove! What does he say, deah boy?"

"Listen!" said Tom Merry dramatically.

The brakeload of juniors, as well as the driver and the telegraph-boy, listened with breathless intensity.

"'Please delay departure till next week. Urgent business. Sorry short notice.—Fawcett.'"

The juniors looked at one another blankly, and in silence.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Harry Noble, at last, with slow emphasis. Then, as nobody spoke, he added: "I'm blessed if I'm not!"

THE END.

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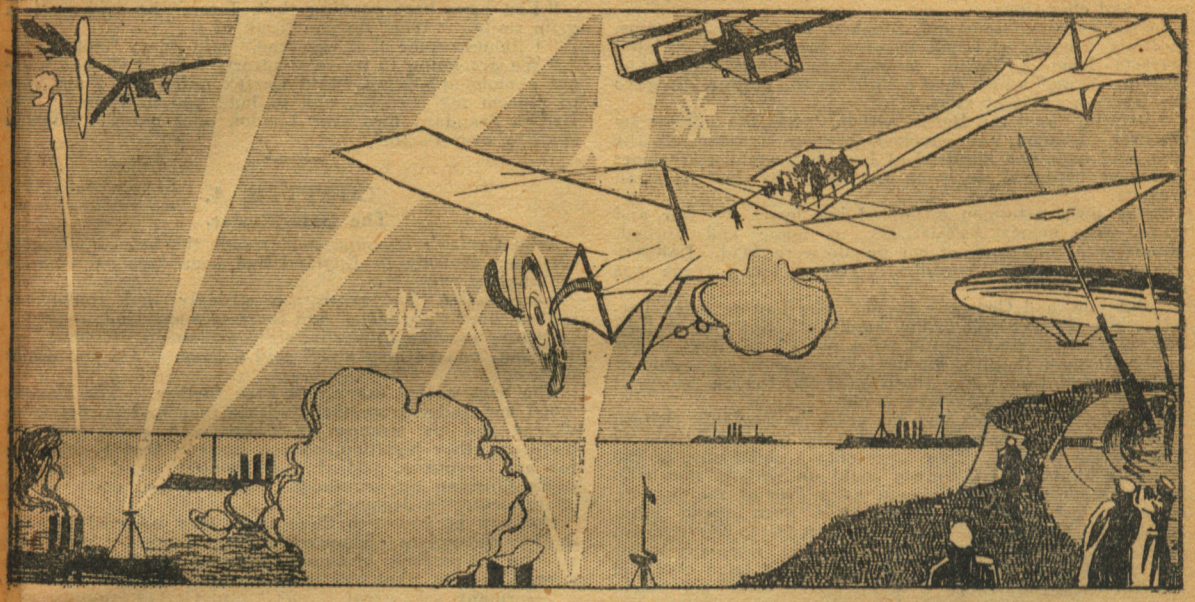

BRITAIN'S REVENGE!

By JOHN TREGELLIS.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

AUBREY VILLIERS, nicknamed Sam Slick. A lad who has performed wondrous service for his country in her time of need, during the terrible invasion by the Germans.

STEPHEN VILLIERS, his brother. He is Sam's companion in all his exploits.

After the sweeping defeat of the Germans in London, as related in "Britain at Bay," Sam and Stephen take a short rest in the great, but now ruined, city, awaiting news. The boys buy a newspaper which has published a rumour regarding Britain's terms.

(Now go on with the story.)

Germany's Defiance!

There was nothing in the paper about Germany's ideas on the matter. Nothing could be known for certain till the Government actually gave out the news and published Germany's answer.

Till the next morning about ten o'clock, the nation had to wait. And then, about ten o'clock, the streets were echoing with the cries of the newsboys.

"Result o' the Peace Conference! Germany's Reply!"

People hurried to buy papers on every hand, and they were soon selling at half-a-crown a copy. Stephen darted out and procured one, mounting up to the room again with it.

A great black headline right across the page greeted the eyes of the boys.

"GERMANY'S DEFIANCE!"

"The German Reichstag (Parliament), in answer to the British communications, makes the following demands as the price of peace:

"I. Britain to pay Germany a war indemnity of £50,000,000 sterling.

"II. Germany to retain Holland as part of the German Empire.

"III. Britain to surrender Rhodesia, the Transvaal, and Natal, to Germany.

"IV. Egypt to be returned to Turkish rule."

To say that Sam and Stephen—like many thousands more—were astonished when they read the above, is to say nothing.

"It must be a joke!" cried Stephen, when he found his breath. "It's utter rot!"

"Pretty grim sort of joke," said Sam, staring at the paper.

"Why—why, anybody'd think it was they who'd licked us, instead of our licking them!" shouted his brother. "Is it just silly bluff?"

"It's partly bluff, no doubt. I'm not so sure whether it's silly. It's got to be seen yet what we can do. Remember, Germany's the biggest power on the Continent. We haven't beaten Germany, only a little slice of her army, that's over here in England."

"Rot!" cried Stephen again. "An' then the Kaiser—what of him?"

"It says here in the paper that he won't let his capture make the smallest difference to Germany's demands, even if he has to stay here a prisoner for years. Nobody expected that, but it's rather plucky of him, confound him!"

"I believe the whole thing'll go pop!" exclaimed Stephen. "It's only a try-on!"

All Britain was in a ferment over the news that day, and scorn and wrath were heard on every side. The nation would never submit to such mad demands, nor even think of them! But there were people, and many of them of good sense, too, who thought differently. Perhaps Britain could not help herself, they said. Of course, the surrender of her colonies would never be agreed to, but how were they to turn Germany out of Holland?

On the other hand, there was a very noisy section who clamoured for "peace at any price." "Stop the war! Stop the war!" was heard by the depraved tub-thumpers. What did it matter, they said, whether our lands abroad were given up, when things were so bad at home?

Let the money be borrowed, and Germany paid, to be rid of the war at once! It was not those who had fought and bled for their country who said it, but those who had kept themselves out of harm's way, and taken care of their comfort and their skins.

The day passed amid anger and excitement. Parliament

was sitting at Westminster, but little business could be got through, and even there the stop-the-war party was noisy and clamorous.

In the evening, Sam and Stephen sat in their rooms, gloomily enough, and had between them some translated extracts from a Berlin newspaper, printed in "The Evening News," which shed a light on the matter. It gave the German point of view.

"Britain," said the Berlin article, "was the sufferer by the war. London was wrecked, her trade swept off the seas, and over two hundred of her big merchant steamers had been captured early in the war, by fast German cruisers.

"Her own statesmen estimated her losses, by war and trade, were nearly £400,000,000, at home and abroad. Hundreds of thousands of her people were dead. Industry was at a complete standstill. Her shipping trade was ruined.

"But how had Germany fared? She had enriched herself while Britain was being bankrupt. She had gained 300 miles of sea-coast, 15,000 miles of rich territory added to the German Empire, for her army was in possession of Holland, and would stay there until the British Army—if there was one—came to turn it out.

"As for Von Krantz and his army in England, Britain was welcome to them, and could keep and feed them as long as she pleased. They were only a small slice of the Kaiser's forces, and Germany could do without men who had surrendered. The German navy was at the bottom, certainly, but Germany, richer than ever, could build another. The British fleet was blockading the German harbours, but that was no great matter. Germany never had a big shipping trade. But she had a huge overland commerce instead, which a dozen navies could not touch. Germany was out of Britain's reach, and had still a few fast cruisers which were making the seas dangerous for British commerce.

"Finally, if the war went on, Britain had everything to lose, while Germany would not be damaged. The British Government was already short of money, and found it difficult to borrow it. The country was half ruined, and to keep up the war money was necessary. Britain must submit."

Sam flung the paper on the table.

"Some of it's true, an' some ain't," he said moodily, "but that about the money hits the nail on the head. Nothing can be done without it, an' how can Britain raise it in the state she is now—with half the people starvin'?"

"I suppose it's true about the fleet, too. Our warships can't steam overland to Berlin."

There was a long pause, and they both felt low-spirited.

"I say!" said Stephen, at last. "D'ye remember that strange old chap whose grounds we stumbled into on Salisbury Plain, when the balloon came down in his enclosure? He who wanted to scrag us, because we'd seen his aeroplanes, or airships, or whatever they were?"

"John Carfax?" said Sam. "Yes, I remember him."

"An' that shed with the huge frame in it, with fans an' propellers an' things; an' the model aeroplane he showed us afterwards, that sailed about the room like a bird, an' driven by a little motor?"

Both the brothers' thoughts went back to that strange night when they came by accident into the lonely enclosure on Salisbury Plain, and the carefully-guarded sheds and buildings that held such curious-looking inventions.

"Do you recollect he said those airships an' things of his would give him the mastery of the world, and that he would bring them into action against Germany when the time was ripe?"

"Yes, I remember that, too," said Sam; "and that we promised to be his witnesses."

"Well, d'you think he could do it?"

"I'm afraid not," said Sam, with a doubtful smile. "So many clever men have tried that game, an' failed. We've heard nothing of him since, either. It looked useful at the time, but——"

"I believed in it," said Stephen; "and so did you, too, when we were there. It sounds different here, afterwards. But——"

There was a quiet knock at the door as he spoke, and the next moment it opened. Into the room walked a tall, elderly man, straight as a dart, with piercing black eyes, a white, peaked beard, and bushy white eyebrows. At the first glimpse of him, both the boys sprang to their feet in astonishment.

"You remember me, I see," said the visitor, with a smile, holding out his hand, which Sam gripped eagerly.

"John Carfax! I should think we do, sir!" exclaimed Sam. "Why, we were talking about you at this very minute!"

Carfax glanced at the table, and saw the paper with the German article in it.

"You have been reading that, I see," he said, with a grim smile. "What do you think of it?"

"I thought some of it was true," said Sam; "not all."

"We are going to prove it utterly false, and that without a moment's delay," said Carfax quietly. "I am here to redeem my promise, and to hold you to yours. The British Standard flies over London once more. Soon it shall fly over Berlin!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Gold-Master.

John Carfax's announcement struck the boys dumb with surprise. Nobody in England had ever dreamed of such a thing, as yet.

Nevertheless, his words, so strongly and confidently spoken, fired their blood, and their eyes sparkled.

"Carry the flag to Berlin, sir!" exclaimed Stephen.

"That, and nothing else," said Carfax. "Do you doubt it?"

The boys waited eagerly to hear further. The gloomy mood had fallen from them. Since they had parted from Carfax and his strange workshops and closely-guarded buildings, they had doubted the marvels that he claimed for his inventions, and if they thought about it at all, while finishing the campaign, they put him down as an experimenter—a dreamer.

But now he was with them again they believed in him, despite themselves. They could feel, somehow, that they were in the presence of no ordinary man. And John Carfax seemed to know what was in their minds before they spoke.

"Germany asks great things," said Carfax, tapping the paper that lay on the table. "Well, she shall have them. But not the things she demands. Quite another dish shall be served her," he said; and with knitted brows he glanced out of the window at the ruined houses and desolation of the City. He turned to the boys again.

"You remember the models I showed you, and my two large aeroplanes, driven by motors?"

"Rather, sir!" said Sam. "Will they—are they ready to move yet—the big ones?"

"Move?" Carfax smiled. "If I were to tell you—— But never mind that. You will know soon enough. We are going to act, not talk. I'm not here about the aeroplanes, as a matter of fact, to-night. It is my brother, Harrington Carfax, I wish to speak about. You do not know him yet, I think?"

The boys knew little enough of John Carfax himself, and naturally knew nothing at all of his brother, or that he had one. But they noticed John spoke his name with much respect.

"No, sir," said Sam. "Is he an inventor, like you? Does he know about airships?"

"No, not a thing. But he holds a far greater power than mine—infinitely greater."

"You speak in riddles, sir," said Sam, puzzled.

"There is no need to do so. Harrington shall speak for himself. He knows the service you have promised me, and he approved of it. I hear his step on the stairs now, and, with your permission, I'll introduce you to him."

The curiosity of the two young scouts was keenly aroused, and naturally they were glad to consent. John Carfax opened the door.

A small, shrivelled-looking, birdlike man entered the room, with a slow stride, and peered at Carfax and the boys without saying a word. His face was clean-shaven, and looked as if covered by parchment instead of skin. He was very spare and thin, and as unlike the tall, commanding form of the other visitor as possible, save only for the piercing black eyes, which were just like John's. Stephen thought he looked like some grave old raven, that had lived long, and knew everything, good and evil, but did not talk about it. In spite of his queer appearance, he was not unpleasant-looking.

"My brother, Harrington Carfax," said John to the boys. "Harrington, these are my youthful but celebrated friends, the Greyfriars Scouts."

The newcomer nodded briefly to the boys, and peered at them for a few moments in silence.

"I have heard about you," he said. "By your record, it is plain you can be trusted, and I have great faith in John's judgment. By the way, you have seen John's inventions, I think."

"Yes," said Sam; "he showed us them."

"What do you think of them?" said the little man, turning from Sam to Stephen.

"If they're as good as Mr. Carfax thinks—an' we've his word for it they are," added Stephen hurriedly—"they'll

the greatest thing ever known, I think. But he said," continued Stephen diffidently, looking at Harrington Carfax with great curiosity, "that you were a much greater inventor than he."

"No, no," replied Harrington Carfax quietly, with a dry smile; "you mistook him. I am no great inventor; I am a mere scientist. I mess about with acids and minerals, and so forth. I have effected one discovery, among others, which men would wade in blood for, if they thought they could win it."

He spoke as if to himself, and the boys, wondering, listened intently.

"It seems curious that I should tell you this," said the newcomer, peering at the boys again, "and more curious still that I should show it you. But you have John's secret, and I approve his choice in telling you."

John nodded.

"What we both may need—though I do not say we shall," said Harrington—"is an outside witness—somebody not connected with us or our helpers, and who has no interest in telling anything but the truth. Strong as we are, we may need such a witness. You two youngsters are well known to all the nation, and they trust you. Will you do the same for me as you agreed to do for John, and vouch for me?"

"Certainly. We'll be glad to," said Sam earnestly.

"Then I will show you the power that shall wreck Germany, and without which even John's great machines would be useless, and fleets and armies of no avail. I have a motor-car at the door; and, if you are not afraid of a night journey, and the loss of rest, you shall see the proof of what I have said."

"We'll go at once, if you wish," said Sam, "and gladly. We're always ready to march."

"Come, then," said Harrington Carfax; and he led the way down to the street.

A large Mercedes car, unattended, stood at the door, and Harrington took the driver's seat, motioning his brother to sit beside him. The two boys got into the body of the car, each taking a heavy military ulster with them. There was a muffled whirr, and the car glided away down the street at a rapid, noiseless pace.

"What on earth are they goin' to show us?" whispered Stephen to his brother. "Is it some terrific new explosive, d'you think, or a new kind of gun?"

"I don't fancy it's that, somehow," said Sam. "But unless this chap's a regular humbug—which I don't believe—it's something pretty startling. No good guessin', for I suppose they'll show us soon."

"It's outside London, anyhow," said Stephen, a little later, when the car ran swiftly through Surbiton in the darkness, and presently left Esher behind, and took the main south-western road.

Soon they were spinning along at a tremendous rate through the open country, and Harrington Carfax proved himself an unusually expert driver, and one who cared little for legal speed-limits. They were often travelling nearer fifty miles an hour than twenty when the road was open and straight, the powerful front lamps flinging their beams far ahead.

"Have you guessed where we're going yet?" said Harrington Carfax over his shoulder to Sam.

"I know the country hereabouts pretty well," said Sam, "and the road, too. You're both Hampshire men, I think, an' you'll be goin' into that county."

"Right!" said the driver. "But John lives out north on the plain, while my den is nearer Andover."

The car sped swiftly onwards for another half-hour, and then turned sharply through byways and side roads for some distance. Andover had been left a good way off to the right, and Sam judged they were coming down somewhere by the River Test. At last they stopped.

Harrington Carfax's "den," as he called it, was a large, handsome old ivy-covered manor-house, and adjoining it was a water-mill, abutting on the Test, and which, as John explained, supplied the house with power for the electric light.

The door was opened by a footman, the car taken charge of by a chauffeur, and the two boys accompanied their hosts into the house.

It was a fine, comfortable old place, full of deep cellars, old oak, and armour. It was not at all the boys' idea of a scientific professor's abode. In the big dining-hall were two keen-looking young men in evening-dress, who rose and shook hands with Harrington Carfax, bowed to the boys, and took themselves off, as if realising they were not wanted just then.

"Shall my servants bring you supper, after your drive?" said Harrington, as they entered the dining-hall.

"Not for me, thanks!" said Stephen.

"Nor for me," added Sam. "We fed just before you arrived, sir."

"Then we will proceed at once to business," said Harrington, and took a bunch of keys from his pocket. He paused for a moment. "I do not even ask for your promise of secrecy as to all you will see," he said; "for I know I can rely on you to say nothing until I ask you."

"Certainly!" said Sam.

"This way, then."

"I will wait for you here, Harrington," said John; and his brother nodded.

He led the boys through the end of the centre hall and down a long, thickly-carpeted corridor, that ran a surprising distance, and at the end was a heavy curtain. Beyond, a felt-covered door confronted them.

Their host opened this with a key, and by the slow, heavy way in which the door swung Sam guessed that it was of steel, rather than wood, beneath the felt covering. Harrington locked it carefully again, after they had passed through, and led the way ahead again.

They were still in a corridor, but the walls were much more plain and bare, and looked very substantial. After ten or fifteen yards they went down a flight of stone steps, with a plain felt carpet over them, and Harrington paused a moment before a door on the left.

"You see that?" he said. "There are over a hundred square yards of paved cellars down the flight of stairs beyond that door, and there is another entrance to them, which I don't propose to show you. I only mention this in passing. Our destination is here."

He opened a second door, and beyond it were three fair-sized rooms side by side, each with its doorway, and evidently all were scientific laboratories. Harrington led them into the one on the right.

It was very simply supplied with apparatus for the laboratory of a scientist. There were many queer-shaped glass retorts and tubes, long rows of stoppered bottles, a large number of fire-proof cups and pots, and some powerful-looking electrical apparatus.

"Is this your workshop, sir?" said Stephen, looking round curiously.

"This is the testing-room," said his host. "We do things on a small scale in here, but you will understand all the better for that. I must leave you for a moment."

"Hope he's not going to touch off any explosives in here," said Stephen, as Harrington disappeared. "It's pretty close quarters for bustin' a lyddite shell, or any experiments of that sort."

"He wouldn't bring us all this way to show us lyddite," said Sam. "I'm pretty curious to see what it is he's got."

Their host came in again, busied himself with some of the apparatus, which he handled with noticeable neatness and skill, and then turned to the boys.

"Have either of you anything made of lead about him, by chance?" said Harrington. "If so, I shall be glad to have it."

Stephen pulled out of his pocket a flattened German bullet, which he had picked up at Maldon after it struck the barrel of his carbine, and had since kept it. He handed it to Harrington.

"And a bronze coin, if you've got one," said his host, taking the bullet. Sam produced a halfpenny. "Now, if you choose, you may watch what becomes of those pieces of metal."

He cleaned both the bullet and coin with acids, and then placing them in a stone jar, added with infinite care two different liquids in certain quantities known only to himself. A couple of little metal plates at the ends of wires leading from an electrical apparatus were then placed in the jar, a third liquid added, and soon the contents began to seethe and sizzle violently.

Sam and Stephen watched with interest, wondering what this had to do with a great war-making discovery.

Harrington said nothing. After a fairly long period, which he timed exactly, the scientist took out the coin and bullet. They could no longer have been recognised. Both seemed partly fused together, and of a curious, greenish-brown colour.

Another similar process followed, and then the lump of metal was put in a crucible, which was heated to a terrific temperature by an electric furnace at the other end of the room. In ten minutes a spoonful of molten metal was poured from the crucible into a jar of some acid or other. As soon as it was cold the resulting lump was treated by a machine which seemed to slice and cut it in all directions, and it was then placed in a small white vessel to which the wires of a curious-looking electric coil were attached. Harrington Carfax tended the coil, there was a blinding flash around the vessel, which made the boys shield their eyes, and a little later the vessel was opened.

"See!" said Carfax, showing it them.

The lump was no longer to be seen, but the metal seemed to have gone all to pieces and crystallised itself round the sides of the vessel, and lay at the bottom like a frosty white dust.

"Now for the last stage," said Harrington; "and then you will understand all that has been hidden from you."

He added with great caution another liquid to the dust, in a very small quantity, and put it all into a little round porous vessel, called a cupel—a sort of crucible not bigger than a billiard-ball. This he fixed between two copper points on a stand, with wires leading to it, and turned on a current.

There was a hissing in the cupel, and a little steam floated away from it. Then the cupel rapidly grew to a heat so tremendous that it glowed and gleamed like a brilliant white comet hanging between the copper points, and the boys could hardly look at it. For quite ten minutes this continued; and then the current was turned off, and the vessel cooled.

At last Harrington Carfax took down the cupel, and opened it before the boys' eyes.

"See," said Harrington, "here is the power that neither kings nor nations can fight against and conquer."

The young scouts looked eagerly into the cupel to see what had become of their leaden bullet and bronze coin that had undergone so many searching processes. But there was no trace of either.

In the bottom of the cupel lay a gleaming button of shining gold, half the size of a rifle-bullet.

CHAPTER 4.

Harrington Carfax's Gift to the Empire.

In that moment the veil fell, as it were, from the boys' eyes, and they understood. Sam was struck perfectly speechless.

They had expected to see some death-dealing engine of war, or some weapon that human flesh and blood could not stand before. But here, indeed, was the great power that is behind every war and every throne, and without which neither can live—gold!

"Is it—is it the real thing?" muttered Stephen, doubting his eyesight.

"Do you know anything of chemical tests?" said Harrington to Sam. "You will find the acids in that cupboard, and may satisfy yourself."

Sam had gone through the chemistry course at Greyfriars, and knew the simple tests for the metals. He took up the shining button with a hand that trembled somewhat, for he felt he was testing one of the greatest discoveries the world had known, and one that scientists have sought in all ages—the conversion of base metal into the king of metals by chemical process. He took the labelled bottles, and the test was soon made.

"Yes," he said, putting the button back on the bare marble slab, and staring at it curiously, "it is absolutely pure gold."

"And you made it?" gasped Stephen.

"Made it is not the word. Man can make nothing. I converted it from the base metals you gave me. You saw me do it!" cried Carfax.

"And that lump of gold was my leaden bullet and Sam's halfpenny!" cried Stephen.

"Exactly!" said Harrington Carfax calmly. "And if you had a thousand bullets with you they could be gold by this time to-morrow."

The boys did not know what to say. The discovery was too amazing.

"Have you seen enough?" said Harrington. "Come into the next room, and I will show you one thing more."

They followed him, and he pulled an iron chest out from beneath a slab, and opened it. It was packed with solid, shining rows of newly-cast gold ingots.

"Three days ago these bars were a boat-load of old lead and black tin, brought up the river," said Carfax. "We do not usually let it remain here, however, but in the cellars."

"The cellars!" repeated Stephen to himself. "This is amazing! And—and does it cost much to do this, sir?" he said.

He remembered that gold was said to have been produced by modern scientists, but at an expense so huge that many times the gold's value was paid before they got it.

"I can make £100 at a cost of £5 for the process on a large scale," said Harrington.

"Great guns! £95 for nothing! Is there any limit to what you could make, sir?"

"In a few months, in these laboratories, I could make more money than there is in the world."

They looked at the little withered, keen-eyed, strange-looking man, and at the bars of gold in the chest, and by their own eyes' evidence they knew he spoke the truth.

"And now you have seen the working of my secret, though the secret itself and the way to use it neither you nor any man shall ever know. Let us go back to the house," said Harrington.

He closed the laboratory, and led the way back along the corridor, the boys following, wondering if they were asleep or awake.

Sam judged the laboratories and the place they were in to be at or near the water-mill by the river. But he did not give much thought to that, his mind was buzzing with the experience he had gone through, and he thought of all that little button of gold must mean to the world.

They reached the dining-room once more, where John Carfax was waiting for them, and his brother locked the door as soon as they were inside.

"Well?" said John, glancing curiously at the boys' faces. "Harrington has shown you his power, I see."

"Yes," said Sam, "he has."

"And you realise what it means?" added Harrington.

"A child could realise that. Your brother is richer than all the treasuries in the world. Everything is at his command," said Sam, almost awestruck, "because a sum of money that would bankrupt a whole nation is nothing to him."

"Just so!" said John. "See, now, what he can do. He can set Britain on her feet. Why is Germany able to force these demands for our colonies on us, and try to strip us of our Empire,"

"Because the war has been so awful that it's nearly bankrupted us," put in Stephen. "There's no trade, an' people are starving everywhere."

"And now that this power has been placed in my hands," said Harrington quietly, "no British subject—man, woman, or child—shall starve through the ruin Germany has made."

The boys were silent for some moments.

"Have you known this secret long, sir?" said Sam to Harrington.

"For two years," replied the scientist. "And not a word have I breathed of it to any man save John and my two assistants—the young men you saw here when you entered. They are relatives of mine, and absolutely to be trusted. They help me in the processes, for I need help. But the secret itself—the true properties of the liquids and the chemicals they themselves handle—they do not know—nor ever will."

"Two years!" murmured Sam.

"Yes," said Harrington. "All that time I have felt like a man who keeps some powerful and terrible beast chained in his house. I have made and used certain quantities of gold, and done—I hope—some good with it. But to make use of the great secret as it stands, I have never dared to do that. The responsibility is too great." He turned to Sam. "You see now, don't you, how tremendously important it is that the secret should be kept, even now, and that nobody should know I have this power. They must know I have the gold, but not that I can make it."

Sam nodded quickly.

"Because," put in John Carfax, "if the secret itself became known, it would soon be worth nothing. Gold would be of little more value than lead, if it could be turned out so easily, and the world would seek some other material for coinage and exchange. You see?"

"Yes," said Stephen, "and I don't wonder you've never made full use of your secret, sir. I should think its power might be terrific for good or evil, an' no man's clever enough to say which."

"You are right. I have feared to use it. But now, at this crisis, I will use it to its utmost—to save the British Empire!" said Harrington Carfax. "To us who are subjects of it and born under its flag, that is more than money, or life itself!"

"Right, sir!" cried Sam. "And how are we to help?"

"I will tell you. To-morrow the question will be asked in Parliament as to whether the war is to go on or not, or if we agree to Germany's terms and knuckle under. And that is where I shall need your testimony. John, you explain."

"You must know," said John Carfax to the boys, "Harrington is a member of Parliament——"

"I never knew that!" cried Sam.

"He was only elected three weeks ago, in the place of Mr. Mansfield, member for Andover, who was killed in the war, poor fellow. You may wonder that any thought was given to elections and such things during the reign of terror, but we knew the importance of getting Harrington a seat, and a chance to speak when the time came. He is immensely popular in this division on account of his good work, and we

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got him nominated, and enough voters to run him through. Parliament, you know, has returned to Westminster now.

"To-morrow," continued John, "the thing will be settled. It lies with the nation, but I don't think they will refuse. Harrington will take you to the House, and you will sit in the Visitors' Gallery, and hear the question raised—Peace or War. Then, if need be, you may be called on to bear witness that Harrington can do all he says. I think they will take your testimony—you are well known."

"I've given the Government pretty good proofs already," said Harrington, with a dry smile. "They ought not to need very much more; but we'll make sure."

"And are you an M.P., too, sir?" asked Stephen, turning to John Carfax.

"Not I, my lad. The sort of proof I shall give 'em doesn't need talking about in the House. I'm not going with you and Harrington. But you'll see me there, none the less, in a way that I think will be a slight surprise to some of you."

"And now for bed," said Harrington, rising, "for we've much to do to-morrow."

. . . . . .

It was ten o'clock next morning when Sam and Stephen, after a refreshing sleep in luxurious bed-rooms, and a hearty breakfast, stepped into the motor-car and were whirled away Londonwards by Mr. Harrington Carfax, who this time took his chauffeur with him.

Westminster was reached after a quick run, and the car stopped at the very gates of the Houses of Parliament. A strange sight they presented to those who had known them before the invasion. The great clock-tower of Big Ben was wrecked a third of the way down from the top, by Von Krantz's artillery, and parts of the House itself were badly damaged, but not so much as to prevent its use.

It was the first visit of the boys to the nation's great meeting-place. There was no time to lose, for the debate was already beginning, and Harrington soon passed the two brothers into the Visitors' Gallery.

"I am going to take my seat," he said, leaving them hurriedly. "I will call for you afterwards, when you are needed."

Sam and Stephen looked down upon the great hall with lively curiosity, and tried to recognise some of the great statesmen whose portraits they had so often seen, and succeeded. But for some time they could see nothing of Harrington himself, who sat quietly in some back bench, and not in the foremost rows.

There was a strained air about Parliament that day, and the Front Bench men especially—the Cabinet Ministers and the Opposition leaders—looked anxious and pale. Somebody was making a long, excited speech which nobody seemed to be listening to, when the boys came in. When that was at an end, a tall, frock-coated man arose from his seat, and put a question.

"Will the Premier inform the House what reply has been made to Germany's demands?" he said.

An eager silence fell upon the benches as the Prime Minister—a tall, commanding figure, but pale and weary-looking now—rose to reply. He spoke in a voice that everybody could hear to the last word.

"The result of the Cabinet meeting cannot yet be made public," he said, "but Germany's demands, as they stand, are impossible."

Loud cheers from most of the benches greeted this.

"And yet," said the Premier, with a sigh, "the difficulty is plain to all. The country is in a terrible state, the people are starving, and the drain of the war's cost is tremendous. Hunger and suffering face us on every side. I am betraying no secret in saying this. We know it, Germany knows it, all the world knows it.

"None the less," he said, in louder tones, "is it to be thought of that we should let our Empire go, and take third place among the nations!" His voice was nearly drowned in fierce protests. "Germany is pressing us hard, knowing our difficulty, and I cannot say yet what we shall decide."

The Premier sat down amid a disappointed murmur, and a big, burly member with a broad, white face and little side-whiskers caught the Speaker's eye, and rose from the benches opposite.

"Let the war cease!" he cried, gesticulating, his voice booming through the House like a gong. "Stop the war, and give Germany what she asks, I say! Let us have peace, and buy it at any price we can! Let South Africa and Egypt go, and fill the mouths of the English people again!"

A fierce, indignant clamour broke out on every side. Harsh cries of "No, no!" "Shame!" "Order!" were heard. The scene was extraordinary. Elderly, staid members rose and shook their fists at the speechmaker, amid cries of "Traitor!" But his booming voice made itself heard still, and he was not alone. A large number of members were cheering him.

"What is this talk about Empire?" he cried harshly. "Who cares for the Empire with bread at one-and-six a loaf, and trade ruined? Stop the war! Give us peace at any price! Germany is right to take all she can!"

It was long before the clamour died down; but at last the Premier's son, who was in the Cabinet, got a hearing.

"The honourable member's speech," he said grimly, "needs no reply. He wishes us to throw overboard all that our people have fought and bled for, and to betray our fellow-Britons across the seas into Germany's hands, in order to stop the present suffering. It is true we suffer. But Britain has suffered before, and emerged the victor!

"Yet one thing remains," he continued, his voice dropping a little. "It is chiefly money that we need. Without it we can neither wage war nor allay the misery of our people. Will no one tell me, amid all this clamour and uproar, how we are to save ourselves?"

It was then that Harrington Carfax caught Mr. Speaker's eye, as the Premier's son sat down.

"I call upon the honourable member for Andover," said the Speaker.

The little man rose to his feet, and in the hush that followed the last speech his voice carried evenly through the House.

"The difficulty of money need not stop us," he said quietly. "I have paid into the Treasury, as a gift to the nation, the sum of one hundred millions sterling."

Everybody turned to stare at Carfax in blank amazement.

"I am ready, for the saving of the Empire, to pay a further sum of two hundred million pounds," continued Harrington, "within a short period. The first sum can go to allay the sufferings of the poor, feed the hungry, set trade on its legs, and recoup those who have lost by the invasion of our country. The second sum shall arm us to attack Germany, and force her not only to give up her outrageous demands, but to yield to us, and accept our own terms. If more money is needed I will give it, provided Britain stiffens her back, casts off the advice of traitors, and fights for her honour and her Empire!"

A murmur of astonishment filled the whole house. All eyes were fixed on the small, wizened figure at the back bench. Surprised whispers were heard on every side.

"Madman—must be!" "What's he mean?" "A hundred millions!" "Who is he?" "No man on earth has half of it." "Crazy as a loon!"

A sneering laugh was heard, somewhere below the gangway.

"If the House is in doubt," said Harrington Carfax quietly, "I call upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer to confirm my words."

Everybody turned and stared as the Chancellor, alert and spruce-looking, rose to his feet.

"I have to inform the House that the honourable member's statement is correct," he said, his usually grave face showing great emotion. "I have been bound to secrecy for the past sixty hours, and accepted the responsibility under that condition. The Treasury's coffers have received the sum of one hundred million pounds in gold of absolute purity, delivered by the agents of the Member for Andover."

The buzz of amazement grew almost to a roar as the Chancellor sat down.

"Explain—explain!" cried fifty voices, while cheers began to ring out heartily.

"I trust the Chancellor's word is enough," said Harrington Carfax. "I have two witnesses in the House, moreover—witnesses well known to all—who will testify before the Cabinet afterwards that I am able to keep my word, and pay in the promised two hundred million pounds as well. As for explaining, I have a right to keep my secret, for the sake of Britain, and I shall do so. I will only say this—I am master of all the wealth that Britain needs, and it is at her service."

"The gold-master!" cried a deep voice from the Front Bench, and the name caught on. A hundred voices shouted it. The House, as it does on rare occasions, went wild. The members rose to their feet and cheered till the roof rang.

"It is the power we needed!" cried the Premier's son, as soon as he could be heard. "Now Britain can rely on her skill and the strong arm once more! Who says now that we shall yield to Germany?"

The small mob of Little Englanders and anti-war members—smaller than ever now—still tried to make a noisy protest; but their voices were drowned, and their objections not even listened to. The safety of the Empire stood before all. Harrington Carfax was greeted with wild enthusiasm.

"There is one other power which, under Providence, shall give us the victory," he cried, as soon as he could be heard—"a power as great as mine, and one you have yet to witness."

All noise was hushed at once, and everybody hung on his words. He had proved himself worth listening to. The House waited, wondering what he meant.

Before he could speak again, a member, with strong excitement written on his face, entered the chamber and spoke to a friend on one of the upper benches. So quiet was the House, waiting for Harrington's speech, that all heard the member's words.

"There's an extraordinary sight in view from the terrace!" he exclaimed. "A huge airship, or something very like one, is descending towards the Thames and nearing the House!"

"I am answered," said Harrington. "This is the power I spoke of. Gentlemen, go and see for yourselves."

It was no time for etiquette for the niceties of Parliamentary procedure. The members' curiosity was roused to the utmost, and rapidly the House emptied itself, all flocking towards the upper outlets.

"Come on!" exclaimed Stephen to his brother, in the Visitors' Gallery, as soon as they heard the announcement. "They're goin' to learn what we know already. Let's get a good place."

They hurried to the broad Terrace, overlooking the Thames, already fast filling with the members. All eyes were turned skywards, and sharp exclamations of surprise were heard on all sides.

For up in the blue a huge aeroplane was moving. It looked like a gigantic box-kite, with a platform and engines amidships, and great fanlike propellers whirring at its rear end.

In a great circle it came ringing down swiftly towards the earth, while all the upturned faces gazed at it. Then, with a long swoop, it poised itself over the river, just abreast the terrace, and remained there motionless, its propellers spinning, and the drumming of petrol engines sounding sharply. On a bridge on the platform, cool and unruffled, was the tall form of John Carfax.

Stephen sprung on to the parapet of the terrace, and waved his cap with a ringing whoop.

"Hurrah for Carfax and the kingdom of the air! Death to all foes of the Empire!"

CHAPTER 6.

The King of the Skies.

John Carfax, standing by the guiding-lever, raised his hand in salute. The crowd of statesmen, members, and ministers stared dumb-struck at the great airship.

There, at last, was the plain proof that the problem of flight was solved. They had all seen the wonderful structure come down from the very clouds, as swiftly and easily as an eagle might do, and now it hung poised between river and sky, on a level with the spectators.

"Great heavens!" said a deep voice among them. "With such a power as that, what might not a man do! Who is he?"

Nobody replied. The well-dressed crowd were devouring the vessel with their eyes. She was as new to them as a creature from another world would have been, and it was amazing to see how the great structure defied the laws of gravity.

When the word "airship" had passed round the House, most of those who hurried out expected to see the sort of machine which has so often been illustrated in novels—a sort of big steel torpedo with screws and rudders, as imagined by some author who supposed that such a thing could ever fly.

John Carfax's vessel was totally different. It was an aeroplane—a great open framework like an oblong box with the sides and ends knocked out, and offering the same resistance to the air as the body and wings of a gliding seagull. It flew more on the principle that a kite flies—at least, the kite's flight was the mere A B C of the idea that Carfax had brought to so great a science. He had supplied all that was wanting.

The enormous propellers and fans were evidently the movers and steering-power of the machine. A broad, railed-in platform on the lower part of the structure formed a sort of deck, and on this was a pent-house, which evidently sheltered the engines, whose whir and buzzing could be plainly heard, and from which came the faint odour of petrol, such as a high-class motor leaves.

There were other deck-houses, very lightly but strongly built, evidently for stores of various kinds, and the aeroplane looked splendidly equipped. Across the after part of the deck platform, as has been said, ran a small bridge, something like that of a steamer's, and on it stood the inventor.

His assistants were the two young men whom the boys remembered well as having seized and captured them on the night when the war-balloon came down in Carfax's enclosure. One of them, who was standing at the door of the little engine-shed, caught Stephen's eye, and winked at him.

"There's no doubt about it! It's a living fact!" said the Premier. "Who would have believed it? Ay, with a power like this, anything may be done!"

John Carfax turned upon his bridge and faced the crowd of members, who ceased every sound, and listened eagerly for what he had to say.

"Gentlemen," said Carfax, in clear tones, "I have brought the aeroplane Condor to prove to you that the complete mastery of the air is won. And I place her and her sister ship, the Eaglet, at the disposal of the nation, backed by my brother's gold." He paused, and his eyes roved over the crowd. "I think," he added quietly, "we need listen no longer to counsels of cowardice and surrender? No patriot ever doubted we should win!"

A cheer from five hundred throats answered him. The enthusiasm at sight of the mighty power before them filled nearly every man.

"The nation will owe the deepest debt of gratitude to you and your brother, whatever the issue!" said the Prime Minister warmly. "You have shown to us here what no man believed in or set eyes on before to-day—save yourself."

"That is not so, sir," said John Carfax. "There are two amongst you—only visitors, and little more than boys at that—who have known my secret for many weeks, and kept it honourably till the time was ripe. They are my brother's witnesses, too—the Greyfriars scouts, whom every man in this country has heard of and trusts."

All eyes sought Sam and Stephen as they were pointed out by those who recognised them, and Sam growled, for he hated being stared at.

"I am now going to take them with me for a trial trip before you all, that you may see whether the Condor is a fit engine of war or not," said Carfax briefly, and gave an order to his assistants. "Lieutenant and Sergeant Villiers, give me the honour of your company aboard here, and we will show these honourable members something new."

A big, self-important M.P., with bushy whiskers and a red face, pushed his way forward.

"If you can assure me that this machine is safe, I shall go with you myself, sir," he said, in a loud, commanding voice, "and test your invention."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said John Carfax coldly. "My guests will be the Villiers brothers. Come along, youngsters!"

Sam jumped on the parapet beside his brother, the aeroplane brought its decks nearer, and they both vaulted nimbly over the rails on to the platform. The great framework glided away again over the river, and the boys felt a thrill of excitement as they realised that they were out of touch with the earth, and saw the Thames flowing swiftly below them.

Carfax gave an order, touched a switch, and then, with a whir and a rush of wind the Condor rose on a long, slanting swoop, at such a pace that the river and the Houses of Parliament seemed to be dwindling away beneath her like wax in the sun.

The two brothers clapped their caps firmly on their heads and gasped. They felt as if they were leaving their insides below upon the earth, and their weight running out through their boots. It was a queer sensation. They caught one glimpse of a sea of up-turned faces on the terrace, and then they seemed to be alone in a world of empty space.

The Condor did not go straight up like a lift. She mounted on a tremendously long slant—though her poise and balance remained perfectly level—and then soared upwards in a circle, as if she were climbing a gigantic staircase. Yet she did it all as easily as a seagull sails down the wind, and presently she hung motionless.

The boys looked down. London lay beneath her like a street map, and the Houses of Parliament looked no bigger than a doll's house. Far beyond over seven counties the eye reached easily, and the air was chill and keen at that great height. A strong breeze was blowing, but the aeroplane breasted it without an effort.

"My only aunt!" cried Stephen. "Isn't it wonderful?"

The boys were almost beyond speech. They had been up in balloons twice, but this was no more like a balloon ascent than an express train is like a donkey-cart. They expected to be seized with giddiness when they first looked down, but they were not. The horizon on every side seemed to rise up round them as if they were in the centre of a great cup.

"Is—is this the first time you've ever had her out, too?" exclaimed Sam.

"Ah, no!" said John Carfax, smiling. "She has been up, and many a hundred miles, on trial, since you saw her. But only on the darkest nights, and at a great height, so no one has even guessed at her existence. However, I knew she could not fail. She could no more fail to float in the air, than a shaving of wood can help floating on water."

"But if the engines broke down?"

"Then she could no longer travel ahead, but would be suspended, motionless, until we manœuvred her to the

ground by means of the rudders and planes. Hugh, show them the engines."

The elder of the two assistants showed the boys the interior of the shed. It taught them little, but they saw a wonderfully compact mass of sharply-throbbing machinery, in a very small space.

"That engine," said John, "is twenty times more powerful than any other yet in use, and at one-tenth the weight. It also consumes very little petrol. We have to consider weight. I could not carry a much larger crew than I have now, with you two. A couple more persons at most. Now I will handle her for you."

Before the boys could reply, the Condor went skimming off at a marvellous pace; how fast, Sam could not guess, for there was nothing to judge by. She lowered again, however, and went in chase of a small flock of wild pigeons which were making a journey overland at a great height, as they do when migrating. The pigeons were terribly scared by the huge machine, and fled at their utmost speed; but the airship overtook, chased, and passed them as if they were standing still. Then, with tremendous sweeps, she soared back and forth three times, to a lower elevation.

"We'll give those honourable gasbags below something to talk about," said Carfax grimly. "One stroke more, and then we'll adjourn. Fix the mortar, Kenneth, and bring out one of the smallest shells."

The second assistant opened a trapdoor in the floor of the platform, and fixed over it, mouth downwards, what looked like a little mortar, or tube, with a curious-looking instrument that might have been a compass, beside it.

Sam judged the latter to be some sort of a range-finder, or sighting arrangement.

A small, pointed object, that was evidently a shell or bomb, was brought out and loaded into the tube, after which Carfax slowed the Condor almost to a standstill, and steered very carefully.

"I wish we could drop it on one of those traitors on the Terrace who were shrieking for us to give away the Empire!" said Carfax grimly. "But we'll finish off the old barge yonder instead, for an object lesson."

The Condor now hung a quarter of a mile above the Thames, and opposite the Terrace, on the other side of the river, an ancient coal-lighter could be made out. She had been rotting at her moorings for many months. Sam looked over the side, and, unslinging his field-glasses, focussed them on her.

Kenneth, the second assistant, was bending over the upright tube that pointed downwards through the platform, his eye to the range-finder. There was a click, a moment's silence, and the coal-barge vanished amid a flash of white flame, and an explosion that came echoing up through the sky towards the Condor.

"Wiped out, by gum!" exclaimed Sam. "My word, I begin to see now what this machine is capable of!"

"That is only a pistol-shot to a forty-pounder cannon, compared with what we have at our command," said Carfax. "It is enough for an illustration. Now we will return. They'll want you at the House."

Down went the Condor like a bullet, and in a few seconds she was abreast the parapet once more. So impressed were the men of Parliament, that she was received in silence for some moments, and then a cheer went up.

"Tell them anything they ask you," said Carfax, shaking hands with the boys. "See here, will you hold yourself free to go with me, whatever I do or whenever I start?"

"Like a shot!" cried both the boys eagerly.

"Very good. I shall be glad to have you. I'll pick you up at the windows of your own rooms, at six o'clock to-morrow evening. Good-bye till then!"

Sam and Stephen stepped off on to the parapet, and no sooner had they done so, than the airship, in spite of the cries of the crowd calling on Carfax to land, went skimming away again into the skies, and was soon lost to sight in the west, leaving the Members staring after it. The Premier was the first to recall the House to its dignity.

"Let us return, gentlemen, and get to business," he said in tones that everybody heard and obeyed. "This sheds a new light on matters indeed, and we have to come to a decision."

"Better get back to our places, eh?" said Stephen to his brother. "They'll cut it short now, and then we can g away. My word, but wasn't that a trip!"

The House filled rapidly, and the high hopes that ha been raised were visible on every face. The Premier spok first.

"Germany's demands shall be refused," he said, and loud cheers greeted him. "I may tell you that now, withou even the form of a Cabinet meeting. The suffering and lo in the country will be rapidly made good with t magnificent gift of money the nation has received.

"As to this marvellous machine that we have seen, must know more about it before we can tell whether it reason for pursuing a war abroad. Doubtless it may b use for transporting troops, and for scouting it would b great value."

"Or anything else!" cried a voice.

"But that must be for the War Office to decide," continued the Prime Minister. "We cannot move upon what we know of it at present."

A secretary brought him a despatch, which he took eagerly and opened, resuming his seat. A strongly-built keen-looking member, Captain Hosken, who was well known for having fought gallantly at the head of an irregular corps in the war, jumped to his feet.

"What more do we want?" he cried. "We've the ship the men, and the money, thanks to Carfax! And, with the great engine of the air to back us, why hesitate?"

"Where are the men to meet Germany's legions?" shouted a voice through the cheers that greeted the speaker.

"Haven't we the whole of the gallant Colonial troops—one hundred and fifty thousand of them, counting all they've raised to help us?" cried Hosken.

A conflicting clamour broke out on this. The House was out of hand, and the Speaker's authority almost forgotten. The greater part of the Members were with Hosken; but still the peace-at-any-price brigade made, as usual, much noise. And even the oldest and wisest warriors were in doubt whether it was wise to attack Germany's huge legions at home, with such small forces as Britain could put in the field.

In the midst of it, the Prime Minister, who had been conferring earnestly with two of his colleagues, rose to his feet, the despatches crushed in his hand, and strong emotion on his usually calm face. The clamour was hushed.

"I have news of the greatest importance to give to the House," he said—"news that, as a rule, would be kept till a later date than this before it were given out. But I am empowered and desired to make it public now. The Government of France declares its readiness to support Britain in refusing Germany's outrageous demands, and the armies of France are ready to join with our own and fight side by side against the German legions, if the war is to continue!"

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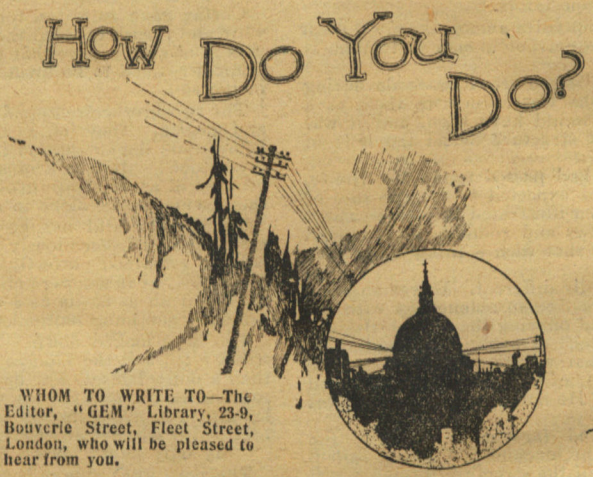

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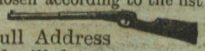

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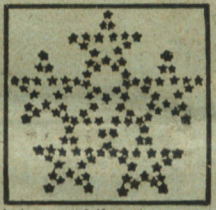

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