

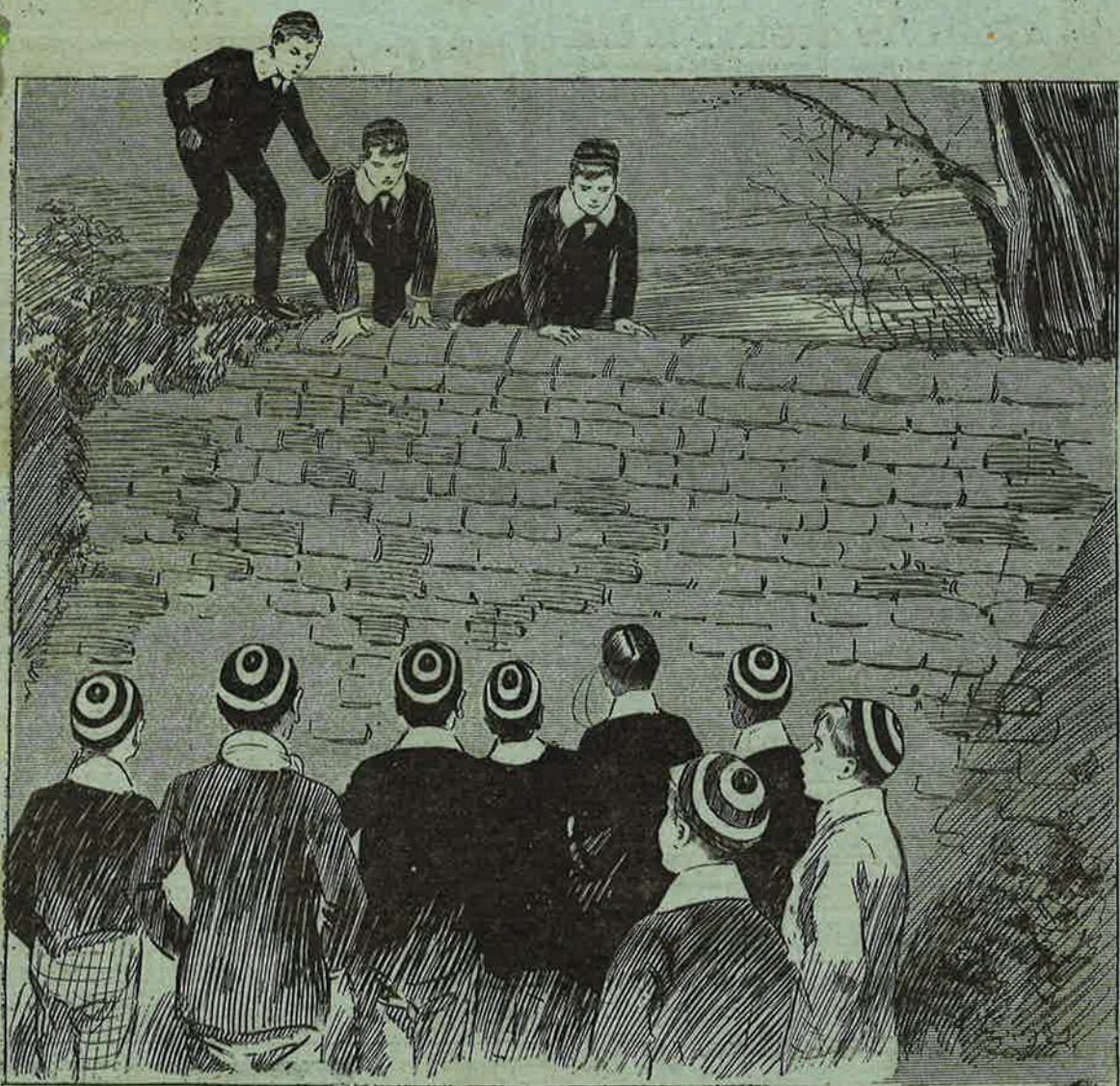
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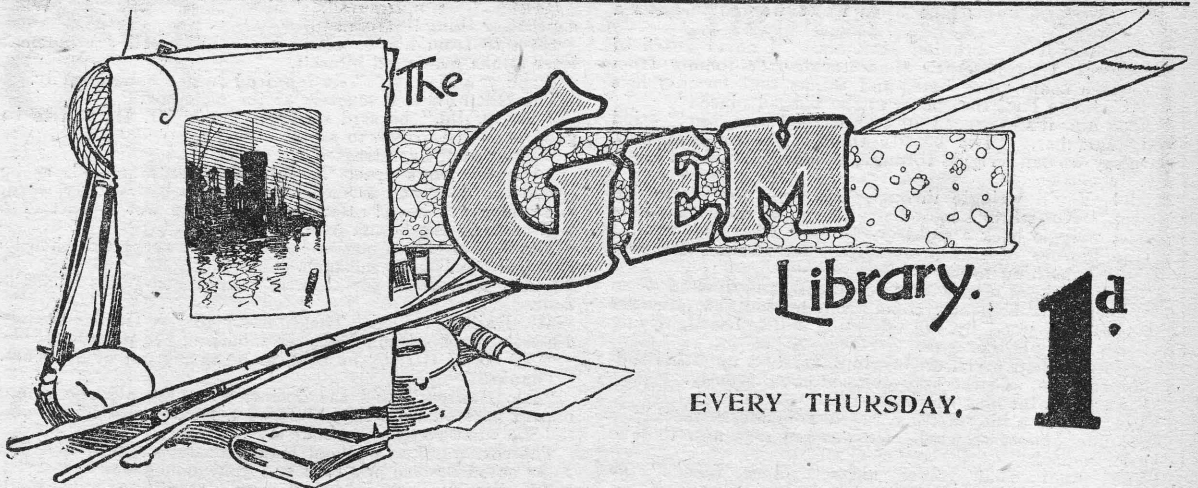
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By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

relaxed a little, and a wintry sort of smile contorted his leathery cheeks as he hobbled past the juniors.

"Mornin'!" he wheezed.

"Good-morning!" chorussed the three as they swung along.

"Queer old bird that," said Manners, when they were beyond earshot of the old farmer. "I wonder what was the matter with his face. Did you notice?"

"Rheumatics," suggested Lowther.

"Or perhaps he was pleased to see us," said Tom Merry, who had not the remotest idea that the agonised expression on the farmer's face was intended for a smile.

"M'yes!" said Manners reflectively. "He looked about as pleased as if he had fallen down and hurt his face. Hallo! What the dickens is this?"

The Terrible Three halted with one accord, and stared at a big board that had come to view as they turned the corner of the lane, and then eyed one another.

"My hat!" gasped Manners.

"My only aunt!" cried Lowther.

Tom Merry gave a low whistle of surprise.

The big, black letters on the board could not have caused the juniors more surprise had they been written in fire.

THIS LANE IS PRIVATE.

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED!

"My eye!" said Tom Merry at last. "Prosecuted! I wonder who's the bounder that stuck that thing up? Why,

CHAPTER 1.

The Closing of the Right-of-Way.

THE Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther—faced the keen March wind with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. They presented the appearance of three healthy specimens of British boyhood; and the sour face of Michael Strong, an old farmer who supplied the college of St. Jim's with butter and eggs,

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we've always used this lane when we've wanted to. It's a right-of-way!"

"Of course it is," grunted Manners. "I never heard of such cheek. I suppose it's that stockbroker Johnny from town who's come down here, and thinks that because he's taken Codicote Hall that he owns the blessed place!"

"Look how it's plastered up with barbed wire, too!" cried Monty Lowther. "The beastly thing's like an iron web. I dare say we can wriggle through, though," he added hopefully.

"Ah! You'll wriggle through 'ere, will yer?" growled a voice. "Not while I knows it. I'll make them that does wriggle, wriggle back a sight quicker nor what they comes. An' the howner of this 'ere' estate, Mr. Francis Browne, will 'ave something to say!"

A burly thick-set man with a red beard, and dressed as an under-keeper, had silently come from behind the quick-set hedge, and he stood by the offending notice-board, eyeing the three with pig-like eyes.

The juniors had given an involuntary start upon his sudden appearance, and the man grinned complacently.

"Gave yer a bit of a shock—eh?"

"Yes; yer're a bit startling," said Tom Merry meekly.

The under-keeper scowled. He was not sure how to take this cool remark.

"You mind what you're about, young feller!" he remarked.

"I've seen things like that in cheese," said Lowther, in a low tone.

"Wot's that?"

"Oh, nice day for the time of the year!" replied Lowther pleasantly. "Aren't you tired?"

"Of wot?"

"Oh, your face—that's all!"

Velvetens spluttered with rage, but the wood and wire that barred the entrance to the lane, also effectually prevented him from getting out.

"Get on!" he howled.

"Don't excite yourself, my good man," said Manners. "It's bad for you; you might break something. What did you say, Merry?"

For a few moments the Terrible Three discussed the situation, utterly regardless of the unpleasant face and remarks of the man behind the barricade.

"It's jiggered up our walk, anyhow," said Tom Merry. "Let's get back to the coll., and tell old Blake and Figgy about it. It's no good sticking here. So long, whiskers!"

There was no malice in Tom Merry's laugh as he bade the keeper good-bye, but the man looked positively venomous. A stranger to Rylcombe, he did not understand the boy's chaff, and he made the fatal mistake of losing his temper, and hurling uncomplimentary epithets after the juniors as they walked unconcernedly away.

They had not gone far before they encountered D'Arcy and Herries, and they all trooped back again to view the offending notice. The gamekeeper was not to be seen.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Yes, rotten, isn't it?" commented Tom Merry. "Still, it's no good chewing the rag. I can hear that red-whiskered chap snoring somewhere under the hedge, and we don't want to spoil everything for the rest of the day. What with his face and his language you could cook by them."

CHAPTER 2.

The Head Receives a Letter.

"N the ball!"

The morning sunlight streamed through the open window of the Head's study, and the breeze carried to his ears the shouts and laughter of the juniors playing in the quad.

Following his usual custom, Dr. Holmes was going over the morning's post before breakfast, and he smiled to himself with quiet amusement as a howl came from below in the shrill, unmistakable tones of Wally, D'Arcy's young brother.

Stern, and quick to punish the wrong-doer, the austere demeanour of the Head concealed a kind heart, and he revelled in his task of training his boys to grow up good and noble men.

As he opened one letter after another Dr. Holmes's mind strayed from the subject in hand, and his thoughts dwelt on the long list of "old boys" who had left his care and distinguished themselves in their several callings and professions in the world beyond the quiet, grey walls of the old college. Some had fallen for their country's sake, while others—

Abruptly the Head came back to earth, and he bent over a letter he had just opened. A flamboyant crest headed the thick notepaper.

Dr. Holmes read the note with a puzzled frown. Then he laid the letter down on his desk, with a sigh.

"Hum!" he murmured. "Most extraordinary! What a peculiar thing! Hum!"

He rose from his desk and pressed the bell. A moment later Binks presented himself.

"Did you ring, sir?" he inquired rather unnecessarily.

The Head glanced severely at the page-boy.

"Yes, I did," he said shortly. "Ask Mr. Railton to be good enough to come to me at once."

Binks promptly retreated.

"Wonder wot's upset 'is 'ighness?" he mumbled, as he closed the door and crossed the entrance hall. "My word, ain't he got a heye! But 'e little knows wot a 'eart of a 'ero beats in the bosum ov Binks."

The School House master looked rather surprised when he received the Head's message.

"The 'Ead wants yer at once," announced Binks from the door.

Mr. Railton smiled. The courtesy of the Head certainly did not gain anything from the mouth of the page-boy.

"All right, Binks," he said, as he swung out of his room.

"Thanks!"

"Ah, Railton," said the doctor, when the athletic young master entered his study. "Have a look at this letter, and tell me what you think about it!"

The corners of the School House master's mouth twitched as he noted the red and blue and gold monogram.

"Not quite in the best of good taste," he murmured.

"Why, the man's mad!" he exclaimed, as he came to the end of the letter. "Why, he has no right to close the foot-path! It's a right-of-way!"

"I know," returned the Head. "And," he went on, "I fancy he will have some difficulty in convincing some that we know of his right. You see, he anticipates trouble, or he would not have written to me requesting that I should forbid the boys to use the footway."

"The tone of this letter is decidedly impertinent," said Mr. Railton. "He seems ignorant even of common courtesies."

"I think we can afford to ignore that," said the Head drily. "It is not unusual in people of that class. I shall leave the matter in abeyance for a time. I cannot countenance any outbreak, but on the other hand I am not going to be a party to Francis Browne's—I believe that is his name—desire to infringe public rights."

"Certainly not. I agree with you!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Would you like me to call and see him?"

"No; not yet, Railton. I'll think the matter over first. You need make no mention of this to the boys."

Mr. Railton left the study, but the letter was no longer a secret between himself and the doctor, for the quick ears of Binks had gathered through the partly-closed door most of the conversation, and before the House-master came out, the closing of the right-of-way was confided to a Third-Former, and the news circulated like lightning.

Thus it came about when the Terrible Three reached the college, bursting with the news, they found excitement in the air. A little group of Fourth-Formers were gathered together in the quad, and verbal squibs burst on the ears of the Terrible Three as they came up.

"Miserable worm!"

"Rotter!"

"Rank outsider!" were some of the epithets that floated on the breeze.

"What's up?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Ugh!" grunted Figgins disgustedly. "Don't you know?"

"We're not thought-readers," remarked Lowther sarcastically.

"Haven't got enough brains," suggested Figgins, looking very warlike.

Tom Merry pushed himself between Lowther and Figgins. "Pax, Figgy!" he cried. "Now, what is all this fizzle about?"

"Why, that beast!" exclaimed Kerr impatiently.

"Who?" demanded Merry.

"Oh, I don't know!" exclaimed Kerr.

Tom Merry looked at the Scottish member of the New House in astonishment.

"Don't know?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, he does!" interposed the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors. "It's that chap who's taken Codicote Hall."

"Queen Anne's dead," said Monty Lowther. "That news is stale."

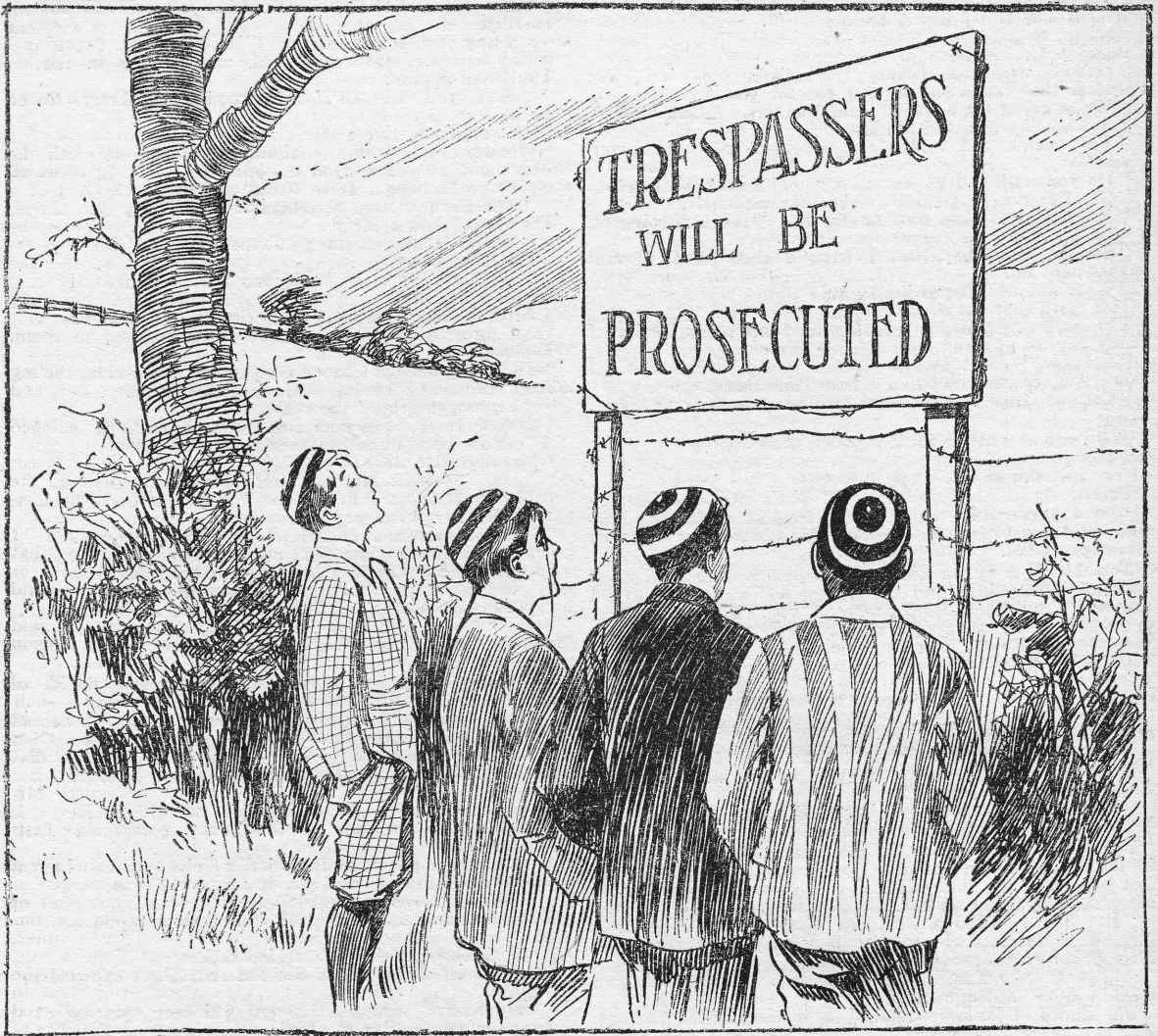
"Oh, is it!" said Figgins.

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "Considering that we've seen the notice-board ourselves, and—"

"Have you?" exclaimed Figgins excitedly. "It's true, then?"

"What?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Why, that he's closed the right-of-way across the woods, of course!"



"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Yes, rotten, isn't it?" commented Tom Merry.

"That's it. How did you come to hear about it?"
 "Oh, I don't know!" replied Figgins. "Someone or other spread the glad tidings," he went on vaguely.
 "Glad tidings!" snorted Kerr. "I don't think! There's the bell now, so we must be going."

Class that morning was a decided failure, and impositions were showered at the heads of the excited and indignant juniors, in batches of fifties and hundreds. At last, however, the morning passed, and they were free to spend the rest of the day as they pleased.

"Tell you what," said Tom Merry, as the three left the hall after dinner.

"Tell on," interrupted Manners. "What is it?"
 "Oh, shut up!" replied Tom. "It's about that chap who's boxed up that footpath."

"I thought it would be," remarked Monty Lowther. "Funny I should have been thinking about the same thing. Ow!"

Tom Merry drove his elbow into his chum's ribs. "Stop your cackling," he cried, "and listen to what your uncle tells you, or there'll be trouble!"

"You were saying?" inquired Manners pointedly.
 "I was saying what I should have finished by now if you hadn't started jawing."

"Well, get on with the washing!"
 "Shut up! Look here! Suppose we interview that chap."

"What waste a whole half on that mouldy-bounder?" exclaimed Lowther.

"I'm ready," said Manners; "that's if you'll do the interviewing part."

"You on, Monty?"

"Oh, all right!" grunted Lowther. "I suppose so."

CHAPTER 3.

The Interview with Francis Browne, Esq.

THE Terrible Three spotted Figgins & Co. as they crossed the quad.

"Pax!" shouted Tom, as the rival Co. approached with a warlike attitude. "Pax, fatheads!"

"Who're you calling fatheads?" demanded Kerr.
 "Oh, not you, of course! No, no, never let it be said," replied Tom Merry. "Coming for a stroll, Figgy?" he demanded inconsequently.

"Right-ho!" declared Figgins. "You chaps are on, I suppose?" he added, turning to Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, I suppose so," said Kerr. "Where shall we go?"
 Tom grinned at his chums, and his left eyelid quivered expressively.

"What are you looking so mighty mysterious about, you three?" inquired Figgins. "Anything on? I suppose there is, or you wouldn't have come out to meet us."

"I like that!" snapped Tom. "Just as if we should come out to meet you!"

"Well, you did, anyway!" declared Kerr aggressively.
 "Oh, stop it!" said Figgins pacifically. "If we're going for a walk, let's stow this wrangling! Cheer up, Fatty, you'll get up an appetite if you walk fast."

Fatty sighed, and, looking down at his ample waistcoat, muttered something about feeling faint.

"Hallo, hallo!"

Blake & Co. strolled up.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "What's in the wind? Got a wheeze that you want working out for you?"

"We're going for a walk," said Manners. "Coming?"

"A walk!" exclaimed Herries.

"Yes; can't you understand English? A w-a-l-k, fat-head!"

"Do you want a thick ear, Manners?" demanded Herries.

"Oh, I'm not particular!" retorted Manners.

"No rowing!" shouted Tom Merry. "We are going on a mission. Buck up! You coming, D'Arcy?"

"Sowwy, deah boy, but I have wathah an important engagement on."

"What's that?" demanded Blake.

The assembled Co.'s pricked up their ears.

The swell of St. Jim's turned a deaf ear to the leader of Study No. 6's question, and strolled off.

"I know!" cried Digby. "He's going to the station! Don't you remember he had a letter this morning?"

"Cousin Ethel!" exclaimed Blake. "Half a mo', Gussy!"

With one accord the juniors pelted after Arthur Augustus. All thoughts of the proposed walk were forgotten, and Tom Merry sprinted ahead.

Practically all the juniors of St. Jim's rendered homage to the winsome little lady, and if Figgins remained somewhat in the background, we know his service was none the less appreciated.

Tom Merry & Co. united in looking upon Cousin Ethel as a chum, and rendered her the respect which every nice girl can win from any healthy-minded boy. Even Skimpole, engrossed as he always is with mighty problems dealing with social questions on a large and ambitious scale, felt that his store of knowledge and his books of notes were out of place when he encountered the frank gaze of Arthur's cousin. Perhaps in a vague way he felt his limitations.

D'Arcy turned with a haughty stare as the juniors crowded round him.

"We're coming with you," announced Blake coolly. "Don't be a selfish beast! Why shouldn't we meet Miss Cleveland as well as you?"

"I absolutely wufuse—" began D'Arcy.

"Rats!" interrupted Figgins rudely.

For some little distance the swell of St. Jim's walked on in dignified silence; but his good humour soon returned, and he was keenly interested in Tom Merry's expositions of his plan for calling on Mr. Francis Browne.

"Bai Jove! Quite a brilliant ideah! I shall be most pleased to accompany you, Tom Mewwy, and place the mattah before the howwid boundah!"

"M'yes!" said Tom Merry doubtfully. "I dare say you would. Stop shoving, Blake!"

The crowd of juniors streamed on to the station platform just as the train came in.

It came to a standstill, but there was no sign of the expected Cousin Ethel.

"This is rotten!" said Tom Merry. "Hallo, who's that? I believe—"

"Yes, it is!" cried Manners excitedly. "There's his initials on his bag! Francis Browne, Esq., or I'll eat my hat! Just the type of bouncer that would have his name written in full, for everyone to gaze at!"

"That's him, right enough!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Looks a bouncer, anyway," muttered Manners.

"Bai Jove, yes," added D'Arcy, scrutinising a shabby-looking individual, who had just alighted from a third-class carriage.

"That's not him, fathead!" whispered Blake. "Over there—look! That fat Johnnie with the chessboard for a waistcoat!"

"I absolutely wufuse to be called a fathead, Jack Blake," said D'Arcy. "I demand—"

"Shut up!" said Blake. "All right, you're not a fat-head, ass!"

Further argument was cut short, for the deputation, headed by Tom Merry, had made a move in the direction of the new owner of Codicote Hall, and D'Arcy hurried forward.

Matters of this kind the swell of St. Jim's considered himself best fitted to deal with, and he feared Tom Merry might commit himself to some—as he termed it—social solecism.

He, himself, was not quite sure what this meant, having only that morning come across the expression; but he had an idea that it was in some way connected with what he would describe as being *infra dig*.

Arthur Augustus arrived at the head of the little procession just as Tom Merry raised his cap to an astonished and

portly gentleman standing outside a reserved first-class carriage.

"Pway excuse Tom Mewwy!" said D'Arcy, sweeping his glossy silk hat from his head, and bowing in the most approved fashion.

"Rats, you silly ass!" murmured Tom Merry, drawing back.

It would only have made matters worse to insist on the retirement of D'Arcy at that stage, and once the swell of St. Jim's got his mind fixed on one idea, nothing short of a coke-hammer would drive it out of his head.

"I believe I have the honour to address Mr. Fwancis Bwowne?" said D'Arcy.

"What?" snapped the gentleman.

"I believe—"

"Who are you? What do you want? What's the meaning of all this?"

Mr. Francis Browne, with the little circle of juniors standing round him, fired off one question on top of another. When he got to the end, he looked angry, and, indeed, he was, for he was not slow to take the expressions on the boys' faces as being directed towards his own person.

"Impudent brats!" he muttered.

D'Arcy caught the words, and drew himself up haughtily. "Your oppwobwious wemark," he observed, "is in extremely bad taste!"

"Oh," groaned Merry, "he's off again! Silly ass!"

The swell of St. Jim's ignored Tom Merry's remark, and regarded Mr. Francis Browne through his monocle.

"What do you want?" exploded that gentleman.

For a moment D'Arcy did not reply, but at last he decided to waive the question of Mr. Browne's rudeness.

"Get on with it," whispered Tom Merry.

"We wewpewent," said D'Arcy, with a lordly wave of his arm, "the college of St. Jim's, and we wish to uttah a pwotest regarding the closure of the wight of way through the grounds of Codicote Hall. And we—"

"You—you—you impudent young jackanapes!" Mr. Browne spluttered. "Get off at once! Porter!"

"My deah sir!" expostulated D'Arcy. "Pway westwain yourself, you misappwewhend—"

"Silence!" snapped the angry man. "I do nothing of the kind! You are a parcel of impudent young ruffians, and—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fixed his monocle in his eye, and regarded the red face of the portly gentleman with a haughty stare.

"I consider you as most wude," he observed calmly, "and as one gentleman to another, you owe me an apology!"

"I—I—I," stammered Francis Browne—"I'll box your ears if I have any more of your confounded impudence! Get off!"

"I absolutely wufuse!" replied D'Arcy. "Your wemarks are most offensive, and I demand an instant expression of wegwet."

"Go away!" snapped the enraged man, glaring at the unperturbed swell of St. Jim's. "Go away at once!"

"Arthur!"

D'Arcy turned abruptly and he raised his hat as he caught sight of Cousin Ethel; but the shock did not make him forget his customary politeness. He raised his hat again, and bowed farewell to the astounded owner of Codicote Hall.

The arrival of Cousin Ethel put an effectual stop to the interview, and the chums of St. Jim's left the platform in the possession of Mr. Francis Browne.

Fatty Wynn, who had taken advantage of the moment to visit the refreshment-room, came hurrying out with a large paper bag.

Cousin Ethel was laughing and talking to Figgins as the fat Fourth-Former emerged from the station, and Fatty Wynn's cheeks grew red as he caught the words: "I came by an earlier train. Yes, he is awfully greedy!"

It was a chance remark, and one that D'Arcy's cousin did not think could have been heard by the Falstaff of St. Jim's; but it was, and it rankled in his mind all the way back to the college. He lagged far behind the merry, laughing crowd, and his usually placid countenance bore a decidedly perturbed expression.

Skimpole would have said that his mental equilibrium had been thrown out of balance. But the fact of the matter was Fatty was upset. The few words he had overheard pronounced by Cousin Ethel had pierced the layers upon layers of fat that encased his unctuous little soul. The pride of Fatty was awakened. No longer would he anticipate the delight of pork sausages, and the jammiest of jam-tarts should be henceforth for him things to be shunned. Fatty sighed, and waddled past the tuckshop, and cast no more than a sidelong glance at the tempting display of good things fresh from the oven. A feeling of pride glowed within him as he left the tuckshop behind. He felt already that he had conquered, and another roll of fat emerged from

his collar as he held his head higher, and determination gathered strength within him. But Fatty did not know what lay before him—what pitfalls of desire would beset his path. His train of thought was broken by a hail.

"Fatty!"
The Falstaff of St. Jim's came to a halt, and turned slowly round. His little eyes grew bright with eagerness.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing in the doorway of the tuckshop, and Fatty remembered that the swell of St. Jim's had recently received a remittance from his father.

Fatty Wynn hesitated, and, in response to D'Arcy's call, he half-reluctantly retraced his steps. He knew at the bottom of his heart that that call could only mean one thing, yet he tried to make himself believe that the swell of St. Jim's hailed him for any purpose but that of standing a feed. Besides, it would be the height of discourtesy to ignore the summons of one who had in the past stood so many royal feeds.

Fatty reached the door of the tuckshop, and his gaze rested for an instant on the back of Cousin Ethel, and then he fled.

Figgins was buying chocolates for Cousin Ethel, and Arthur Augustus was doing his best to point out the propriety of his paying for them himself, and in the heat of the discussion Fatty was forgotten.

CHAPTER 4. A Lively Meeting.

"A FAT lot of good it was meeting that Brownie chap!" grunted Manners, as the three entered their study after leaving Cousin Ethel and her companions.

"We're no forrarder at all!"
"I said it would be no good!" growled Monty Lowther.

"Just as if a boulder like him would listen to reason; besides—"

"Well," declared Tom Merry, "we won't give in just yet, at any rate! Let's call a general meeting, and discuss the matter. We shall get some fun out of it, anyway. Must do something these dull times. Buck up, you chaps! Get hold of one or two of the kids, and I'll write out the notes."

Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Wally were playing in the quad, and were prevailed upon to act as messengers. The summonses brought along the juniors in batches. Anything of the kind always did, as there was sure to be a row.

"Are we downhearted?" yelled Blake, as he entered.

"What's the giddy game?"

"Wait and see!" said Manners.

"Order—order!"

"Rats!"

"We can't get in!" yelled someone at the door of the packed study.

"Make way there!"

"Now shut the door, and let's get on with the washing!"

Tom Merry banged on the table with a ruler.

"Order!"

Francis Browne certainly had ideas of his own regarding property. His acquirement of money had proved to him that the best way to get it was to grab by any and every means that would not bring him within the pale of the law. Strength to Francis Browne, Esq., was might, and might was right, and since the world in which the financier had moved before his retirement to Rylcombe had recognised and bowed its servile heart to his money, it naturally followed that he thought he had the right of might to close the footpath through his estate.

But whatever the villagers might think about the matter, the juniors of St. Jim's were on the warpath, and revolt was in the air.

The British boy has a very independent spirit, and anything likely to interfere with his liberty of action is very

fiercely resented, and no sooner resented than measures are taken to thwart the would-be stealer of his rights. Thus, for the time being, the rival Houses sunk their differences, and met together to fight the common foe.

"The point is," shouted Tom Merry, "what are we going to do?—We can't possibly let that boulder Browne have everything his own way. What shall we do?"

"As a sincere Socialist—" began Skimpole.

"Shut up!" interrupted Blake rudely. "According to you, I suppose you—"

"Order!" yelled Manners.

"Order, yourself!" retorted Blake.

"As chairman of the meeting," shouted Tom Merry, "I insist on the matter being considered in a calm what-you-may-call-it spirit."

"Hear, hear!" cried Herries. "Silence for the chairman's speech!"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Manners. "You're kicking up more row than anybody!"

"You go and eat coke! Go and boil yourself!" said Herries, looking very warlike. "I—G-r-r-r-r-r!"

The indignant owner of Towser was reduced to silence by Digby's arm passing affectionately round his neck, and a grimy paw being pressed over his mouth.

Skimpole took advantage of the temporary and partial silence. He cleared his throat.

"As a sincere Socialist," he observed, "the rights of the individual must not encroach on those of the community—Ow!"

"Exactly!" observed Jack Blake grimly. "Sit down!"

The brainy one was silenced, and he spent the rest of the meeting with the chief of Study No. 6 sitting on his chest.

"That's right! Sit on him!"

"How would a paragraph do in the 'Weekly'?" suggested Tom Merry.

"Ripping!"

"Capital idea!"

"Good wheeze!"

A chorus of approval greeted Tom's proposal.

"I'll write you a jolly good article—about a couple of pages. Something that'll make the boulder sit up. Something really good," suggested Manners modestly.

"You! You write!" exclaimed Lowther, with lofty scorn. "Why, you couldn't write a patent advertisement, let alone a serious article of this kind. I'll do it! I know just the sort of thing that's required. I should make the injustice of Francis Browne's action perfectly clear to even the dullest mind."

Manners sniffed, and Skimpole could be heard gurgling beneath the weight of Jack Blake.

Everyone started again to voice their own opinions, and no one seemed to be afraid of blowing his own trumpet. Clearly, however modest the juniors might be on other occasions, there was no hint of diffidence apparent when it came to contributing to "Tom Merry's Weekly."

The editor of the "Weekly" tried to settle the matter in his own way.

"Stop that row!" he roared, springing to his feet, and pounding on the table with an ebony ruler. "I am going to write the article myself!"

"Boo-oo! Booh yah! Hark at him! Bah! Boo!"

The squeals and catcalls were deafening.

"Line up!" shouted Tom, who saw what was coming.

"Ow!"
The Co. forgot their literary aspirations, and responded right nobly to their leader's call. But the odds were overwhelming, and in three seconds pent-up feeling burst forth, and Study No. 3 resembled a menagerie broken loose.

Figgins and Tom Merry hugged one another, and, whirling round, bumped into the table and sent the inkpot flying into the face of Skimpole, who was lying on his back on the floor trying to keep his limbs from being trampled on by the throng of feet hopping around.

It was at the exact moment that the inkpot was displaced that Skimpole had his mouth wide open, ready to yell, and the brainy one swallowed more of the black, acrid fluid in the space of half a second than he used in writing a year's notes.

Spitting and spluttering like an angry cat, the unfortunate Skimpole scrambled to his feet, helping himself in the process by clutching anything that came within reach. It was really by the aid of Blake's ear that he finally regained his equilibrium.

"Wow! Leggo, you—you—you— Oh!"
Blake paused in his string of expostulations, and stared at Skimpole's open mouth in astonishment.

"Gug, gug, gug! I— Goo, goo! Gug, go out!" gurgled the short-sighted junior, keeping his mouth wide open. "Gug, gug—"

Howls of laughter greeted this strange outburst, and, in

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sheer amazement, the juniors ceased hostilities, and allowed Skimpole to stagger to the door. He lost no time, but clutched at the door-knob, and disappeared down the passage in the direction of the bath-room.

After the departure of Skimpole things quietened down a bit. The dust-up had cleared the air a little.

"Now let's get to business!" said Tom Merry cheerfully, mopping his face and screwing his neck free from his crumpled collar. "Hallo, Gussy! You off?"

In the excitement of the fray none had noticed what had become of D'Arcy. Which was not to be wondered at, for at the commencement of the outburst the swell of St. Jim's had been hurled to the ground with his face in the coal-scuttle.

After the outbreak, quietude descended on the meeting.

"I think," said Tom Merry, looking round the circle of flushed faces, "that under the circumstances you had all better agree to an—an—well, an agreement to take no notice of any offending remarks made in the heat of the moment. Take them in the spirit of having been said in the heat of the moment. And—"

"Blessed if he don't talk like a penny book!" muttered Gore.

Tom Merry's speech was put to an early test. Gore's remark was loud enough to be heard by several, and, in view of what Tom had just said, it was quite impossible to resent any remark that was passed, even if came, as it did, from the cad of St. Jim's. As was only to be expected, the chief of the Terrible Three rose to the occasion.

"Unless, of course, those remarks," he went on quickly, "are promoted by a spirit of malice, such as our friend Gore has given us such a good example of."

"Hear, hear!"

"It is clear," cried Tom Merry, "that in this Brownie case we must band together in the firm desire to insist on our rights!"

"Hear, hear, hear!"

Frantic cheers greeted this last, and those that had grown hoarse with shouting, pounded on the floor with their heels.

"He's as bad as—as the dog in the manger," cried Tom Merry, "and we must turn him out. I propose that—well, on second thoughts, I will consider contributions for the 'Weekly'."

Ironic cheers drowned the rest of Tom Merry's speech, and the meeting came to a close.

"I'll send you something this evening!" shouted Digby as he left the study.

"You!" exclaimed Herries. "Why, you're no hand at that sort of thing! Why, you're as bad as a—as—"

"As a mouldy Board-school kid!" muttered Gore.

"What's that?" demanded Tom Merry, who overheard the remark, and turned swiftly. "What did you say?"

"Nothing!" mumbled Gore.

"Yes, you did!" retorted Tom, with flashing eyes, and a set expression about the lines of his mouth that caused the cad of the Shell to squirm inwardly. "You said something about a Board-school kid—something rotten, I know! It's like you to mumble and say caddish things to yourself. You keep your tongue between your teeth, or there'll be trouble, for a certain cad I know would be thrashed by any Standard IV. Board-school chap, and be put to shame!"

Gore's face went red and white by turns, but he had not the courage to face the scornful indignation in Merry's voice and attitude, so he shuffled off.

"Fancy a thing like that running down Board-school fellows!" said Lowther.

"Why, it's money, not manners, that's admitted him to St. Jim's. A reformatory is the place for him I—"

"What's that?" asked Manners. "Did you say I had something to do with bringing Gore here?"

Lowther gazed at Manners in amazement.

"Off your chump?" he inquired pleasantly.

"No, I'm not!" exclaimed Manners. "But I'll thank you not to take my name in vain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anything wrong with you?" cried Lowther, turning to Tom Merry. "What on earth are you two cackling about?" he went on, gazing at Tom and Manners in bewilderment.

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We shall have to tell Digby about this. He'll explain the connection between Manners and manners—that's if we give him time, and—"

"Chuck it!" growled Lowther, as it dawned upon him that he had committed an awful pun. "There's nothing to laugh about; besides, it is not good manners to make merry over a slip. Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom and Manners went for Lowther, and gently but firmly brought his head against the wall.

"Had enough?" inquired Tom.

"Yes! Pax!" gasped Lowther, straightening his collar.

"Pax it is, then," said Tom royally. "Let there be peace in the wigwams, and get on with the washing!"

The cad of St. Jim's walked down the corridor with an evil look on his face. Anything approaching disinterestedness was quite foreign to his nature. Gore always thought that since he himself always acted for the achievement of some ulterior object, that others always did likewise, and he flattered himself that he was mighty quick in discovering a mean motive in some apparently, and, in reality, perfectly harmless action.

He was a mean soul, and Mellish piped appreciation that pleased his vain spirit.

"I'll get even yet!" he muttered to himself as he crossed the sunlit-quad. "They think they can get the best of me! But I'll show them a thing or two!"

Turning over one scheme and another for revenge, Gore reached his study, and slammed the door.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Mellish.

"Huh!" grunted Gore disagreeably.

"What's up?" inquired his partner.

"Nothing's up! What do you suppose?" demanded Gore aggressively.

"Oh, I thought something had upset you, that's all," replied Mellish meekly.

"Stop thinking, then!" retorted Gore, with a snort. "Your brain is addled enough already, and you had better not strain it any more. I don't want to dig with a raving lunatic!"

This was pretty strong, even for the cad of St. Jim's, and Mellish showed his surprise.

"Well, when you have finished staring in that idiotic way perhaps you will put the kettle on?" said Gore, flinging a pile of books on the floor, and flopping into a chair.

"Put it on yourself!" snapped Mellish. "And boil yourself for all I care. Do you good, I should think! Get some of the grumpiness out of you!"

Gore flushed crimson, and his lower lip protruded.

"Look here," he shouted, "I don't want any of your cheek, or there'll be trouble!"

"Will there?" inquired Mellish. "Whose?"

"Whose? What do you mean?"

"Why, yours or mine, of course!"

Gore scowled.

"There'll be trouble—a black eye for you, if you don't stop it! I'm not going to stand any of your cheek, so don't you think it! Put the kettle on!"

Quite unconsciously, Mellish had at that moment taken up the kettle to fill it, but at Gore's command he promptly banged it down on the grate.

"Sha'n't!" he muttered defiantly. "Put it on yourself!"

For a moment Gore did not reply. His chin had sunk to his chest, and he was busy evolving some scheme to play off on Tom Merry.

Presently he grunted. But the matter of the kettle was not referred to. Instead, he gave an ingratiating sort of grin.

"Let's chuck rowing, Mellish," he said amiably. "Can you get hold of some of those books—you know the sort of thing I mean. Those blood-and-thunder things that Binks carts about with him."

"What, you're not—"

"No, of course not!" snapped Gore, looking ugly. "Can you get hold of some?"

"Why don't you ask him for some yourself?" suggested Mellish, in an unmodified tone.

"Look here," said Gore. "Listen, and don't be an ass!"

Gore whispered a few words to his crony, and Mellish gave a feeble chuckle.

"All right!" he muttered. "I'll manage it!"

"Mind he doesn't spot you," murmured Gore, "or you'll spoil everything!"

CHAPTER 5.

Fatty's Expedition—and Return!

WITH the exception of Gore, Mellish, and one or two others, most of the juniors had left the meeting with the firm idea of inditing their protests against the infringement of their rights for "Tom Merry's Weekly."

One of the exceptions was Fatty Wynn, and he finally decided to not only give up the tuckshop, but to take steps to reduce his corpulency. He caught sight of Darrel, the senior prefect, as he wandered along the corridor, and his fat face assumed a set expression that was distinctly comical as he hurried after Darrel as fast as his fat legs could carry him.

"Darrel!" he wheezed. "Darrel!"

The senior turned round.

"What's the matter?" he inquired pleasantly. "A sudden attack of hunger?"



"Oh, dear!" panted Fatty Wynn. "I might just as well have had a good blow-out!"

"No, Darrel," said Fatty, with a gasp. "I want you to give me a pass. I want to run down to the village."

"You want a pass! What for?" exclaimed the prefect. "Surely the tuckshop can supply all your wants in the way of indigestible tarts? Or have you cleared them all out?"

"It's not that," said Fatty, conscious of a feeling of virtue. "I am not feeling very well, and I want to get something from the chemist."

"Humph!" ejaculated Darrel, eyeing the fat junior's rosy face critically. "You don't look as if there was anything very much the matter with you. Is it internal?"

Fatty Wynn mopped his shiny brow. "It is not a matter for joking about, Darrel," he said. "Cheeky young rascal!" cried the senior. "Well, I suppose you may as well take your pass."

"Thanks, Darrel!" said Fatty, pocketing the slip of paper, and hurrying off.

"What's up?" shouted Tom Merry, as the fat member of the New House waddled past. "Lost anything?"

Fatty kept his nose in the air, and did not deign a reply. And by the time the juniors had recovered from their astonishment his fat little figure had vanished in the distance.

When Fatty Wynn reached the chemist's shop, a pale-faced young man with straw-coloured hair came to the counter in response to his tapping on the glass showcase.

"Yes, sir?"

"I want some—some—" Fatty stopped with a blush. "Yes?" said the chemist encouragingly. Fatty made a plunge for it.

"I want something to make me thin!" he blurted out. A smile hovered round the assistant's thin lips. "Certainly!" he said. "What would you like? We have several excellent preparations."

The fat junior looked puzzled. "I don't quite know," he said at last. "Can't you recommend something?"

"Well, there are so many different kinds of remedies. Would you prefer a specific in the form of a liquid or solid? Or, of course," he rattled on, "you can try exercise. We have all the latest things in exercisers."

The idea of taking exercise did not appeal to Fatty at all. There was nothing that savoured of the heroic in pulling at a pair of rubber bands, and he shook his head decidedly.

"Would you like to try this, then?" said the chemist, taking a huge bottle from a shelf. This size is only half-a-guinea!"

"Oh!"

Fatty Wynn uttered the single exclamation in an unmistakable tone.

"Too much?" said the young assistant. "Well, here's a smaller size. How would this do?"

"How much is that?" inquired Fatty, eyeing the bottle with interest.

It was black, and suggested something nasty enough for anything. "This size is six shillings. Of course, the larger size is much cheaper. You save—"

"Have—haven't you anything a bit cheaper?" cried Fatty.

An injured expression crossed the chemist's face. "You can't expect to get thin for nothing!" he said facetiously. "I expect that it has cost you a good deal to get as fat as you are now."

Memories of the many shillings that had been exchanged for tarts and other comestibles flashed across his mind, and far from feeling regret, his mouth began to water at the mere thought. He was brought back to mundane existence and the matter in hand by an impatient cough from the man behind the counter.

The fat junior plunged his hands into his pockets, and brought out a mixed collection. After extracting various coins from a miscellaneous assortment of impedimenta dear to his heart, he dug a sixpence from its resting-place in a forgotten chunk of toffee, and made up a total of eight shillings and fourpence.

"I'll take that bottle," he said. "That is, of course, if you can thoroughly recommend it."

"Of course!" replied the chemist promptly. "It's the best thing on the market! Shall I send it for you?"

"No, thank you!" said Fatty. "Have you anything else I might take at the same time?"

The corpulent member of the New House was in the habit of spending every penny on his visits to the tuckshop, and out of pure force of habit he wanted to go the whole hog, now he had started. Had he been in a tuckshop instead of an apothecary's, he would have calculated his consumption and expenditure to a fraction. Fatty was very experienced in some things. But here he was at a loss, and he did not want to exceed the limit of his funds.

Fortunately, the chemist had a quick pair of eyes where a sale was concerned, and the amount in Fatty's possession had not escaped his notice.

Without any difficulty the junior was supplied with several small packets containing pills and powders, and his joy was great when he found that his bill came to exactly eight-and-fourpence.

Fatty came out of the chemist's shop with a smile on his round face and a bulky parcel under his arm.

But he had not proceeded very far on his way back to St. Jim's when a couple of figures hove in sight, and his smile vanished.

There had been trouble of late between the Grammar School boys and the collegians. Fatty looked intently at the approaching strangers. He felt rather nervous, for he knew that no chance of a rag would be allowed to pass without an attempt to score.

"That is," he muttered to himself, "if those two are not from the col."

The fat one was not left long in doubt on this point, for the two boys came towards him at a run that, as they came closer, revealed both their identity and their intentions.

"Frank Monk and Carboy!" gasped Fatty Wynn, as he broke into an ambling trot.

A wild whoop quickened his pace to a run. As he took to his heels he could hear the Grammarians pounding after him.

"Oh dear!" panted Fatty, after the first fifty yards had been covered. "I'm sure I shall drop this parcel. I might just as well have had a good blow out!"

For the next twenty yards his fat, short legs flew over the ground in grand style. Then he gradually slackened speed. Before he came to a halt, Frank Monk's hard fist grabbed hold of his collar.

"Ow! Leggo!" squealed the Fourth-Former, hugging his precious parcel and gasping for breath. "Leggo!"

"Bide a wee, my pippin!" said the leader of the Grammarians. "What have you got in that parcel?"

"Never you mind what I've got!" replied Fatty valiantly. "It's nothing to do with you!"

"Now," said Monk severely, "little boys must not be cheeky!"

"You—you beasts!" spluttered Fatty, wriggling in the grasp of the burly Frank.

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the latter. "This will never do!" "Help!" cried Fatty, careless of the fact that there was not a soul in sight. "Help! Help!"

"Chuck him and his parcel as well in the ditch!" suggested Carboy.

"Trophies of war, my boy!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "No, no; we can't do that! I expect the little pig has some grub wrapped up there that he was going to smuggle into his school. Naughty little boy! We can't allow that, you know!"

"It's not grub!" cried Fatty eagerly. "It's— Ow! Ow!"

"I don't know that we ought to take his parcel away from him," observed Carboy.

A gleam of hope shone for an instant in Fatty Wynn's eyes.

"You see, Frank," went on the Grammarian maliciously, "if we let him keep it, he would probably make himself ill by gorging the whole lot by himself!"

Frank Monk grinned cheerfully as he saw the change come over his captive's flushed face.

"That would be too cruel!"

"Hand over, then!" commanded Carboy.

"Sha'n't!" retorted Fatty.

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed Frank Monk. "Stand by to receive plunder!"

A dexterous twist on Fatty's neckband brought a squeak to his lips, and loosened his hold on the precious parcel. As it fell to the ground Carboy caught it in one hand.

"Now buzz off!" cried Monk, releasing the fat Fourth-Former so suddenly that he twirled round and floundered into the ditch.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When the indignant and perspiring Fatty finally scrambled out of the muddy ditch, the Grammarians were far down the road.

"Mouldy beasts!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

But neither he nor the raiders saw the true humour of the situation as yet, for Carboy, had he known the real nature of the contents of that parcel they had commandeered, would surely have left it to Fatty to sample.

"Eight-shillings-and-four d.!" moaned Fatty, as he trudged dismally back to St. Jim's. "What a blow out I might have had!"

Kerr was standing by the gate of the old college when Fatty Wynn hove in sight. The Scottish member of the New House screwed up his eyes as his study chum drew near.

"What have you been up to?" he demanded.

"Nothing!" grunted Fatty.

"Fudge!" said Kerr rudely. "Look at your clothes. Been having a row with a steam-roller?"

"Shut up!" grumbled Fatty, trying to push by.

Kerr stood still and stared in astonishment. Fatty Wynn in a bad temper was a thing almost unknown. There was only one thing that could explain such a state of affairs, and the canny mind of the Scot came very near guessing the truth.

"Somebody been wolfing your grub?" he inquired.

"No!" growled Fatty.

"What, then?" demanded Kerr, more mystified than ever.

"Never you mind!" snapped Fatty Wynn, as sharply as it was possible for one of his naturally amiable temper.

"Let me get in!"

"Tell us all about it?" said Kerr persuasively, following his fat chum. "It isn't those Grammarian cads, is it?"

Fatty's face betrayed him.

"It is!" exclaimed Kerr triumphantly. "Here, Figgy! Fatty's been ragged by the Grammar cads, and won't split!"

The long-legged chief of the New House came up.

"Hallo! You've been through it!" he exclaimed.

"What's been the trouble?"

There was just a hint of sympathy in Figgins's voice, and Fatty's resentment vanished under its genial influence.

"So they collared your parcel?" said Figgins, when Fatty had finished his tale of woe.

"Yes, that's it!" cried Fatty Wynn. "The beasts! They took me unawares, and—"

"What was in it?" inquired Kerr.

Fatty did not reply.

"Well, you image!" cried Figgins. "What's all the mystery about?"

Still the fat Fourth-Former did not reply. He was aware that the knowledge of the contents of that parcel would only bring down upon his head ridicule, and after what had happened he did not feel that he could stand any more.

"Was it grub?" exclaimed Figgins impatiently.

"No-o!" said Fatty reluctantly.

"What, then?"

"Never mind what!" cried Fatty desperately. "It doesn't matter. Besides, it's a secret!"

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "Sorry, I'm sure! But we can't let those Grammar cads score over us, all the same!"

"Anyhow, we shall have to let it drop for the present," said Kerr. "Let's get up to the study; I want to write my essay."

Fatty came up in the rear as the three entered their room. He sighed heavily.

"Give over, do!" exclaimed Kerr irritably. "You're enough to give a laughing jackass the hump. What's the matter with your face? You look hungry!"

This remark touched Fatty on the raw, and he sighed again, more heavily than before.

Kerr grunted impatiently.

Figgins had already started his paper. Long experience had taught the leader of the New House that silence was

sometimes the best policy, especially in matters dealing with internal affairs.

After a while Kerr settled down to work, and soon afterwards Fatty followed his example.

For a time nothing disturbed the silence of the study but the scratching of the juniors' pens as they raced over the paper.

Presently a knock came at the door.

Taggles, the porter, bumped a brown-paper parcel on the floor.

"For Master Wynn!" he growled.

Fatty looked up with languid surprise.

"A parcel for me?" he said slowly. "Why, I—"

"Yes, for you, fathead!" exclaimed Kerr, springing to his feet and skipping across the floor. "Why, for all you know it may contain grub. Shall I open it?"

"If you like," said Fatty, then he started to his feet. A horrible suspicion had darted into his mind. "No, don't!" he cried. "No, no, no!"

"Too late old boy!" exclaimed Kerr, as he slashed through the string. "I—"

A crash of glass brought Figgins to his feet with a jump. "What the policeman!" he cried. "What the dickens are you two up to?"

"I don't know," mumbled Kerr dazedly. "I'm awfully sorry, Fatty. I hope nothing is broken."

Kerr's remark was the result of an agitated mind rather than the result of observation, for even shortsighted Skimpole could not have failed to see the dark, thick stain spreading over the study floor.

"It doesn't matter," muttered Fatty Wynn, hastily going on his hands and knees and picking up the pieces of glass.

"Let me help you!" exclaimed Kerr.

"No, no! Get away!" roared Fatty.

Kerr stood up in alarm.

"Off your onion!" he demanded pleasantly. "What have you got there, Figg?"

The leader of the New House did not reply for a moment. He was busily engaged in examining a piece of broken bottle he had picked up from the floor.

The piece of glass bore a label, and across the label were scrawled some lines in ink.

Kerr, failing to get a reply, stepped round the mess on the floor and peered over his chum's shoulder. He gave a whistle of astonishment.

Fatty, who was quite unconscious of what was going on, groped about on the floor.

A roar of laughter caused him to look up in surprise.

"I say, you chaps—"

Fatty stopped abruptly. His eye had caught sight of the piece of broken bottle held by Figgins, and he guessed part of the truth.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Figgins.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," growled Fatty, raising himself to his feet. "I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Kerr. "You silly young ass, you! Fancy going in for a thing like this! My word! No wonder those Grammar School cads sent it back. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mother Pepper's Patent Anti-Fat for Corpulent People!" read Figgins, aloud. "Oh, you silly little ass! You'll poison yourself, Fatty! You drop it. We don't want to lose our only claim to fame. What would the New House be without its Falstaff?"

Fatty Wynn shuffled out of the study, and the remnants of his purchases were placed for the edification of visitors on the middle of the mantelpiece.

A little later, a fat figure might have been seen waddling in the direction of the tuckshop. Events had hardened Fatty's heart. He no longer felt the sting of Cousin Ethel's remark, and his mind was fixed on the ways and means of obtaining a feed on tick.

CHAPTER 6. "A Wuff Waid!"

"YOU don't know anything about it!"

Study No. 6 that same afternoon was also the scene of much unusual industry, and Blake, Herries, and Digby had held much discussion over their contributions to the "Weekly."

"I tell you," shouted Blake, "that you're absolutely—"

In the middle of Blake's remark, Arthur Augustus bounced into the study. He was his immaculate self again, and not a speck of coal-dust remained, but his patrician countenance was flushed and angry.

"Wot!" he exclaimed, flinging a paper down on the table with a bang.

"Steady on!" cried Blake. "What's the trouble?"

"Wats!" repeated the swell of St. Jim's. "Uttah wottahs!"

Blake looked mildly surprised.

"Somebody been treading on your corns?" he inquired.

Arthur Augustus looked more indignant than ever.

"I shall no longer regard you as a fwiend!" he said severely. "I absolutely wefuse to have you wefer to my feet in that wibald mannah!"

"Did 'ums, den?" cried Digby, as he lounged into the room. "Somebody been upsetting your apple-cart?"

The swell of St. Jim's surveyed Digby with a witheringly icy glance.

"Oh, don't please!" said Digby, quite unabashed. "Don't look at me like that! I shall feel so nervous in a minute. Stop it, do!"

D'Arcy turned on his heel, and busied himself in front of the mirror.

"Wats!" he muttered.

"It's a bad job about you!" exclaimed Digby. "Giving way to naughty tempers in your old age. Gussy, I'm surprised at you!"

D'Arcy sniffed.

"Wottahs!" he muttered.

"Are you referring to me—us?" demanded Digby. "If so—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake held up the paper that D'Arcy had brought in.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling about?" said Digby. "Why, that's the Grammar cads' mag. You don't mean to say there's anything funny in it, do you? Let's have a look."

Arthur Augustus turned round and glared, but Blake pretended not to see his violent signals, and handed the paper to Digby. Herries also got up from the table to have a look.

The Fourth-Formers glanced at the sheet, then burst into roars of laughter.

"My eye! This is funny!" gurgled Herries. "Oh, Gussy, you'll be the death of me!"

The swell of St. Jim's was crimson with mortification.

Blake stopped laughing abruptly.

"Never mind, Gus," he said. "They won't get much change out of us. Cheer up!"

"I am not downhearted, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I shall call upon that uttah wottah, Fwank Monk, and demand an apology."

"Eh?" cried Digby. "You'd better keep out of the clutches of Monk. We don't want to lose you yet, you know."

"As one gentleman to another," replied Arthur Augustus, "I shall expect to receive an expression of regret."

"My word!" exclaimed Blake. "You don't expect much. I can just fancy Frank Monk going down on his hands and knees to you! I don't think!"

"I regard your expression as extremely wude, Blake," said D'Arcy, with a languid air.

"But look here," said Blake. "You're not serious, are you? You'll get scragged, you know!"

"I am absolutely in earnest, deah boy. It's quite impos- sible for me to allow those wottahs to libel me in that howwid fashion."

D'Arcy pointed to the offending sheet, the Grammar School mag., and fixed a steady eye on Digby, who showed signs of breaking out again into a fit of laughter.

Arthur Augustus folded up the paper, and went out.

"Leave us a lock of your hair, Gussy!" cried Digby. "My hat, though," he added, "surely the silly ass is not serious!"

"He is," declared Blake. "I suppose we ought to stop him. He's sure to get chewed up."

"Fancy taking any notice of a thing like that. It was funny."

Digby smiled at recollection of the fancy design for a waistcoat the Grammarians had inserted in their magazine. It had been described as the latest thing in attire, and was named "The Darcillian Waistcoat, as worn by the biggest lunatic in the asylum of St. Jim's."

"Oh, well," said Blake, "we shall have to let it go at that. He's made up his mind to see the matter out, so it's of no use to bother our brains about the result. After all, he may cool down after a while."

For the rest of the day, Arthur Augustus was very absent-minded. His mind was filled with the iniquity of the Grammarians, and their daring in inserting the picture of a thing like a patchwork quilt, and calling it a D'Arcy waistcoat. The "dig" of the swell of St. Jim's was touched in its most vulnerable spot, and he could not rest.

Blake, Herries, and Digby did not give the matter a second thought when D'Arcy returned. They were too fully occupied with the question of right-of-way through Codicote Wood, and they failed to notice the abstraction of their chum during the afternoon.

After tea, the swell of St. Jim's could restrain himself no longer. He would go at once. He would call on the leader of the Grammarians and demand an instant apology.

"The uttah wottahs!" he kept repeating to himself. "I will make the howwid boundahs uttably ashamed of themselves! Bai Jove I will!"

Seeking the privacy of the deserted dormitory, D'Arcy arrayed himself in a suit of beautifully-cut clothes, and he gave more than usual care to the selection of a suitable tie, boots, and collar.

When he had finished, the effect was stupendous. Correct in every detail, the tout ensemble presented by Arthur Augustus in all his glory was indeed a poem, and calculated to strike awe into the most scoffing breast.

Leaving the dormitory, D'Arcy paid a visit to Darrel. "Can you oblige me with a pass, deah boy?" he said, as he entered the prefect's study.

Darrel looked up from a pile of books, and surveyed the swell of St. Jim's with a smile.

"What! Another one for a pass? Rather late in the day for a wedding, isn't it, D'Arcy?" he remarked pleasantly.

"Pway don't wot!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wish to go on a most important mission—a matter of dig, deah boy."

"Oh!" said Darrel, duly impressed. "Shall you be going far and for long?"

"Not at all, Dawwel. Can I have a pass?"

D'Arcy was anxious to get away without having to answer a direct question. He was right in surmising that, had the senior any idea of where he intended going, the desired pass would be withheld.

Darrel looked at his watch.

"Till seven. Will that do for you? You're not contemplating any mischief, are you?"

Arthur Augustus looked at the prefect calmly.

"Oh, all right, then," said Darrel good humouredly.

"Here you are."

"Thanks, deah boy!"

D'Arcy picked up his pass, and went. His patent boots twinkled as he passed down the corridor, and his eye gleamed behind his gold-rimmed monocle.

Had his chums of Study 6 seen that eyeglass they would have recognised that Gussy was on the warpath. For it was reserved exclusively for special occasions. But Blake, Digby, and Herries were nowhere to be seen, and D'Arcy passed unchallenged from the college.

It was dusk when he crossed the quad, and a keen wind nearly swept his glossy silk hat from off his head as he passed through the gate and turned into the lane leading to the Grammar School. But Arthur Augustus turned up his coat-collar, and faced the long walk determinedly.

Once his mind was made up, D'Arcy was not to be turned from his purpose.

Without any more terrible adventures than that of plunging his foot into a puddle of muddy water, D'Arcy reached the gate of the Grammar School. He gave the bell a lusty pull.

Lights gleamed from the windows of the square, ugly building, but outside all was dark, and not a soul was about.

"Huwwy up!" cried D'Arcy, as a figure came down the path.

"Who's that?" inquired a voice.

"I," said D'Arcy. "Be good enough to huwwy up!"

"An' who are you, I should like to know!" growled the school porter, peering through the bars of the gate. "You can't come in now; it's too late!"

"I must!" said D'Arcy. "I want to see Fwank Monk."

"Oh, you want to see 'im, do yer!" growled the porter.

"Well, he ain't visible. Call again in the morning."

The man turned to go, and something like a wail of anguish rose to the lips of D'Arcy.

"Stop!" he cried.

"Wot's the matter?" demanded the porter, coming back a little.

"The unmistakable chink of coin had caught his ear.

"It's against the rules," he muttered, as the gloved hand of D'Arcy dropped a couple of silver coins into his fist. "But I allus likes to oblige a gent like yerself. Come inside."

The iron gate creaked and groaned, and Arthur Augustus found himself on the sacred soil of the Grammarians' stronghold.

The porter touched his cap with respect as the swell of St. Jim's passed the jealously-guarded gate. A judicious tip works a miracle upon the heart of the grumpiest of menials.

"You see that door, sir," he said, pointing towards the house, "well, that's the entrance. If you go there and inquire for the 'ead-master's son, I dare say as how the fust one yer comes acrost will tell yer where 'e is. Don't be in such a mighty 'urry, though," he added to himself, for he

had recognised the colours of St. Jim's College in D'Arcy's necktie. "I shouldn't be so mighty surprised if you comes back down that path quicker nor wot you's a-going of up it now."

The swell of St. Jim's went right in. The door was open, and he stood looking at the bare walls of the entrance hall. When it comes to a question of "dig," there is none braver than Arthur Augustus, and he ventured without a tremor of fear where it is safe to say neither Tom Merry nor Jack Blake would have set foot without taking wise and reasonable precautions.

A small and freckled-faced youngster emerged from a doorway, and stopped abruptly as he caught sight of the figure of D'Arcy. He glared at the swell of St. Jim's in dumb-founded silence.

"Can you tell me where Fwank Monk is, my little man?" inquired D'Arcy politely. "I wish to see him at once. I am pressed for time."

The boy's mouth opened and shut; not a sound issued from his lips.

"Huwwy up, my little man!" said D'Arcy.

The small boy flushed, and he glared at Arthur Augustus angrily.

"Who are you calling names?" he demanded.

The swell of St. Jim's surveyed his small antagonist through his eyeglass.

"I was addressing you," he said. "Be good enough to give my compliments to Fwank Monk, and tell him that I wish to see him on a most important mattah of business. Huwwy up, my little man!"

D'Arcy was quite unconscious of any offensiveness in his mode of address, and his astonishment deepened when the boy doubled up his fists, stood on tiptoe, and yelled "Yah!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Who're you calling names?" repeated the youngster. "I'm not your little man, you—you fop!"

A hard, little fist shot out, and smote Arthur Augustus on the waistcoat.

"Bai Jove! You little wottah!" cried the swell of St. Jim's, making a grab at the boy. "I shall administah a faithful thwashing."

"You!" cried the youngster, with scorn. "Let's see you do it. Yah!"

D'Arcy forgot his dignity, and made another grab, but his small enemy slipped from his grasp and fled.

D'Arcy followed, and before he knew where he was he found himself in the juniors' common-room. In an instant he was surrounded by a yelling mob. A dozen pairs of hands grabbed him by his coat, and he was held prisoner, while the diminutive youngster he had met in the hall eagerly explained the situation. The tale lost nothing in the telling, and cries of "Soek him! Skin him alive! He is a St. Jim's rotter!" arose on every side.

The swell of St. Jim's struggled manfully, but the youngsters piled on top of him like bees round a honey-pot, and he went to the dusty floor with a bump.

"You'll wuin my twousahs, you little wottahs!" he shrieked. "My—my—Ow! Gr-r-r-r!"

The captive's expostulations were cut short effectively. A grimy, inky handkerchief, that had done all sorts of duty, was thrust into his mouth, and knotted at the back of his head.

"Let's truss him up!"

No sooner said than done, and in a few minutes the figure of D'Arcy was reduced to a wriggling mass of handkerchiefs, ties, braces, and dusters.

Anything and everything that could be turned into a means of restraint was applied to his hands, feet, and body. Even his head was tied up, as if he had the toothache.

In the struggle his hat had been trampled to shreds, his tie was torn in half, and his collar hung by one buttonhole in front of his waistcoat.

Blinded with dust, half suffocated, squirming with rage and inarticulate anger, the swell of St. Jim's was hoisted on to a high desk, and propped up with chairs.

The yelling mob joined hands, and danced round him with unholy glee. Never had there been such a rag in the memory of the eldest there. Never had there been such a glorious chance of scoring off one of the collegians.

A red-headed little demon clambered up beside the unfortunate D'Arcy, and chanted a catchy refrain, while he emphasised each word with none too gentle taps of a sooty poker on the top of their captive's head.

"Come and see the wrinkle,
Come and see the whale,
Come and see the guinea-pig
A-looking for his tail."



"He's asleep, or pretending to be!" muttered the cad of St. Jim's.

The doggerel was yelled forth with untrammelled joy. The young savages danced and shrieked, and to D'Arcy it seemed as if it was a terrible nightmare.

"Come and see the kangaroo
Playing on the flute,
Come and see the crocodile
Learning how to shoot!
Come and see the college kid,
How the one and only did
Become a——"

Suddenly the triumphant chorus changed its tune, and with howls of dismay the mob scattered to right and left.

Frank Monk stood in their midst!

"What's the meaning of this?" he cried. "What have you been up to? Who—who is this? You little ruffians! Here, come back!"

Frank Monk addressed the empty room, for barring the silent, motionless figure of D'Arcy, trussed and reclining gracefully on the desk, the room was empty. At the first sign of the head-master's son the delinquents had fled. They knew that they had carried matters too far, and Frank Monk angry was not always safe.

"Can't you speak?" muttered Frank, gazing at the dishevelled object. "By Jove, it's a St. Jim's chap! How in the world did he get here? He is more like a mummy than a boy!"

Monk had seen the college colours on what was left of D'Arcy's tie, and he busied himself in releasing the panting captive.

"D'Arcy!" gasped Frank, as he removed the bandages from the swell of St. Jim's perspiring face. "Good heavens, half a mo! Let's get these things off your legs! Ha, ha, ha!"

The captain of the Grammarians could not resist a chuckle. The appearance of the unfortunate D'Arcy was irresistibly funny.

But the next moment Frank Monk grew serious, and he helped the dishevelled swell of St. Jim's to straighten his rumpled condition.

"Better come to my study and have a brush down," suggested Monk at last. "You can't do much good like this. The young ruffians! I'll gate the whole crew of them!"

"Pway don't do that!" said D'Arcy. "It was a wuff wag, an' the little wuffians ought to be punished, but I don't want you to be beastly wuff on them."

Frank Monk looked rather puzzled, but his brow cleared as he realised the purport of D'Arcy's remark.

"It's awfully decent of you, D'Arcy," he said. "A thing like this is beyond a joke. But you're not hurt, are you? No bones broken? By jingo, though, they've ruined your clothes!"

Arthur Augustus sighed.

"Bai Jove," he muttered, "I can't return to St. Jim's like this!"

"I'll lend you one of my coats. Come on!"

The pair left the common-room, and Frank Monk led the way to his study. They saw no one on the way. There was not even a hint of a junior; they had vanished like a lot of scared rabbits.

The close-up washstand did good service, and by dint of much use of soap and water, and a brush down, the swell of St. Jim's was restored to something approaching his accustomed dapper condition.

Of his monocle nothing remained but the cord and the gold rim; but long experience had taught D'Arcy to provide against contingencies, and Frank Monk gasped when Arthur Augustus turned from the tiny looking-glass, looking something like his old self, and a monocle gleaming in his eye.

"Why, I thought—" began Monk.

"I carry a spare one, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Now I think I must return."

"But," said Monk curiously, "what did you come for?"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

Events had quite driven the object of his visit from his mind. Besides, the captain of the Grammarians had proved himself so obliging, that D'Arcy found it impossible to be properly indignant.

"Oh, a matter of no gweat importance!" he said at last. "Bai Jove, I must make twacks! I must return by seven. I watah wanted to see you about a small mattah of dig., but under the circs., deah boy, we will allow the mattah to west."

"Just as you like," said Monk agreeably. "Whatever it was, I'm sure you don't bear any ill will."

"Watah not!" said D'Arcy, blissfully unaware that Monk had seen the copy of the Grammar School mag. sticking out of his pocket, and divined the reason of his visit. "I considah you have acted as one gentleman to anothead, and I'm extwemely obliged."

"That's all right!" cried Monk heartily, with secret admiration for the "sporty" behaviour of D'Arcy in excusing the juniors' attack. "How will this do? You can send it back some time. You'll want a cap, too!"

Frank Monk's overcoat hung round the slim form of the swell of St. Jim's in voluminous folds, but he was glad enough to accept it, for his own was ripped up the back from tail to collar.

The chief of the Grammarians barely restrained a laugh, and he was obliged to turn away when D'Arcy put on one of his caps.

D'Arcy's face almost disappeared, but he managed to get it clear of his monocle by tilting it at a rakish angle.

"It—it—the best I can do," said Monk apologetically, as he shut down the lid of the washstand, fearful lest D'Arcy should see his comical aspect in the glass. "I'll let you out by the side gate, then you can take the short cut across the fields."

The two parted at the wicket-gate with a hearty hand-shake, and then D'Arcy set out on his return journey. He had no time to lose, for it was just striking seven as he entered the gates.

Taggles peered out of the lodge door as D'Arcy's footsteps sounded on the gravel.

"Who's that?" he demanded. "Oh, it's you, is it, Master D'Arcy?" he grunted. "Well, hall I can say is, yer 'at don't fit yer very well."

The swell of St. Jim's did not hear this last remark of the school porter, otherwise he might have put his cap in his pocket, and saved himself from—

"Whoop!"

"Bai Jove! You—you—"

D'Arcy's muttered exclamation was cut short in an effective, if somewhat drastic fashion. Half a dozen figures emerged from the misty gloom, and half a dozen pairs of hands grabbed him before he could utter a protest.

Arthur Augustus went down in a heap, and his disordered mind received a further shock as Blake's cry of "Collar the rotter!" smote his ear.

By this time the aristocratic nose of D'Arcy was pressed firmly into the turf bordering the gravel pathway, and Fatty Wynn was seated on his back.

"This is where we get our own back!" cried Figgins. "Don't squash him quite, Fatty."

"I know," said Tom Merry, "let's frog— My—my only hat! It's—it's— Look, it's Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn jumped away as if he had been shot.

Arthur Augustus sat up and looked at his howling chums, speechless with indignation.

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Figgins. "I'm awfully sorry, Gussy! I—we thought— Ha, ha, ha! We made sure it was Frank Monk!"

D'Arcy's dignity was decidedly ruffled.

"You—you wottahs!" he exclaimed as he got to his feet.

"What are you doing in that get-up?" demanded Digby. "That's not your coat!"

"Neither is that your cap!" added Herries, in a tone of righteous indignation.

The swell of St. Jim's passed his hand wearily over his brow. As he did so, the absence of collar and tie was

revealed, and a chorus of cries of astonishment greeted the discovery.

"What the—what the policeman have you been doing?" said Kerr. "Been trying to commit a burglary?"

These and other various suggestions were fired off one after the other at the bewildered D'Arcy.

"Well," exclaimed Monty Lowther virtuously, "you can't blame us, Gussy, if you go about like a beastly tramp. Just look at you! Why, you're a disgrace to St. Jim's! It's a jolly good job that nobody's seen us with you!"

Blake glared at Monty Lowther aggressively.

"Look here, you Shellfish, if Gussy does look a scarecrow, it's nothing to do with you, unless you're looking for a thick ear!"

The pride of Arthur Augustus rose to boiling point at this backhanded sort of defence, and he regarded Blake with a dignity that was none the less by reason of his tattered appearance.

"I most distinctly wefuse to be chawctewised as a scarecrow, and unless you tendah me an instant apology, I shall cease to wegard you as a fwient!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry cut all further arguments short by linking his arm in that of Arthur Augustus.

"Come on, you chaps," he cried, "let's get in! It is too beastly cold out here for a conversazione!"

Merry's remark was intended chiefly for the members of the School House; but Figgins & Co. took the invitation as being also extended to themselves, and followed in the rear.

With Tom Merry on one side, and Jack Blake on the other, the swell of St. Jim's allowed himself to be conducted to the Terrible Three's study without a single protest.

"Now," said Tom Merry, with a judicial air, "we want some explanation of your— Hallo! You New House chaps here, too? Oh, well, you may as well stop. Shut the door, Figgys!"

Figgys meekly obeyed, and they all gathered round Arthur Augustus with an air of expectation.

The swell of St. Jim's had sunk into Tom Merry's arm-chair, and maintained a moody silence.

"Come on," said Blake, at last. "Buck up, Gussy, this isn't a beastly waxwork exhibition."

Arthur Augustus was too exhausted by his series of misadventures to take notice of Blake's peremptory request. He sighed wearily.

"Well," said Tom Merry, after a long pause, "are you going to be so rude as to keep us waiting much longer, Gussy?"

This effectually drew D'Arcy, and he came back to something like his usual attitude.

"As you will wemebah, Blake, I showed you this afternoon a copy of the Gwammah School mag. containing a most—"

"Yes, I remember," interrupted Blake impatiently. "Get on with it, do!"

"I shall sewiously wepwimand you, Blake," said D'Arcy, with emphasis. "I have told you about your wudeness before, and I absolutely wefuse to be intewpurred in my discourse."

"Oh, Gussy!"

Jack Blake looked duly humiliated, and the frown on the brow of Arthur Augustus gradually disappeared.

"As I was saying, deah boys, I observed in the wotten mag. of the Gwammahians, a distinct libel on my taste in matter of dwess, and—"

Tom Merry yawned.

"Mewwy," observed the swell of St. Jim's, "I consider you most wude!"

"Oh, Gussy!" pleaded Tom Merry.

Again the frown of disapproval disappeared, and Arthur Augustus resumed his narrative.

"After I had given the mattah due considewation, deah boys, I came to the conclusion that I could only demand an abject apology from that wottah, Fwank Monk, as being the one wespensible for the outwage to my dig—"

"Ha—er!"

Manners stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth, and stifled his outburst.

"And then?" queried Herries, with a deeply-interested air.

"I am coming to that," said D'Arcy. "I went—"

"Did—did you get the apology?" stammered Kerr, crimson with suppressed laughter.

"I absolutely wefuse to be huwinded in this mannah! I shall defah the mattah until you wottahs have wecovered your mannahs!"

Arthur Augustus stared frigidly at the circle of grinning faces, and rose to his feet.

"I shall go and change. Pewwaps when I have completed my dwessing, I shall weturn and be able to nawwate my stowy to a wespectual audience."

The chums looked at one another inquiringly as D'Arcy stalked to the door.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"It's no good stopping him. Once Gussy rides the high horse, we may as well let him alone. What, are you going, too?" he added, as Blake, Herries, and Digby made for the door. "Drop in again when you're passing."

"We'll drop something on your head," said Blake darkly. "But, joking aside, we must make Gussy divulge what he's been up to. We can't allow those Grammar cads to score off us like this. Twice in one day is a bit too much of a good thing."

"Sure!" assented Merry. "All right, go and keep an eye on your prize ass, and bring it along as soon as you can prevail upon his lordship to honour us with his company. No, no! Pax, fatheads!"

Tom Merry dodged round the table as Blake advanced in a crouching attitude.

"All right," said Blake, with a grin, "I can't stop to wipe up the floor with you now! So long!"

CHAPTER 7.

D'Arcy and the Pickled Onion.

"WELL, you chaps, make yourselves at home," said Tom Merry, as Blake & Co. closed the door.

"Better stay supper. Buck up, Figgy! Cousin Ethel wouldn't know you with that long face."

The long-limbed member of the New House flushed painfully.

"It's all right, old son!" cried Tom Merry cheerily. "I'm only rotting. Let's see if we can't get some wheeze to work off against those Grammar chaps. What with them and that boulder Browne, we've got our hands full."

There were not enough chairs to go round, so Manners and Monty Lowther drew up the table and perched themselves in the middle of the circle round the fire.

The Terrible Three's study was always noted for its cosiness, and now it seemed unusually comfortable.

The juniors chatted eagerly, and various ideas for bringing about the downfall of Browne and the Grammarians were discussed exhaustively, only to be rejected.

"You don't seem to be very brilliant, Merry," observed Kerr, at last. "Call yourself captain, and here we've been jawing for over half an hour, and you've done nothing but throw cold water on every idea that's been suggested."

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's only to stop you chaps from getting into hot water. If you would suggest a sensible wheeze, I should be only too glad to take the lead."

"Take the lead, indeed!" snorted Kerr. "I—"

"You've made some bright suggestions, haven't you?" said Manners ironically.

"Get off with you! This bit of shortbread is a bit too tough for you to crack, anyway."

Kerr looked very vexed.

"Weel, I," he said in his broadest accent—it always came out when he was angry—am thinking you'll not be so—"

"No," said Manners, with a twinkle in his eye, "I quite agree with you. You're a genius. Now shut up; we've got to scrag the Grammaria—Ow!"

"You're gassing a lot," said Tom Merry. "Let's hear what you've got to propose."

Manners shut up and rubbed his leg.

"You! Fatty! Got any ideas?"

Fatty Wynn mumbled something about not being able to think while he was hungry.

"You, Lowther?"

Lowther was equally unresponsive.

"Figgy?"

No reply.

"That's just it!" cried Tom Merry. "You can all gas one against the other, but when it comes to getting out an idea on your own, well, where are you? Fancy being captain of a crowd of noodles like you are! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about you?" demanded Manners.

"I? Oh, I've thought of something ripping while you've been wasting time!" said Tom airily.

"What?"

"Chuck it off your chest!"

"Let's have it!"

"Not now. Wait until Blake and the others come back."

"Oh! Boo, bah!"

"Don't believe it's anything, after all!" scoffed Lowther.

"You're trying to gain time."

"Oh, no, I'm not!" said Tom, who knew his chum was trying to pull his leg, "and you know it, too."

"Well, grumbled Lowther, "you might tell us, anyway. I don't see what you want to wait for."

Tom Merry changed the subject.

"What about supper? Let's have some supper. What have we got, Monty?"

Lowther opened the cupboard door, and grunted expressively.

The faces of Merry and Manners were a study, and with one accord they looked at Fatty Wynn.

"Half a cold sausage, a stale loaf—yes, some mouldy biscuits, a pound of sugar, and—"

"That'll do!" cried Tom Merry. "Can't you find a cold chicken or some pate de fois gras or a ham or two? You forget our guests, Monty. We can't ask them to share half a sausage."

"There's some condensed milk!" cried Lowther, holding up a tin.

"That's no good! We shall have to forage round for something or other—"

"Don't trouble," said Figgy. "We had some grub not very long ago—"

"But we haven't," said Tom Merry. "Besides, I asked you to stop. Lemme see!"

"It's too late for the tuckshop," cried Manners. "So it's no good looking at your watch. We can let Fatty have the cold half a sausage and the milk, and make do on bread-and-pull-it."

"Not me!"

"I'm not hungry."

"I know!" exclaimed Tom. "I'll try the housekeeper. She's a decent sort, an' p'r'aps she'll let me have some of that pie we had for dinner. Cheer up, Fatty!"

"Oh, Fatty's trying to get thi—" started Figgy, but he stopped abruptly as he caught sight of his fat chum's imploring face.

"What?" inquired Merry, from the doorway.

"Oh, nothing," said Figgy. "Fatty's feeling faint, that's all!"

Tom Merry vanished.

A few minutes later a bang on the door brought a shout from Manners.

"Who's that?" he shouted.

"Me!"

"Who's me? Come in!"

Another hard bang came at the door.

"Open the door, fathead!" cried Tom Merry's voice.

Manners got up from his chair, and crossed the study.

"Can't you— My hat!"

Tom Merry came in with a smile all over his face.

"Silly ass!" he exclaimed. "Why couldn't you open the door?"

The Shell captain had both arms full, and the only serious one in the study was Fatty Wynn. The sight of provisions always made Fatty serious. He could not joke over a thing of so much importance.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "What, in the name of goodness, have you got there?"

"Two loaves," announced Tom, "a lump of cheese, and this!" A huge earthenware jar was set upon the table.

"That's all I could get," said Tom Merry. "But I guess we'll be able to keep from starving if we get through this little lot."

"Phew!" sniffed Kerr, with his nose close to the mouth of the jar, which was covered with parchment, and neatly tied with string. "It's— Oh, phew!"

The others looked suspiciously at Tom.

Figgy had a sniff.

"Phew!"

"When you've done sniffing," cried Tom, "p'r'aps you'll get out the forks and things? Get your nose out of it!"

"It's a jar of pickles!" shouted Lowther.

"Onions!" cried Manners. "What a lark!"

Fatty Wynn hovered round the pickle-jar in an ecstasy of delight.

"I'll help you lay the table!" he cried, waddling to the cupboard. "How many are we?"

"Six, Fatty!"

"Six!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn.

"More than that!" cried Tom Merry. "There's Blake and the others. Ten altogether!"

Fatty's face fell.

"Don't you think we might make a start?" he said, when the table was ready. "Those chaps may be ever so—"

"Here we are again!" cried a voice. "What's this? A giddy banquet? What's in the jar?"

On the appearance of the chums of Study No. 6, Fatty promptly slid his portly form into a chair, and pulled it as close to the pickle-jar as he could get it.

"You're just in time!" said Tom Merry. "Crowd up, you chaps, and make room for Gussy!"

"Phew!"

Jack Blake's remark was peculiar but expressive. Digby and Herries squeezed in beside Fatty Wynn, and grinned at D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's had changed, and had nearly recovered his wonted calmness, but the distinctly pungent

odour emanating from the now opened jar of pickled onions offended his aristocratic sense of smell.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter, Gussy?" inquired Tom Merry, standing and prodding with a fork into the capacious mouth of the jar. "Oh, bother it! I can't get the blessed things out with this!"

"Try the shovel," suggested Jack Blake.

"Get inside," added Herries.

"You shut up, or I'll send you in after them!" retorted Merry. "Come out!"

Tom jabbed the fork into the jar, and some of the vinegar spurted out.

A howl came from Arthur Augustus.

"Pway be careful, deah boy," he cried, hastily slipping his chair back. "You'll wuin my clothes if that beastly stuff gets on them. I——"

"Got him!" cried Tom Merry triumphantly, holding up an onion impaled on the fork. "Who's this for? Sorry, Gussy! I shall get used to this in a minute. Do not get alarmed, Fatty; there's plenty here."

"Why don't you get a gun, Merry?"

"Put your fist in!"

"Tackle them low!"

Despite the ribald remarks, Tom Merry prodded manfully away, and eventually each had in front of him a generous helping of the tasty if odorous pickles.

Fatty munched away contentedly.

"This is not half bad!" declared Tom.

"No, it's fine!" mumbled Digby. "Why, you're not getting on very fast, Gussy!"

The juniors had all been intent on their plates, but now all eyes were focussed on Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Oh, Gussy!" reiterated Jack Blake.

"I'm not hungwy!" said D'Arcy.

"Why, you said you were just now!" cried Blake. "I'm surprised at you being so rude as to turn up your nose at the fare provided by our distinguished host!"

"I'm not turning up my nose!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "Pway excuse me, Tom Mewwy. I would pweah not to partake of these—these——"

"I'm afraid I shall have to take it as a deadly insult, Gussy," said Tom Merry gravely. "In France, you know, I should challenge you to a duel if you refused to eat my onion."

"But we're not in——" commenced Lowther. "Who're you kicking, Manners? Do you——"

"Shut up, fathead!" hissed Manners. "Can't you see the joke?" he muttered. "D'Arcy and onions, fathead!"

The combination suddenly dawned on Monty Lowther, and he burst into a splutter of laughter.

"But, Mewwy, I assuah you, deah boy——"

"I cannot regard your refusal in any other light, Arthur," interrupted Tom, in a grave voice.

D'Arcy looked round in despair, but no one came to his aid.

"Suably you would not considah it vewy wude of me?" he almost pleaded.

"I have no wish to discuss the matter any further," replied Tom, with a splendid assumption of offended dignity.

The assembled juniors nearly choked with laughter, as, with a hopeless look of resignation, Arthur Augustus picked up his fork.

Not for a moment would the one and only hesitate when it came to a question of good manners, and every eye except Fatty Wynn's watched the progress of the onion to the mouth of D'Arcy.

Half-way he hesitated, and placed it on his plate again. An expression almost of agony came over his face.

"Tom Mewwy!"

Tom did not reply. His head was bent, and a frown was all D'Arcy could see.

D'Arcy sighed, and again his hand raised the fork.

The tension grew greater than ever, and Figgins rose hastily from his chair, seized with a fearful fit of coughing.

"Ugh!"

Down went the fork again.

Manners was the next to start coughing. Then, in quick succession, the others joined in, till only Fatty Wynn and the disconsolate Arthur Augustus were silent.

Fatty was eating, and D'Arcy was miserably regarding his plate, and wishing he was a thousand miles away.

"It—it must be ca-ca-catching!" mumbled Figgins, as he returned to his chair.

"Yes—yes— Gug-gug-gug!" assented Tom Merry.

"Those onions are jolly fine! Gug-gug!"

"I say," whispered Blake, with fiendish delight—"I say,

Gussy! Aren't you going to st-start? You're awfully rude, you know!"

It was a masterly move on Blake's part. He retained his appearance of gravity to the last word.

"Gussy's off his onion!" muttered Lowther.

But the joke passed unnoticed, for the onion was again on its way upward. The silence now became painful, and everyone held their breath.

Arthur Augustus shut his eyes. He was scarcely aware of what he did, but his hand did not waver this time. His mouth opened, and so intent were the others that their mouths opened, too, and then a roar of laughter, unrestrained, untrammelled, burst forth.

The onion was in!

The swell of St. Jim's gazed at his chums through a mist. It was his first pickled onion, and its pungent flavour brought the tears to his eyes.

"Gurgh!"

"He's swallowed it whole!" howled Tom Merry. "Oh, Gussy, Gussy, you're too funny for words! Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's had swallowed it, and he got up from his chair and glared at Tom Merry.

"I fwust, Tom Mewwy, that you are now satisfied, and I beg you to——"

"Never mind, Gussy!" cried Tom. "It was only a little one!"

At this the roars of laughter burst forth again, and it was with difficulty that Arthur Augustus was prevented from quitting the study.

"It was only a joke, Gus!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"Then you were not weally offended, Tom Mewwy?"

"No, of course not!"

"Bai Jove, then, I considah it was a most wotten twick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After a while something like calm was restored, though every now and again a belated chuckle would burst forth, to evoke a severe glance from D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 8. A Disturbed Night.

"WHAT about the weeze?" inquired Figgins. "You'd better be quick. We shall have to clear soon, or Monteith will be on our tracks."

"Well, I propose," said Tom Merry, "that we send a note to Frank Monk, asking him to tea."

"What!" shouted Figgins. "Have you gone dotty, or what?"

"I—— Oh-o-o-oh!"

Arthur Augustus started to say something, and finished with a prodigious yawn.

"Why don't you ask him to come and stay with us?" demanded Blake.

"Don't you chaps be in such a beastly hurry!" retorted Tom. "You wait till your uncle explains, and then talk. Now——"

"Now, is bedtime!" cried Kildare, popping his head into the study. "Phew! The place is like a pickle-factory! Come on out of it, you New House chaps. Time good little boys were in bed. Out you go!"

"Just a mo', Kildare," said Tom.

"Not a sec'!" retorted the captain. "Out you all get—quick march!"

Quick march it was, for the genial stalwart captain of St. Jim's would stand no nonsense, and the juniors streamed out of the study.

"Night-night, Figgy!" shouted Tom.

"Good-night, deah bo—— Oh—oh-oooc—ah!" yawned D'Arcy.

"By Jove! I'm sleepy, too," muttered Jack Blake. "Come on!"

Arthur Augustus was tired out, and he tumbled into bed without troubling to fold his clothes.

Such a state of affairs had never been known to occur before, and Blake, Digby, and Herries stood round D'Arcy's bed a few minutes later and looked at one another in surprise.

"My hat!" exclaimed Blake. "Just look!"

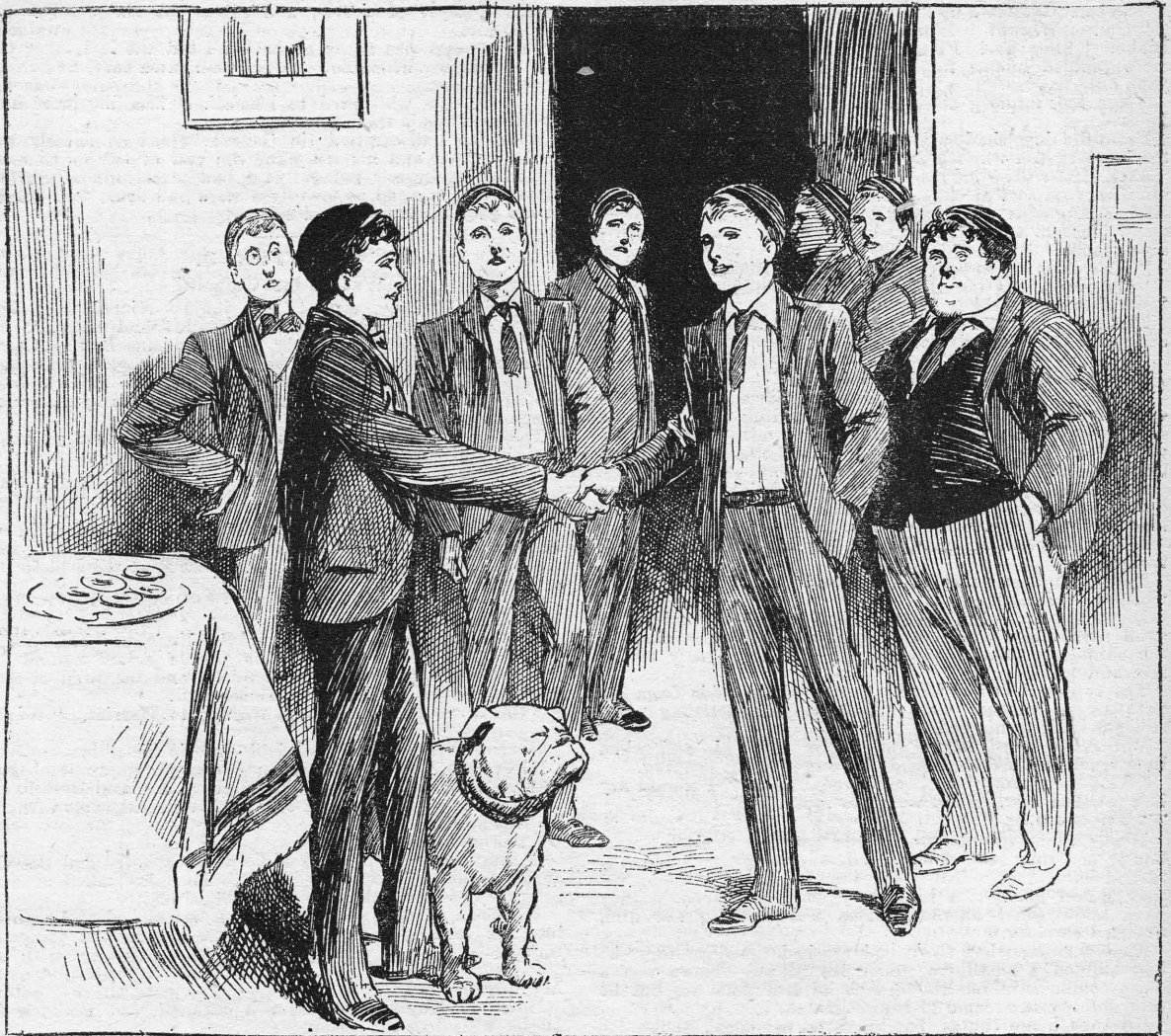
"Why, he's asleep!" said Digby. "Fancy him leaving his togs about like this!"

"P'r'aps it was the onion," suggested Herries, with a cackle of laughter. "My word, it was funny, though! Ugh! I'm tired."

Ten minutes later the whole dormitory was sound asleep and snoring.

Kildare came along on his rounds, and stood for some time at the door. The silence was suspicious, but the unmelodious series of snores were too good to be false; and he went away surprised but satisfied.

The swell of St. Jim's would have indignantly denied that he snored, but on this night it was unmistakable.



"Hallo, Monkey!" "Hallo, fatheads!" Frank Monk grinned at his old enemies as he shook hands and accepted the invitation.

It may have been the onion, or it may have been his exciting day. Whatever it was Arthur Augustus got exceedingly restless, and presently he began to moan and mutter:

"G-rr—wot, grrr—wottahs grrr—I ab—bab grrr! Take grooch!—away—grrrooh!—wefuse, howwid — gr-r-oo-o — ow!"

Jack Blake started up in bed, and peered sleepily through the gloom.

"Wonder what that was?" he muttered. "Made sure I heard something. Puss, puss, puss!"

Nothing but snores could be heard, and Blake nestled down in the warm bed again.

"Ow!"

This time Blake, Herries, and Digby woke up.

"What are you kicking up that ghastly row for?" demanded Blake.

"Go on; it wasn't me!" retorted Herries and Digby simultaneously.

"Who was it, then?" asked Blake, in a loud whisper.

"Ow—wow!"

A fearful scrimmage seemed to be in progress.

"It's—it's Gussy!" gasped Blake. "What's up with him?"

"Ow—woh! Wottah! I'll give you a feahful thwashing!"

Thump, thump, thump!

"Good heavens!" cried Blake, springing out of bed and pattering across the cold floor. "What's the matter, D'Arcy? Strike a light, somebody! Light the gas!"

Herries opened the door, and a faint beam of light came from the gas-jet in the corridor, revealing a strange scene. Arthur Augustus was sitting up in bed, and pummelling the bolster for all he was worth.

Thump, thump, thump!

"Wottah!"

"He's asleep!" whispered Blake. "Don't wake him, for goodness' sake!"

The three stood watching and shivering for some two minutes. Then suddenly Arthur Augustus finished his fight, and lay down as still as if he had never moved.

"It's the onion; that's what it is," said Herries, as they went back to bed, after covering up D'Arcy as best as they could without causing him to wake. "Let's hope he doesn't get taken like that again!"

It was not long, however, before the onion started its fell work again. Digby was dreaming he was flying, soaring over the housetops in grand style. Then he bumped into a chimney-pot and woke up. A dim, ghastly, white figure stood at the foot of his bed.

"B-rrr!"

The junior clutched the bedclothes and stared at the apparition with round eyes.

Comprehension came slowly to him.

"Ugh!" he muttered through his chattering teeth. "It's Gussy. He's on the go again!"

D'Arcy moved silently away, and Digby heard him fumbling with the lid of his box.

"Blake!"

Digby got out of bed and shook his chum by the shoulder.

"What the—"

"Sh-sss! D'Arcy's up!"

"Up? Where? What? Oh, bother him!" grunted Blake. "Silly ass! I'll take jolly good care there's no more pickled onions for him. Where is he? He hasn't gone out—has he?"

"No; he's fiddling about with his box. Here he comes! Look!"

From the deep shadow at the further end of the dormitory there emerged a white blur.

Jack Blake drew in his breath sharply. He was not at all a nervous sort of chap, but this nocturnal wandering of Arthur Augustus was getting on his nerves. Besides, it is never pleasant at any time to be awakened from a comfortable snooze.

"He's carrying something," whispered Digby.

"By jingo, it's his collar-box!" muttered Jack Blake.

"What in the world is he going to do?"

The swell of St. Jim's passed close to the two watchers and made unflinchingly for the fireplace.

"Surely—What?"

"Let's go and see what he's doing."

Without a sound, Blake and Digby followed in the tracks of their chum. They could see him bending down in front of the grate. He was muttering to himself. "Wottahs!" was all they could hear, but presently they drew closer, until they could have touched his back.

Something like a shiver ran down Digby's spine. It was an uncanny adventure this, standing there in the grey blackness watching a sleepwalker.

D'Arcy was still muttering, and they heard him push back the register.

"What in the name of goodness!" said Blake, in a whisper. "Look!"

Digby gave a sort of half-gasp, half-hysterical giggle. The swell of St. Jim's had pushed his precious collar-box up the chimney. This accomplished, he rose suddenly to his feet and turned.

The two juniors had barely time to draw aside from his path as he walked, with wide-open, but unseeing eyes, straight back to his bed.

Without a word Blake and Digby followed, and when they reached D'Arcy's bedside he was soundly sleeping.

"This licks everything," muttered Blake. "I should say he's satisfied now. Shall we go to roost?"

"Yes, come on!"

It was a long time before the two got back to sleep again, but at last they both dropped off, and no other sound disturbed their rest. No other sound disturbed them, yet they would have both been very wide awake could they have known that another person was walking the dim, deserted corridor.

That evening when Gore had reached the dormitory, he had slipped a small tin under his pillow. There was a disagreeable grin on his face as he had done so, but he said nothing to anyone of his action.

Gore often did things that he dared not speak about.

The tin contained a sticky, unctuous substance. A substance pleasant enough when used for making toffee, but anything but pleasing when used for the purpose designed by the cad of St. Jim's.

Gore had intended to get up again soon after the lights were out, but he had gone off to sleep. Some two hours after, as if to remind him of his evil thought, the tin slipped from beneath his pillow, and its cold metal surface pressing against his cheek woke him with a start.

Gore's little eyes glinted.

"Wonder what the time is? I must have gone to sleep. Ugh!"

He sat up in bed and looked from side to side cautiously. Then he slipped out of bed on to the floor, and, tucking the tin under his arm, stole across the room. A moment later he was flitting down the corridor. He made straight for Study No. 6, and, entering, closed the door behind him. The fire was still smouldering in the grate, and cast a faint red glow in the room.

The faint illumination was enough for Gore's purpose, and he gave a grunt of satisfaction as he placed his tin on the floor and raised the lid of a fairly large wooden box. The box was the property of Arthur Augustus, and contained some of his choicest and most select things in neckwear. With infinite care the cad of St. Jim's took out layer after layer of the gorgeous silk ties. When the box was about half empty, he leisurely removed the lid from his tin, and with delicate care allowed a thin stream of the black, sticky fluid to flow over the remainder of the

ties in the box. Then, with methodical precision, he replaced a layer of scarfs, and again the tin came into requisition.

This process was repeated until all but the last layer of ties remained. These he replaced with extra care, and then closed the box.

"Good!" he whispered to himself. "That'll please his lordship—I don't think!"

With the half-emptied tin Gore returned as silently as he had come, and his sleep for the rest of the night was not troubled by any twinges of a bad conscience. Perhaps some evildoers sleep as soundly after a bad deed, well done, as the good do after a kind action.

CHAPTER 9.

Who is the Culprit?

CLANG, clang, clang! The juniors stirred uneasily, but morning bell continued its insistent clang.

The leader of Study No. 6 was the first to open his sleepy eyes, and as he came to the wide-awake state the memory of D'Arcy's midnight antics returned to him, and the first thing Jack Blake did was to turn his eyes in the direction of the sleepwalker's bed.

The sight that met Blake's gaze caused him to sit bolt upright and open his mouth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

His laughter brought the rest of the juniors to sitting positions.

"What's the matter with you?" grunted Herries, in a sleepy voice. "Off your—oh-o-o-o!—off your rocker?"

Jack Blake could not reply. He pointed at the still form of Arthur Augustus.

"My hat! Ho, ho, ho!"

"He, he, he! Ha, ha, ha!"

The clamour awoke the swell of St. Jim's, and he rubbed his hands over his eyes. The simple action caused a renewed outburst of abandoned mirth, and the swell of St. Jim's blinked around in utter amazement.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed, turning to Herries. "What are you—"

Herries shrieked and buried his face in his pillow.

"Pewhaps you would be good enough to explain the reason of this wibald laughter, Digby? I considah—"

Digby roared louder than ever as Arthur Augustus turned his face towards him.

"Wottahs, I—"

D'Arcy broke off in the middle of his speech, and stared at his hands. They were black. Then he looked at his pillow. It was smudged and horribly dirty.

The swell of St. Jim's then leaped out of bed and stared into the looking-glass. He gave one glance and jumped round.

"Soot! Wottahs!" he cried. "What a wotten twick! My—my—"

Howls of laughter greeted this outburst, but Blake and Digby were looking serious.

"We can't tell him," muttered Blake. "He'd have a fit if he knew he'd been walking in his sleep. What shall we do?"

"Mum's the word, for sure," whispered Digby. "I'm as dumb as an oyster!"

The sound of the second bell sent Arthur Augustus and the rest scuttling to their washhand-basins.

"A wetched wotten twick!" asserted D'Arcy, as he towled his head. "I'm surprisid."

"It wasn't us, Gussy," declared Blake.

"Who was it, then?"

"How should we know?" demanded Herries. "Some rotter must have done it while you were asleep. Or you might have—"

Blake clutched hold of Herries, and drew him aside.

"Shut up, fathead!" he muttered. Then he whispered hurriedly in his ear. When he had finished, Herries gave a whistle of surprise, and then burst into a peal of laughter.

"We can't tell him," he agreed at last. "We shall have to make something up."

D'Arcy was dressing in dignified silence.

"I say, Gussy," said Blake, "you don't think we had anything to do with planting that soot on you, do you?"

"On your word of honah?"

"Honour bright!" said Jack Blake.

"Honest Injun!" cried Herries and Digby. "Come on, buck up. The others have all gone," added the latter.

"I accept your word, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I shall considah it my duty, though, to give the perpetwatah of the howwid twick a feahful thwashing!"

"M'yes! Oh, yes!" agreed Blake, stifling a chuckle. "I should if I were you!"

The swell of St. Jim's favoured the Shell leader with a frigid glance, then stalked to his box.

The three chums exchanged glances of consternation.

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE CAD OF ST. JIM'S."

A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
by Martin Clifford.

"We shall have to see this through," whispered Blake. "Why didn't you think to take the beastly box out?" "I like that!" commenced Digby indignantly. "Why—"

The swell of St. Jim's gave a wail of anguish. "Some beastly boundah has waided all my beastly collahs!" he cried. "Do you know anything about the mattah, deah boy?"

"No, I don't," replied Blake promptly. "Ask me?" "Don't wot!" said Arthur Augustus, turning haughtily away.

The effect was rather spoiled, for D'Arcy placed the heel of his boot on a piece of soap, and another wail of anguish broke the quiet of the dormitory as he sat down with a bump.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "What are you doing down there?"

"Wats!" gasped D'Arcy. "Blake, you are an uttah wottah, and I shall no longer considah you in the light of a fiwend!"

"Oh, Gussy!" said Blake solemnly. "Oh, how can you be so—so—so unkind?"

D'Arcy eyed his chum suspiciously, but the expression of Blake's face deceived him, and he relented.

"Well, undah the circs., deah boy, I will ovahlook youah extweme wudeness. Have you seen my collahs?"

"Ask me?" replied Blake, in a tone of humility. He was thinking hard all the time.

D'Arcy positively glared. But the matter was becoming urgent. It was impossible for the swell of St. Jim's to go down without a collar.

"Pway don't wot!" he exclaimed, gulping down his anger. "Where are my collahs?"

"Don't know. Ask me?"

Jack Blake grinned into his trunk as he rummaged about and dragged out a collar for himself. The expression on D'Arcy's face was too much for his gravity, and the swell of St. Jim's grew scarlet as muffled chuckles came from Digby and Herries.

"You're a set of wottahs," he cried. "How can I go down undah these circs.? Bai Jove!"

"Why don't you hunt round for them?" asked Blake. "Pr'aps some bounder has hidden them? Strikes me I shall have to do a bit of detective work," he added to himself.

Arthur Augustus peered eagerly beneath the beds, and the three made a great show of helping him.

"I wonder if they're up the chimney?" cried Herries.

Jack Blake looked at his chum indignantly. He saw himself being done out of his own little pet idea.

"Wubbish!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"May as well have a look, anyway."

Herries ran to the fireplace.

"Look!" he cried triumphantly.

The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his monocle, and examined specks of soot on the hearth.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed.

With a covert grin at Jack Blake, Herries knelt down and thrust his arm up the chimney.

D'Arcy watched anxiously.

"Hurray!" cried Herries. "Cheer, you chaps!"

"Bai Jove! Thanks, deah boy! That was a bwight ideah of youahs!"

"You—you beast!" whispered Blake.

Herries grinned, and hurried on with his dressing.

"I shouldn't say anything about the miscreant who played that jape off on you," said Blake solemnly, after breakfast.

"You will stand a much better chance of catching the culprit if you keep quiet."

"I shall certainly not discuss the mattah, Blake. I hope to pounce on the boundah when he is off his guard."

"M'yes! By the way, what about young Monkey and his coat?"

"I pwesume you wefah to Fwank Monk?"

"Yes, that's it. Hallo, Merry!"

Tom Merry grinned as he came up.

"Just been having a chow with Figgy," he exclaimed, "and we've decided to send the invite to tea with the coat and compliments."

"Wight, deah boy!"

"Well, you'd better skip up and get it, then," said Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to skip. I will return in a moment!"

The coat and cap were made into a neat parcel, and accompanied by a politely worded note of invitation, dispatched by Binks.

A portrait of his Majesty the King done in silver made the service a willing one, and after dinner a note of acceptance was delivered to Tom Merry.

"He's coming!" announced Tom, as he read the laconic message.

"I'm glad we have made it a twuce!" said D'Arcy.

"A—a what?"

"A twuce!"

"Oh, a truce! Pax, you mean, you image!"

"I abso—"

The appearance of Mr. Railton cut short the protest of Arthur Augustus, and he meekly followed the others for afternoon class.

CHAPTER 10.

Gore Scores!

"HALLO, Monkey!"

"Hallo, fatheads!"

"Sit down!"

Frank Monk grinned at his old enemies as he shook hands and accepted the invitation.

Study No. 1 had done the thing in style, and a tempting display of eatables adorned the table; or, rather, tables, for an extra one had to be borrowed for the occasion, and placed side by side, with two rows of chairs it practically occupied all the available space.

"Grub first and jaw afterwards," announced Tom. "Pass the bread-and-butter, Fatty."

Frank Monk's grin grew broader as Fatty Wynn did the honours. It was pax, and so he made no reference to a certain brown paper parcel, commandeered and returned.

Raids and the subject of Francis Browne were taboo during the meal, but the assembled juniors found plenty to talk about, and Frank Monk found himself almost wishing that he was a "Saint."

"Have some more tea, Monk?" inquired Blake.

"No, thanks!"

"Another jam puff?" said Figgins.

"No—no, thanks!"

"Some more—"

"No, no, no! Not another scrap! I'm done!"

"Now to talk biz., then," said Tom Merry.

"Of course, deah boy, we shall waid you—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to—"

Jack Blake caught up a jam puff, and held it suggestively.

Arthur Augustus glanced at his new waistcoat, shuddered, and was quiet.

"You see, it's like this, Monke—Monk," went on Tom Merry. "We're up against a bounder who's closed the right of—"

"The right-of-way through Codicote!" exclaimed Monk.

"Sorry to interrupt you, but so are we. We're going to do something to stop it!"

"What?"

"Haven't quite decided yet."

"Well, look. We shall raid the place and pull it down. D'you care to come in?"

"Rather!" cried Monk. "When?"

"To-night!"

"To-night!"

Details were discussed, and the Grammarian rose to go.

"At the bewitching hour, then? So-long, you chaps! Thanks for the feed. Not so bad for a parcel of Saints!"

With this parting shot, Frank Monk started off with a laugh.

"Half a mo'. We'll see you to the gate, in case you get scragged!" cried Tom Merry.

On the way the juniors and their guest passed Gore and Mellish and a little group of others, but the presence of the Terrible Three was sufficient to send them slinking away.

"Pax until after Browne is settled," said Tom, as they parted at the gate.

"Ere's a box fer you, Master Merry," growled Taggles, as they passed his lodge. "Come in by carrier. Ain't 'ad time to bring it hup. Dunno as I can now I— Thanks, Master Merry. I'll bring it hup at once!"

Tom slipped a shilling into the porter's hand, and they followed him, bursting with curiosity.

The case was certainly heavy, and Taggles puffed and blowed as he mounted the stairs. He bumped it down on the floor of the study, and wiped his brow, then grunted and withdrew as no more shillings were forthcoming.

"It's from Huckleberry Heath," said Tom, examining the label.

"Hooray!" cried Blake. "Open it!"

The box from Miss Priscilla, Tom Merry's kind-hearted old nurse, was as welcome as the flowers in spring, and an eager, interested crowd gathered round as he cut the cord.

"It can't be codliver-oil or pills this time!" said Tom Merry hopefully. "I had a consignment only last week. I wonder what it is?"

"Open it and see, for goodness' sake," said Manners.

"The beastly thing is nailed down," cried Tom, tugging at the lid. "Got a hammer somebody?"

Unusual celerity was at once displayed. Manners, Monty Lowther, and Blake made a rush for the door.

"Half a mo'!" shouted Manners. "I'll get one!"

"Hold on, fathead!" howled Blake. "I'll get it!"

"Out of the way, image!" yelled Lowther, colliding with D'Arcy. "Get out of the daylight, can't you?"

The force of the impact sent the swell of St. Jim's reeling across the study, and he fell in a heap against the door.

Manners and Lowther flourished over him, and piled on top of the unfortunate Arthur.

"Ow!" came a muffled shriek. "You're wumpling my beastly waistcoat."

"Gerroff my neck!" howled Blake. "Ass! Fathead!"

After a good deal of expostulation, the juniors sorted themselves out and scrambled to their feet.

While they were squabbling, Tom had wrenched the box open with his bare hand.

All was forgotten as he raked out the packing and shavings. Even Arthur Augustus did not complain of injuries; he showed signs of curiosity, and leaned forward curiously.

"Get your head out of the way!" cried Lowther. "What is it?"

Tom Merry pulled out a strangely shaped parcel, wrapped up in brown paper.

"My only aunt!" exclaimed Digby. "It's a megaphone."

"Megaphone, my hat!"

"It's—it's a grannypHONE, a gramophone, I mean!" shouted Tom Merry. "Good! I wonder how you put the beastly thing together?"

"I'll show you!"

"You get out!"

"Get out yourself! I know how it goes. You put this thing on here, and—Ow! Ass! Fathead!"

Herries hopped about on one foot, clutching the other.

"Was that your toe, Herries?" inquired Blake. "Sorry. I thought I was treading on something."

"Stop rowing!" roared Merry. "How can I put this thing together while you're kicking up this ghastly row?"

By dint of trying the several parts and much unneeded advice and assistance, Tom Merry at last got the gramophone together.

It was a handsome instrument, and evoked cries of admiration.

"Quite brightens up the study!" said Monty Lowther. "Where are the records?"

"By Jove!"

A look of anxiety came over every face while Tom plunged both arms down into the straw and shavings, and a sigh of relief went round when he brought up a heavy parcel.

"Be careful!" exclaimed Blake. "Don't drop them, for goodness sake!"

The first record brought to light was "The March of the Men of Harlech," and Fatty Wynn eyed the glistening disc with sparkling eyes.

Fatty was patient, and his face beamed when Tom Merry placed the record on the turntable, and wound up the spring.

A soft whirr that developed into a shriller tone as it gathered speed, and then the sound box, with its sapphire needle, was placed gently on to the record.

"B-r-r-r! C-r-k! G-r-r-r!"

This was followed by a jumble of hoarse grinding sounds. Tom Merry flushed, and the little circle gathered round the gramophone retreated.

"Well, if that's Welsh," said Kerr, "I don't like it!"

"It isn't," cried Fatty indignantly. "It's not a bit like that. It—"

"Try it a bit slower!" suggested Figgins. "It'll give us time to get out then."

After some difficulty, Tom Merry succeeded in regulating the adjustment for the speed, and again the record was started.

This time there was only a short preliminary grinding sound, and then a loud voice rattled off the title of the piece, then the thrilling march began.

"Rom ti tom ti tom tom de de rom ti tom tom tom—"

Fatty Wynn waved his podgy arms and chanted in a shrill falsetto.

Then his legs started going, and there was a general stampede.

"Not for me!" cried Blake. "Not if I know it. Here, Fatty's going off his chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry roared with delight as the fat junior pranced about.

"Rom tom tom de day!"

Flushed but hugely pleased with himself, Fatty subsided into a chair as the march came to a crashing end.

"Come back to Erin!" cried Tom Merry, as he picked up the next record. "H'm! We won't have that just yet. Let's try a waltz or something soothing!"

"Yes, do," agreed Blake. "We don't want a mad Irishman prancing round. Fatty's bad enough!"

Record after record was played, and at last only two untried ones remained.

"Which shall it be?" inquired Tom. "Scot or Paddy?"

"Oirish!" yelled Reilly, the Irishman.

"Scotch, mon!" howled Kerr, the Scotsman.

The pair made a frantic rush for their pet record, but Jack Blake pushed his sturdy form between them and their prey.

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Worm!"

"Shut up!"

"Shut up yourself!"

"Who're you calling a fathead?"

"You, you silly chump!"

Tom Merry sprang on to the table, and seizing the gramophone trumpet applied it to his mouth, and let forth a powerful yell.

"Order!"

The bellow succeeded in distracting the attention of the abusive ones, and everyone's pair of eyes in the crowded study was fixed on Tom.

"Jolly good wheeze!" cried Jack Blake. "Go it, Tom! Give us a solo!"

"Shut up!" bellowed Tom Merry. "Manners, you stop it! Where are your manners, Manners?"

"Boo!"

A chorus of yells greeted Tom's atrocious pun, and the babble broke forth again. No one could make themselves heard. Each tried to shout the other down. At last a break came in the proceedings, caused by Lowther falling in the fireplace.

Half-a-dozen hands yanked him out of his perilous position; but Lowther was anything but grateful.

"You are a set of rotters!" he spluttered, surveying his dishevelled garments. "Can't you let a chap alone?"

"There's thanks for you!" laughed Jack Blake. "We saved you from a terrible end, and this is what we get for it. Buck up! Shove on Paddy's!"

"Not now!" said Tom Merry. "It's getting late, and I've got the 'Weekly' to see to. There's all your mouldy essays to read. We mustn't neglect our friend Browne."

There was some grumbling, but Kerr and Reilly were pacified, and a general exeat took place.

Manners and Lowther and the chums of Study 6 accepted an invitation over at the New House with Figgins & Co.

"I must change my collah and tie, deah boy!" remarked Arthur Augustus as they left Tom Merry to his editorial labours. "I will join you in our study."

"Right-ho!" replied Blake. "We'll wait for you if you must."

The swell of St. Jim's changed his collar in record time, and then turned over his ties.

"I shall have to huwvy!" he murmured.

"Are you weady, deah boys!" said the swell of St. Jim's, as he entered the study, giving a last pat to his mathematically parted hair.

"Ready!" cried Herries; "I should say so. Why we've been waiting this half hour."

"Weally!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I'm awfully sowwy. I—"

"Put your tie straight!" interrupted Blake suddenly.

"Bai Jove! Thanks, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, fumbling with his neckgear.

Herries and Digby giggled, but Blake frowned, and they promptly looked as solemn as a pair of owls. Something was in the wind. What it was they could not quite make out, but the wink that had followed their chum's frown was quite sufficient.

Arthur Augustus was blissfully unconscious of the grin on Blake's face as he turned to the glass for a glance at his tie.

"I say, deah boy," he cried. "Don't you think we might w'ite to that boundah Browne, and explain the posish of affairs?"

"Umph!" grunted Blake doubtfully. "I don't know, I'm sure. You see—Put your tie straight, Gussy!"

"Weally!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in alarm. "This is most annoying. I shall have to complain to my hoshiah about these ties. Is that bettah?"

"Well," said Blake critically, "what do you mean, the affairs of the state of Denmark, or your—I say, Gussy, put your tie straight!"

The swell of St. Jim's clutched at his tie, and positively whirled round to the glass.

"Bai Jove!" he cried. "These ties are simply howwid. I shall certainly have to change my pwovidah. How's that, deah boy?"

"Oh, you'll do," remarked Digby. "Come on!" "Gussy," exclaimed Blake, "PUT YOUR TIE STRAIGHT!"

Arthur Augustus gazed at Blake for a moment, and then, with a despairing gesture, undid his tie, and marched across the room.

"Thanks, deah boy! I must weally change this tewwible affaih!"

Arthur Augustus cast the discarded necktie into a corner and made for the box that held some dozens of his choicest selections of the latest things in ties. He raised the lid, and then an irresistible temptation came over Herries.

Arthur Augustus had presented a "back," and with two steps and a bound Herries landed.

"Buck, buck, how many horns do I hold up?" he cried. "Gurh!"

Following Herries' example came Digby.

"Buck, buck——"

The rest of Digby's chant was broken short.

The swell of St. Jim's had collapsed.

"Put—put!" gurgled Blake, in frantic enjoyment of the unexpected development of his unpremeditated words. "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Digby and Herries rolled off the prostrate Arthur Augustus, roaring with laughter.

"Come on Gussy, get up!" cried Blake at last. "What are you doing down there?"

In the general collapse the box had overturned, and the swell of St. Jim's was fairly bonneted. His legs wriggled spasmodically, and it dawned on the three that something was wrong.

"Ug—gug!"

"Christopher!" exclaimed Blake. "What's up? Yank him out!"

Herries seized the overturned box.

D'Arcy was covered with ties. They hung round his head and neck in festoons, and he was wildly gasping and spluttering.

"What ever's the matter?"

The Result of the £50 'Gem' Football Competition.

The following are the 143 winners who had only two pictures wrong in the Competition. I was obliged to hold over this list from last week's issue through want of space.—Editor.

WINNERS OF 2s. 6d. PRIZES.

P. Squires, Victoria Street, Mansfield; J. Griffiths, Avoca Place, Grangetown, Cardiff; W. Const, Gray's Inn Road, Holborn, W.C.; S. Austin, Norman Road, St. Leonards-on-Sea; F. W. Swingler, Beech Avenue, Sherwood Rise, Nottingham; W. A. Hards, Rodsley Avenue, Gateshead-on-Tyne; A. Robinson, Whiskin Street, Clerkenwell, E.C.; H. Corbett, Camberwell Road, S.E.; A. Hellawell, Guest Road, Barnsley; E. W. Whitehead, Perry Street, Northampton; W. Hill, Hibbert Street, York Road, Battersea, S.W.; R. L. Anderson, Park Hill Hall, Barnby-Don, Yorks; J. Pinnington, Council School, Warrington Road, Prescott, Lanes; A. D. McLellan Longley Road, Tooting, S.W.; A. Russell, Conduit Street, Gloucester; J. Latham, Mount Street, Coventry; S. Miles, Katherine Road, East Ham, E.; H. Aitken, High Street, Falkirk; G. Pinckney, Brunswick Road, West Green, South Tottenham; G. Bennett, Muirhead Street, Glasgow, S.S.; J. Lee, Shaw Heath, Stockport; J. McKnight, jun., Bicknell Street, Blackburn; H. Ward, Colin Road, Dudding Hill, Willesden; J. Alexander, Watson Crescent, Edinburgh; D. Hamilton, Brown Street, Wishaw, N.B.; H. Barnett, Hide Hill, Berwick-on-Tweed; V. Lechmere, Thlaneraig, Ellon, N.B.; H. Holliday, Third Street South, New Frodingham, Doncaster; Miss C. Manning, Beechdale Road, Brixton Hill, S.W.; R. Armour, Ravensdone, Berwick; W. Horbury, Brinckman Street, Barnsley, Yorks; A. Taylor, Glendevon Terrace, Mount Florida, Glasgow; G. Dewar, jun., Smith Street, Govan Hill, Glasgow; H. Holt, Enfield Buildings, Aske Street, Hoxton, N.; Miss N. Briggs, Beechdale Road, Brixton Hill, S.W.; J. Hall, Jesus Lane, Cambridge; H. Wolfe, Sangley Road, South Norwood, S.E.; A. Kilgour, Middle Street, Peckham, S.E.; D. E. Stansfield, Wharmcliffe Street, Sunderland; A. F. Villiers, Leominster House, Llandrindod Wells; H. G. Skeel, Jaberdasher Street, N.; Miss L. Everet, Foundry Walk, Pitfield Street, N.; J. Hayward, Sandy Hill Road, Plumstead, Kent; W. L. Manning, Beechdale Road, Brixton Hill, S.W.; B. Tucker, Denmark Road, Twickenham, Middlesex; V. Moir, Thorne Road, Doncaster; C. E. Wells, Apley Road, South Norwood, S.E.; W. G. Briggs, Beechdale Road, Brixton Hill, S.W.; F. Bush, Newfoundland Road, St. Agnes, Bristol; R. Beveridge, Hazelbank Terrace, Edinburgh; J. Ainsworth, Bolton Street, Chorley, Lancs; T. Harrison, Great George Street, Preston; S. Tennant, Christchurch Road, Ilford, Essex; H. Bartup, Kemp Street, Brighton; E. Coombs, Addington Road, Stroud Green, N.; Miss J. Voort, The White Cottage, Worcester Park, Surrey; R. H. Kightley, Allen Road, Northampton; W. C. Lee, Shaw Heath, Stockport; E. Moore, Ruthven Street, Hillhead; A. Brudenall, Everton Road, Birkdale, Southport; H. Watson, Walkley Lane, Walkley, Sheffield; J. L. Dean, Bathampton Street, Swindon, Wilts; O. E. Price, Tressillian Road, Brockley, S.E.; F. Duckett, Honeywell Street, Barnsley, Yorks; G. Bloomfield, Norman Road, Greenwich, S.E.; F. Wild, Balfour Road, Highbury New Park, N.; Miss J. Hunter, St. Ervan's Road, North Kensington; Miss F. Weedon, Essendine Road, Maida Vale, W.; J. Tennant, Belton Road, Willesden Green, N.W.; H. Tabraham, Nelson

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Blake grabbed a handful of ties, and dropped them with a grunt of disgust.

"Ugh!" His action partially cleared D'Arcy's face. The swell of St. Jim's struggled to his feet. His condition was at once pitiable and comical.

Try as they did, the three could not resist a laugh, and, for the moment, Blake forgot his own condition. He was reminded by an involuntary action. He passed his hand over his forehead, and it stuck!

Blake gave a shriek.

D'Arcy was hopping about with ties whirling round his head, and Blake was making savage dabs at his face with his handkerchief.

Digby and Herries backed a little.

"Have they both gone dotty?" muttered Herries.

"I dunno," replied Digby mechanically.

"It's glue or it's treacle!" howled Jack Blake. "I'll—I'll scrag the beast that did this. I'll— Here, let's get the beastly things off, Gussy!"

Fuming with rage, Jack Blake pulled and tugged, Herries and Digby assisted gingerly.

"Outrageous!" gasped D'Arcy, when he was relieved of his unwelcome attachments. "Wottahs!"

"Rotten!" snorted Blake. "I'll skin the beast that did this. I'm going to wash. As for you, Gussy, you had better chuck all those things in the fire and have a bath. You're like a beastly jam factory!"

Some half an hour later, Blake & Co. went over to the New House, and Jack Blake was loud in his denunciation of the culprit.

"I'll scrag the beast!" he vowed, as he concluded the story of their misfortune to Figgins & Co.

All the honours were with Gore, so far.

CHAPTER 11.

A Mystery.

STUDY No. 1 presented a very cosy and comfortable appearance. The fire was burning brightly with the clearness induced by the crisp March evening air, and Tom Merry, while he read page after page of written manuscript dealing with the iniquities of Browne, scarcely felt its genial influence steal over him.

At this moment he was engaged on an effort of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and presently he yawned, and, laying the pinned sheets of paper across his knee, gazed into vacancy.

The swell of St. Jim's had written what he described to Blake as "a wippin', wousing article," but to judge from Tom's expression, the closely-covered pages must have had some quite opposite effect. Gradually Tom Merry's eyes closed, and he sank into profound sleep.

The little clock on the mantelpiece ticked the minutes off, the fire crackled, and soon the captain of the Shell punctuated the seconds with a crescendo of unmelodious music.

From five minutes to six, the long hand on the clock moved imperceptibly to a quarter past, and then something else came into motion.

A faint creak, and the door of the study slowly opened. A head came round the edge of the door, and a pair of eyes peered round the room. Then a figure entered silently, and the door was softly closed.

From the entrance Tom Merry could not be seen; but after standing motionless by the wall for a few seconds, the figure gave a start, and, standing on tiptoe, looked over the high back of the armchair before the fire.

When the mysterious visitor had first entered, Tom's snore was taking a rest; but it had now burst out with renewed vigour.

"The beast's asleep, or pretending to be," muttered Gore, for it was the cad of St. Jim's who stood behind Tom's chair. "I thought the room was empty. What luck, though!"

With infinite caution and with extraordinary silence for one so clumsily built, Gore slipped round by the table until he stood facing the sleeping Tom.

Gore was satisfied that his victim was really asleep. From his coat-pocket the cad drew a small bundle of books. They were crumpled and dirty, but the gaudy covers could not be disguised.

A couple of these thin paper books were soon placed on the floor by Tom's feet. A few more Gore laid carelessly but silently on the table, and then he stood for a moment pondering. One of the books remained, and the cad was considering a masterly move, and weighing his chances of success. Should he let well alone? No, it was worth it!

It took time, but at last Gore succeeded in removing D'Arcy's manuscript from Tom Merry's hand, and placed there instead the last book, which he had artistically opened.

Gore's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. His unpremeditated effort was a triumph.

"That'll take some explaining away," he murmured softly, as, with a last glance at his victim he moved away as cautiously as he had come.

Outside in the dim corridor Gore gave vent to a chuckle of glee. When he reached the top of the stairs, a frown came to his brow.

"I wish the Head or old Linton could see him," he thought. "I wonder—"

The meditation of the cad of St. Jim's broke off, and he shrank back. Someone was coming up the staircase.

"Linton!" he muttered.

The little master came up the stone steps three at a time, and Gore had no chance to retreat. Mr. Linton stopped him as he made to descend.

"Have you seen Merry, Gore?"

For a moment the cad of St. Jim's hesitated.

"I—I think he's in his study, sir."

"You think! Don't you know?"

Gore shifted uneasily. The next instant Mr. Linton had gone—gone in the direction of Study No. 1. Gore waited until he heard the master tap lightly at the door and enter, then he fled.

"Oh, Merry, I want you to—"

Mr. Linton stopped abruptly. His entrance had disturbed Tom Merry's peaceful snooze, and he had jumped to his feet. He was startled, and his face reddened.

"You want to speak to me, sir?"

"What—what have you there?" snapped the master, pointing to the book that had fallen to the ground as Tom had risen. "And there on the table there? Merry, I am surprised at you, I am, really!"

"But—"

"Not a word, sir! Give me those—those horrible things had risen. "And on the table there? Merry, I am surprised at you, I am, really!"

"But—"

Tom spoke to the closed door. Mr. Linton had gone, taking with him Gore's little souvenirs.

Tom Merry stared at him blankly. Was he dreaming, or what was it? He was dazed with amazement. The thing was past human comprehension.

Monty Lowther and Manners bounced into the study.

"Finished?" inquired Lowther.

"Eh?"

"Finished, I said!"

"Oh, I don't know!" muttered Merry. "I've had a most horrible dream or something. I don't know."

A tap came at the door.

"Master Merry, the 'Ead wants ter see you!"

"I say—" commenced Manners.

Tom had started for the door.

"Tell you when I get back," he muttered.

Mr. Linton had kept his word, and gone straight with the books to the doctor.

The Head looked surprised when the coloured pictures were placed in front of him, and he looked still more surprised when the excitable little master gave his account.

Dr. Holmes had his own views on the subject of boys' literature, but he listened with courteous attention to what Mr. Linton had to say. When the worthy little master had finished, the Head sat silent for a moment, a faint smile on his refined, scholarly face.

"For the time being, Mr. Linton," he observed at last, "we will waive the main question, and," he went on irrelevantly, "I take it you are of the opinion that boys ought not to read anything at all except the acknowledged classics."

The light of battle flickered for an instant in the little science-master's eyes. He took off his glasses and rubbed them vigorously.

"Well," he observed, replacing his spectacles with care, and regarding the Head, "I certainly am of the opinion that some sort of restriction should be placed on the particular kind of literature provided for the young."

"Quite so!" agreed Dr. Holmes. "But who would you invest with the arduous task of reading and selecting that which, while being interesting to the undeveloped mind, cannot have anything in it to—to—let me say one of the same cultured taste as yourself? By the way, what did you read when you were a boy?"

Mr. Linton coloured slightly, and the Head went on rather quickly, punctuating his remarks with his fingertips.

"Of course, books of this kind I do not approve of," said the doctor, flicking a contemptuous forefinger at the highly-coloured covers of the books favoured by Binks, the boot boy; "but, stupid as they are, I think that really that is the worst that can be said of them, and I have no fear that any boy in this college—a ring of pride came into the Head's voice—" would do more than glance at them out of pure curiosity. I don't think that any of my boys would go further than the first page. Do you?"

"Well, I—well, as you put it," said Mr. Linton, "I feel bound to admit that what you say is true. But," he went on, "what was Tom Merry doing with them in his study?"

The benevolent eyes of the doctor twinkled. "Perhaps he was contemplating writing a scathing review for the school weekly."

"But he denied all knowledge of them!" cried Mr. Linton. "H'm! That makes the matter somewhat different," said the doctor. "We had better interview Merry himself."

Binks was despatched in search of Tom, and a few minutes later the captain of the Shell tapped at the study door.

Tom Merry's face was troubled and perplexed as he crossed the room. His eyes travelled from the calm face of the Head to the worried one of the Form-master, and his glance finally rested on the books spread out on the table.

"I have sent for you, Merry," said the Head gently, "to ask you if you can offer any explanation for being in possession of these—er—books."

Dr. Holmes waited quietly for Tom's reply, and while he waited, his shrewd eyes read the flushed face of the youngster.

Tom Merry was struggling with an awkward case. He did not know what to say. The absurdity of the position would have been laughable had it not been so serious, and so fraught with peril—peril of a kind that Tom Merry feared. Every boy in the college, bar Gore and one or two others, valued the good opinion of the Head, and, despite the knowledge Tom had of his own innocence, he felt his helplessness.

"I don't know anything of the books, sir," said Tom, at last, looking frankly at the doctor.

"What were you doing, Merry," asked the Head, "before Mr. Linton came in?"

Tom Merry turned redder than ever.

"I was preparing copy for the 'Weekly,' sir, and—and I think I must have fallen asleep."

"What were you doing when you fell asleep?" inquired the Head.

"Reading one of D'Arcy's rott—one of D'Arcy's articles, sir."

"Ahem!"

"And then, when you were awakened, you found one of these books on your knees?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry simply.

A vague theory was forming in the doctor's mind, and for some minutes there was silence in the study.

"I think that will do, Merry, for the moment," he said at last. "But I have no doubt that you will do your best to clear up the mystery."

"I shall, sir!" said Tom Merry fervently.

"Can you make anything of it?" inquired the Head, when Tom Merry had gone. "A curious case, eh?"

Mr. Linton passed a hesitating forefinger and thumb over his chin before he answered.

"Very strange, indeed!" he muttered. "Somehow I don't think Merry is telling a lie."

"Neither do I," said the Head drily.

Consternation but mildly expresses the feeling that reigned in the study when Tom Merry returned and told what little he knew of the mystery of the books.

"Every blessed thing seems to be going wrong," grumbled Manners, at the finish of Tom Merry's tale of woe—"every blessed thing! I don't know what the old col. is coming to. I shouldn't be surprised if we got cracked up over to-night's raid on old Browne. And there's poor old Gussy, too!"

"What's that?" said Tom.

The story of the misfortunes of Arthur Augustus was told over. For a time Tom forgot his own worries in listening to those of another.

"Jolly rotten, who ever did!" he exclaimed. "As soon as this Browne affair is off our hands we'll have to tackle the kid that is chipping bits out of us! We may as well get to bed now. We've got to be well on the warpath by twelve to-night."

CHAPTER 12.

The Conspirators.

"G-R-R-R-R-R!"

Tom Merry sat up in bed suddenly, and peered round the dormitory. He could see but dimly, and the long row of beds, jutting out like so many pegs from the opposite wall of the long room, assumed strange, contorted shapes, and murmurings and grunts in various tones of sleepy discontent came to his ears.

"It's beastly cold," murmured Tom, stretching out his hand and groping about by the side of his bed. "I wonder what the time is? Ugh!"

A dim form rose slowly from the pillow of the adjoining bed.

"Wazzer matter?" muttered a sleepy voice.

"You awake?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Of course I am, fathead!" grunted Monty Lowther, with a yawn. "What'd you suppose? What's the time?"

"Don't know!" exclaimed Tom, springing out of bed and putting his cold hand on Monty's bare chest.

"Ow!"

Lowther gave a faint yell and a shudder, and squirmed under the warm bedclothes.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Tom, clutching the bedclothes. "Up you get!"

"It's cold!" mumbled Monty, from underneath.

"Can't help that!" declared Tom Merry. "You do as your uncle tells you, or there'll be trouble. Coming?"

"I suppose so," grunted Lowther, putting one bare foot cautiously out of bed. "It's pitch dark, though. What's the good of getting up in the middle of the night?"

"It's half-past eleven," announced Tom. "Get a move on, lazy bones. Pull that sleepy head Manners out of it. Can't understand how some of you can be so lazy. It's a lovely night. Look at the blue sky!"

"Fat lot of sky, I don't think!" grunted Lowther, pattering across the dormitory and relieving his feelings by stripping the bedclothes from the bed of his chum. "Get up!"

The chill air soon brought Manners to a sitting position.

"What the policeman!" he exclaimed indignantly.

"Up!" retorted Lowther laconically. "Come on special orders from the chief. Up! Here are the others."

The juniors were soon fully dressed, and they gathered round Tom Merry in the darkness.

The conspirators carried on their conversation in whispers. All except the Terrible Three and the leaders of the Fourth were sound asleep.

"Shall we make a start?" said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "All ready?"

"Yes," murmured Manners, "all's well."

"I can't find my beastly toppah!" muttered D'Arcy, in a stage whisper.

"Sh-s!" hissed Jack Blake. "Shut up, you cuckoo; you'll wake everyone in the place! Come on!"

"I wefuse," said D'Arcy—"I wefuse to be called a cuck—"

Digby and Herries seized the swell of St. Jim's, and gently but firmly propelled him out of the dormitory.

"Stop your cackle!" growled Digby, as they followed in the wake of the others. "Here's your hat. Why don't you look after your things?"

"Sh-s!"

One by one passed out of the door, which had been cautiously opened by Tom Merry. When the last one was through, the captain of the Shell pulled the big oaken door softly to, and fastened it by means of a piece of string. The catch was a spring lock, that could only be opened from the outside by means of a key, so Tom Merry provided against the contingency of being shut out.

He joined the others, waiting in the shadow of the wall surrounding the quad.

"You've been a jolly long time," grumbled Manners. "What have you been up to?"

"Oh, nothing much," said Tom; "just fastening up the door, that's all. All clear?"

"It's jolly cold!" muttered Fatty Wynn. "I wish I'd thought to bring some sandwiches."

"Hallo," said Tom, "where's Figgy and Kerr?"

"Here!" muttered the leader of the New House.

"Good! Thought p'raps you'd find the bed too comfy. Let's get on. I expect Monk and Carboy will be waiting for us. Chuck gassing, and keep a bright look-out."

A quarter of an hour's walk, and the St. Jim's contingent encountered Frank Monk, Carboy, and Lane, and a little group of valiant Grammarians.

"All serene," said Monk. "Let's get on."

The small army passed silently along the lane, and soon reached the scene of action.

"Here we are!" muttered Tom. "Careful about old red-beard. We don't want half a dozen keepers buzzing round."

The work of demolition proceeded silently; and in ten minutes the right-of-way was clear of notice-board, barricade, and barbed wire.

The leaders shook hands, and did not stay to gloat over their work. At the end of the lane the two parties separated.

"Pax is off," warned Tom Merry, as the Grammarians turned to the left; "so look out for squalls after to-morrow."

"Same to you," called back Monk, "and many of 'em. So long!"

The juniors found the door just as they had left it, and proceeded without hindrance to the separate dormitories.

There was a feeling of unrest among them when they got up, drowsy and tired, the following morning, and it was fully justified, for the Head sent for them after breakfast.

Dr. Holmes went straight to the point.

"I have received from Mr. Francis Browne a letter to the

effect that a barrier erected on his estate has been destroyed. Do you boys know anything about the matter?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "He has no right—"
 "We will leave the question of right and wrong alone, Tom Merry," interrupted the Head. "I shall not, unless you wish, go into the matter. It is not unlikely that your own sense of right and wrong has been slightly blinded. I think you all understand what I mean. You may go. You will each bring me five hundred lines for—for overstepping the bounds."

There was a meaning in the doctor's voice that did not escape the juniors' notice, and they gladly left the study.

"Sporty old chap!" said Manners. "I reckon we got off jolly cheap."

"So do I," chimed in Lowther.

They all strolled out into the quad, and Blake held an indignation meeting over the tie episode.

CHAPTER 13. Tom Merry Exonerated.

"GUS! I say, Gussy!" Arthur Augustus was dragged away by his young brother. "I say, Gussy—Arthur, I mean—I hear you're going on a raid. Can I come?"

"Certainly not!" replied the swell of St. Jim's, thinking of his spoilt ties, and quite unaware for the moment that Wally was referring to a past event.

Contrary to his custom, Wally tried to be softly persuasive.

"Don't be a selfish bea—!" He was just going to say beast, but remembered in-time that such a term would hardly be very propitiative. "Don't be so unkind, Gus," he said meekly. "You might just as well let me come with you."

The resolute expression on D'Arcy's face gave way slightly, and he beamed at his young brother with an air of pleased approval.

"I'm awfully sowwy, Wally," he replied at last, "but under the circs. it is quite imposs."

Wally jerked his elbow impatiently, but managed to restrain the retort that sprang to his lips.

"I say, Gus," he pleaded, "surely you can make an exception. Surely you are not going to be bound by what a rotter like Herries says."

Arthur Augustus fixed a frigid stare on his brother. Wally glanced inwardly; he knew he was in for it.

"You young wascal!" cried D'Arcy severely. "I absolutely wufuse to allow you to adwess such an oppwobious wemark to one of my fiwends."

"I didn't mean anything," protested Wally.

"I expect an apology," said D'Arcy, turning away.

"Oh, rats!" muttered Wally to himself, as he watched D'Arcy stalk away. Then he started after him.

Catching up with his brother, Wally laid a grimy paw on D'Arcy's sleeve.

Arthur Augustus turned round at the touch and gasped.

"You—your little wottah!" he cried, whipping out his silk handkerchief and hastily flicking his coat. "How dare you put your howlidly dirty hands on me!"

Wally turned a trifle red. Again he had to put a curb on his tongue.

"I—I—oh, I'm sorry!" he growled, with a gulp.

"And pway what is it you are sowwy for?" demanded the swell of St. Jim's, with a judicial air that quite escaped the notice of the younger member of the House of Eastwood.

"Why, for—for touching your beas—your coat," cried Wally.

"I accept your apology," said D'Arcy, "but I wewwet that I cannot pass ovah your extwemely wude wemark wespwcting—"

"Oh, all right," exclaimed Wally; "I'll beg pardon for that too. Will that satisfy you?"

"I am extwemely pleased to accept your expression of wewwet," said D'Arcy with dignity. "Now—"

"Can I—"

"Don't be so wude as to intewwupt one oldah than yourself. Now you had better go and make yourself wespwctable."

Wally was left standing speechless with indignation.

"Fancy having a thing like that for a brother!" he muttered, as he strolled moodily across the quad. "Ugh!"

Wally's indignation was nothing compared to what it would have been had he known that the raid had already taken place.

"Been having a lecture from your silly ass of a brother?" inquired a voice.

Wally swung round sharply. If he allowed himself the luxury of calling his brother names more forcible than polite, he was by no means disposed to allow others a like privilege.

"You speaking to me?" he demanded angrily, and glaring at the snub nose of Jameson.

"Keep your hair on!" exclaimed the Third-Former, hastily backing away. "I was only joking. Besides—"

Wally grinned cheerfully.

"That's all right," he said. "I was a bit ratty, that's all. Anything going?"

"Nothing," replied Jameson, accepting the situation and walking by his chum's side as amicably as if nothing approaching a row had ever occurred. "Except the breakfast bell," he added, as the summons changed forth.

All that day Blake and Tom Merry were very abstracted, and with the two leaders wool-gathering, things were very slow. After tea Jack Blake moodily started on his lines. He had not done twenty before he threw down his pen.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy reproachfully. "You wottah! Look what you've made me do."

The swell of St. Jim's pointed to a big blot on his nicely-written page, but Blake only grunted and left the study.

"Of all the— Well, I don't know; I give it up," grumbled Digby. "Talk about a bear with a sore head! Why, Jack's as grumpy as half a dozen! Bah!"

Binks was polishing the silver, when he looked up, and saw Jack Blake standing in the door of the little room allotted to him.

"I want to speak to you, Binks."

"Yus!"

"Seen anything of Gore lately?"

Binks grinned and dabbed some whiting on a rag.

"P'raps I 'ave, p'raps I 'aven't," he muttered sagely. "Anyhows, I knows what I knows."

"Look here," said Blake impatiently, "I don't want any of that twaddle. Some of your beastly books were put in Tom Merry's study, and I'm going to find out who put them there."

Binks stared at Jack Blake with open mouth.

"Come on!" said Blake persuasively. "You know something about it, I can see. Here!"

The Fourth-Former took a half-crown from his pocket, but Binks drew himself up.

"I don't want that, Master Blake," he said stiffly. "You did me a good turn a little time back over the secret passage, an' I won't touch anyfink."

"Oh, all right, then, sonny," said Blake; "but I must know. Come on, out with it!"

"Well," said Binks slowly, "I ain't seen anyfink of that there Gore, but—!" He paused impressively.

"For Heaven's sake get on with it!" roared Blake.

"Oh, orl right. His pal Mell—Mell—"

"Mellish?" cried Blake. "That's enough for me!"

"Thought 'e wanted ter know somefink," grumbled Binks, as Blake disappeared; "now 'e's gorn."

Jack Blake was angry, and when he was roused his brain worked quickly.

"Gore, you cad!" he burst out, banging into the bully's study. "What do you mean by planting those books in Tom Merry's study? Answer me, or—"

Gore stuttered and turned on Mellish.

"You—you sneak!" he roared.

"That'll do!" shouted Jack Blake. "You've fairly given yourself away now. And what about that beastly treacle you sneaked into Gussy's tie-box—eh? I'll give you treacle!"

Gore was no weakling, but he was a mere baby in the hands of the indignant Fourth-Former, and his teeth rattled and chattered as Blake shook him and cuffed him.

"It—it was only a joke," he managed to blurt out at last.

"Joke indeed!" scoffed Blake. "You're a low down, beastly sneak! As for you, Mellish, I'll—"

Jack Blake turned as he spoke, but Mellish had made himself scarce.

"It would serve you right if I went straight to the Head," he went on. "As it is, I shall leave it to Merry. You can take that from me for the treacle."

A lefthander lifted the cad into the coalscuttle, and Blake went out and slammed the door.

"I shall have to go to the Head," said Tom, when Blake told of his discovery. "The rotter! I hope to goodness the doctor doesn't insist on probing into the matter. Bad as Gore is, I don't want to get him expelled."

"It would serve him jolly well right," grunted Blake. "He's a rank outsider."

"So, Merry, you cannot tell me the name of the person who placed the books in your room," said Dr. Holmes, at the conclusion of Tom's evolved and circumspect story.

"I'd rather not, sir," replied Tom.

"Well, I will do as you wish," said the Head, after a pause. "Please send Binks to me."

"It wasn't him, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The Head raised his eyebrows, and a slight smile curved his lips.

"I do not for a moment imagine it was, Merry. I am

interested to find out who brought those books into the college, not into your room."

Tom Merry looked abashed, and went out.

A little later Binks went in, and also came out, looking not only abashed, but very unlike the dashing Dick Turpin he so fondly imagined himself to be cut out for.

From the Head's room Tom wandered into the library. An idea had occurred to him, and he spent some time in poking about the dusty shelves. At last he found what he wanted, and a hasty examination brought a cry of glee to his lips.

CHAPTER 14.

Mr. Francis Browne's Charity!

SKIMPOLE, the brainy one of St. Jim's, gave a long-drawn sigh. The easy run of his thoughts had been disturbed, and between his eyes and his notebook was a misty shape. He turned over his notes, his book on travel, his pile of closely-written manuscript dealing with social problems, but he found nothing to fix his attention to the matter in hand.

It was altogether inexplicable. Hitherto, Skimpole had found no difficulty in applying his mighty brain to whatever attracted his attention, be it beetles or Socialism, and now he was incapable of a single defined thought.

Tom Merry's gramophone had done its fell work!

Some strange influence was at work, and at last Skimpole methodically collected his papers, placed them in their proper order in the drawer, and thoughtfully made for Study No. 1.

He knocked gently, but there was no reply. So, after waiting a little while, he went in.

The gramophone stood on a corner of the table, and he regarded the machine with a new interest. His knobby brows met in a reflective frown. The junior's experience abroad had given him a wider outlook in life, but he had remained just as enthusiastic over Socialism as ever, and now that his book on travel lacked material, he turned to his old love with unabated ardour.

At last the brow of the enthusiast cleared, and he carefully selected a record, and placed it blank side up on the turntable of the instrument.

"I will now proceed," he muttered, "to deliver a short lecture. My message shall be duplicated a thousand times, and will bring hope to the hearts of the suffering and down-trodden millions. Ahem!"

Skimpole cleared his throat, and took up an attitude in front of the big red trumpet. A soft whirr, and the disc revolved with increasing velocity.

"Friends and brothers!" shouted the amateur Socialist, with his mouth to the horn. "I am here to tell you of the coming change in your—in your—" A violent fit of coughing interrupted the message, and while Skimpole grew red in the face, and spluttered in his handkerchief, the disc merrily revolved.

"Dear me!" murmured the brainy member of the Shell at last. "I believe that I shall have to make a fresh start. How very annoying! Dear me! I—"

"Hallo, hallo! What are you up to?" demanded Tom Merry, flinging open the door, and bursting into the study.

Before the amateur Socialist could recover from the shock, a fist, hard as nails, was fixed into his neckband, and he was gently propelled in the direction of the door.

"I—I— S-top! I—"

"I'll give you 'I—I—I—'" cried Merry. "You maniac! What d'you mean by meddling about with my gramophone? Out you go! You can't make a record like that!"

Skimpole gurgled and attempted to struggle, but in the grip of the athletic junior he was helpless, and he found himself in the passage, with the study door shut in his face.

For a moment he gazed at the panels of the door meditatively.

"How very annoying!" he muttered disconsolately, making off in the direction of his own study. "I must talk to Merry in a calmer moment. He cannot be aware of the enormity of his offence, or he would have allowed me to continue my message to the suffer— Ow!"

"You ass!" roared a voice. "Why the policeman don't you look where you're going?"

"I apologise!" said Skimpole. "I—"

Before the scientist had completed, Manners and Monty Lowther had vanished into their study.

Tom Merry was doing a caper all to himself round the study.

"We've got him," he shouted, before the astounded juniors could utter a word—"we've got him fair and square! Look here!"

The book he had retrieved from the library was laid on the table, and he pointed to an old map.

"I don't see," said Lowther vaguely. "Got who? What?"

"Why, Brownie, of course!" shouted Tom Merry. "Fathead! Ass! Don't you see this map is over a hundred years old, and it proves beyond a doubt that that path is a right-of-way, and he can't close it? Hurrah! I'm going to take this to the Head! Run round and tell the others that Brownie's done brown!"

There was a grim smile on the Head's face when he had looked over Tom's find, and he patted him on the shoulder.

"I don't think such a thing is likely to occur again, Merry," he said, "and, under the circumstances, I will—ahem!—reduce your imposition to fifty lines. You can tell the others."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom gratefully.

Two days later, the Head received a registered letter from Mr. Francis Browne, containing an apology and a piece of crinkly paper that caused the juniors some trouble to dispose of.

The matter necessitated a general meeting in Study No. 1. "Undah the circs., deah boys," said D'Arcy, "we must accept the ofah of apology. I considah the beas—the—"

"Boulder!" suggested Manners.

"I uttahly wefuse to take wegard of your wude intewwptions," said the swell of the School House. "Mr. Fwancis Bwowne has made the amende honouwable, and—"

"Say that again, Gussy!" cried Tom Merry. "The what?"

"I shall not wepeat my words, Tom Mewwy," exclaimed D'Arcy severely. "As I observed, the mattah is a thing of the past, and as one gentleman to anohtah, we must wegard the mattah as settled, and a thing of the past—"

"Oh, come off your perch!" said Blake. "The fact of the matter is, old Browne did a climb down because he couldn't help it. You know jolly well that if Tom hadn't had the luck to dig out that musty old plan, he wouldn't have—er—"

"Bounded!" cried Lowther triumphantly. "That's it! The boulder bounded, and we're bound to accept the boulder's bound! How's that?"

"Rotten!" said Tom. "But let's get on with the subject. What are we going to do about the fiver?"

The juniors were silent for a moment. They had all the healthy schoolboy's liking for a feed, but they did not like Browne, and the acceptance of his five-pound note seemed to savour of an acknowledgment of their acceptance of Browne as a friend.

"Chuck it away! Give it away!" growled Figgins, his homely face bearing an indignant expression.

"We can't do that," growled Lowther.

"Oh, blow the thing!" grumbled Manners. "Can't we send the beastly thing back? 'Declined with thanks' sort of thing, you know."

"Certainly not, deah boy!" said D'Arcy firmly. "We can't be so wude as to return the olive bwanch."

"Oh, rats!" muttered Herries. "Let's do something for goodness' sake! We've wasted enough time over the beastly thing as it is. I want to take Towser for a walk."

"How will this do?" cried Tom Merry, who had been busy scribbling while the others had been talking.

"That's my poem!" shrieked Manners, as Tom held up a sheet of paper.

"Is it?" said Tom Merry calmly. "Well, it's not that I am going to read to you. So don't worry."

"You have no right—" commenced Manners. "What do you mean by scribbling on the back of my poem?"

"Oh, all right! You shall have it back," said Tom.

"Anyway, it wasn't any good!"

"Ugh!" snorted Manners.

"Dear Sir," read Tom Merry, disregarding his chum's indignation. "We, the undersigned, thank you for your donation to—"

"Chuck it!" shouted Figgins. "We—"

"Will you allow me to finish, Figgy?" inquired Tom quietly.

"Oh, all right! But we won't have it!"

"We, the undersigned, thank you for your donation to the Rylcombe Cottage Hospital. How's that?"

"Neat!"

"Ripping!"

The meeting closed with uproarious cheers, and then Tom Merry put on a record, and the juniors yelled the chorus:

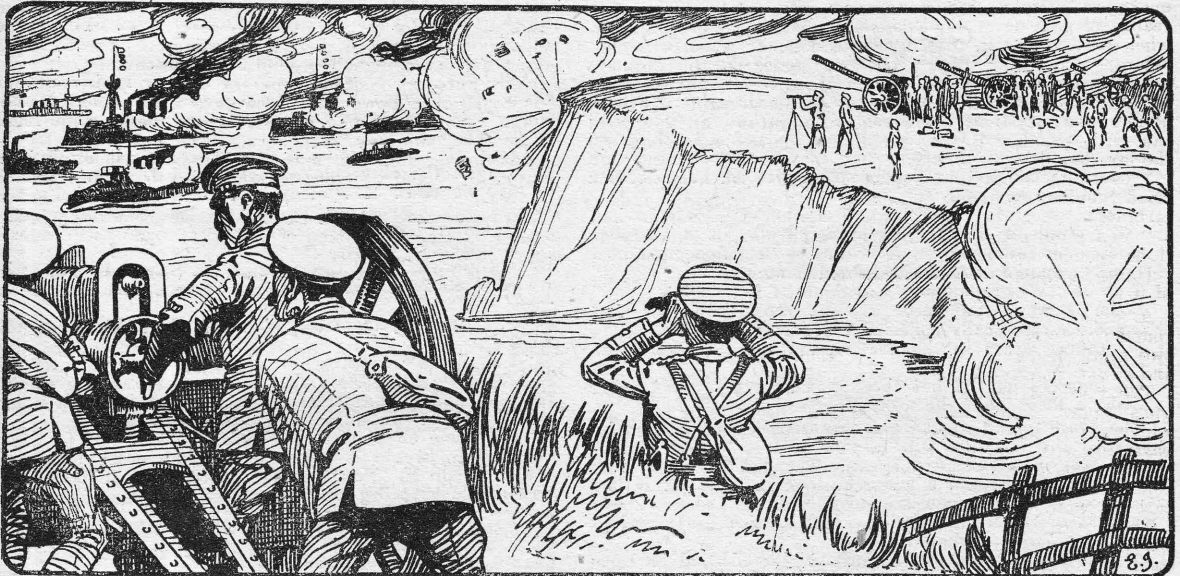
"Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!"

THE END.

(Another long, complete school tale of "Tom Merry and Co" next Thursday. Please order your copy of THE GEM LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)

Please tell your Friends about this Story.—Ed.

BRITAIN INVADED!



A Powerful and Stirring War Story.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

The Greyfriars School Cadet Corps, commanded by Captain Sam Villiers, scout, are standing about in small groups, talking anxiously, when the clattering of hoofs is heard, and a young farmer from one of the homesteads on the cliffs comes galloping in on a sweating horse, and reins up hastily.

"The rurriners are on us!"

he cries. "There's a whole fleet o' tugs an' barges an' ships o' war headin' in for Frinton Gap, wi' thousands o' men aboard! They're Germans, an' they're goin' to land!"

Captain Sam Villiers was at his side in a moment.

"How far off are they?"

"Four mile out wher I left, and comin' in fast. I've tried to send messages at the telegraph-offices, but none can't get through. They tells me all the wires is cut. Let me go! I must push on!"

Nearly all the boys are killed or captured when the first German column attack and capture the school.

However, Sam Villiers and his brother, Steve, manage to escape and gain the British lines.

General Sir Sholto Nugent manages for a time to keep the Germans in check.

At last Sir Sholto has enough men to fight a decisive battle, and makes a glorious victory of it. Bad news, however, comes from the north. There the British have suffered a terrible defeat.

The British Army retreats on Harlow in order to fight a decisive battle—as the German forces have commenced their march on London.

The battle opens, and in spite of heroic efforts, the Britishers are forced to retreat before the huge force of the Germans, who later on in the day commence shelling London.

The two boy scouts attach themselves to the Coldstreams and help in the defence of the Bank of England. The Prussians are repulsed time after time, but at last rally in large numbers and charge down on the barricade.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Capture of the Bank of England.

This time, helped by the fire from behind, the Prussians came on more resolutely, and even the storm of lead that met them could not stop the charge. The sergeant who was handling one of the Coldstreams' Maxims dropped limply, shot through the forehead by a bullet that glanced round the shield, and the gun ceased its sharp rattle. Sam was just behind, and in a moment he sprang into the gunner's place and gripped the lever. The Maxim had hardly stopped when its vicious whirr broke forth again, and Sam swept his side of the street with deadly precision.

Mowed down though they were, the distance was so short and the enemy in such numbers, that many of them reached the barrier, and they hurled themselves upon it with fierce shouts, swarming over the paving-stones and sandbags. The steel clashed together as bayonet met bayonet, and the big Coldstream Guardsmen arose and met the foe hand-to-hand.

A tall Prussian Grenadier leaped upon the barrier and made a thrust with his bayonet at Sam. A quick snapshot from Stephen brought him toppling down, and the elder cadet, never moving, rattled off the last cartridges of the Maxim's belt in the very face of the foe, and then drew his revolver and fought as men fight when victory or defeat is hanging in the balance.

What happened in that grim struggle none of those who fought in it could have told. Every man attended strictly to his own assailant, and as one went down another came up.

The fight raged on the top of the barricade as though all Britain depended on it, and still the Prussians swarmed up.

Powerful as they were—the pick of the Kaiser's army—they were no match, man for man, for the Coldstreams. The attackers fell back for a moment from the barrier, driven down by the bayonets of the tall Guardsmen, who fought like unchained devils, and never flinched from shot or steel.

"Now or never!" cried the company officer hoarsely, cutting down a Grenadier as the words left his lips. "The Maxims!"

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE CAD OF ST. JIM'S."

A School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
by Martin Clifford.

That one pause turned the scale, for it gave the farther Maxim time to open on the Prussians before they came on again. And as the devastating breath of the machine-gun was turned on them again at close quarters they fell in heaps, and those behind wavered, broke, and ran for it. Flinging down his empty revolver, Sam clapped fresh cartridge-bands to his own Maxim like lightning, and before the flying Grenadiers could seek shelter the two spouting guns mowed them down in swathes. The battalion was practically wiped out, and hardly twenty men escaped.

The dry-throated cheer that went up from the Coldstreams told their comrades at the other barricades of their victory, and the panting Guardsmen, grim and blood-stained, looked out upon a street that was paved with dead. The real reality of war never came home so terribly to the boys as when they helped in that desperate defence, when cornered veterans fought for their lives and homes on the ground where peaceful citizens in black clothes were wont to pass to and fro from their business in ordinary times. Fritheim's prophecy had come true—the gutters of the city ran with blood. But as yet it was chiefly the blood of the invaders.

"Twice we've beaten 'em off! We shall hold them yet!" cried Stephen excitedly, cramming fresh cartridges into his carbine.

"Von Krantz'll want reinforcements from the Fatherland if he spends men at this rate," said the subaltern grimly. "Hallo! Guns! Now we're goin' to feel the weight of it!"

A stern silence fell upon the Guards as he spoke, for round the bend of the street, near the wrecked Post Office, two small field-guns, dragged by hand, suddenly appeared, and swung round to a halt just as they became visible.

The two Maxims at once opened fire on them; but the guns replied rapidly with a couple of light shells, one of which soared just overhead, and the other burst against the barricade with fearful crash.

"Get the gunners if you can!" said the company commander. "Give them a cheer to show 'em we don't care for their pop-guns!"

There was little need of it, for nobody doubted that the Coldstreams feared anything on top of the earth, and the state of the street showed it. But the cheer went up, and the rifles spoke rapidly, while the German guns sent in shell after shell.

From the first shot, however, it was plain that the barricade was doomed. It could not stand against a bombardment at short range, and the deadly shells turned the barrier and the space behind it into a smoking inferno. No guns of any power had been expected in the streets, nor could any barrier be made to resist them. The wall of flagstones and sandbags began to melt and give way under that awful fire, and, though the men were partly sheltered behind them, the loss was heavy, and any effective reply was impossible.

The further Maxim was blown bodily to pieces, with its gunner, and a few seconds later a shell, dropping in front, overturned Sam's gun, and sent him rolling over behind the barrier, half-stunned by the explosion. He scrambled dizzily to his feet, feeling for his revolver, and the shells battered against the stones in an infernal, pitiless tattoo. One last belch from the guns, then the shelling ceased, and a fresh company of Prussians came rushing down upon the barricade at the same moment.

"Meet 'em, lads! Volleys, and then up on top!" shouted the subaltern, for his senior officer was lifeless on the ground, with a dozen of his men.

The rifles rang out sharply; but they alone could not check the swarming rush, and the barrier was half smashed. The Guards rallied to meet their assailants with the bayonet.

There was little time to notice it, but not more than half the charging Prussians had bayoneted. The rest seemed to be rushing forward without firing, and not till the foremost reached the broken wall did the defenders realise what the attack meant. The nearest of the enemy as they approached hurled at the Coldstreams things that appeared to be balls of metal, and as the first one struck the barrier, it burst in a sheet of yellow flame that seemed to flood the whole place with fire.

"Petrol bombs! The skunks!" gasped Sam, firing swiftly with his revolver at the storming party on his side.

In grim earnest the thinned defenders realised what they had to deal with. The shells of petrol, flung by hand, rained upon the barrier, and turned it into a cascade of fire that poured among the quick and the dead together, nor could any flesh and blood stand against it.

Choked and blinded by the fumes, and scorched by the leaping blue flame, the defenders staggered back helplessly, falling among the dead and wounded. A rifle volley was poured in over the barricade by the storming party, who then leaped straight in at either side, and, dashing through

the fire with a bound, gained the inside of the barrier. They flocked over in a steady grey stream, that hurled itself over the scorched and half-blinded Guardsmen, and bayoneted them right and left.

A huge Grenadier came springing down upon Sam with a flying leap, and the cadet's revolver exploded in the Prussian's face. Dashed down by the man's great weight falling on top of him, Sam knocked Stephen over, who was just behind. They fell heavily to the ground together, barely clear of the licking flames, upon some overturned sandbags, and the limp form of the Grenadier pressed the half-stunned boys down.

Hardly realising what had happened, Sam lay gasping for breath where he lay, and he felt the shock of the oncoming Prussians as they sprung over the barrier, several of them landing on the body of their fallen comrade. The fight was raging and stamping all around; but the thinned-out Coldstreams were now outnumbered by four to one, and their defences broken down. Still, never a man turned to look behind him. They died at their posts, heaping the slain before them till they were borne down and bayoneted by overwhelming numbers, and the Prussians swept on after their dearly-bought victory to take the other barricades in the rear.

The enemy had broken through at last, but the splendid heroism of that little band of defenders made as glorious a record as many a victory.

"Sam! Sam!" roared Stephen. "Are you wounded? For Heaven's sake move! You're crushing the life out of me!"

Sam pulled his wits together, and, realising what was amiss, struggled to rid himself of the dead weight that pressed him down. Stephen being undermost, had suffered more, and his face was dead white with the strain, for his ribs were nearly crushed in. As the body of the Grenadier rolled aside the boys lay panting where they were for nearly a minute.

Neither friend nor foe had any time to pay attention to those who had fallen, and the boys were passed over as wounded by the Prussians, who were still pouring in. The whole open space between the Exchange and the Mansion House was now the scene of a desperate hand-to-hand fight, for two more barricades had been forced.

It was soon over. No quarter was given or asked. The overwhelmed defenders died where they stood, fighting to the last.

"They'll get us, too," muttered Stephen. "It's all up!"

"Are you hurt?" said Sam quickly.

"Not wounded. I can get about."

"The fight's over, an' if you an' I are caught alive we'll be set against the wall an' shot. The Germans want us, an' we'll be recognised. I've no use for that."

"If we can get away we may do 'em some damage yet. But can we?"

"We'll have a jolly good try. I don't mean to let the beasts butcher me in cold blood. Quick now, while they're still busy!"

Sam leaped to his feet, and led the way with a quick dash across the front of the Royal Exchange. He dodged through behind the tall pillars of the facade, and halted at the last one to watch his chance to get across the mouth of Cannon Street, where lay the smoking ruins of another barricade heaped around with British and German bodies.

The Germans had already passed over it, for they had reached this barricade by the back of the Exchange, and now they were chiefly collected about the Mansion House, where their commander was seeking entrance. Just then a loud, shattering explosion some way behind was heard. The Prussian Grenadiers and their leader were blowing in the gates of the Bank.

"Now's our chance," said Sam. "We can do no good here."

Darting across Cannon Street, the boys made for the farther side. A belated Prussian, with a petrol bomb in his hand, caught sight of the British uniforms, and, with a guttural exclamation, he raised the thing to hurl it at the boys.

Sam's revolver cracked at the same moment. The bullet struck the bomb and shattered it, and the man fell shrieking as the flaming petrol soused over him.

"My aunt! How ghastly!" muttered Stephen, with a shiver, as he ran.

"It was him or us!" returned his brother grimly. "It's no more than the deserts of anybody who uses those vile things. The Coldstreams could have held 'em off in fair fight but for that."

A clear course lay before them for the moment, and they made the most of it. Away they went as hard as they could pelt towards the Monument. The narrow approach to London Bridge was soon before them.

A whole legion of British troops was pouring South across

the bridge, having been drawn from all quarters after the street-fighting to the east of the City. Not a man among them but would have thought it an honour to stay and fight till he dropped, but they had inflicted all the loss they could on the enemy, and now the Germans had stormed the chief position it was the duty of the British officers to save all the men they could for the defence of South London, which was a nut the Germans were not likely to crack.

"They've lost heavily, too," said Sam, as he saw them, "and I'll bet Von Krantz is short of five thousand men after to-day's work. He's got North London safe, but we've made him pay the price for it. The country's at bay at last, an' we've got the Thames for a barrier."

"How are we to get over? Shall we fall in with one of the retreatin' companies?"

"They won't thank us at a time like this," returned Sam. "The bridge is a tight fit, too, an' the troops are hurryin' over. It'd be an awkward place to be caught on if the German guns turned up. Better go on our own."

"There's a boat at the pier," said Stephen, looking over; "let's take her. It's a long time since we were afloat, an' we might do some scoutin' down the wharves. The Germans have captured several of 'em."

"Good notion!" said his brother. "Come on!"

They hastened down to the Old Swan Pier, against the east side of the bridge, where in times before anyone dreamed of seeing German troops in London the Margate and Clacton excursion steamers used to take their passengers aboard for a trip down the coast. A couple of skiffs lay moored against the pier, with their oars in, and the boys jumped in and pushed off.

The roar and rattle of the fighting had given way to a sullen silence, save for the tramp of the troops going South over the old bridge. Few of the khaki-clad men in the thinned ranks were unwounded, and blood-stained rags bound the arms or heads of many of the weary, battle-worn men. But by the stride of them, and the grim, dogged way they marched, it was plain to see the bulldogs had many a grip for the enemy left in them yet.

Sam took the oars, and the boat skimmed away slowly down the stream with the tide. It was nearly low water, and Stephen sat in the stern wiping his carbine with an oily rag. He had never let the precious weapon go, even in the heat of the engagements, though it was the fourth he had owned since the beginning of the campaign. He patted his cartridge-pouch with satisfaction, for it was still half-full.

"I wonder if they'll try to get hold of the shipping on the river," said Stephen. "They—Hallo! Swing her round! Let me get a shot!"

A couple of bullets plunked into the water close alongside the boat, as two rifle-shots rang out from a wharf some way down the river, where some German transport corps had arrived. One or two of their escort were showing themselves over a pile of packing-cases, and taking shots at the boys.

Stephen's carbine spoke, and one of the Germans toppled backwards and plunged over the corner of the wharf into the river. The others hastily took cover, and bullets began to patter round the boat, one striking a rowlock and grazing Sam's head.

"Let's get out of this. No good being potted for nothing," he said, sending the boat round the next wharf, out of sight of the Germans, with a few strong strokes.

"Rotten shots those Service Corps men are!" said Stephen. "Can't you give me another chance? I could bag one or two of 'em."

"I'm not goin' to be shot in a skiff for the sake of your frivolous amusements, you young rip," returned Sam.

"It's time we got across to look for a job. P'r'aps Ripley will send us into the Germans' ranks to-night. We'll keep near the bridge, an' land on the south side."

"Our troops are nearly all over," said Stephen as they neared it. "I say, ain't the bridge pretty dangerous to South London? Ripley'll have to guard it like anything, for the Germans'll try to get across."

"Not they," said Sam; "it's just the other way round. Von Krantz dare not march his troops over the water with all those millions swarming in South London, an' arming themselves fast. An' he can't cannonade it. He knows better than to shove his nose into such a trap till they're all starved out. The bridge is a much greater danger to the Germans than to us, because when our troops mass together in South London they'll be able to make sorties across an' take the Germans in the rear, while our other chaps march in from the North. See?"

"But there are several other bridges," objected Stephen. "Not frontin' right on to the City an' Mansion House, like London Bridge," replied Sam.

"Then the Germans'd be glad if the bridge were smashed up?"

"Yes; but they can't do it. We can mount guns on our

south side, an' sweep the approaches to the bridge. Look, they're placin' 'em now!" he added, pointing to some field-pieces that were rapidly being placed in position on the far side.

"I see," said Stephen pensively; "an' I s'pose that chap stickin' like a fly up there is one of our fellows, secin' the bridge is all sound?"

"What!" exclaimed Sam.

For answer Stephen pointed to the first arch over the water on the City side, not far above them. A human figure, with ropes and boxes slung about him, was clinging close under the arch, as Stephen said, like a fly. Whether he had mounted from below or climbed down from above and hidden, they could not tell, nor could Stephen imagine for the moment what he was about.

"He's one of the bridge inspectors, ain't he?" said Stephen.

"Great heavens!" cried Sam, dropping his oars and whipping out his revolver. "Can't you see? He's laying blasting-charges under the bridge to blow it up! He's a German spy! Give him a bullet—quick!"

The range was long for a pistol, but Sam's revolver spoke rapidly five times, and Stephen's carbine added its loud crack at the third report. The spy clinging to the arch threw up his arms with a shriek, and came whirling downwards, turning over and over as he fell.

Almost at the same instant there was a loud explosion under the arch, and then an appalling crash that seemed to shake the very heavens. The entire arch leaped upwards in a blinding flash of flame, and huge masses of masonry were driven in all directions, as the great bridge was torn asunder.

The shock of the explosion was awful. The arches roared and rumbled along the Thames like thunder, and the houses shook as if by an earthquake. Then came a tremendous, sousing splash, as the great masses of stone fell back into the river; and the very sky seemed to rain missiles of all kinds.

"Look out!" cried Sam, grabbing at his oars and shouting at the top of his voice to make himself heard. "We're swamped, sure as a gun! Sit in the bottom of the boat!"

He made a desperate effort to get her head round in time, but the backwash was quicker still. The falling arch threw up a huge, steep wave that would have swamped a whale-boat, much more a light skiff. The boat seemed to rear right up on end, lurched violently, and was swamped and turned bottom upwards in less time than it takes to tell it.

Stephen made a desperate effort to stick to his beloved carbine, and the extra weight of it nearly ended his career, for he was unable to reach the boat. Sam had flung an arm across the keel the moment he bobbed up alongside, and, looking round for Stephen, he caught his brother by the shoulder, and pulled him to the upturned craft.

"Hang on tight!" cried Sam. "You young ass, what's the good of that rifle now? Let it go!"

"Not me," gurgled Stephen, coughing up a pint of Thames water; "the cartridges are all right—they're brass watertight uns. Can't we turn the skiff over?"

"No good; we can't bale her out if we do. Get astride the keel, that's the only thing," returned Sam. He hauled himself up with some difficulty, and helped his brother after him. The usually placid Thames was tossing and seething like a cauldron, and the boat was driving down-river on the last of the ebb-tide.

"My aunt," gasped Stephen, clearing the water out of his eyes and hair, "we were lucky not to get hit on the head by any fallin' bricks! Is that the bridge?" he added, staring at the famous structure, now torn asunder and showing a ragged gap through which an ocean steamer might have sailed. "What a sight! How the dickens did it happen, Sam? I haven't got my bearings yet."

Sam looked grimly at the wreck of London Bridge, and said nothing for some time.

"I reckon we're the cause of that, when you come to reckon it up," he said. "We meant well, but our luck wasn't exactly in. It's a pretty ghastly mess."

"We! How could we do it?"

"Why, that spy was fixin' mines or bombs or something under the arch. You saw that."

"But we got him—just before the explosion, too."

"Yes; that's just it. He probably meant to start the things with a fuse, an' get away in-time," returned Sam.

"When we started pumpin' bullets at him, one of us must have hit one of the mines an' exploded it. It naturally set off all the others, an' the bridge went to glory. That's the only way I can account for it."

"Great guns!" said Stephen, in utter dismay. "Then we've played the Germans' game for 'em, an' done no end of harm! What an awful business!"

"I don't think it really made much difference," said Sam; "we needn't reproach ourselves. It would have been impossible to reach the mines in time to get 'em all off,

that's pretty sure, an' it was only a question of another twenty minutes or so. The bridge was bound to go."

"But were there any of our chaps passin' over it?" said Stephen, turning pale.

"Thank goodness, no. The last of the troops had passed five minutes before, an' the guns were already gettin' into place on the south side."

Stephen heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Will it make much difference to our side?"

"It's very awkward, of course. Ripley 'll have to make the best of Cannon Street Bridge an' Blackfriars now, if we want to cross an' tackle the Germans. We're not ready for that, though. As for you an' me, we may count ourselves jolly lucky to be alive at all, for we weren't a hundred yards off the spot."

"Where are we makin' for?" asked Stephen, his spirits beginning to rise again.

"How can we make for anywhere, you chump, with the boat bottom upwards an' the oars gone! We'll have to go where she drives, an' get ashore as best we can, unless we kick off our ridin'-boots an' chuck our weapons an' cartridges away, an' swim for it."

"Don't let's do that," said Stephen; "goodness knows if we'll get any more. Ain't that the place the Germans shot at us from—yonder?"

The wharf where the engineers and sharpshooters had been seen was just abreast them; but the overturned boat had driven right out into midstream, and now passed unnoticed. Those ashore probably had their hands too full to waste time shooting at derelicts, and all London within earshot was either mourning or rejoicing over the wrecked bridge, according to their nationality. It was not likely anyone even guessed that the two soaked figures riding on the keel of the skiff had had anything to do with it.

"A precious ticklish report we shall have to give the Staff if we get out of this alive," remarked Stephen ruefully. "Is this ebb-tide goin' on for ever? We shall find ourselves at Gravesend if it don't stop."

"We'll have to swim for it if she don't drift inshore soon," growled Sam; "this sort of cruisin' ain't to my taste at all. I'm getting chilled, too."

To his disgust the skiff drove on with the last dribble of the ebb, and still farther down he began to fear the flood would merely drive her up again.

It was rapidly becoming dusk; but, as the tide turned, an eddy caught the boat, and drove her in towards the northern shore.

"It's the German side," said Stephen, as they drifted towards a wharf piled with empty oil-cans and tanks, with a tall warehouse just behind; "but I don't think the beggars are down as far east as this if—Hallo!"

Four men suddenly stepped out from among the oil-cans as the boat touched the wharf, and they levelled rifles at the boys. The leader of them, a big, grim-looking man in a bowler-hat and serge clothes, called out sternly:

"Out of that, you sausage-mongers! We've got you!"

"Hold on!" cried Stephen. "If you take us for Germans you're off the track. Put those guns up; it's the close season for shootin' cadets."

"British, are you!" exclaimed the big man. "I took you for German scouts upst on the river. Well, it's lucky for you you're not. I'll give you a hand up the stairs," he added; and ten seconds later the boys, cold and dripping, stood on the wharf.

"Are the Germans as far down as this yet?" said Sam, as the four men looked at him curiously.

"The brutes are raiding the warehouses all along the river, and seizing all goods," said the man in the bowler. "They'll be along here pretty soon, an' we've work to do."

"Why haven't you cleared out like the rest?" asked Stephen; for he heard the sound of marching feet and harshly-shouted orders no great distance away.

"Because I'm going to hang on to this place an' account for a few of the dogs before I'm wiped out," said the speaker fiercely. "I'm a ruined man! Dy'e see? This is my warehouse an' wharf. It belongs to me. The little bit of trade I had is wrecked by these sausage-eating devils, an' if they want the house an' stock I'll hold it till the last of it's down, an' then blow it up. If I can send some of 'em to their last account before I go, I'll die happy. Here, have a nip o' brandy—you're perished."

"How many men have you?" said Sam, taking the flask.

The raw spirit burnt his throat; but he needed it, and so did Stephen. It set the blood moving in their chilled veins.

"Five in all, an' they're with me to the last."

"So," said Sam, his eye brightening, "let's have a look at the warehouse. What's your plan for defending it?"

"We've got none. We've a rifle apiece, an' we shall fire on 'em from the windows till they rush us," replied the warehouse owner grimly. "Come on, men!"

They entered the tall, square building, and the boys followed. Sam said nothing, but he took a quick survey of

the whole place, inside and out. On the ground-floor were several casks of paraffin oil, and a somewhat rotten old staircase led to the upper stories.

"By gum," exclaimed Sam, "this looks promisin'! An' you mean to say you've no plan of defence? Always ought to have one. It'll make all the difference. Look here, you've been decent to us, an' my brother Steve and I will lend a hand if you'll have us. We'll help make things hot for the Germans."

"You'll only get wiped out. However, stay if you like. You're a plucky pair of kids."

"I don't see any need for gettin' wiped out," replied Steve. "This warehouse of yours seems a first-class place."

"We'd better go to the top windows, an' stand by with our rifles instead of talking," said the owner grimly.

The boys made no reply, but Stephen nudged his brother as they went upstairs past the paraffin-casks, and Sam nodded in reply. They reached a room on the upper floor, the window of which commanded the dingy street below the wharf.

"With two of us here, an' two at t'other window, we can put a good many of 'em before they reach the entrance doors of the house," said the owner darkly, picking up his rifle. "My men are fastenin' up the double doors below. Once the beggars get in, we can drop a few more of 'em on the stairs before they reach us."

"It's a pity there aren't more like you," said Sam. "But ain't there another stairway an' entrance to the place? There usually is in these old wharf-houses."

"Yes, a little back stair, leadin' from this floor down to the cellars, which gives out by an entrance below the wharf? You can get out that way when the tide's low. But they'll never find it."

"Just so," said Sam. "We could get out that way, though."

"Who wants to get out?" growled the owner fiercely. "We're done anyhow an' all I want is to kill as many of 'em as I can."

"Jolly good notion," said Sam approvingly; "but there'll be a squad of the Germans detached to raid this warehouse while the others are busy elsewhere. Wouldn't it suit you just as well to nab the whole lot that are told off to attend to you, an' keep your own skin whole as well? It can be done quite easy, can't it, Steve?"

"Rather!" said Steve swiftly. "It's a dead snap."

The warehouse owner stared.

"What dy'e mean?" he said impatiently. "Who are you two kids, an' who taught you to talk like that?"

"My name's Sam Villiers, an' this is my brother Steve. We've had some practice at the game."

"By glory," exclaimed the owner, "the two youngsters of the Greyfriars Corps who captured Von Adler! Well, I'm twice your age, but you can take charge here if you have any plan for rubbin' it into the Germans. I've heard of your games an' the luck you've had."

"Thank you," said Sam; "then we'll get to work, and perhaps the luck'll hold good for us once more. This is a real soft snap. Is that lighter-barge alongside the wharf afloat?"

"She is."

"Right! She'll do for a transport. Send one of your men to unmoor her, an' make her fast by a couple of lines that can be chucked off at once. Have you a rope long enough to reach from this window to the ground, an' strong enough to bear one man at a time?"

"Plenty of 'em."

"Then coil one up, an' chuck it on top of the cupboard there."

"That'll be for us to go down by?"

"No, for the Germans. They'll need it," said Sam, grinning. "There's no time to ask questions, nor to answer them. Show me that back staircase."

It was shown him at once. At the bottom of a long, dark passage on the upper floor a heavy door was opened, and showed a narrow, winding stairway that led right down to the cellars.

"That'll do," said Sam. "Now you men must take off those barricades on the main entrance doors, an' just turn the key in the lock instead. We want the Germans to get in pretty easy."

"It beats me," said the bewildered warehouse-owner. "I don't know what you're driving at; but I reckon you do. Let's look sharp. Any more orders?" he added, as they hurried down the main staircase.

"Bear a hand to stave these petroleum-barrels," said Sam, picking up an axe as soon as he reached the ground-floor, and smashing in the head of the paraffin-casks.

They stoved in every barrel that was there, and the two brothers then turned three of them over, and flooded the whole ground-floor—which was paved in stone—with paraffin.

"Right-ho," said Sam. "Now get me a couple of handfuls of tow and some matches—mine are all wet."

The matches and tow were quickly forthcoming. Sam stuffed them into his pocket, and inspected the fastenings of the large folding-doors that opened on the street. He drew back all the bolts, and left the door merely locked. There was another door that opened on to the wharf on the opposite side. That he locked and bolted thoroughly.

"One door's enough for 'em to come in by," he said. "Mustn't make it too easy for 'em, or they'll smell a rat."

The warehouse-owner was burning to know what Sam's plan was, and in a few short words, as soon as they were in the upper rooms, Sam told him.

"Holy pokers," exclaimed the owner, "but you're a young marvel if ever there was one! No wonder the Germans ha' put a price on your head!"

"Warn the men in the other room to be ready when I give the signal," was Sam's reply. And he strode to the window, and looked out down the street.

"Here they come—nearly twenty strong, too," said Sam. "There's another lot right away down the street, just takin' possession of the big storeyards there. They won't trouble us. We'll give this lot a warmin', for they don't expect any war, an' we ain't Boers."

He fired a shot close over the heads of the approaching company below. It halted abruptly, and the officer at its head looked up at the windows.

Six rifles cracked in a stinging volley, and four of the Germans went down. The others, reaching the doors, dashed their heavy rifle-butts furiously against the lock.

The warehouse-owner and his men, with grim, fierce faces, leaned out of the window and shot straight down at the storming-party. One—two—four of the Germans fell dead before the entrance. Then the door flew open as the lock gave way, and with fierce shouts the Germans poured into the house.

"Now," said Sam coolly, "we've got 'em where their hair is short! Move quietly, an' the thing's done."

"Is it!" said Stephen, appearing suddenly from the other room. "Seven more of 'em have broken in through the wharfside door as well, Sam. It looks as if they've got you where your hair's shorter still—an' they're three to one!"

Sam's jaw set hard. "Think so?" he said grimly. "Then follow me, an' we'll see who wins."

Sam's Little Cargo.

The rest of the men joined them quickly from the other room, and one of them repeated Stephen's warning. The Germans had broken in by both back and front.

"We don't need telling that," said Sam. "No more talkin'. Move as quietly as you can."

He led them rapidly down the dark corridor, along the next passage, and to the door that shielded the secret stairway to the cellars. As they passed the landing, they heard the Germans coming up the main staircase three steps at a time, and the jingle of accoutrements and hoarse voices rang through the building.

"Quicker to go downstairs than up," said Sam, throwing open the door, and showing the dark spiral stairway, while at the same moment his brother lit a lantern. "Light 'em down, Steve, an' set the pace as hot as you can."

Stephen went flying down the steps with the others after him. Sam stayed only to lock and bolt the door at the head of the stairs, and then dashed down after the others. Within thirty seconds they were all in the damp, muddy open cellars of the lower basement, and ran through them to the opening which gave out upon the muddy foreshore underneath the piles of the wharf. The tide was already deep

round the outside of the wooden quay, and Sam led the way up one of the ladders at the back, and crouched among the tanks till his men were round him.

"There are two left below to guard the back entrance," he whispered, pointing to a pair of dark forms standing with their rifles at the broken-in door on the wharf; "we must rush them. There aren't likely to be any more in front, but four of you had better go an' make sure. The rest of 'em are on the top floor by this time, lookin' for us. Now then!"

He dashed out, the armed men with him, and Sam cried sharply in German to the two men at the door, calling on them to surrender. They clapped their rifles to their shoulders, but both went down as the warehouse-owner and his men fired. Four of the wharfmens ran round to the front, and Sam, darting to the broken door, snatched the tow from his pocket, and set it alight.

He hurled it in through the door, and the inch-deep of paraffin on the stone floor lit with a blast that nearly blew Sam backwards. In less than three seconds the whole place was in flames, and the oil-barrels were roaring with great columns of fire and black smoke spouting up from each. The noise of a couple of rifle-shots in the street beyond was nearly drowned.

**NOW YOU'VE FINISHED
LEAVE ME IN A TRAM.**

Shouts of alarm came from the Germans at the top of the house, and they came flying down the first flight of stairs, only to find their escape cut off. The rotten old wooden staircase was a crackling mass of flame, as high as the first storey, and beyond.

"Now you're arranged for, you pillagin' persons in spiked hats," said Sam coolly, stepping away back on to the wharf as the men returned from the streets, "an' I'll lay anybody thirty to one against your findin' that that locked door hides an extra staircase, in your sore distress."

"Only one of 'em at the street door, sir," cried the biggest of the warehousemen. "He got me through the arm with a bullet, but I dropped him."

"Right-ho!" said Sam. "Three of you guard the alleyway there leadin' to the street, in case another party turns up. You can hold it against twenty, if need be."

"By glory," cried the warehouse-owner, "are you going to cook 'em?"

"Not quite that. You don't want 'em served up like a grill, do you?" rejoined Sam. "Ah, there they are! We sha'n't need to bother guardin' the cellar staircase."

Three or four spiked helmets were thrust out of the back top window which the defenders had occupied a few minutes before, and the lieutenant in charge of the raiding-party yelled out in a scared voice:

"Ach, you English schellums! Dis is not war! Vos you mean to roast us alive?"

"That rests entirely with you!" Sam called back, in his blandest voice. "I don't think you'd have stuck at roasting us, if necessary. But I shouldn't call us any names if I were you. You see, it'll be gettin' warm up there presently."


"Varm! Teufel! It vas varm now!" screamed the officer. "My men shall fire upon you if you do not get us oudt!"

"Present!" said Sam sharply. And up went five rifles at once, covering the Germans at the window.

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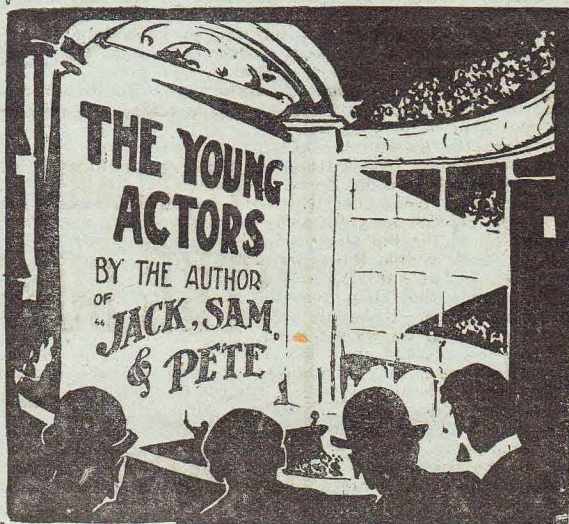
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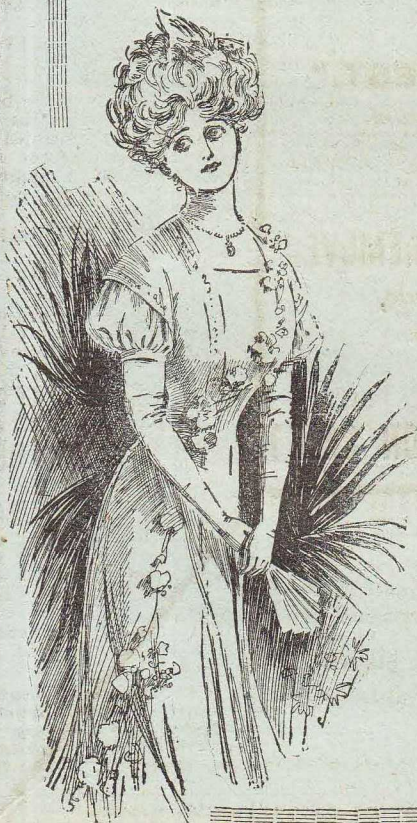
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